

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, I sincerely thank each participant for finding her voice and sharing her story. We hope these stories will move you and motivate the campus to continually improve upon prevention and intervention efforts.

RESOURCES

DOMESTIC ABUSE INTERVENTION SERVICES

Provides 24-hour crisis line, emergency shelter, legal and medical advocacy, safety planning, and support groups to dating/domestic violence victims/survivors.

(608) 251-4445

www.abuseintervention.org

RAPE CRISIS CENTER

Provides 24-hour crisis line, support groups, legal/medical advocacy, and accompaniment and counseling to sexual assault victims/survivors and their friends and family.

(608) 251-7273

www.danecountyrc.com

UNIVERSITY HEALTH SERVICES

Provides counseling by appointment to students on a variety of issues including dating/domestic violence, sexual assault, stress/anxiety, and depression.

(608) 265-5600

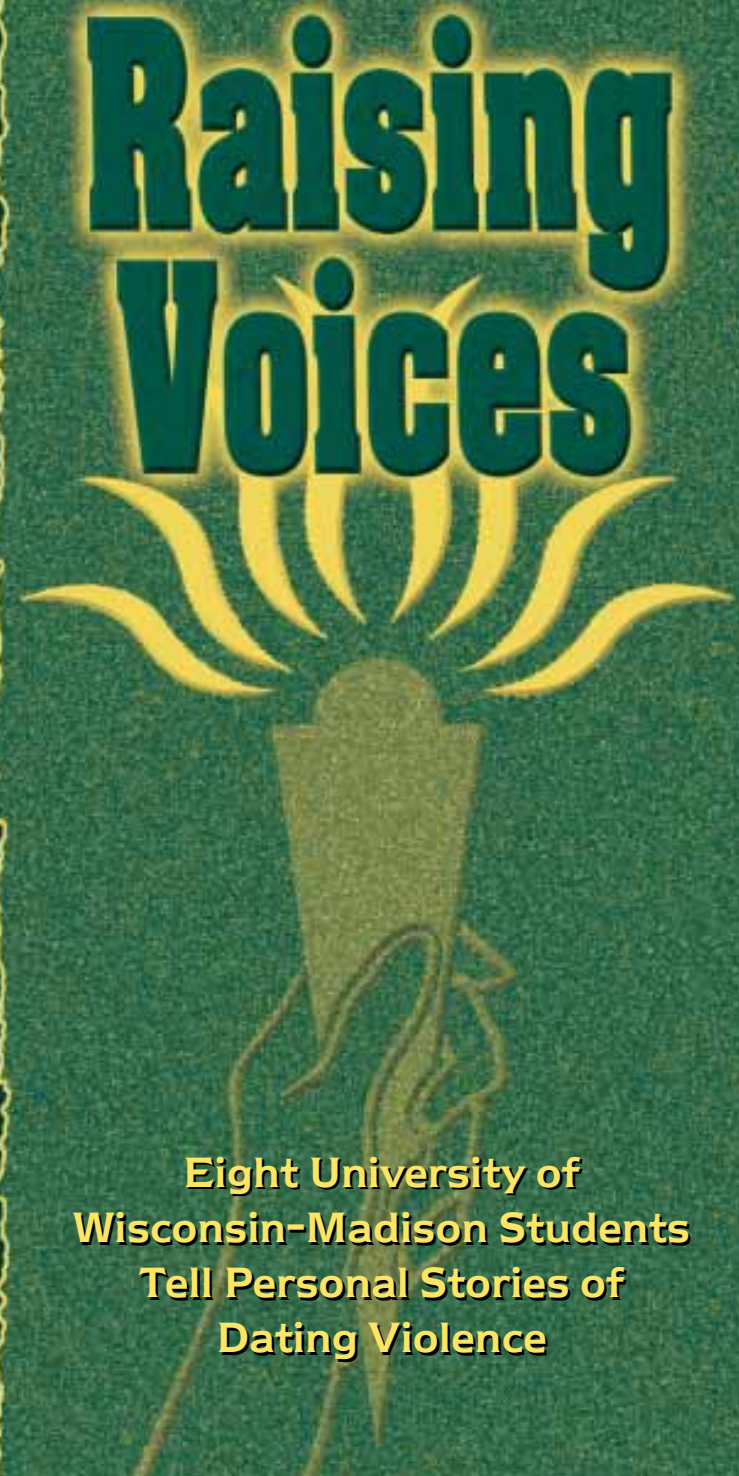
www.uhs.wisc.edu

DEAN OF STUDENTS OFFICE

Provides support and advocacy (including academic advocacy) to student survivors of dating/domestic violence and sexual assault. The Dean of Students Office can conduct nonacademic judicial investigations in cases of dating/domestic violence and sexual assault when the alleged perpetrator is a student.

(608) 263-5700

www.wisc.edu/students



**Eight University of
Wisconsin-Madison Students
Tell Personal Stories of
Dating Violence**

INTRODUCTION

Dating/domestic abuse affects students on every college campus, yet the issue is rarely discussed. Often our idea of dating/domestic abuse is clouded by stereotypes—it only happens between people who are married, working class, or weak or ignorant. But dating/domestic abuse can affect anyone, in any type of relationship, regardless of social class, race, sexual orientation, or education. It is happening to UW–Madison students right now.

This project provides a forum for students to anonymously share their dating/domestic abuse experiences. Eight women told me their stories in one-on-one interviews. I preserved the authenticity of participants' contributions by using direct quotes, but I omitted identifying details and changed the participants' names in order to protect their anonymity. I hope this anthology will give a voice to those students and provide information that will enhance prevention and intervention efforts.

