Disrupting the gender binary in the conceptualization of domestic violence

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Acknowledgement

In the spirit of reconciliation, I would like to acknowledge that this scholarly output was written on Treaty 7 territory in Mohkinstsis, the original Blackfoot name for what we call Calgary, where the Elbow and Bow river meets. These are the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy including Siksika, the Kainai, the Piikani, as well as the Iyarhe Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. This territory is also home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3. My time in Mohkinstsis has allowed me to grow and attend Mount Royal University, but it has also permitted me a space to further discover my own identity. I acknowledge that my topic surrounding peer support programming for those impacted by domestic violence is greatly affected by the ongoing colonial legacy in this country. Colonialism brought about a violent gender binary system to this land which we still reproduce in the present. This system attempted to erase, the legacy of which continues to try to erase, the existence of people that are Two-Spirit as well as anyone who may fit outside of it.

I would like to express gratitude to my community partner at Sagesse, Lian Tolentino, my faculty mentor Dr. Milena Radzikowska, the Catamount Fellowship fellows, Barb Davies, and Cordelia Snowdon-Lawley, for supporting me throughout the entirety of this fellowship. All of you have believed in me throughout this experience and reminded me of my potential. I would also like to thank those who attended the community conversation I facilitated, Dr. Zack Marshall for helping me find additional resources on my topic, as well as Brian Jackson, Gabrielle Pyska, and Ash Paré for helping me on my creative works. Lastly, I thank my good friend A. as well as Cari Ionson for being proud of me for taking on this fellowship and for reminding me of the importance of the topic I researched.

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Introduction

Domestic violence is a systemic issue that disproportionately impacts people that are LGBTQ2S+ (Egale, n.d.). Statistics based on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, two-spirit, and additional sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQ2S+) populations in the United States reveal that on average, 43.8% of lesbian women, 61.1% of bisexual women, 26% of gay men, 37.3% of bisexual men, and 54% of trans people have experienced domestic violence compared, to 35% of heterosexual women and 29% of heterosexual men (Walters et al., 2013; James et al., 2016, as cited in Shultz, 2020). Yet, LGBTQ2S+ people face barriers to inclusion when it comes to the resources and supports surrounding domestic violence. Ham et al., (2022) mention that the gender binary The Gender binary: The system that expects people to fit within either two genders of "man" or "woman", and for them to align with their expected assigned sex at birth of male or female (The 519, 2020). system within gender-based violence prevention and support services is the main indicator of the inclusion (or exclusion) of LGBTQ2S+ people, as it affects every aspect from research, funding, legislation, services, and how society understands domestic violence. The gender binary system shapes the conceptualization of domestic violence, and disregards experiences that exist outside of its binaries (Ristock, 2002, as cited in Ristock et al., 2019), including LGBTQ2S+ people.

Domestic Violence: A Hidden Crisis Affecting All Genders and Sexual Orientations

The Gender binary: The system that expects people to fit within either two genders of "man" or "woman", and for them to align with their expected assigned sex at birth of male or female (The 519, 2020).

This scholarly output was developed in partnership with Sagesse, and addressed the research question of "How might we create inclusive peer support programming for people impacted by domestic abuse that recognizes and honours gender as a spectrum?" Sagesse is a Calgary-based non-profit organization with the mission to disrupt the structures of domestic abuse, and is the only organization within Canada providing peer support programming at the intersections of domestic violence.The binary system affects access to support services and informs why LGBTQ2S+ individuals who have experienced harm, often seek out informal supports (Lindhorst et al., 2010, McClennen, 2005, as cited in Walters & Lippy, 2016). Working with Sagesse as part of the Catamount Fellowship, I had the opportunity to explore the three intersecting themes of the gender binary system, domestic violence, and peer support, with a focus on how they affect LGBTQ2S+ people.

Even though my focus remained on LGBTQ2S+ folks, I discovered that the system also disservices people that fit within the gender binary when it comes to services, even though the system was designed for them in the first place. Changes are needed to the system, as many people who have experienced harm are unable to receive the help needed. With more and more younger generations, such as Generation Z accepting gender and sexuality beyond binaries than previous generations (Garrett-Walker & Michelle, 2021), and with 1 in 500 Canadian adults being trans or non-binary (Statistics Canada, 2021, as cited in Kelley & de Santos, 2022), the current system requires a transformation to recognize and honour gender as a spectrum.

