

Domestic violence in the lgbt community

[Sociology](#), [Violence](#)



Domestic Violence is fundamentally different in LGBT relationships for numerous reasons. There are many causal and contributory factors that make domestic violence in the LGBT community uniquely different than male-to-female or female-to-male battering. To understand these differences one must recognize domestic violence beyond the stereotypical heterosexual manifestation. According to *A Professional Guide to Understanding Gay and Lesbian Domestic Violence*, same-sex battering mirrors heterosexual battering, but same-sex victims have fewer resources and are less protected. Seven states define domestic violence in a way that excludes same-gender victims. Making matters worse is the fact that in some states sodomy is still considered a crime which forces a victim to confess to a crime in order to prove a domestic relationship. Many women's shelters refuse services or safety to same-sex victims. Since same-sex marriage is not legal, many families are not considered "real families" in the eyes of the law, making it more difficult for these victims to get help. Perhaps one of the most compelling reasons LGBT domestic violence is so different is found in the unique communities of LGBT people.

LGBT communities "provide social forums, rites of passage, rituals for celebration, and bodies of art and literature that combat isolation and allow us to explore our full potentials (Bartlet, 1993)." Because many LGBT people feel shunned and excluded from the American ideal, they have forged their own communities as refuge from the inequalities and persecution of mainstream America. The tools a batterer uses to maintain control, like power and control, cut across all lines of gender identity and sexual

orientation, but a batterer's behavior is always peppered with community influences.

Batterers play on their victim's vulnerabilities and community values to maintain control. The volumes of hate, hostility, and condemnation directed at LGBT people from mainstream America encourage self-loathing and internalized homophobia. It covertly forces isolation and creates a false sense of safety from within the community. And LGBT batterers manipulate those difficult realities to employ highly effective weapons against their partners. So community is a strong contributing factor to domestic violence in the LGBT community.

The Frustration-Aggression theory of domestic violence adds another distinction to LGBT domestic violence. In essence, this theory opines that human beings can become violent when their goals are blocked. For gay male and female abusers, this theory is painfully true. Throughout childhood, before sexuality begins to develop, gay youngsters, like everyone else, think about and plan their future selves. They negotiate a life path within the frames of family, community, society, and the culture in which they live.

In early adolescence, when sexuality comes to the fore and one's homosexuality is questioned, those dreams of family and community begin to feel too exclusionary. This can be a time of tremendous stress; the sense of being inherently different and "bad" can be overwhelming. All the evils about homosexuals one has likely heard in the media and around the family can be internalized, and begin a pattern of self-hate and destruction. All adolescents ask the question, "Who am I?", but for the adolescent

homosexual it becomes increasingly more difficult to recognize that one is not necessarily growing up to be the person he originally imagined.

And the person he is becoming is reduced to villainy by mainstream America. He begins to realize that many of his life goals are blocked, like marriage and basic human rights. Without a strong support system to negotiate and redefine his identity, this can be a traumatic and damaging experience. But family support is often lacking and positive gay role models are scarce. Coming out in adolescence is often a terrifyingly alone experience that can damage the soul and lead to frustration and anxiety that will carry on into future relationships.

Coming to terms with second-class citizenship in the families, communities, and society in which he has imagined himself so abundantly different can result in frustration and feed the self-hate that has already started seeping in. And anger develops when certain fundamental goals are blocked. With such rite-of-passage circumstances as these, it is no wonder that domestic violence happens in 39% of gay male relationships (Merrill, pg. 44). A psychological aspect that contributes to the escalation of Domestic Violence in the LGBT community can be associated with the term heterosexism.

Many use the term heterosexism to describe an individual who strongly believes in heterosexual relationships. Heterosexual relationships are described as being attracted to the opposite sex and being in intimate contact with only the opposite sex. Heterosexism is used in correlation to negative attitudes, bias, and discrimination of those who favor same sex relationships. The reason why this term is becoming associated with same-

sex relationships that involve domestic violence is due to the use of power and control related to the term heterosexism.

The power and control that ensues from heterosexism being used could be easily be described as “ outing the victim in the abusive relationship. ” One gathers an idea of the victim’s “ out” status within the individual’s work, friends, and family relationships. Inquiring if the victim has told those he or she cares for about his or her sexual preference usually does this. Knowing this information is beneficial to the abuser because it will allow the abuser to control what the victim will say to the police, or anyone, about any abuse that would exist in the relationship.

The contradiction of this term would exist within the abusers identity. The abuser would use the victim’s fear of exposure against that individual as if it would be a bad thing to come out to those who care for and love the victim. The abuser will use ideology related to bigotry slanders, faith, natural law, or popular beliefs as a weapon to keep this victim in the cycle of abuse. Same-sex female domestic violence is an unspoken problem in the lesbian, bisexual, transgender population.