This anthology is not meant to be a representative sample of students experiencing dating/domestic abuse at UW–Madison. First, male victims of abuse are not represented. Males certainly can be victims of dating/domestic abuse, but female victims greatly outnumber their male counterparts. Second, several participants now work on issues related to violence against women, but I don't mean to suggest that the majority do, nor that they should. Perhaps women who work on these issues are more inclined to tell their stories. Third, while dating/domestic violence affects each individual in a unique way, certain people, such as people of color and LGBT people, may face different issues when dealing with the violence and trying to get help. Though this anthology contains the stories of a lesbian woman and a woman of color, the stories do not pretend to fully represent the experiences of any minority group. While I regret that I did not have the resources to do more interviews in order to increase the diversity of this anthology, the eight women's stories do present a very diverse set of experiences.

Many of the women interviewed spoke of resources they used to get help. Some of the women had positive experiences with these resources while others did not. Two of the women talked about negative experiences with the police. I do not want to discourage victims of dating/domestic abuse from calling the police. There are many instances in which the police provide appropriate and respectful intervention. However, I encouraged women to talk openly about trying to get help. I hope this anthology will assist the campus community in improving and strengthening resource areas.

Following these stories you will find the "Power and Control Wheel" and the "Equality Wheel" which list some specific behaviors that may constitute an abusive relationship or a relationship with mutual respect. If you or someone you care about is experiencing dating/domestic violence, there is also a list of resources that can provide help.

I hope these stories inspire you to look at how dating/domestic violence affects your life, what you can do as an individual and as a member of the larger campus community to help others, and how we might work together to prevent this often overlooked issue.

Rachel Perry, December 2002

ANNE

Anne grew up in a small Wisconsin town, and began dating a man during her senior year in high school. Shortly after they began dating, he convinced her to move in with him. Anne described the first signs of abuse as very subtle. He began to limit Anne's contact with her family and friends, and "to get his point across that I was to shut up, he'd pinch me or squeeze my hand really hard or really small things like that, and I just knew that wasn't right."