Social Context and Methods

My experiences as someone who may be seen as nonbinary and transmasculine, existing outside of the gender binary, has greatly affected my approach to the research question. When supporting many nonbinary and transgender people in my life that have experienced harm, I noticed how few formal services tailored for LGBTQ2S+ individuals exist. This personal experience directed my research as I wanted to understand how the current system of domestic violence came to be, and how it continues to fail the queer people that I know in my life that have experienced harm. In addition, I wanted to explore how things may change, and what may be disrupted to accomplish this. Thus, when exploring "How might we create inclusive peer support programming for people impacted by domestic abuse that recognizes and honours gender as a spectrum?" I acknowledge that I can not fully separate my own personal experiences from my methods.

To explore the research question at hand, I first did a literature review breaking down the three themes of gender, domestic violence, and peer support, all with a focus on LGBTQ2S+ people. The following month, a community conversation took place to inform the direction of this scholarly output. This report utilizes academic and non-academic sources, and I had the intention of providing sources that outline the local context of Calgary. Although this was not always possible as research is limited within the local context and regarding organizations that offer peer support programming for those that have experienced harm. Sagesse remains the sole organization that provides peer support programming at the intersections of domestic violence in Calgary (as well as nationally). Due to the fellowship only lasting 8 months, my time is limited in exploring the research topic at hand and I hope that more research and attempts to create social change continue beyond this report.

Key Concepts

To understand the research question, the themes of gender, domestic violence, and peer support require unpacking. Other terms of importance will be included in a glossary at the end of this report.

Gender:

Gender from a more Western perspective is seen as a set of socially constructed categories that encompasses gender identity, gender expression, sex, and sexuality, relating to how we use our bodies to interact in relation with one another (Ramirez & Munar, 2022; Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019). It is the meaning from these interactions that we then internalize (Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019), including how we categorize gender and that which it encompasses.

Figueira (2016) mentions that gender is a constructed category and our understanding of it can only exist as we continuously perform gender, shaped by societal norms (informed by Butler, 1990, 1993). How we act out gender creates the appearance of male and female as normal sex categories (Figueira, 2016, informed by Butler, 1990, 1993). People that do not follow societal expectations when acting out their gender (i.e., LGBTQ2S+ people), are seen as "abnormal" (Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018).

Therefore, when discussing gender on a spectrum, it is about conceptualizing gender outside of and beyond the categories of what society sees as normal. The normal is a binary nature of gender where there are only two genders—men and women—and they match the sex assigned at birth and assume heterosexuality (The 519, 2020; Jackson et al., 2010). For gender to be seen on a spectrum, not only does the gender binary require to be disrupted, but along with it, its assumptions. Perhaps the most prominent – heteronormativity – the assumption that heterosexuality and cisnormativity assume the gender binary as normal (The 519, 2020). Other assumptions that require disruption include heterosexism, homophobia, transphobia, cissexism, and biphobia (see glossary, page 19).

Domestic violence:

Domestic violence is a wide-ranging term that may refer to violence in intimate partner relationships in addition to violence in families (Ristock et al., 2019). Violence may affect anyone regardless of gender and sexuality and may include the following forms: physical, verbal, emotional/psychological, sexual, spiritual, digital, or financial abuse, as well as neglect, stalking, and harassment (CPS, 2017, as cited in Laskey et al., 2019; Government of Alberta, 2023). Another form of violence that intersects with domestic violence but is not considered an offence in the Criminal Code of Canada, is coercive control (Gill & Aspinall, 2020). Coercive control is the repeated and constant use of physical, psychological, sexual, emotional, and/or financial violence in efforts to destroy the sense of identity and freedom of a person in order to control them through "entrapment" (Arnold, 2009, Dawson et al., 2019, Stark, 2007, as cited in Gill & Aspinall, 2020). As a result of coercive control, the person who experienced harm may lose their sense of self as well as their confidence in their capabilities to make their own choices (Arnold, 2009, as cited in Gill & Aspinall, 2020).