Facts about lesbian domestic violence, myths within the population and services are all misconceived reasons why female domestic violence is such a big issue. There is not a lot of data on female same-sex domestic violence. Therefore, most information is taken from heterosexual domestic violence cases and small population samples from the lesbian community such as women’s festivals and lesbian cruises. Within the lesbian, bisexual, transgender community domestic violence is taboo. A fact from the Lesbian

Partner Violence Fact Sheet is 17 - 45 % of lesbians have reported being involved in at least one case of abuse (Rose, 2000).

Lesbian victims of abuse are fearful of speaking out for reasons of being judged and pushed out by the lesbian community as a whole. The lesbian, bisexual, transgender communities within a certain area can be small. Unpleasant public allegations ostracize the person and take away community support. Lesbians have few choices of where and how to get help and support, yet the numbers of lesbians affected by domestic violence is about the same as the number of female victims in heterosexual couples (Pattavina, 2007).

Types of abuse in female same-sex domestic violence is similar to heterosexual couples, such as hitting, pushing, slapping, disrupting sleep, having sex when one doesn't want to, and not talking to one another. Behaviors in female same sex domestic violence also include " jealousy, controlling, becoming involved too quickly, unrealistic expectations, blaming others for their feelings, and hypersensitivity" (rainbowdomesticviolence.itgo.com).

A difference is that in a small-knit community, fear of losing support from family and friends isolates and potentially prevents the victim from getting help or even reporting the abuse (Hassaouneh, 2008). But the fear of being " outted" if that partner is recognized in public, at work, or by the family as being a lesbian is a homophobic fear that hampers the victim in leaving or getting support (Hassouneh, 2008). There is also the isolation within minority groups of lesbians, bisexuals, and transgenders.

Lesbians often have less support in terms of cultural, ethnic, and religious background to turn to in time of difficulty, like domestic violence (Pattavina et al. , 2007). Especially in cultures where women are not as valued as much as men, it can lead to feelings of discrimination within one's own community. There is a myth among the lesbian community that a utopia exists. The myth about " lesbian utopia" is that women are sensitive, nurturing, caring, and get along better because of those reasons. Lesbian utopia is just that, a myth. Women do hit, hurt, and violate other women.

Another myth about female intimate partner couples is that there is a more masculine " butch" woman and a more feminine woman in the relationship. That is not always the case. Yet another myth is that the " butch" or masculine women is the batterer. Again that is not always the case. A big myth is that female same-sex violence is not as dangerous or serious as heterosexual or gay male couple's domestic violence (Hassouneh 2008). Violence is violence regardless of who perpetrates it. Female intimate partner abuse is under-reported (McClennen and Gunther, 1999).

Many lesbians are afraid of losing the only support system they have (Miller et al, 2000). It may be that the perpetrator is their only support system and there is no knowledge of whom or where to turn for help. Then there is the lesbian who does report and she, the victim, ends up getting arrested (Hassouneh, 2008). The misinformation among law enforcement about how to identify the victim in same-sex domestic violence cases is not always cut and dry (Miller et al. , 2000). There are perpetrators that act as victims.

The larger of the two women may get arrested even if she is not the masculine one in appearance. Or the more masculine-appearing woman

does get arrested although she may be the victim. There are not always services for women who are lesbian, bisexual, or transgender in the community (Hassouneh, 2008). Either, shelters don't accept women from the lesbian, bisexual, transgender community or there is no legal standing within the state to substantiate a crime. Many states do not recognize same-sex relationships therefore there are no laws in regards to protection.

Many victims in female intimate partner relationships may have experienced violence from a heterosexual relationship in the past. Also "lesbian individuals are more likely to experience domestic abuse at the hands of their partners than to be exposed to antigay violence perpetrated by strangers" (Pattavina et al. , 2007). A study done by Blaise Fortunata and Carolynn Kohn (2003) of 82 participants, 25 being batterers and 57 non-batterers, states batterers were more likely to have been victims of sexual and/or physical abuse in their childhoods. Also, there was a higher use of drugs and alcohol among batterers.

The study suggested some personality traits a batterer would have, such as "antisocial, aggressive, borderline, paranoid and delusional" (Fortunata and Kohn, 2003). These traits would be seen as lacking in the areas of "poor boundaries, impulse control, problem solving, affect regulation, along with fear of abandonment, jealousy, low self esteem and an inflated sense of entitlement" (Fortunata and Kohn, 2003). Although Harvey Wallace, the author of the class textbook, would say that there are not any specific characteristics that would describe an abuser. Wallace then goes on to cite factors by other researchers that backup what was depicted in the Fortunata and Kohn study. Factors or characteristics such as the abuser having "abuse

in the family of origin, low self-esteem, male superiority, authoritarian personality and copes by minimizing the abuse” are Wallace’s (2008) examples. The first step in getting treatment as a victim is to accept that the victim is a victim. Reaching out for help, looking up shelter phone numbers and calling them, or getting a plan together for when the victim needs to get out are some good first steps (rainbowdomesticviolence. itgo. com).