These behaviors progressed, and when Anne did things her partner didn't approve of, he withheld affection or threatened to break up with her. He isolated her from her family and friends. When he did allow Anne to see her family, he would tell her what she could or could not talk about, and how much emotion she could show around them. He insisted that Anne consult him on her activities so he could approve them. He was also irrationally jealous of other men. Though Anne describes the abuse as primarily emotional, at times he used physical violence against her. "He'd hit me or prevent me from leaving or hang on to me," Anne says. She became depressed, and found it hard to concentrate in school. She also became extremely shy and guarded around other people, and limited her social activities to things she did with her partner. After two years at the local technical college, Anne moved to Madison and began school at UW–Madison. Her partner followed her and continued his abusive behaviors. One night Anne was at her partner's house, and he had been drinking. When Anne got up to go home, he became incredibly angry and pushed her out the door so forcefully that she flew into a fence.

After that incident, Anne broke off the relationship. Her partner harassed and stalked her for the next two months. He would call her frequently and hang around outside her apartment building, so much so that Anne was afraid to go home and frequently had a friend escort her. This made an impact on her education at UW–Madison. "I guess my fear of what he might do was more of a concern than my homework. I think I cared [about my education], but I took the attitude that I had a lot more to worry about," Anne says. She often wished she could talk to someone at the university about her situation. "There were a couple times that I really, really wanted to go to my teaching assistants and say that I know I'm not doing stellar work, but explain why. I was just kind of afraid. I thought maybe they'd think I was making excuses," she says.

Throughout her abusive relationship, Anne had a small support network that consisted of the family that employed her and a close friend, who all supported her during the relationship and helped her after she ended it. She also found that talking to a therapist helped her work through some of the feelings she had about the abuse. Anne suggests that other students who are in an abusive relationship should "find someone nonjudgmental who you can talk to about it... when you realize it's time to make the break, ask them to be your support... Have someone you can rely on, and make connections with other people, so you aren't completely isolated, especially on such a big campus." Anne also stresses that emotional/verbal abuse deserves the same attention as physical abuse. "You may not have visible scars, but I think people who go through emotional abuse feel the same turmoil and worthlessness as any other form of abuse," she says.

KIM

Kim is a UW–Madison undergraduate who was in an abusive relationship before she came to Madison. Kim’s partner was extremely possessive and became angry very easily. She was alerted that her partner’s behavior might be out of line by his previous girlfriend, who had warned her by saying, “Look out for him—he’s got a temper. I don’t want to see you get hurt.” Kim’s partner yelled at her and attempted to humiliate her, and she was often very upset. “I don’t see yelling as part of a relationship. When you have an argument, you talk through it,” she says.

Once, Kim was talking to a male friend in a public place, and her partner thought this friend was her ex-boyfriend. Her partner began to yell at her, and grabbed her tightly around the throat. Kim was extremely upset by this episode, and broke up with him the next day. Kim had not considered his earlier behavior abusive, but after that incident, she realized it had been. Since she has been at UW–Madison, Kim “looks for how somebody deals with their anger” and is sensitive to any type of physical aggression.

While living in University Housing, Kim encountered another situation that left her with a similar sense of being violated. She was hanging out with a friend, when the friend invited her to his room, locked the door, and tried to coerce her to have sex. She refused, insisted he let her out of the room, and left. This experience brought out some of the emotions she had experienced in her earlier abusive relationship. Later, Kim found out that he had done the same thing to several other women, and University Housing was trying to kick him out of the dorms. Kim decided not to press charges with University Housing, but reached out to friends and her House Fellow for support. “That’s one of the really good things about the whole House Fellow deal—If you need anything, talk to [them] about it, and if [they] can’t help you, [they] can find somebody who can.”

Kim knew that both of these situations were not her fault, even though both men blamed her for their actions. “If you start dating somebody and you think their behavior is something you can’t work out in discussions, don’t stay in the relationship because you feel obligated,” she says.

CHRISTINA

Christina was involved with an emotionally and physically abusive partner while a student at UW–Madison. She and her partner both came from unstable family backgrounds, and Christina financially supported her partner. She felt her role in his life was unique and important. “I was stable for him,” she says. “Stability he never had, someone to care for him. I felt like I really loved him. I guess I really didn’t start to realize the abuse until three or four months after it started.”