Peer Support:

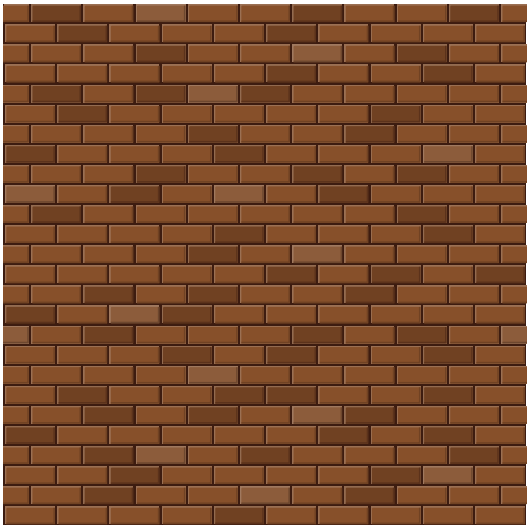
Peer support involves accommodating people for "where they are at" in a space with those who have comparable experiences and backgrounds (Dawson et al., 2013; PeersForProgress, 2021a). Relationships in peer support require a non-hierarchical structure, supports must be easily available to access, and they should be recurring, not short lived (PeersForProgress, 2021a). Peer support is often organized informally, and the models of peer support may include: support groups, one-on-one support, peer support of an individual and their family, phone call based, digital based (such as text messages), or through community health workers who work between communities and health care professionals (de Ven et al., 2023; PeersForProgress, 2021b). The main purpose of peer support is to allow people to talk about their experiences and connect with others, cope with feelings of isolation and experiences of discrimination, improve community relations and capacity, and increase the well-being of individuals (Borthwick et al., 2020; PeersForProgress, 2021b). Peer support programming benefits participants as they may learn new coping skills and expand their support networks, while at the same time, being a cost-efficient service due to the limited need for trained professionals in its facilitation (Austin et al., 2014, Coatsworth-Puspoky et al., 2006, Lagrand, 1991, Mead et al, 2001, Mead & MacNeil, 2006, Salzer et al., 1994, Schon, 2010; Solomon, 2004, Watson, 2019, Seebohm et al., 2013, Taylor et al., 2007, as cited in de Ven et al., 2023).

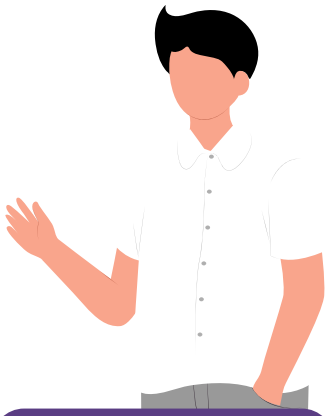
How historical norms, values, laws have shaped the present system

The gender binary system is prevalent in the conceptualization of domestic violence as well as the sectors that tackle this systemic issue. This affects services including peer support, but also research, funding, services, and how the public views domestic violence. Experiences of people that are LGBTQ2S+ or simply anyone who does not fit within the expectations of the gender binaries are disregarded. This leads one to ask, how does the gender binary system intertwine with domestic abuse, and how did this come to be in Canada?

Before the 1970s, domestic violence was generally widely dismissed as a "private issue" occurring in the home and therefore not requiring public intervention (Heffernan, 2011, as cited in Taylor et al., 2022; Ham et al., 2022). During the 1960s and 1970s, feminist activists fought against this concept of "private issue", and instead brought forward that the "personal is political" and that domestic violence is a social issue that requires public intervention (Ham et al., 2022). Activism and the founding of the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC) in 1972, helped to create social change, as they influenced the federal Liberal Party of the time to establish programs allowing activists to create women's shelters (Loreto, 2020, as cited in Ham et al., 2022). This established the shelter system in Canada predominantly for women escaping abuse, allowing for organizations such as Toronto Interval House to first offer a place for women beginning in the mid-1970s (Kane, 2017, as cited in Ham et al., 2022).

