

Fall 2006

Domestic Violence Physical and Emotional in the Male Gay Community

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DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL IN THE MALE
GAY COMMUNITY

by

Lee A. Rhodes

A Research Project in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies
Psychology

Regis University

August 28, 2006

Approval Page:

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL IN THE GAY
MALE COMMUNITY

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August 28, 2006

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence partner abuse both physical and emotional occurs in male same sex relationships at the same rate as in heterosexual relationships. The National Coalition of Anti-Violence programs conducted a 10-year study in 10 United States cities, which documented violence at a rate between 25-33% in same sex relationships. A 1991 study found that 46% of the women responding had experienced two or more incidents of physical violence in their relationships (Coleman, 1991). The Survivor Project in Portland, Oregon, is currently conducting a study of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people regarding domestic violence.

Domestic violence can begin as emotional and verbal attacks and often are not recognized as abuse, before escalating to physical violence that can be life threatening. Those who stay in abusive relationships do not enjoy violence. Some are just too frightened and do not know of any resources that can help them get free from the abuse that they are receiving from their partner. Some stay and hope and pray that their partner will change and the abuse will stop. Domestic violence is thought to only occur most commonly in heterosexual relationships. In most gay male relationships the abused males may not even realize that they are experiencing abuse. It is also believed that domestic violence in same sex relationships can be mutual. There is nothing mutual about abusive behavior toward anyone, when an abusive partner chooses to use control, intimidation and or force against his partner.

The purpose of this paper is to define: what is domestic violence, physical and emotional abuse and the cycle of violence. There are some important words and terms that one should be knowledgeable about and understand when helping and supporting gay men, which are victims of domestic violence. Explore literature concerning domestic violence in the gay male community. In this paper is, A Report from the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program, the California Report on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Domestic Violence in 2000. A Report Assessing Domestic Violence in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual and Transgender relationships, Court-approved Batterers' Intervention Program, Crisis Counseling, short-term and outgoing individual mental health service. Partner abuse prevention groups and workshops, referral to LGBT shelters, referral to LGBT specific and sensitive legal services, and advocacy with law enforcement and criminal justice personnel and agencies, service provided. Break the silence, survivor project. Domestic violence "THE WHEEL," Battering in Intimate Relationships using isolation, using emotional abuse, using the children, using intimidation, coercion and threats, minimizing, denying and blaming, physical abuse, using social status and privilege, using economic abuse and sexual abuse, safety planning, accountability and Survivor Groups.

What is Domestic Violence? (www.crimevictimlaw.com/criminal/domvio.html)

Power and control: Domestic violence is a pattern of behavior used by one individual to maintain power and control over another and typically refers to a family or intimate partner relationship. Behavior includes emotional abuse (name-calling, humiliation); isolation (kept from friends and family); limiting the partner from working or (controlling all the money); threats and intimidation (creating fear of physical harm, including displaying weapons, damaging property or hurting pets) and physical violence (including forced sexual relations, kicking, pinching, hitting, pushing etc.).

Domestic violence typically begins with non-violent behavior and escalates over time to increasingly threatening and physically violent behaviors as the victim seeks to pull away from the relationship or assert his or her independence. Once the abuse becomes physical, it often becomes increasingly violent over time, starting from a slap or a shove and escalating to severe beatings or injuries using weapons and potentially leading to homicide.

Domestic violence happens in heterosexual and same-sex relationships, across socioeconomic groups and among all races, ethnicities and religions. In heterosexual relationships the abuser is almost always the man, but can also be the woman.

The Cycle of Violence: (www.crimevictimlaw.com/criminal/domvio.html)

The cycle of violence begins with the tension-building phase in which tension mounts and culminates in an incident of violence. The abuser may, at this point, be arrested or the victim may seek a restraining order. Often, immediately after the violent episode, the abuser is remorseful and promises that no further violence will occur. It is during the “honeymoon” phase that an abused partner may come to forgive the abuser, believe that it will never happen

again and continue the relationship. This phase may then flow into another tension-building phase, culminating in an even more violent event and increasing the risk to the abused partner. Without successful intervention by police, victim advocates, and/or counselors, this cycle continues and the violence escalates.

Important words and terms to know and understand in supporting the gay male community, (Connie Burke and reproduced for Wisconsin Coalition against Domestic Violence information sheet): These definitions explain how many people use these terms. Remember that people define and describe their identities in many different ways that may be very different from these terms listed below.

Gay: A man or boy whose primary sexual and romantic feelings are for people of the same sex. While many people use this term only to refer to Gay men, others use it as a general term to include both men and women for example: “the gay community.”

Lesbian: A woman or girl whose primary sexual and romantic feelings are for people of the same sex.

Bisexual: A person whose sexual and romantic feelings may be for people of either sex.

Homosexual: Refers to any person, male or female, who’s sexual and Romantic feelings are for people of the same sex. While this term was once widely used, it is generally not preferred today. One reason many people do not like it is because it sounds so technical and because it is not a label that emerged from inside the community. The term “homosexual” also has a negative impact on people because homosexuality was once defined as a mental illness. Although the medical and psychiatric professionals have since said that being gay is not an illness, the term still feels oppressive to many.

Heterosexual/straight: Refers to any person, male or female, who’s sexual and romantic feelings are for people of the other sex.

In the life: Is a term which refers primarily to gay men and Lesbians, but may refer to anyone who identifies as living outside heterosexual and or gender norms.

Queer: An inclusive term, which refers collectively to bisexual people, lesbians, gay men, transgender folks and others who may not identify with any of these categories, but do identify as queer. While queer has often been used as a hurtful, oppressive term, many people have re-claimed it as an expression of power and pride. It is also preferred by many because of its inclusiveness. However, there are others who do not identify with this term and still experience it as insulting.

Out: Letting others know about one's own sexual preferences.

Outing: Letting others know about others sexual preferences.

SUMMARY

Some think that same-sex couples may be less prone to the domestic violence aspect because partners are more likely on equal footing with respect to gender. Another aspect of male sex roles focuses on respect. A male is socialized and has the desire to be respected, and to earn respect through economic success. Men are also taught to display an air of confidence, to be self-reliant and strong. The last aspect of the male sex role is one which involves being violent and daring. An important part of the male socialization process is the casual use of violence. Some men with a problem of being abusive have been taught, perhaps through sports or the military to react to problems violently. (Tessian, 1989, p. 104) Franklin (1988) concurs with this and states, "aggression and violence in male sports beginning with Little League and extending through high school and into professional leagues is unabashedly supported, encourage and often demanded by parents, coaches, and spectators" (p.65) Island and Leteller (1991a) concluding that it is almost impossible go grow up as a nonviolent male in this society because of the influences of the television, movies, sports, advertising and the military on male socialization (P.50)

The problem of gay male domestic violence is alluded to in the social science literature, the fact that socialization is the same for most gay men; as it is for most heterosexual men. The male sex role as dictated by our society has several dimensions. The display of certain emotions like fear, tenderness, trust, love, compassion and sensitivity are weaknesses and are discouraged. There are attributes associated with being feminine, and men are socialized to not exhibit these types of characteristics. Most men typically go through a similar socialization process; therefore homosexual men are no different than heterosexual men, in this regard.

