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Understanding Domestic Violence in the LGBT Community

"Although I know that domestic violence happens in lesbian relationships, it's still hard for me to believe that women abuse other women. We rarely hear about domestic violence in the LGBTQ community, and it seems that so many people don't take it seriously. My situation was really serious, however."

- Lesbian woman, DV survivor, age 34, Los Angeles.¹

As with DV in heterosexual relationships, the society in which we live is the greatest force causing and maintaining DV within LGBT relationships.

Minority Stress afflicts members of all minorities. For LGBT individuals, this may include the stress and pressures of living in a heterosexist, homophobic society. LGBT individuals may also experience internalized homophobia, which may manifest into self-loathing or abuse of an intimate partner. Further, the disempowerment which accompanies minority status may lead individuals to seek less healthy forms of power and control, such as drug use, self-injurious behavior, or abuse of a loved one.²

Research has found that greater minority stress is associated with lower relationship quality and both perpetration and victimization of intimate partner abuse.³

Another study reported, "Multiple layers of victimization in the lives of many LGBTs compound the experience of trauma and its impact on mental health and well-being."⁴

"I tried to leave the relationship, but as strange as it may seem, I always ended up feeling safer with my violent partner."

- Lesbian woman, DV survivor, age 34, Los Angeles.⁵

External homophobia and heterosexism play a large role in third party involvement in LGBT DV situations. Law enforcement, courts, and legislation are often discriminatory. Few crisis centers and shelters have LGBT services, and even fewer exist specifically for LGBT victims. Victims may face the risk of being outed by their partners, and their families may not be a safe haven to turn to.⁶

Sadly, another factor maintaining LGBT DV is the LGBT community itself. Members of the LGBT community are constantly trying to prove their equal status and the value of their intimate relationships to

mainstream society, making them unwilling to admit the existence of DV within the community.⁷ As one study reported, "It [domestic violence] is embarrassing, and it makes us look bad in the eyes of others, such as the heterosexual American. As a community, we wish it were not happening, and we not wish to have to deal with it.... Until the gay community decides that intimate partner abuse must be prevented everywhere, hundreds and thousands of LGBT will be battered and their cries ignored."⁸

"I wish I had time to tell you about all of the incidents. This is sadly normal for too many people I know who are LGBT. What makes it worse is that most of the time, people don't report these incidents because they think no one will care, and thus, no one will care to do anything about it."

- Lesbian, age 39, Harrisonburg, VA⁹

¹National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Domestic Violence in the United States in 2007."

²Carrie Brown, "Gender Role Implications on Same-Sex Intimate Partner Abuse," *Journal of Family Violence*, 23 (2008): 457-462.

³Carrie Brown, "Gender Role Implications on Same-Sex Intimate Partner Abuse."

⁴K.F. Balsam, "Nowhere to Hide: Lesbian Battering, Homophobia, and Minority Stress," in *Intimate Betrayal: Intimate Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships*, ed. E. Kaschak (New York: Haworth Press, 2001), 31.

⁵National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, "LGBT Domestic Violence in the United States in 2007."

⁶Carrie Brown, "Gender Role Implications on Same-Sex Intimate Partner Abuse."

⁷Carrie Brown, "Gender Role Implications on Same-Sex Intimate Partner Abuse."

⁸D. Island and P. Letellier, *Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them: Battered Gay Men and Domestic Violence*, (New York: Harrington Park Press, 1991), 57-58.

⁹National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs, "LGBT Domestic Violence in the United States in 2007."

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