Where the prevalence of the gender binary is most dominantly seen, is in the method that feminist activists used to shift the societal discourse from the private to the public. The activists created the archetype that within domestic violence, the woman is "helpless" and "battered", while the man is abusive and controlling (Fraser, 2014, as cited in Ham et al., 2022). This archetype persists in the prevailing viewpoint of the "victim" and "perpetrator" framework, conceptualizing domestic violence as assuming heteronormativity and binaries (Ham et al., 2022). This means that domestic violence is understood as involving the binaries of the victim – a woman who is heterosexual, cisgender, and feminine – and the perpetrator – a man who is heterosexual, cisgender, and masculine – while other narratives are excluded. Ham et al. (2022) mention that another consequence of this archetype is that it created the binary that women must experience physical violence for it to count as domestic abuse. This binary may be seen in the present, as coercive control (which does not always involve physical violence), and is not included as a crime in the Criminal Code of Canada.





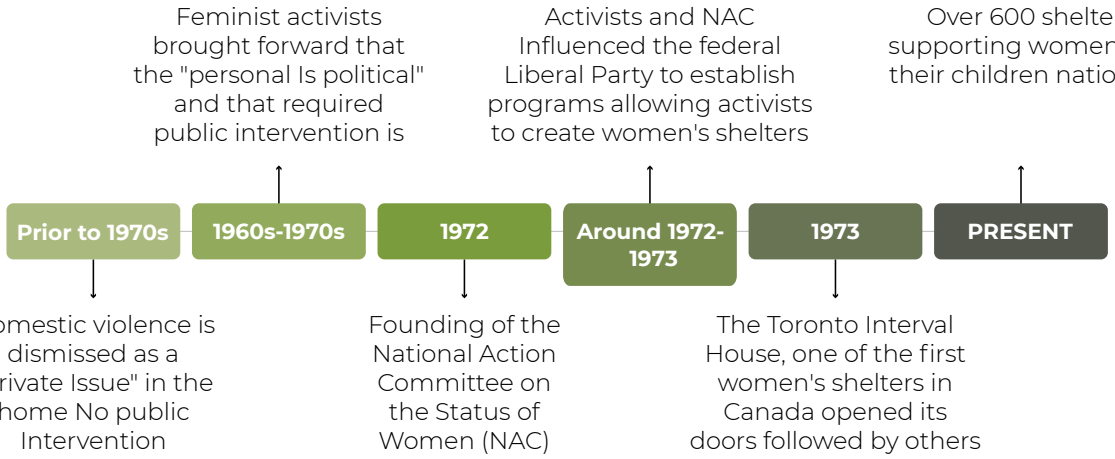
Victim = Women
Assumed as heterosexual, cisgender and feminine

Perpetrator = Man
Assumed as heterosexual, cisgender and feminine

The history of how the system of domestic violence was conceptualized upon the gender binary continues to shape how services present themselves in Canada. Shelters, mainly assisting women and their children, are perhaps the most prevalent form of support with over 600 shelters existing nationally (Ham et al., 2022). As shelters remain the dominant way to publicly intervene for women who have experienced harm, this may mean that it is prioritized over other services such as peer support programming. How does the historical understanding of domestic violence, founded upon a gender binary system, specifically act to exclude certain narratives in the present?