Batterers, whether gay or heterosexual, have been profiled as having negative self-concepts and low self-esteem, which lead to high dependency needs, (Byrne, 1996: Coleman, 1994, Walker, 1989). This process is likely to be exacerbated by the combination of male sex role socialization and homophobia, which are inherent in society, (Renzetti 1997.) Homophobia can be internalized to produce negative self-esteem, and may also be used as a weapon of abuse when the abuser threatens to “out” or expose the target’s sexual preference.

CHAPTER TWO

Exploring the Literature on domestic Violence

If the statistics are correct and 95 percent of 99 percent of violence in heterosexual relationships is male against female, there are one to five cases out of a hundred where a female will be the perpetrator and a male the victim survivor. We need to sharpen our skills for assessing domestic violence and avoid making assumptions about the partners we see.

Similarly, to address domestic violence in the gay male relationships, we need to rethink some of our ideas about gender. Other gender-based assumptions need to be challenged as well. Many people believe, for example, that within same-gender relationships, the larger or more masculine person is the perpetrator and the smaller or more feminine individual is the victim. That is a myth, just as it is a myth that sadomasochistic sexual practices, body piercing, leather attire, or frequenting the bar scene are indicators of domestic violence.

Patterns in Domestic Violence: There are many similarities between battering in heterosexual relationships and gay men relationship dynamics in which one partner has primary power and control over the other. All types of abusive behavior physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, psychological, and economic can be used to control a partner, regardless of gender. The danger is often greatest when the victim/survivor has decided to leave. The abuser feels he is losing control of the partner and will try even harder to regain that control, perhaps using lethal means. A victim/survivor of domestic violence may stay in the relationship for a variety of reasons. He may believe the abusive partner is going to change. The abuser may exhibit genuine remorse, making repeated promises to stop and abusive behavior, which may follow a cyclical pattern. The abuser may use threats to keep the victim in the relationship, such as threatening to hurt family or friends or take the children away. The abuser may threaten to out

the partner to family, colleagues and employers. This threat can be a very powerful weapon, especially if the victim/survivor is a member of an ethnic or racial minority and could be ostracized by his family and community. Outing a partner who is a parent can have legal ramifications, as sexual orientation and transgender identity are still used against parents in custody disputes. People also remain in relationships when they perceive they have no safe place to go. Shelters have been designed for heterosexual women. Male victims/survivors have a hard time finding a safe haven, as do individuals in rural communities. Gay and bisexual men who have battered their male partners have difficulty finding appropriate treatment. Placing a gay man in a treatment group with heterosexual batterers is a risky venture, as the gay man may confront intense homophobia from the other men in the group.

Local California Summaries from the: Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Domestic Violence in 2000 report (published by the Nation Coalition of Anti-Violence Program, 7/01 Los Angeles California.)

The L. A. Gay and Lesbian Center's STOP (Support, Treatment/Intervention, Outreach/Education and Prevention) Partner Abuse/Domestic Violence Program serves gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and offers a broad range of services including survivor's groups; a court-approved batterers' intervention program; crisis intervention; short-term and ongoing counseling; prevention groups and workshops; criminal justice advocacy; specialized assessment; LGBT domestic violence training, education, consultation, and prevention services for those at risk.

Reported case of LGBT domestic violence in Los Angeles increased from 1,356 in 1999 to 2,146 in 2000. 95% of these cases were reported to assess by, or brought to the attention of the STOP Program, the Mental Health Services Department, The Anti-Violence Project of the

Youth Services Department of the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center. In fact, 62% of all clients seen by the L. A. Gay and Lesbian Center's Mental Health Services Department reported or were assessed with domestic violence. The remaining 5% of 2000's total number of cases were reported to organizations in Los Angeles other than the L. A. Gay and Lesbian Center that tracked and maintains information about the number of LGBT clients that they serve. Since 1996, the STOP Program has seen a consistent increase in the number of persons who report domestic violence or who are assessed with it. While that increase has been attributable to progressively expanded domestic violence programming by the L.A. Gay and Lesbian center, the most recent increase is due in large part to funding for domestic violence prevention activities from the California department of Health Services, Maternal and Child Health Branch. Receipt of this funding beginning in July 2000, The STOP Program was able to hire staff for its prevention activities and subsequently increased its outreach and community education efforts, in addition to expanding collaborative efforts with other Southern California service providers.

The STOP Program has developed and maintains strong collaborative relationships with the LA. County Domestic Violence Council, the West Hollywood Partners Abuse Education Task Force, the Statewide California Coalition for Battered Women, the Gay and Lesbian Community Center of Greater Long Beach and numerous other organizations devoted to preventing and addressing domestic violence in California. As a result, the number of service providers that requested and received training about LGBT domestic violence increased in 2000, and there was a broader distribution of LGBT specific domestic violence prevention material throughout L.A. County and Southern California. Also, the number of regional domestic violence programs and services organizations that track LGBT cases more than

double from 2% in 1999 to 5% in 2000, but the vast majority of domestic violence organizations still did not track or differentiate LGBT client data.

The courts in California have slowly begun to standardize batterers' treatment as well as the participation and attendance of batterers in court approved programs regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Criminal justice personnel continued to inadequately assess LGBT cases and failed to apply consistently equal standards throughout 2000. As in 1999, STOP Program saw an increase in the number of LGBT persons mandated to batterers' treatment in 2000. Because of the unavailability of LGBT, specific batterers' intervention programs and the acute need for them the STOP Program became one of the largest batterers' intervention programs in Los Angeles County, where there are 140 other court-approved programs designed primarily for the heterosexual population. In addition to the increase in court-mandated numbers, the STOP Program also saw an increase in the number of primary LGBT victims mandated to batterers' treatment.

The highest number of cases was reported in January and November of 2000. It is possible that the number of incidents increased in conjunction with Halloween, Thanksgiving and Christmas. It is probable that the increases were attributable to increased outreach by the STOP Program during the preceding months. The STOP Program increased its outreach and education activities in October for Domestic Violence Awareness Month. STOP hosted a press conference in December entitled, "Holidays Free from Family Violence" in collaboration with the L.A. County West Hollywood's Mayor, representation from Senator Sheila Kuehl's office, and L.A.'s newly elected District Attorney in his first public appearance following the election.

San Francisco, CA: Reported 691 cases of LGBT domestic violence in 2000. These findings were gathered through collaboration between three agencies, Queer Asian Women's

Services of the Asian Women's Shelter; the Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Anti-Domestic Violence Program of W.O.M.A.N., Incorporated; and Community United against Violence. There were 434 reports from female survivors, 204 reported incidents from male survivors, and 52 cases involving transgender survivors. The three collaboration agencies each made inroads in services available to LGBT survivors. Asian Woman's Shelter created a new program that trains friends of survivors in domestic violence education. Friends are often the first line of support for members of their communities experiencing partner abuse. Building upon 1999 outreach to provide advocacy and support to the deaf and hearing-impaired communities, W.O.M.A.N. Inc. initiated a TTY support line.