To her, the first sign of abuse was his extreme jealousy. He prevented her from going out by taking her money, car keys, and ID. He accused her of cheating on him with other men, even though he cheated on her. At the beginning, Christina equated his behavior with love. “At first, I thought it was because he loved me. I had never had anyone be jealous of me, so I thought it was flattering,” she says.

The jealousy turned into verbal abuse, such as name-calling, and became severe physical abuse. He hit her, kicked her in the head, and once threw her over the back of a couch. She was often covered with bruises. When Christina and her partner learned she was pregnant, he insisted that she terminate the pregnancy, but she chose not to get an abortion. One day, when she came home to their apartment with a maternity dress, he became extremely angry and threw her down a flight of stairs. “That’s when I decided this is it—I can’t have a kid with him,” Christina says. “I decided to get the abortion.”

Her partner was a well-known basketball player at UW–Madison, and Christina says, “I wanted to take pictures of my body and pictures of his face and put it on every women’s bathroom stall at the University with the word ‘ABUSER’ below.” Christina’s friends and family knew about the situation to some extent. “Some friends gave me support, some didn’t. Some were disgusted; they would be all, ‘Are you a moron?’ Other friends, they would just be there for me while I was with him, would come to his basketball games with me,” she says. Christina had avoided police involvement, but she finally called after her partner stole a large sum of money from her and beat her. When the police arrived, however, she found them unsympathetic and disrespectful. They questioned her, and even attempted to arrest her when they could not locate her partner. “Then everyone around me said, ‘I told you not to call the police’... all my friends were on his side, because he was this big basketball player,” she says.

Christina now works with women who experience domestic violence. “I’m glad I could give [my experience] a positive outcome. I can help women in the same situations.” She says that her experience has changed the way she looks at relationships. “I now have no tolerance for anything that even resembles abuse,” she says. She has this advice for students who are in abusive relationships: “If you’re in a situation, you know your limit. Nobody can make you leave. Only you know when it’s time to leave.”

JESS

Jess, now a UW–Madison student, began dating her partner while her partner lived in Madison and Jess was at another university. Her partner was her first girlfriend, and was ten years older. Jess immediately felt this set up a difference of power between them. She first recognized the signs of abuse when her friends began to warn her about her girlfriend's behavior. "I didn't realize she was abusive, my friends told me she was," Jess says.

Jess's most traumatic experience in the relationship was when her partner raped her. This made Jess feel extremely upset, but at the same time it confused her. "It's hard to define in gay relationships. There isn't any evidence of rape," she says. For Jess, it was very difficult to study and concentrate on school while she was in the relationship, especially when they lived together. "My grades just shot through the ground," she says. Jess turned to self-injury to cope with the abuse, started having panic attacks, and became suicidal. She found solace in a close friend, who was always willing to be her confidante about the abuse.

Her partner used guilt to make Jess feel obligated to take care of her when she was depressed. She also used Jess as a scapegoat for her problems. She would yell at Jess to intimidate her, and would use violence around her, though it was not directed at Jess. Her partner's use of force started after their romantic relationship ended, but while the two were still friends and living together. She kicked in doors, punched in windows, and once flipped over picnic tables and knocked over garbage cans while the two were walking in a park. "After that," Jess says, "I started becoming aware of all the little things she used to do in the past."

After breaking up with her girlfriend, Jess joined Promoting Awareness, Victim Empowerment (PAVE), a student group committed to stopping sexual assault. This helped her begin working through some of the sexual violence issues in her relationship. Since the abuse, Jess has not been able to be emotionally intimate with women. It took Jess a long time to start to identify and deal with the abuse in her relationship, especially because she had not commonly thought that relationship violence happened in lesbian relationships. "What I understood of an abusive relationship was that it was, normally, just between guys and girls. And a lot of my friends were in abusive relationships—I saw it happening, and it's different from an outside perspective," she says.