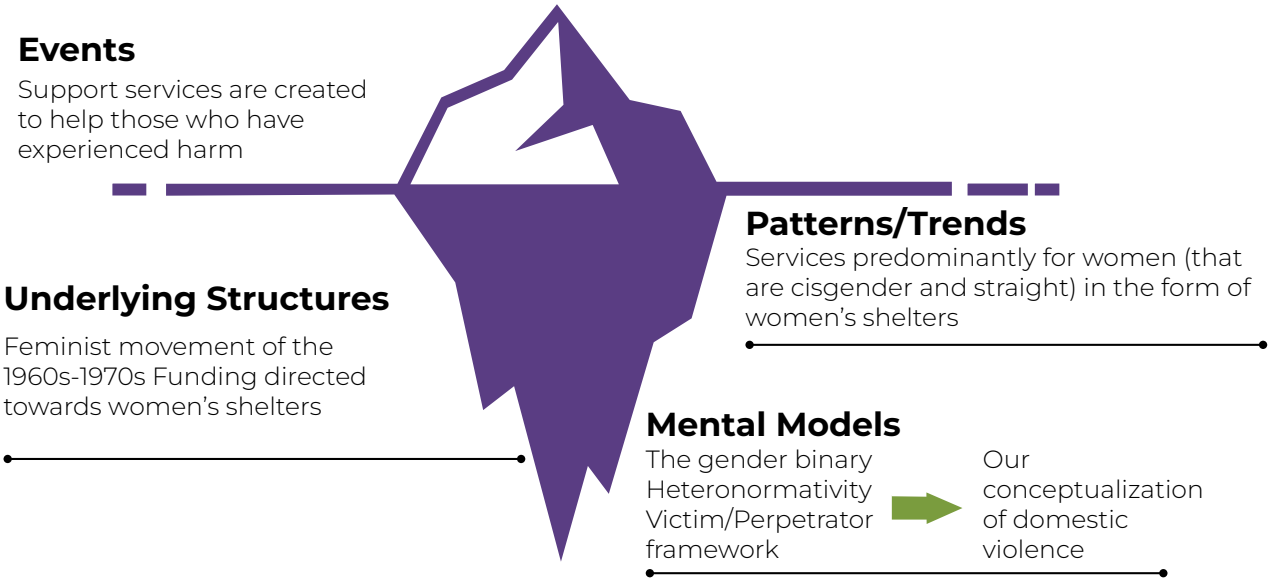
How the System was Shaped

From a "private issue" to the "personal is political"



(Ham et al., 2022)

Background on the Issue of Domestic Violence and Services



Narrow Narratives

Shelters:

Shelters may advertise as being inclusive spaces for those who have experienced domestic abuse, but this is not always true for LGBTQ2S+ people (Brown & Groscup, 2008, Ristock, 2002, as cited in Rainbow Resource Centre and Resolve, 2022). In fact, shelters often control who may access their services based on the gender binary system and how well people conform to it, creating a "hierarchy of inclusion" (Aspani, 2018, p. 1705, as cited in Ham et al., 2022). The false claim of inclusivity is apparent when it comes to how some women's shelters treat trans women. Often, trans women who are more feminine and more conforming to the social norms, are more accepted (Namaste, 2000, Strang & Forrester, 2005, as cited in Pyne, 2011). From a 2018 Canadian national survey of Violence Against Women shelters, 47% of the total 401 organizations that participated noted that they provided services to trans women (Maki, 2018, as cited in Ham et al., 2022). Therefore, on average in Canada, trans women may be excluded from at least half of all women's shelters.

How the system is geared to providing services to women as "victims", also excludes trans men. Of the limited men's shelters available, trans men often do not feel safe accessing them and they may experience being unwanted in women's shelters (Dénommé-Welch et al., 2008, as cited in Pyne, 2011). Other ways that the gender binary, heteronormativity and the victim-perpetrator framework pervade, is in studies revealing that shelter workers may believe that domestic violence amongst LGBTQ2S+ people is less severe amongst heterosexual people (Ford et al., 2013, Parry & O'Neal, 2014, Seelman, 2015, as cited in Rainbow Resource Centre and Resolve, 2022). Historically and more presently, shelters are founded upon the gender binary system and tend to direct services towards the heteronormative idea of what a "victim" is, and in turn, excluding LGBTQ2S+ people.

Stigma and Myths:

Those that do not conform to the gender binary system may experience stigma and myths when it comes to domestic violence. Stigma is the targeting of a perceived difference of a person that is then labelled and stereotyped onto them as an identity category, leading to unfair treatment (Link & Phelan, 2001, Dovidio et al., 2000, as cited in Taylor et al., 2022). When it comes to LGBTQ2S+ people, stigma greatly affects the reporting of domestic violence. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs (2014) reported (from data based on the United States) that only one-third of LGBTQ2S+ experiences of harm are reported to the police, partially due to negative experiences LGBTQ2S+ people have when it comes to law enforcement (as cited in Walters & Lippy, 2016). Additionally, LGBTQ2S+ people often under-report experiences of harm, especially if the one who committed the harm is also LGBTQ2S+, to avoid stigma in their community (Chen et al., 2011, as cited in Shultz, 2020).

Myths – something to be commonly thought of as the truth but is instead untrue – form false narratives surrounding LGBTQ2S+ people and their experiences of domestic violence. The myths of the "Lesbian Utopia" and of the "Cat Fight" are two examples affecting women in relationships with other women, which is informed by the victim-perpetrator framework (Hassouneh & Glass, 2008). Hassouneh and Glass (2008) mention that the "Lesbian Utopia" assumes that men are biologically violent while women are nonviolent, therefore, violence does not exist in relationships only consisting of women. "Cat Fight" presumes that men are bigger and stronger than women so violence enacted by women is less serious in comparison (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001, as cited in Hassouneh & Glass, 2008).