Community United against Violence strengthened its ongoing efforts to provide services to the most underserved groups within the LGBT community, providing advocacy emotional support, emergency housing and courtroom accompaniment to increased number of survivors from communities of color and the transgender community. The bulk of the cases, 438 out of 691 were reported by gay men and lesbians a percentage of (63%). There were 100 documented cases from bisexual survivors (15% of the total), and 80 cases involving heterosexual survivors (12% of the total). There were also significant increases in Latina/Latino survivors (+30% or 86 cases) and multiracial survivors, with 25 incidents reported, up from 14 in 1999. Survivors from communities of color, as well as transgender individuals, often face discriminatory barriers every step of the way when seeking help. In San Francisco, this problem is being addressed with culturally appropriate and sensitive services available at each of the reporting agencies. In 2000, monolingual survivors could access a language bank of multilingual advocates and translators trained in domestic violence through Asian Women's Shelter's Multilingual access Model. Community United against Violence has dedicated Spanish-

speaking staff, which is also bi-cultural. Also at CUAUV, transgender survivors can work directly with a transgender advocate. W.O.M.A.N., Inc began work on the overlooked population of children who witness domestic violence in LGBT families. Statistics on LGBT domestic violence reported by the three agencies represented only a small number of actual cases, and as in heterosexual relationships. LGBT domestic violence occurs in approximately 20 to 25% of all couples. Even in San Francisco, there is a long way to go to meet the demands posed by this problem. Community need still exceeds available recourses, especially in providing survivors with emergency housing and shelter. Currently this is provided through a network of limited hotel vouchers. There is still no fixed shelter or transitional housing specifically designed for San Francisco's LGBT community consequently, most battered LGBT individuals are more likely to remain with their abuser longer and be at ever greater risk for injury.

The California Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Domestic

Violence in 2000: (Los Angeles, Gay and Lesbian Center, Patrick Leteller)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. Rather, it is an old phenomenon getting some new attention. In California 2000, that attention took a variety of forms, namely:

- An effective community-wide educational campaign drawing attention to the problem and telling people where to turn for help.
- Enhanced client screening for domestic violence at a large, urban, mental health clinic.
- An in-depth study of violence in the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning youth, including violence in their intimate relationships.
- A comprehensive service provider needs assessment identifying dangerous gaps in service.
- Increased collaboration between LGBT specific domestic violence service providers and traditional domestic violence service providers working primarily with battered heterosexual women.

As a result of these developments, reported incidents of domestic violence from LGBT people in California jumped dramatically in 2000. In addition, advocates and policy makers now have data to help inform domestic violence services of some of the LGBT community's most vulnerable members, its' youth, as well as valuable information that will inform planning to reduce service gaps affecting the highly diverse LGBT community as a whole.

An important distinction needs to be made. While reported incidents of LGBT battering increased dramatically in 2000, the prevalence of abuse in same-gender relationships did not necessarily increase at all. In fact, actual rates of abuse are likely unchanged, with domestic violence affecting approximately 20-25% of all same-gender couples, as it does in opposite-gender couples. (Merrill, G.S., and Wolfe, V.A. Battered Gay Men: An Exploration of Abuse, Help Seeking, and Why They Stay, (Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 39 (2), 2000), (Renzetti,

Claire, *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*. New York: Sage Publication 1992).

It is also important to recognize that the increases tabulated in California during the 2000 calendar year still represent only a small fraction of cases of LGBT abuse. Only five agencies in California specifically address the problem of LGBT battering. Only about twenty agencies do so in the other 49 states. The fact is, if you are a victim of LGBT battering in America, you are not likely to find the help you need.

Like all survivors of domestic violence, LGBT people face enormous barriers in getting help from law enforcement, the medical system, and from traditional battered women's services and related social service providers. But the additional burdens of homophobia and heterosexism make help seeking even more tenuous for LGBT people, leaving them more isolated and more vulnerable to their partner's violence. As one example, since police officers were perpetrators in almost half (48%) of the incidents of antitransgender violence in San Francisco last year, (*Anti-Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Violence in 2000, Reported* published by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Project, April 2001).

Reported incidents of LGBT battering increased dramatically in California in 2000, with a total of 2,837 incidents reported, an increase of 740 incidents over 1999. Significantly, all of the additional incidents in California were tallied in Los Angeles, which saw a startling 58% increase in incidents with 2,146 incidents reported, an increase of 790 over the previous year. Even though San Francisco saw a slight drop in incidents in 2000, down to 691 from 741 in 1999, the state as a whole still saw a huge increase. California's total of 2,837 reported incidents accounted for 70% of the national total. This put California far ahead of any other state in reports of LGBT battering; only three other cities, all outside California, reported over

100 incidents of abuse in 2000. New York reported 510, Boston reported 397 and Chicago reported 109.

With over 30 million people, California is the nation's most populous state, and it is home to two of the nation's largest and most visible LGBT communities, in Los Angeles and San Francisco. Even so, the high number of LGBT domestic violence incidents reported in California last year point to several factors beyond simple demographics.

Media Campaign Helps Increase Awareness and Client Load:

The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center is home to the broadest array of gay, lesbian, and bisexual and transgender services anywhere and is the world's largest gay and lesbian organization. The Los Angeles Gay and Lesbian Center is a powerful, non-profit force for gay and lesbian rights and home to a wide array of free or low cost legal, employment, educational, cultural and social programs for the LGBT community. A leader in the field of LGBT domestic violence, the L.A. Center conducted one of the first studies ever done on the subject of LGBT domestic violence.

The L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center's STOP Partner Abuse/Domestic Violence Program is the most comprehensive LGBT-specific domestic violence program in the nation and provides multiple services for members of the LGBT community and their children including survivors' groups; a court approved batterers' intervention program; youth groups; crisis counseling, short term and ongoing individual counseling; partner abuse prevention groups and workshops; referral to LGBT sensitive shelters; referral to LGBT specific and sensitive legal services; advocacy with law enforcement/criminal justice personnel and agencies/service providers and others; specialized assessment; LGBT domestic violence training, education and consultation; and prevention services for those at risk.

In July of 2000, the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center's STOP Partner Abuse/Domestic Violence Program received a \$450,000 grant from the California Department of Health Services, Maternal and Child Health Branch, to expand its prevention services and make domestic violence prevention education more available throughout Southern California.

More specifically, the grant in part funded a public information poster campaign that alerted people to the phenomenon of same-gender battering and told them where to turn for help. The campaign's eye-catching posters and "There's No Excuse for Partner Abuse" (L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center's STOP Partner Abuse/Domestic Violence Program) stickers were displayed in LGBT bars, coffee shops, and bookstores, distributed to domestic violence service agencies throughout Southern California, and reprinted in the mainstream and gay press were stories about same-gender abuse. A large part of the increase in California's reports of LGBT battering can therefore be attributed to the effectiveness of campaign and related outreach efforts.

The Department of Health Services Grant also funded LGBT, specific trainings for domestic violence service providers throughout Southern California as well as three full-time staff, all to insure that when LGBT survivors turned to social service for support, they would be appropriately identified and treated with understanding and compassion. As a result of this systematic training and outreach, referrals from battered women's service agencies and related organizations to the STOP Domestic Violence Program increased dramatically over the year.

A second factor contributing to California's lead in reports of LGBT battering is that the STOP Program also expended its screening of all clients who came to the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center for mental health services. Additional questions were added to the existing

domestic violence assessment; thereby enabling clinicians to more readily identify and intervene with all clients at risk for partner abuse. The L. A. Gay and Lesbian Center's multiple and varied programming included family support, counseling, HIV services, anger management, alcohol and drug abuse treatment, etc., a wide array of clients were seeking help from the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center but not necessarily with domestic violence as their presenting problem.