Jess is concerned that UW–Madison does not do enough to reach out to victims of abuse. "People don't understand that if you've got abuse or trauma going on, how badly that affects your academic performance. Like it can keep you up all night, so you're not going to do well in school. And you've got this fear inside you, so you're not gonna be able to concentrate," she says. Jess hopes that more professors will be trained to talk to LGBT students about these issues, and more counselors will identify as LGBT, so that students experiencing abuse in a same sex relationship can have people to talk to. Jess reminds students, "Be aware of [relationship violence] in your own relationships."

SHARISSA

Sharissa is a UW–Madison undergraduate who has been involved with her partner for two years. Early in the relationship, her partner exhibited irrational jealousy, and was insecure around Sharissa's bisexuality. Sharissa says, "He would say, 'You have more people to cheat on me with.'" Sharissa did not recognize his jealousy as an early sign of abuse. "It's really confusing because you think, 'Oh they're jealous because they care about you.'" Her partner began to verbally abuse Sharissa, especially when he drank. He would make jealous remarks and call her names. A few months later, he started grabbing her arms, holding her down, pushing her, and once he slapped her. On one occasion, he forced Sharissa to have sex. Since the abuse occurred only when her partner drank, Sharissa had difficulty defining her situation. "When ninety-eight percent of your relationship is really great, it's everything you want, it's ideal. But that two percent is really bad, it's hard for you to figure out." Her partner abstained from drinking for periods, but every now and then he relapsed and became more violent.

During one particularly violent episode, Sharissa called the police, which was difficult for her to do because she had to confront issues that arose around the fact that she and her partner come from different communities of color. She felt chastised for going to the police. "In our [respective] communities, we're not supposed to call the cops," she says. She was disappointed with the police response. She felt they treated her with little respect, and they arrested her partner even though she decided not to press charges. Sharissa indicated that racism was a factor in how the police responded. "I called the police because I wanted the situation diffused—I didn't want him arrested. If you get somebody arrested, especially in a community of color, you're looked at as a bad girlfriend," she says.

Sharissa felt stigmatized because people who found out about her abusive relationship changed their opinions of her. "You have a lot of people who see you as a victim," she says. Sharissa felt that the abuse affected her education because her partner purposely picked fights the night before he knew she had a big test or project due. Sharissa's grades dropped in a few classes in which attendance was mandatory, because she was absent when violence occurred.

Currently, Sharissa's partner is in an alcohol program, and they are in relationship counseling. Sharissa feels that society plays a big role in propagating abuse. "I think that a lot of what goes on in abuse is socialization. You're socialized to be aggressive as a male," she says. Sharissa also is concerned that professors and department chairs are not routinely trained to deal with violence issues. She feels many people who are victims of abuse do not reach out for support because they fear they will be perceived differently. "Until we get rid of the myth that somebody who is abused is a bad person or a weak person, I don't feel like a lot of people are going to reach out for emotional support," Sharissa says.

CLAIRE

Claire, a UW–Madison graduate, was involved in an abusive relationship that began in high school and continued through her undergraduate years. Claire first identified the abuse in her partner's extreme jealousy. She noticed he always needed to know where she was and who she was with. Gradually, Claire's partner became more physically abusive. "The emotional abuse started first, and I would have run for the hills if the physical abuse had started first," she says. Her partner consistently blamed her for his own abusive behaviors. "It was always manipulation that I was the one that was causing the physical or psychological abuse to occur. He wouldn't take responsibility for anything. . . . He would turn it around. It was always something I did," Claire says. At the time, she had difficulty distinguishing the abusive behavior from her feelings for him. "Any other person I'd been with before hadn't acted that way, but. . . I've never been in love like this before with someone either. So that was always hard for me to distinguish, thinking, well this was what true love was about—real intense emotion."