When it comes to people that are bisexual, they may face the myth that bisexuality is not real, that they are simply "confused" and should ultimately choose to partner with either men or women exclusively (Barret & St. Pierre, 2013). The myth surrounding bisexuality perpetuates biphobia; more research is required to understand if this myth is a major cause of why people that are bisexual experience high rates and heightened severity of domestic violence (Barret & St. Pierre, 2013). Myths and stigma exclude the narratives of LGBTQ2S+ people when it comes to domestic violence and they reinforce how those outside the norms of the gender binary system are discredited.

Experiences of men in heteronormative relationships:

Beyond people that are LGBTQ2S+, cisgender straight men who have experienced harm are also excluded from the conceptualization of domestic violence. The victim-perpetrator framework greatly affects men when it comes to narratives surrounding masculinity: men are strong, can solve their own problems and can defend themselves (Corbally, 2015, Rentoul & Appleboom, 1997, Bjørnholt & Rosten, 2020, Tsui et al., 2010, as cited in Taylor et al., 2022). Access to support services is often contingent on being recognized as a "victim" – associated with passivity and weakness – which challenges the masculinity narrative (Overstreet & Quinn, 2013, Walker et al., 2019, as cited in Taylor et al., 2022). As men may associate "victim" with femininity, it may prove insight into why men who have experienced harm by female partners, often do not seek support (Machado et al., 2016, as cited in Taylor et al., 2022). If men are able to recognize they have experienced harm and decide to seek support, they may be limited as most services for men are for those who have committed harm as the system often only sees women as "victims" of domestic violence (The Laurel Centre and RESOLVE, 2021).

Why is it important to disrupt the system?

Domestic violence is conceptualized as part of the gender binary system and assumes heteronormativity and the victim-perpetrator framework. The narratives of LGBTQ2S+ people as well as men in heteronormative relationships who have experienced harm are excluded from the system. Historically, women fought to bring awareness to domestic abuse and did create social change that brought about political action and the shelter system. Their efforts should be recognized, but it also deserves questioning, does the current system support women that conform to the gender binary system?

Simpson and Helfrich (2014) mention that the system of domestic violence along with services, emphasises the "universality of women's experiences" – that women all have a similar experience of abuse – which excludes how intersecting identities may affect experiences of violence (p. 442). Crenshaw (1991) provides an example from studying shelters in communities of colour within Los Angeles as to how intersecting identities, including race, gender and class may affect experiences of abuse. She noted that many women of colour due to gender and class oppression face poverty and overwhelming childcare responsibilities, which is then made worse due to how racial discrimination affects employment and housing (Crenshaw, 1991). Therefore, Crenshaw (1991) mentions when it comes to intervention strategies, shelters must not solely address domestic abuse, but instead, also confront how the oppression and discrimination that these women face due to their intersecting identities, inhibit them from establishing alternatives to abusive relationships. Crenshaw shows that the system of how domestic violence is understood does not serve women nor address how violence may be prevented, and that experiences of harm can not be universalized as one.

Returning to the research question, why is it important for inclusive peer support programming for people impacted by domestic abuse that recognizes and honours gender as a spectrum to be created? Creating inclusive peer support programming is important as the gender binary and along with the shelter system excludes and universalizes narratives. This is not to fully dismiss the shelter system as an emergence resource but to instead highlight the need for other forms of support that provide upstream preventative approaches. Peer support programming not only aids in overcoming experiences of harm and in helping people reconnect to themselves after experiences of trauma, but it may do so through people sharing their own narratives (de Ven, 2020; Glazer & Marcum, 2003, as cited in de Ven et al., 2023). Peer support may allow people to discover similarities amongst themselves, have their experiences seen as normal rather than "abnormal", and allow a space for beliefs and perspectives to be challenged (Mead et al., 2001, Azevedo et al., 2020, Cross, 2019, Gregory et al., 2021, Konya et al., 2020, as cited in de Ven et al., 2023). Thus, peer support programming provides space to heal from harm, but can also disrupt perceived differences amongst participants while still honouring the many narratives and experiences of domestic abuse.