Research on domestic violence clearly indicates that when parents in medical settings are asked about domestic violence in an empathetic and non-judgmental manner, they are likely to respond truthfully, (Council on Ethical and Judicial Affairs, American Medical Association, Physicians and domestic violence: Ethical Consideration, Journal of the American Medical Association. 1992:267:3190-3193) Clients of the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center were no exception: an astounding 65% of the mental health clients were assessed to be experiencing domestic or at risk for it. As a result, STOP Program staff was able to provide information and counseling for many additional clients.

Little help is available for battered LGBT persons. In an effort to determine what help is actually available to LGBT people affected by domestic violence in Southern California, the L. A. Gay and Lesbian Center collaborated with the L. A. County Domestic Violence Council and City of West Hollywood on a survey of 1000 social service agencies and domestic violence organizations though-out Los Angeles County.

The survey, the first of its kind included questions about staff training on LGBT battering, organizational policies and procedures on LGBT issues, the agency's published materials, and how they screen victims and batterers, and other salient issues.

Not surprisingly, the responses are disheartening. Only 41 agencies responded to the survey in all (a 4% response rate), and many of those submitted incomplete responses. The vast majority (73%) of the responding agencies neither mention LGBT people in their printed material, nor addresses LGBT issues in their policies and procedures. Most do not use LGBT specific language when screening new clients and many do not train staff about LGBT domestic violence. In short, the majority do not attempt to serve LGBT people at all, not to mention serve a population as challenging as LGBT survivors of domestic violence.

What does this mean? It means, for instance, that when a battered gay or lesbian person reads a brochure from a local domestic violence service agency. He/she will most likely read only about women battered by men and will assume the agency does not help gay or lesbian. If he/ she call their hotline anyway, he/she is likely to speak to a counselor who has had no training on gay or lesbian battering and will ask what the “husband or boyfriend has done.” If he/she comes out to the counselor as gay or lesbian, the counselor is not likely to be able to talk in any depth about gay or lesbian battering or to make referrals to LGBT sensitive services. The counselor may inappropriately identify the caller as a perpetrator of abuse, and make it difficult for him/her to get proper victim services in the future because he/she has been labeled a batterer by the system. The counselor may also be explicitly homophobic and hostile, contributing to the caller’s isolation and confusion. Like many other gay and lesbians who seek help from domestic violence services, this man or woman is not likely to call again and may be deterred from seeking help from other sources despite escalating violence from his/her partner. (Renzetti, Claire. *Violent Betrayal: Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*. New York: Sage Publications, 1992. For a discussion of the barriers gay and bisexual men face in receiving help

from domestic violence services, G.S. and Wolfe, V.A. Battered gay men: An exploration of abuse, help seeking, and why they stay, *Journal of Homosexuality* Vol. 39 (2), 2000.)

While there is clearly a dearth of services available for LGBT persons affected by domestic violence, the vast majority of survey respondents (78%) expressed a desire for trainings on the topic, for information about resources, referrals, and for staff support to better identify and help LGBT persons.

In an effort to meet this need, the STOP Partner Abuse/Domestic Violence Program increased efforts to expand the activities of the LGBT Issues, Committee of the L.A. County Domestic Violence Council. The L.A. County Domestic Violence Council was chartered in 1979 and was the first joint government, private sector domestic violence program in California to launch a comprehensive approach to family violence.

The Council's LGBT issued Committee is a dynamic committee comprised of representatives from numerous domestic violence organizations that are committed to creating greater visibility and public awareness about LGBT domestic violence. Chaired by staff of the STOP Program and the City of West Hollywood, the committee is one of the Council's largest and most active committees. The committee studies the problem of LGBT domestic violence in Los Angeles and makes recommendations and develops activities that support the coordination, education, public information, training, legislation, services and programs.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

This study was used to collect data and to gain an insight in the social phenomenon of domestic violence in same-sex male relationships and for a better understanding of the issues surrounding same-sex male unions. Who are faced with the dilemma of interpersonal violence within their relationships? The research method used for this paper was the qualitative descriptive method and designed to discover and uncover knowledge rather than to test any specific hypotheses. The data was collected and evaluated for this purpose only from news articles, research documents, commentaries, a California report on GLBT year 2000, articles, brochures and support was provided by Safe Nest Las Vegas, Nevada, Tamara Utzig, Supervisor of Advocate Service and Stephanie Liester, Clinical Director of Therapy Services, Family Law Community Legal Education Class attended On Saturday July 2006 at Williams S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada Las Vegas, Nevada and Clark County Legal Services Program, Inc. Mindy Fisher, Law Clerk and Heather Branagan, Intake Advocate, Nevada Legal Services Las Vegas, Nevada. Listed below are recommendations for the state of California from this report:

Recommendations for the State of California

Support the Development of the California coalition of LGBT domestic violence service providers, programs and organizations:

- Create a statewide contingent of LGBT domestic violence service providers, programs and organizations that constitute an informed, diverse and strategic work group.
- Foster presentation in a statewide coalition from statewide and local, public and private entities.
- Implement mandatory training on LGBT domestic violence issues to state and local service providers, health care personnel and criminal justice entities throughout California.
- Review, recommend and influence public policy and legislative action to improve assistance, treatments, education and prevention of LGBT domestic violence.

Earmark and increase funding for LGBT services providers for care, treatment, education and prevention of LGBT violence:

- Allocate, increase and earmark funds for LGBT-specific programs to develop and provide domestic violence services that will assist, treat, educate and prevent the social epidemic of LGBT domestic violence. (It is recommended that these funds come through direct legislation by the Governor and California State Assembly, the Governor's office of Criminal Justice Planning (OCJP), the California Department of Health Services (Battered Women's Shelter Program) and the state's allocation of the Violence against Women Act/VAWA funds.)
- State distributed funding of prevention and direct service programs must be made accessible to all quality programs regardless to the gender or sexual orientation of the client base.
- The LGBT community must be recognized as an underserved population needing dedicated and targeted funding for specifically designed and culturally appropriate technical assistance, public education, outreach, and prevention and intervention programs.
- Funders must support innovative community-based efforts and require projects that claim to work with the LGBT community to provide a historical record of such work in the community in addition to documentation of internal policies and procedures that are inclusive of the LGBT community. The competency of staff and volunteers within funded programs as well as the quality and quantity of their training in LGBT issues and same-gender domestic violence must be documented as well.

Conduct LGBT domestic violence education and outreach to criminal justice and law enforcement agencies:

- Conduct aggressive outreach, training and education to law enforcement and criminal justice organizations and their courts, divisions, precincts and academies throughout California. Training and education must include messages and information to institute or strengthen written policies, procedures and practices that are non-discriminatory toward LGBT populations.
- Create a task force including public and private criminal justice personnel, associations, agencies, unions and service agencies to work in close collaboration with LGBT domestic violence service providers and organizations to recommend and oversee outreach and training efforts.