The abuse in the relationship caused Claire's grades to plummet. Her partner expected her to spend a lot of time with him, and this took her away from her studies. He would pick a fight the night before she had an exam to purposely sabotage her academics. Claire also felt that he tried to sabotage her social interactions. He constantly questioned her and was suspicious of her, so much so that she rarely went out with friends. She was in a sorority, but it was difficult for her to forge meaningful relationships. "My social life with my girlfriends, that hurt too, because I couldn't develop deep relationships with them. But that's part of abusers too—they don't want you to become close to other people [so the other people don't] find out how screwed up the relationship is," she says.

Claire didn't let on to her friends and family that she was in an abusive relationship. She says, "you get the message from people that if you start talking about him and what's going on, that people would get upset, like 'Oh what are you doing with him—you should just dump him.' When people start saying that stuff to you and you're not ready to do that, then you just stop talking about it." The relationship severely affected her confidence. "I was no longer myself. I had become part of this awful relationship that crushed who I was," Claire says.

When Claire broke up with her abusive partner, he began to stalk her. At one point he had to be escorted out of her place of employment by the police. When he sent her a threatening letter, and Claire gave the letter to the police, the police contacted him. She has not heard from him in six years. Claire joined a support group at Domestic Abuse Intervention Services, and received individual therapy to work through issues surrounding the abuse. She now works with students in an advisory position at UW–Madison. She says "trust your intuition—if something doesn't feel right, it's not right. If you don't think someone should be treating you that way, then they probably shouldn't be."

HANNAH

Hannah, a graduate student at UW–Madison, experienced verbal and sexual violence in a friendship that was turning into a romantic relationship. She had gotten to know the man as a friend for two months, and saw the mutual romantic attraction. One night while they were at his apartment, they began to fool around, and he started to use language that Hannah found incredibly demeaning. His language objectified women, and Hannah felt this took away her sense of choice in their sexual activity, though she does not describe it as forced sex. "The whole thing felt like it was something from really bad porn," she says. She left his apartment with "an incredible sense of violation." Hannah questioned this feeling, wondering if it was valid, "because it wasn't rape, it wasn't a stereotypically violent act, I really didn't know."

For a few days Hannah was extremely upset, felt isolated, and was losing sleep. She eventually reached out to her friends. "My friends instinctively knew the right thing to say—not, 'Well if it had been me, this never would have happened.'" She wrote a letter to the perpetrator of the violence, stating, "What you did was wrong, this is why it was wrong—don't ever do that to a woman again." After a brief confrontation with this man, Hannah has not seen him since. "I felt like I was taking something back," she says.

Hannah's experience made her decide to get involved in advocacy work for domestic violence and sexual assault prevention issues. "I've become extremely protective of my space," Hannah says. She won't let anyone she is interested in, or who might be interested in her, come into her apartment. Hannah's advice to students is "if you think it was dating violence, that's the important part. It doesn't matter whether the person next to you thinks it was. These things can be incredibly violating, incredibly damaging, and feel incredibly violent."