Toward inclusive peer support programming

What is being done?

When it comes to existing efforts of creating inclusive peer support programming for those impacted by domestic abuse, Sagesse is the sole organization in Calgary as well as in all of Canada offering such supports for women and non-binary people. As an organization, Sagesse leans on the peer support model to help build capacity across communities as they are the experts in their experiences. In addition,Sagesse recognizes that informal supporters are better equipped at supporting individuals at the intersection of experiencing domestic abuse due to their cultural and environmental context and organic relationships. Other Calgary-based organizations such as Skipping Stones provides peer support groups for trans, non-binary and gender-diverse people, but not at the intersections of domestic violence (Skipping Stones, n.d.). Likewise, the End of the Rainbow Foundation, which works in partnership with Sagesse, provides peer support programming for LGBTQ2S+ folks specializing in assisting newcomers to Calgary (End of the Rainbow, 2020).

In other parts of Canada, the West Islands CALACS (Calacs de L'ouest-de-l'île) provides support groups for those who have experienced sexual violence open to women, all trans people, non-binary people, and two-spirit people (West Island CALACS, 2023b). Organizations in the United States that offer LGBTQ2S+-DV specific peer support programs include: The Network/La Red (2018) offering two telephone-based support groups for LGBTQ2S+ and LGBTQ2S+ BIPOC people; the NYC Anti-Violence Project (2022), offering support groups with creative arts options; and the Community United Against Violence (n.d.-ab) in San Francisco, providing peer support programming surrounding art and mindfulness, as well as self-defense classes. Even though a few organizations are attempting to create peer support programming beyond the gender binary, it is difficult to know what is working within these programs, as publicly available grey literature is limited.

Recommendations

1 Ongoing conversations with communities and community collaboration

Through conversation with individuals and organizations working within this system I had one of my own assumptions challenged surrounding domestic violence as conceptualized on the gender binary system. As a hypothetical situation, I believed that if I were to join a Sagesse peer support group as someone who is nonbinary but also transmasculine, that I would make a group consisting of predominantly women, uncomfortable. This assumption is based on the victim-perpetrator framework, that because masculinity is often associated with the "perpetrator" and violence, I assumed that my presence would be unwanted. In addition, in this imaginary scenario I universalized every experience as one rather than asking myself if all women actually do not want a masculine-presenting person in their support groups. Confronting this assumption of mine highlights the need to ask people what they want when it comes to peer support programming for those impacted by domestic abuse. Consulting and collaborating with the community allows to inform what is needed in peer support programming and if this includes programming that honours gender on a spectrum, how may this be done?

2 Organizations disrupting how they operate on the gender binary system

For organizations to be able to create peer support programming that recognizes and honours gender on the spectrum, they must disrupt the gender binary system in the way they provide supports. The West Islands CALACS (2023a) provides an example of a program based in Montreal which disrupted the gender binary. In July, 2022, the organization announced that they resigned from the larger association of the Quebec Association of Sexual Assault Support and Prevention Center. The decision to break away from the association was due to CALACS announcing that it is in favour of decriminalization of sex work and that it is now offering services beyond only to women, to include all trans people, non-binary, and two-spirit people (which was against the principles of the larger association) (West Island CALACS, 2023a). The changes in the West Islands CALACS stance demonstrates that organizations are able to change how they operate and recognize the harm caused by excluding people from support services.

3 Research on peer support programming

Research on how peer support specifically helps those who have experienced harm is limited, most likely due to the informal nature of peer support being beyond the realm of academia (de Ven et al., 2023; de Ven, 2020). As funding for programming often depends on evidence that is then used to design, implement and to improve programs, continued research is crucial for growing peer support programming (Hardiman, 2004, as cited in de Ven et al., 2023). Research may also help to create a better understanding of what kind of supports are useful to people (de Ven et al., 2023).

4 Organizations collaborating

To create inclusive peer support programming, there needs to be collaboration across organizations. Ham et al. (2022) calls this collaboration "building the table", where organizations dealing with gender-based violence break away from their silos to foster collaboration and communication across organizations and sectors. Ham et al. (2022) also highlight that when "building the table", LGBTQ2S+ organizations require to be included.