Inform and educate the state and its local communities:

- Request a report of the Legislature and hold legislative hearings to outline the key issues and epidemiology of domestic violence, inclusive of same gender domestic violence.
- Include key law enforcement, criminal justice and social service personnel in the above-mention efforts.
- Encourage local coalitions to promote community discussions and initiatives to raise awareness of LGBT domestic violence.
- Conduct an annual Sacramento briefing by constituents, survivors and service providers to inform legislators of concerns and needs of LGBT populations at risk for domestic violence.

California state and local governmental service providers must apply consistent standards when responding to domestic violence:

- Court-ordered batterers' intervention must be consistently mandated for the full 52 weeks as stipulated in the Penal Code at a certified/approved program. Furthermore, batterers' intervention rather than anger management classes must be mandated for perpetrators of domestic violence.
- Restraining orders must be ordered consistently for the full three-year period. Furthermore, Emergency Protective Orders must be issued consistently regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the involved parties.
- Law enforcement and criminal justice personnel must receive increased training in assessment to ensure consistent arrests regardless of gender or sexual orientation of the involved parties.
- Law enforcement and criminal justice personnel must work in close collaboration with LGBT domestic violence specialists in dual arrest cases involving members of the LGBT community.

- Comprehensive training in LGBT domestic violence must be mandated for all health care professionals and standard practice guidelines to appropriately identify, document and intervene in all cases of domestic violence must be established.

**Mandate the study, documentation and evaluation of
LGBT domestic violence:**

- The Governor's Office, the office of Criminal Justice Planning and the California Department of Health Services must require all domestic violence programs in California to include information about the gender and sexual orientation of clients in their statistical documentation and recognize the partnerships of LGBT person as "domestic."
- Include information about gender and sexual orientation in all law enforcement and criminal justice statistical documentation.
- Questions specific to the LGBT community must be included in community and academic studies.
- Fund the California Coalition (see recommendation A) to conduct a thorough statewide victimization survey to properly gauge incidents of abuse in California.

**LGBT domestic violence must be understood as a
multicultural health crisis:**

- Health care professionals and law enforcement and criminal justice entities must be properly trained to understand and recognize the LGBT community as a distinct culture with in its own identity, customs, language and history while understanding and recognizing the impact of sexual orientation and gender identity on other factors of diversity.
- LGBT services and prevention efforts must recognize and respond to California's changing language, race, class and cultural diversity by providing LGBT culturally sensitive public awareness and intervention products, documents and services.
- LGBT outreach, intervention and prevention efforts must provide services and public education across the entire life span of the individual from first relationships in youth to relationships among elders.
- Domestic violence programs must be respectful of diverse family structures including families with recognized and unrecognized legal and/or marital status, individuals and couples with immigration issues, extended non-traditional family structures (including step families) and survivors who are isolated from traditional family support.

Q & A with LGBT Clients Impacted by Domestic Violence

Q: What brought you to the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center's STOP Partner Abuse/Domestic Violence Program?

Kevin: I was arrested following a fight with my boyfriend. Rick and I were together for two years, and after being beaten several times by him. I fought back. Rick called the police and I was arrested, incarcerated, and mandated by the court to attend a batter's group.

Ashley: I was attempting to defend myself when my girlfriend, Rose, sat on me then hit me in the face and head. Our neighbors called the police. I guess they arrested me because I'm bigger than she is and had fewer physical marks.

Karen: My partner, Julie, and I were having problems so we came to the Center for couple counseling. I had a difficult time at first convincing Julie to accompany me but she finally agreed. The counselor that we saw together at the Center explained that couple counseling could make our situation worse and recommended individual counseling.

Jennifer: My HIV case manager suggested that I talk to a domestic violence specialist because I kept coming to my appointments with bruises on my body.

Mike: I moved across the country in an attempt to escape my abusive partner. I was frightened that he'd kill me.

Cheryl: I'm trying to put my life back together after being sheltered. My former partner abused me the entire time that we were together. We saw several counselors and they all insisted that we were both responsible for the problems in our relationship. A friend suggested that I go into a shelter after I was hospitalized following an especially abusive incident with my partner.

Q: Did you know that you were experiencing domestic violence?

Kevin: No, I didn't. When Rick and I partied together, he was often aggressive with me. At first it was confusing but I assumed that it was because of the drugs. Eventually, when he began pushing and hitting me when we were sober, I began to think that it had something to do with me. No matter how hard I tried, nothing changed. I never experienced violence in my family or in any of my previous relationships, so I really didn't know what to make of it. Besides, I'm larger than Rick so it didn't occur to me that it was "domestic violence." I could have fought back if I felt like it. I just didn't want to hurt him.

Ashley: Not really, Rose and I both have tempers. I grew up with a lot of fighting as well. I have four siblings and had to learn how to stand up for myself.

Karen: Somewhere in my mind I did because my ex-boyfriend was arrested for domestic violence and some of it felt similar. I filed a restraining order against him and even went into a shelter for a few weeks. I was just different this time because my partner was female. I just couldn't believe it was "domestic violence."

Jennifer: Not at all, I was beaten repeatedly by many of my boyfriends. Violence just seemed to be part of life.

Mike: For the most part I did. I grew up with domestic violence. My mother was battered by my father and my situation was similar in many ways to that.

Cheryl: Not really. No one ever called it that. Everyone I talked to called it a "relationship problem", "communication difficulties", or "codependence." One person told me that I was attracted to abusive partners.

Q: Did you try to get help before coming to the Center?

Kevin: A friend of mine suggested that I call a shelter. I called a hotline at a shelter but they weren't very helpful. I guess it was because I'm male. The hotline counselor treated me like I was an abuser. When she asked me about my wife, I hung up on her.

Ashley: I never thought that we needed any help. I just thought we were under a lot of stress. We blew off steam by yelling at one another.

Karen: Someone at work gave me a brochure about LGBT domestic violence.

Jennifer: I wanted help but there aren't many places for women like me. When my case manager told me that I could get help from people who understood me, I decided to try it.

Mike: I tried but there were no services for gay male victims of domestic violence within 700 miles of where I lived.

Cheryl: I worked with several counselors and was in a domestic violence shelter as well.

Q Were the police involved? If so, were they helpful?

Kevin: I actually called the police. The first time, the officer told us, "You boys need to play nice." They had Rick leave but he came back drunk several hours later and was more abusive than he had been earlier. The second time, they told us that they would arrest both of us if they had to come back again. That really frightened me so I tried to handle it on my own.

Ashley: I was treated badly. The officers kept saying that they had heard it all before. Every time I tried to speak they told me to be quiet and "save it for a judge." Jail was even worse. Processing took several hours then I sat in a cell for another eight hours before anyone ever acknowledged me.

Karen: I haven't had any contact with the police while in this relationship. Julie and I are still together and trying to work things out.

Jennifer: It seemed safer not to call them. I was afraid that the police would harass and arrest me just for being transgender. I have friends who have been jailed without their HIV medications. That terrifies me.

Mike: I called the police once but they refused to respond. The officer that I talked to kept asking if a female was in danger.

Q: Was the court involved? If so, was the court helpful?

Kevin: I could tell my public defender was uncomfortable with me because I'm gay. He wouldn't listen to me or look at me. I kept telling him that I was defending myself but he insisted on a plea bargain. I spent 5 days in jail really wanted to get out, so I plead "no contest." I was charged with a felony but advised that it would be reduced to a misdemeanor if I plead guilty. I took the deal so now I have to attend a batterers' group for a year, pay a fine and complete 200 hours of freeway cleanup. It isn't fair but it's better than jail.