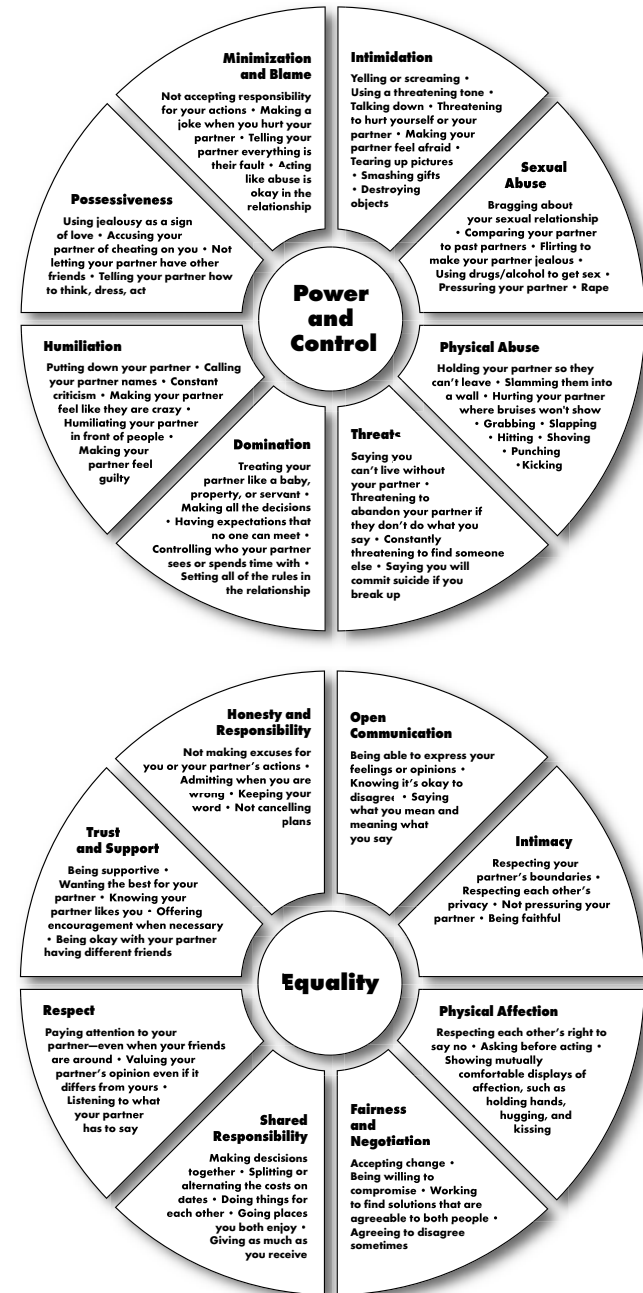
ALICIA

Alicia, a UW–Madison graduate, began dating a friend during her freshman year. The relationship was not exclusive, but it continued for two and a half years. Alicia describes her experience of violence as “sexual abuse in a relationship context.” Early in the relationship, her partner began to use verbal insults and show extreme disrespect for her feelings. When they engaged in sexual activity, he would not stop when she wanted to, and Alicia says, “One time for sure, [it was] a rape.” Alicia describes their pattern of sexual activity as meeting to have sex after going out separately. She says of this pattern, “It was like I was trading the sex for physical contact.”

Alicia broke off the relationship during a semester abroad her junior year, but got back together with him when she returned, at which point “it went from a situation where it hadn’t been very physically abusive, to times where I was very fearful.” At that point he was addicted to cocaine, in addition to the drinking problem he had had since the beginning of the relationship. “He would beat up his male friends and attack his female roommate. He would come over to my house to spend the night and things would escalate and I would run out of my room in fear. He would lock me out of my home,” Alicia says.

As Alicia was getting out of the relationship, she began to volunteer at Domestic Abuse Intervention Services and also worked on domestic violence through independent projects in school. These activities helped her work through her own experience. Alicia says she was always honest with her friends and family about what was going on, but she downplayed her situation, because some of her friends were experiencing other forms of violence. “I wasn’t black and blue, I wasn’t thrown down staircases—some of the things that were happening to my friends. I said it’s no big deal—because I’m not exclusive with him, I can date other people. I had chosen this—so I had my rationalization for why it was okay,” she says.

The pattern of sexual activity and control during that relationship has affected every one of Alicia’s romantic relationships since. “[The relationship] affected how I perceived intimate relationships and trust in intimate relationships. And since he was only the second person I had an ongoing sexual relationship with, it affected my responses in romantic situations, or during sex to this day... I very often break down in tears during sex.” Alicia’s suggestion for students is to “make sure your early relationships are healthy ones.” She continues to educate others on the dynamics of domestic violence and work for a world that will tolerate different models for intimate relationships.



Power and control can also be present in lesbian and gay relationships. A key difference in lesbian and gay relationships is that the abusive partner may be homophobic or may use external homophobia to manipulate their partner. Examples of this type of power and control include threatening to “out” your partner to family, co-workers, or others; saying that no one will believe the abuse because “lesbians/gay men are not violent”; or accusing your partner of hurting the cause for lesbian/gay civil rights if they tell others about the abuse.