Educate the victim in how to create a safety plan by putting personal items such as birth certificate, credit cards, and medications all together so one can leave quickly (rainbowdomesticviolence. itgo. com). Have clothes and hygiene products available in the car or at a friend’s house. Give the victim time to regroup. Her life has been turned upside-down, and the healing process will take a while. When examining homosexual relationships, meaning male-to-male relationships, we see that studies as a whole indicate they have higher rates of promiscuity and violent behavior than heterosexual couples.

We must rely on studies for more accurate rates of domestic violence in homosexual couples because much of the abuse is under-reported. Under reporting is due to largely the same reasons we have discussed about why lesbian victims fear asking for help from law enforcement, friends, or family. The American Journal of Public Health has published a detailed study of domestic violence victimization in the homosexual community. It focused on four geographical areas, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. The study resulted in 2, 881 complete interviews (Merrill, pg. 23).

In these interviews the men answered highly personal questions under strict confidentiality. This was a large groundbreaking study that has been the <https://assignbuster.com/domestic-violence-in-the-lgbt-community/>

cornerstone of homosexual domestic violence research. It was revealed that 39% of those studied reported being battered by their spouse at least once in the last five years. This figure was much higher than heterosexual women victimizations at 11.6% (Merrill, pg. 44). Men infected with the AIDS virus were more at risk for psychological and physical abuse than their HIV negative peers, and were more likely to be victimized in a sexual manner (Merrill, pg. 1). Solid research like this helps to open our eyes to a real problem with homosexual domestic violence, and it needs to be addressed. We need to de-sensitize law enforcement officials and set up more support for homosexual victims and therapy for perpetrators. There is a direct link between high rates of promiscuity and partner violence because cheating is common. Having multiple partners outside of the relationship can dilute the quality of the relationship; furthermore, it blurs boundary lines. Promiscuity commonly leads to jealousy, which in turn leads to emotional and physical abuse (Cruz, pg. 60). The sexual relationships of gay males are plagued with domestic violence, just as lesbian and heterosexual relationships are. There are many similarities and differences when considering the factors that go into domestic violence when looking at gay males versus lesbians and heterosexuals ... let's take a look at a few of them. As discussed before, lesbians have a fear of being "outed" when others are alerted to the abuse happening in their relationships. Gay males who have not fully come out of the closet have this same fear, which may cause them to not report abuse by their spouses.

However, HIV rates run much higher in the gay male population than in the lesbian population, and perpetrators have been known to blackmail their

victims with the threat of revealing their HIV- positive status (Cruz pg. 164). In terms of law enforcement and how it often handles cases of LGBT domestic violence, they stereotypically see the bigger or more masculine partner as the perpetrator, which often times sends the victim to jail. Police are primarily responsible for enforcing domestic violence laws. Legal agencies, in general, are conservative, and many don't try to conceal their homophobia.

This trait begins with the police, and goes up through criminal justice system. The DA's, judges, and probation officers have their own social biases, which often do not support gay and lesbian victims. This is especially problematic for criminal prosecutors who enforce victim protection orders. The patriarchal nature of our society makes it difficult for law enforcement to enforce domestic violence laws. This heterosexual bias also reflects the resistance of the prosecution and judicial systems to prosecute same-sex offenders. The vagueness of the mandate to law enforcement personnel allows a great deal of discretion on the part of the individual officer in the disposition of a domestic violence investigation. " The lack of systematic training on this issue for police officers heightens the idiosyncratic enforcement of laws. The unpredictable nature of the police response represents a significant deterrent to reporting domestic violence among gay/lesbian/bisexual families. This occurs despite the fact that as a matter of policy, preferred arrest policies do exist in many states and localities. These policies suggest that the preferred response to a report of battering is to make the arrest. There are many resources designed to support the LGBT community. Yet, in researching policies of domestic violence issues, one will

find one story after another about the fear surrounding reporting these instances to authorities. It appears that these networks provide the majority of support for many issues, and that those in the LGBT community cannot and perhaps, should not report instances of domestic violence to the police. In conclusion, it is important to remember both the similarities and the differences between heterosexual and LGBT domestic violence.

Despite the fact that the same dynamics of power and control are evident in both forms, the sexual orientation of the partners, the effects of the battery, and certainly, whether there are ample helping resources should the victim decide to reach out have everything to do with how the perpetrator chooses to maintain that control. It is essential that we recognize domestic violence in all our communities. And it is essential that we build community-specific strategies to end domestic violence in all its forms.