Ashley: The judge said that I had a choice of jail or counseling. I was really upset because I felt that Rose should have been arrested too. Now, every time that we have an argument. Rose insists that I'm to blame because I was arrested. She's threatened to call the police if I don't do what she tells me to do.

Karen: I don't feel that I need help from the court. Even if I did, it's hard for me to believe that I could get a restraining order against another woman.

Jennifer: I've been to court in the past and the judges have not been very kind. They call me by my birth name instead of my chosen female name. They also call me "Sir" and "Son," its humiliating.

Mike: The court has not been involved with my case.

Cheryl: I never wanted the court to be involved because I'm a lesbian. I'm afraid that I have too much to lose.

Q: Have the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center's services been helpful?

Kevin: The judge referred me to the L.A. Gay and Lesbian Center. The group I'm in is for people in similar situations. All of the guys in the group fought back and got caught. I prefer the term "survivor" rather than "victim" but I guess that's what I am. We're learning how to stay safe and we all support each other.

Ashley: I still think that Rose needs counseling as well but I've gotten some positive things from it. I'm doing my best to move beyond the whole incident. I don't fight back any longer. I walk away until we've both calmed down. The facilitator and other group members have been really supportive.

Karen: Definitely, I believe that my risk for domestic violence has really decreased. I understand the LGBT cycle of violence and its dynamics. My sexuality has always been an issue with both my ex-boyfriend and with Julie. They've accused me of cheating on them with

people of both genders. I've learned numerous skills to use when it gets difficult and Julie seems to respond differently as well. She's gotten a lot out of the anger management group that she's in.

Jennifer: I come to group every week and individual counseling as well. I've learned that I'm strong and that I can be proud of myself. It's been really difficult for me but I know that I can have healthy relationships. I can't imagine what it would have been like if I lived in an area that doesn't have services for transgender women.

Mike: Absolutely, in many ways. I feel like they saved my life. I'm grateful that I found services specifically designed for the gay community.

Cheryl: It's the only place I can be completely honest about my situation. They really understand what its like to be me.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Think and Re-Think: Domestic Violence in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Relationships: (Connie Burk, AABL/Northwest Network of Bisexual, Transgender and Lesbian)

Survivors of Abuse:

Many survivors of same sex abuse indicate that they do not access mainstream domestic violence programs because the agencies are ill-equipped to handle the complex intersections of homophobia, abuse isolation for gay men, bisexual, lesbian and transgender survivors. Many programs are uncertain how to support these survivors or are reluctant to address homophobic, biphobic transphobic behaviors and attitudes of staff and program participants. However, more and more programs are considering these barriers and beginning to train staff, develop procedures and create values that will allow them to provide competent, safe support for gay men, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

This paper is to provide some baseline information regarding domestic violence in gay men, bisexual, transgender, and lesbian relationships as well as to frame a number of questions regarding the Movement's analysis of domestic violence. One of the main objectives of this Paper is to encourage advocates to examine and critique their thinking in regard to these issues. The intention of this paper is to also keep the values of survivor agency/autonomy, survivor safety and batterer accountability central in the analysis of domestic violence.

To examine some of the differences between the experiences of gay men, lesbian, bisexual or transgender survivors and the experiences of heterosexual survivors, we can start by looking at a few of the tools batterers use to establish and maintain abusive power over their partners.

Isolation: Because of heterosexism and homophobic, few people grow up having information about what an empowered; nurturing gay relationship could look like. Movies, books, music, and jokes routinely represent gay people as perverted and unnatural. We see love stories and romanticize heterosexual relationships, even when they are premised on violence or coercion, but we see few if any representations of gay people as loving, stable and happy. Heterosexism prevents us from having access to the gay culture and to the information that would teach us what a nurturing gay relationship could look like.

Abusive partners can point to the multitude of images that represent gay people as sick and violent and say, “See, this is what it means to be gay. You will have to toughen up if you are going to survive. I am not abusing you; I am only showing you the ropes.”(Connie Burk, AABL/Northwest Network of Gay Bisexual, Transgender and Lesbian, Wisconsin Coalition against Domestic Violence)

Also, homophobia sets one up to be isolated when he/she comes out as gay, lesbian, transgender or bisexual. Often when he/she comes out, friends and family subtly distance themselves from accommodations. Prior to discrimination laws, it was legal to fire a person from a job because he/she was gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Domestic violence advocates should learn about discrimination laws against sex and gender and enforcement them in their communities and states. When educating in your communities about same sex domestic and dating violence, share this information with people, it is important to learn about the limits of these laws. Are the protections enforced? How? What custody cases have been before judges in your area? Have gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people been awarded custody of their children? How have dissolution of property cases been handled?

Trouble-shooting with a survivor about coming out at work, school, church or wherever and abusive partner might be threatening to out them can be a powerful antidote to the threats. Is there someone who might be open to hearing that he/she is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender? Can he/she come out to a supervisor who has supported him/her on others issues in the past? How about a neighbor or family member? Listen carefully. Don't dismiss her/his fears.

It is also vital not to minimize or dismiss physical threats made by men/women who batter. Sometimes advocates assume that a batterer who is the same sex will be less dangerous, whether he/she is abusing his/her partner physically, sexually and emotionally, than a man who batters a woman. To be blunt, this is a myth.

Using Children: Many gay men, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people co-parent children. Like heterosexual families, some parents adopt, some utilize donor insemination and some have blended families from prior relationships. Although many people co-parent, few children have two legal parents of the same gender. In most cases of adoption, only one parent is allowed to legally adopt the child. In other cases, the birth parent is the only parent with legal rights regarding the child.

When a survivor who is being battered in a same sex relationship is not the birth parent or legally adoptive parent, to leave the violent partner, means to leave his/her child. In these cases, it is extremely rare virtually unheard of for a court to award visitation (much less custody) to the survivor. Even in the few instances when a survivor has legally adopted their partner's biological child, it is rare for courts to award custody to the adoptive parents.

As for heterosexuals, these custody battles are long and expensive. Unlike heterosexual custody cases, however, in many communities it is difficult to find attorneys with substantive experience in pursuing these cases.

Safety Planning in Small Communities:

Like faith communities, immigrant and refugee communities and other close communities, it is often very easy for GLBT batterers to gather information about their partners. Most towns and even large cities have only one or two places where people “in the life” gather for parties, evenings out etc. While it is a myth that all gay people know one another, it is true that the size of the gay communities makes overlapping friendships, partnerships and other relationships a common occurrence.

Unlike safety planning with women in less insular communities, safety planning with survivors of same sex domestic violence must include plans for routinely running into his/her batterer, being in meetings and community events with his/her batterer, being seen by and seeing his/her batterer. If we do not work with survivors to anticipate and plan for such meetings, survivors lose community because it is impossible to stay safe. Supporting survivors to reconnect and build community in spite of his/her batterer’s attempts to intimidate, isolate and humiliate him/her is a major role of the Think Re-Think Domestic Violence GLBT program.