5 Compensation for facilitators

The Canadian Women's Foundation & Wisdom2Action (2022) states that more peer support groups are needed, but they require compensation. This may be due to the fact that peer support programming, including peer support groups, are often informally run by peers who are unpaid.

Compensation may allow for facilitators to run peer support programming for a longer period of time and may help to retain volunteers. Sagesse offers examples of how to support facilitators beyond simply financial compensation. As an organization, Sagesse allows its facilitators the flexibility to take breaks from facilitating, may provide raffles for its volunteers to win gift cards, and offers additional training. Another form of compensation Sagesse provides are wellness programs that help to build community from book clubs, to yoga or Reiki healing sessions, and even an online Slack chat platform for facilitators to connect. These additional forms of compensation may be beneficial for the success of maintaining long term peer support programming.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a systemic issue that disproportionately affects LGBTQ2S+ people, who frequently encounter barriers to resources and support because of the gender binary system. This framework influences how domestic violence is conceptualized, historically excluding LGBTQ2S+ narratives and universalizing women's experiences, thereby ignoring the impact of intersecting identities on experiences of violence. In response to these problems, inclusive peer support programming provides a vital alternative form of support in addressing the exclusion and universalization of narratives within the present shelter system. While honouring the different experiences of domestic violence, peer support programming provides a healing space, assists people in overcoming trauma, sharing their narratives, finding commonalities, normalizing their experiences, and challenging beliefs and perspectives.

Existing initiatives to develop inclusive peer support programming for those impacted by domestic abuse remain limited, but there are recommendations for improvements. Engaging in ongoing conversations and collaboration with communities, disrupting the gender binary system within organizations, conducting research on the impact and benefits of peer support programming, encouraging collaboration among organizations, and providing compensation for facilitators to ensure sustainability are some of these suggestions. We may work towards more inclusive support programming for those affected by domestic abuse by implementing these recommendations, which promote healing while honouring the diverse experiences across the gender and sexuality spectrum.

Glossary

Biphobia: "Negative attitudes, feelings, or irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of bisexual people and their communities, or of behaviours stereotyped as bisexual, leading to discrimination, harassment or violence against bisexual people" (The 519, 2020).

Cisgender: "A person whose gender identity is in alignment with the sex they were assigned at birth" (The 519, 2020).

Cisnormativity: The assumption that people that are cisgender are considered as the "normal" or the "norm" in society, in turn, systematically excluding trans people (The 519, 2020).

Cissexism: A system that sees people that are cisgender as superior and "normal" to people that are trans (The 519, 2020).

Gender Binary: The system that expects people to fit within either two genders of "man" or "woman", and for them to align with their expected assigned sex at birth of male or female (The 519, 2020).

Gender Spectrum: "The representation of gender as a continuum, as opposed to a binary concept" (The 519, 2020).

Heterosexism: "The assumption that everyone is heterosexual and that heterosexuality is superior and preferable" (The 519, 2020).

Heteronormativity: The assumption is that heterosexuality is the "normal" or the "norm" (The 519, 2020), as well as assuming cisnormativity and the gender binary.

Homophobia: "Negative attitudes, feelings, or irrational aversion to, fear or hatred of gay, lesbian, or bisexual people and communities, or of behaviours stereotyped as 'homosexual'" (The 519, 2020).

Intersectionality: "A term coined by black feminist legal scholar Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe the ways in which our identities (such as race, gender, class, ability, etc.) intersect to create overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage" (The 519, 2020).

LGBTQ2S+: -Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, Two-Spirit, along many more identities beyond the gender binary system.

Sex: "The classification of people as either male, female, or intersex. Sex is usually assigned at birth and is based on an assessment of a person's reproductive systems, hormones, chromosomes, and other physical characteristics" (The 519, 2020).

Stigma: Is the targeting of a perceived difference of a person that is then labelled and stereotyped onto them as an identity category, leading to unfair treatment (Link & Phelan, 2001, Dovidio et al., 2000, as cited in Taylor et al., 2022)

Trans: "An umbrella term referring to people whose gender identities differ from the sex they were assigned at birth" (The 519, 2020).

Transphobia: "Negative attitudes and feelings and the aversion to, fear or hatred or intolerance of trans people and communities" (The 519, 2020).

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