Accountability:

It is important to hold people who are engaged in battering their partners accountable for their abuse even as we have compassion for them. Becoming accountable for the abuse they are perpetrating is an important step for batterers to heal from whatever violence they may have experienced. We also recognize that people who systematically take power and control over

other people are with us in our communities most all of the time. When attempts are made to ostracize or isolate batterers, we find that:

1. The person simply moves to a new community where people are unaware of their abusive behavior.
2. The community divides over the choice and blames the survivor for the division.
3. The survivor is the one ostracized instead of the person using power over.

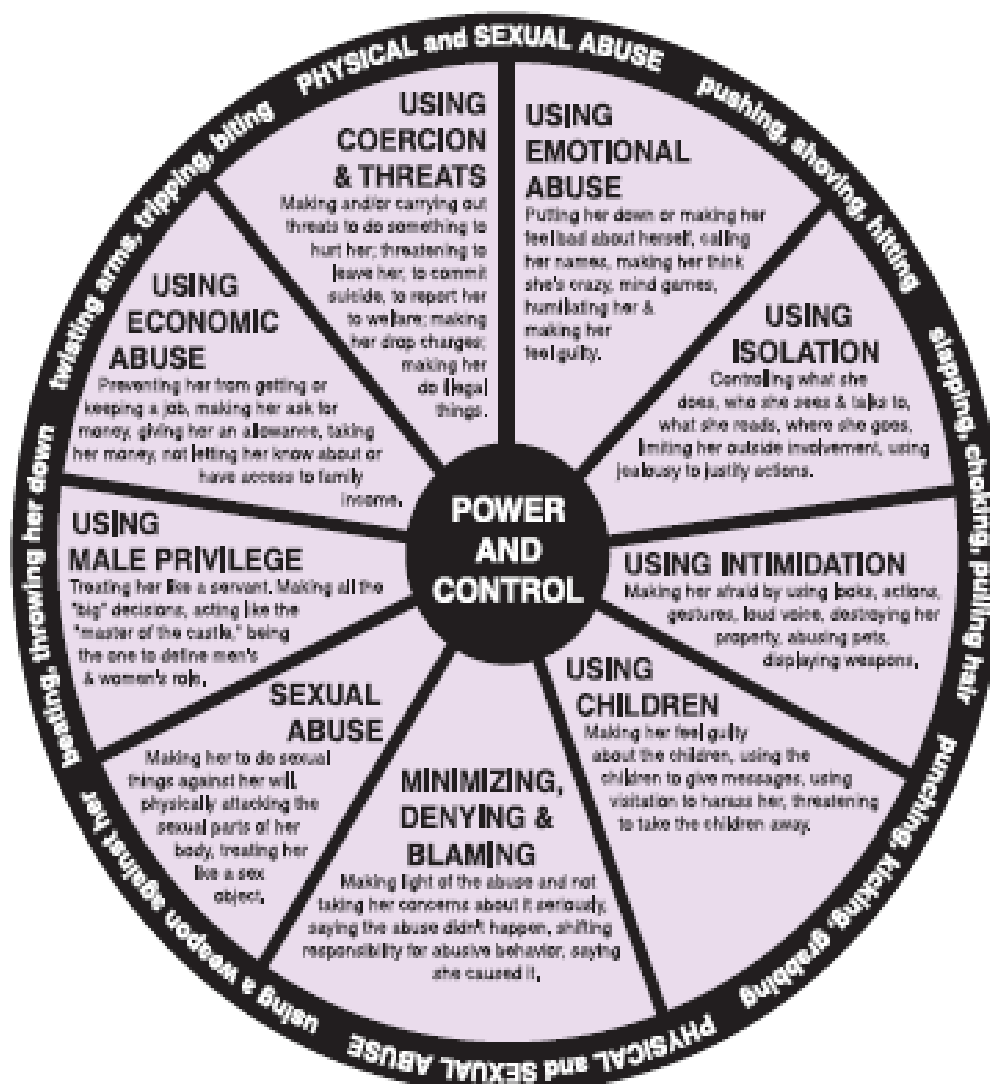
We continue to be challenged by the need to build community based systems of accountability for batterers.

As communities and organizations develop those systems of safe space it is necessary for programs to evaluate their own safety and confidentiality procedures. Do you screen for abusers prior to intaking someone into your program? Have you received training to help you successfully conduct these screenings? Finally, do you routinely communicate your processes for maintaining safety and confidentiality to the GLBT community?

In order to begin to understand same sex domestic violence, we must be willing to think critically about our analysis about domestic and dating violence. In an attempt to make the message understood in a sound-bite world, we have dropped much of the complexity that is necessary to understand GLBT experiences with violence and abuse.

Battering in Intimate Relationships: “The Wheel” (Gay/Lesbian Domestic Violence: Double Jeopardy,) (Reported from: National Lesbian and Gay Health foundation Conference, July 1990)

The abusive behaviors depicted in the wheel can be present in any intimate relationship, in heterosexual, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender couples. But gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender partners are in **DOUBLE JEPARDY**:



Using Isolation:

- Controlling what you do, who you see, talk to, where you go, limiting your outside involvement
- Using jealousy to justify actions
- Sabotaging new relationships
- Not allowing you to be involved in gay/lesbian community
- Using social marginalization and invisibility of gays and lesbians to increase your isolation
- Benefiting from lack of safe places to be out

Using Emotional Abuse:

- Putting you down, calling you names, making you feel bad about yourself
- Playing mind games, making you think you are crazy
- Humiliating you in front of your friends
- Denying existence of the relationship to you or community
- Imposing non-negotiated closeting
- Encouraging shame and self-hatred about being gay/lesbian

Using Children:

- Using visitation (access) to harass you
- Using children to relay messages, telling them bad things about you
- Threatening to take the children away
- Making you feel bad about your parenting
- Threatening to out you so you are at risk of losing children from previous heterosexual relationship.
- Denying you parental rights co-parent

Using Intimidation, Coercion and Threats

- Making you afraid by using looks, actions, gestures
- Smashing things
- Threatening to report you to welfare, immigration, etc.
- Purchasing or displaying weapons
- Abusing pets or destroying cherished items
- Using threats to disclose gay/lesbian identity to friends and family
- Coerced role-playing

Minimizing, Denying and Blaming:

- Making light of the abuse
- Saying the abuse didn't happen
- Saying you caused the abuse
- Blaming stress for the problem
- Calling abuse "mutual" which is further reinforced by heterosexist myths that women don't hurt each other or that, "boys will be boys"

Physical Abuse:

- Hitting, slapping, punching, biting, kicking, pushing or harming you in any way
- Confining, hiding or preventing you from leaving
- Withholding/preventing you from getting physical care, food, or medication
- The assumption of mutual battering leads to abuse being overlooked
assumption that batterer is butch or larger
batterer may accompany you to hospital and be overlooked

Using Social Status and Privilege:

- Reinforcing control over you by use of gender, race class, sexual orientation, immigration status, age, occupation, wealth, physical or developmental ability
- Using institutions to reinforce power or privilege
- Using absence of legal rights, (family, property, etc.) To reinforce power and control
- Maintaining heterosexual pretence for sake of isolation and privileges

Using Economic Abuse:

- Preventing you from getting or keeping a job
- Taking your money
- Making you ask for money or an allowance
- Not allowing your participation in financial decision making
- Threatening to out you at work
- Denying your contribution or rights to family assets

Sexual Abuse:

- Any sexual activity that is unwanted or coerced
- Sexual name calling or accusations
- Uninformed sexual activity, i.e. non-disclosure of STD/HIV status
- Forced pregnancy or termination of pregnancy
- A gay man or lesbian is less likely to request and to receive assistance (e.g. rape is limited to focus on heterosexual rapes)

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Myths About Gay Men and Lesbian Domestic Violence: (Reproduced from: National Lesbian and gay Health Foundation Conference, July 1990)

- Only heterosexual women get battered. Men are never victims of domestic violence and women do not abuse.
- Domestic violence is more common in heterosexual relationships than it is in gay men and lesbian relationships.
- It isn't really violence when a same-sex couple fights. It is just a lover's quarrel and a fair fight between equals.
- It isn't really violence at all when gay men fight it is just boys being boys.
- The batterer will always be butch, bigger and stronger. The victim will always be femme, smaller and weaker.
- People who are abusive under the influence of drugs or alcohol are not responsible for their actions.
- Gay men's domestic violence has increased as a result of alcoholism, drug abuse and the AIDS epidemic.
- Gay and Lesbian domestic violence is sexual behavior, a version of sadomasochism, and the victims actually like it.
- The law does not and will not protect victims of gay men and lesbian domestic violence.
- Gay male and lesbian victims exaggerate the violence that happens to them. If it were really that bad, they could and would just leave.
- It is easier for gay or lesbian victims of domestic violence to leave the abuser than it is for heterosexual battered women.
- Domestic violence primarily occurs among gay men and lesbians, who hang out at bars, poor or are people of color.
- Victims often provoke the violence done to them. They are getting what they deserve.
- Gay male or Lesbian victims of domestic violence are co-dependent.

The Twelve Underlying Principles:

Behind any theory are concepts and principles, a point of view about the nature of the phenomenon that is being explained by the theory. Our theory of domestic violence has twelve such underlying principles. (Reproduced from: National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation Conference, July 1990)

1. Domestic violence is unacceptable human behavior. Domestic violence cannot be tolerated by any member of the gay community, and it must be unambiguously condemned by our entire society.
2. Domestic violence is not difficult to identify. There is a clear, easy-to-remember definition of domestic violence, and the victim is the one who decides if violence is happening or not.
3. Domestic violence is a crime. There are both criminal and civil consequences for assault, rape, and property destruction.
4. Federal, provincial, and local laws stand properly behind the victims of domestic violence. The judicial branch of government, law enforcement, and social service institutions of the United States and Canada exist to protect those who are victims of domestic violence.
5. Domestic violence is the most primitive method of solving problem and “getting your own way” known to humankind. Resorting to violence is ample evidence of a lack of proper development in the perpetrator and evidence of his/her lack of adequate methods of reasoning.
6. Batterers choose to be violent, decide to be abusive and premeditatively intend to harm, but they are not insane or crazy. They suffer from a learned, progressive, diagnosable, and curable mental disorder. There is no other way to view these men/women. No well functioning, mentally healthy person engages in domestic violence.
7. Nothing justifies domestic violence. All attempts at rationalizing and justifying it are to be repudiated. (Self-defense is not domestic violence.)
8. Perpetrators are responsible for every act of violence that they commit. No victim is ever the cause of violence done to him/her, nor does he/she ever deserve it. Perpetrators choose violence and are accountable for their decision.
9. The victim is responsible for staying in a relationship with a violent partner. It is always up to the victim to exit such a relationship.
10. Domestic violence occurs in the gay and lesbian community with the same or greater frequency as in the heterosexual community.

11. Violence is learned at home by imitating and modeling significant others and through many other societal and psychological mechanisms.
12. Violence in the home can be stopped. Violent behavior can be curbed and unlearned by the perpetrators, and rejected by the victims.

How Do You Stay Out?

“Why not just leave?” “Why don’t you just walk out the door?” “I’d leave the first time it happened. Why did you put up with it?” (Reported from: National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation Conference, July, 1990)

These are some of the most common remarks made to victims of domestic violence. Nobody seems to understand why victims stay with those who abuse or batter them. A short list of ten common reasons for staying is listed here:

1. The victims love their batterers.
2. Victims do not want to leave the person they love; they only want the violence to stop.
3. Victims hope and believe, often for a long time, that the violence will stop.
4. The violence is periodic, and the loving periods between violent episodes entice the victims to stay.
5. Victims may believe they provoked, cause or deserve the violence.
6. Victims are often told by others that they provoked, caused or deserved the violence.
7. They may have left before but were encouraged by friends, family, therapists, the clergy, or the police to “go home” where they belong.
8. Victims may have tried to leave and been beaten for it.
9. Learned helplessness sets in, and victims no longer believe they can escape.
10. Victims are threatened with more violence, or even death, if they try to leave, and with good reason they believe these threats.

This list could actually be a lot longer, and pages of “reasons to stay” could be written. The focus of this section, however, is on how to help victims stay out once they leave their partners.

It is fully acknowledge that victims of domestic violence are up against walls of opposition and unimaginable difficulties as they try to stay away from their (stalking) abusive partners. As many victims may know, leaving is one thing; but staying away is completely different. Staying away is at first a full-time, 24 hour-a-day job. It is very difficult to do alone. What follows here are five tips that are instrumental in helping victims stay out of their relationships with violent men/women. Since we know that victims of domestic violence are bombarded with confusion and difficulties during their first weeks and months after escaping, there is not a list of 75 more things for them to remember. The hope and belief is that if these five tips presented here are followed, staying out may not only be possible, it may be a lot easier.

1. Find a Lay Helper
2. Contact Support
3. Get a Restraining Order
4. Develop Crisis Rules
5. Stay Focused

How you manage to get support and stay out of your relationship with a violent partner will depend, in part, on where you live, how much money you have, what resources you have access to, and many other factors. Remember, wherever you are, whatever your situation, it is possible to get out and stay out.

SUMMARY

Batterers, whether gay or heterosexual, have been profiled as having negative self-concepts and low self-esteem, which lead to high dependency needs, (Byrne, 1996; Coleman, 1994, Walker, 1989). This process is likely to be exacerbated by the combination of male sex role socialization and homophobia, which are inherent in society, (Renzetti 1997.) Homophobia can be internalized to produce negative self-esteem, and may also be used as a weapon of abuse.

Relationships between gay men partnerships often go unrecognized by health care providers. Thus a first step in recognizing domestic violence in gay men relationships is to recognize the relationship itself. Gay men victims/survivors face the same abusive dynamics and barriers that any victim/survivor faces, as well as additional obstacles to leaving the relationship. It is affirming to recognize and validate gay men patients. However physicians and other health care providers can begin to assess for domestic violence in gay men relationships without necessarily knowing how to categorize each partner. Moving beyond categories and assumptions, we begin to treat each person as a unique individual and learn to assess more accurately for domestic violence with every patient, regardless of sexual orientation, gender presentation, or gender of the partner.

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Stephanie Liester, Clinical Director of Therapy Services and Tammi Utzig, Victim Advocate Coordinator Safe Nest, Las Vegas, Nevada

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