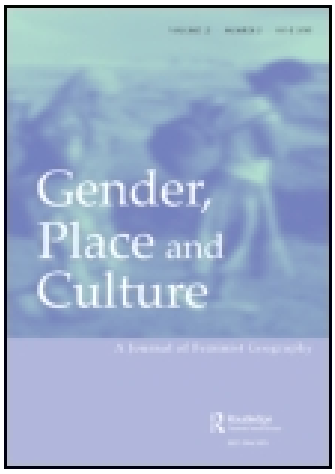

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Cindy Holmes [a]
[a] University of British Columbia , Kelowna, Canada
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Destabilizing homonormativity and the public/private dichotomy in North American lesbian domestic violence discourses

Cindy Holmes*

University of British Columbia, Kelowna, Canada

Developing and circulating community-based educational materials and offering workshops are common feminist approaches to addressing violence in lesbian relationships. This article explores the racialized exclusions in the public/private dichotomy in community-based educational discourses about 'lesbian domestic violence'. An examination of community-based educational materials and interviews with lesbian and queer feminist educators illustrates how the public/private dichotomy produces exclusions and makes certain forms of violence enacted on certain bodies unthinkable and unintelligible. While these discourses challenge heteronormative constructions of violence, they have relied on a simple conceptual framework that has had the effect of promoting a dominant narrative or regime of truth privileging white, middle-class lesbian experiences. This article seeks to destabilize homonormative constructions by arguing for an anti-colonial feminist spatial analysis of violence in same-sex/gender relationships.

Keywords: domestic violence; lesbian; homonormativity; whiteness; public/private

Introduction

Over the past 20 years in North America, community-based educational materials and workshops have been developed as common feminist approaches to addressing violence in lesbian relationships. As a practical tool they have been helpful in disrupting many heteronormative assumptions about violence in intimate relationships thus raising awareness about this form of violence within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities and amongst heterosexual family members, friends and service providers. This article explores the discursive constructions about violence and the public/private dichotomy within educational pamphlets and workshops with a focus on making visible what they produce and obscure. Following from Foucault (1980), the article investigates how certain discourses come to be dominant and considered true through the delegitimization of other discourses. I investigate how certain stories and constructs make visible (and produce) some subjectivities, forms of violence and histories of oppression while concealing or suppressing others.

A central tenet of the dominant Western feminist discourse about violence against women is that intimate relationship violence is hidden through the construct of privacy of the domestic sphere of the heterosexual home. The term 'domestic violence' (although not universally applied) also conveys the idea that intimate relationship violence occurs in private in the home. While there are differences between the dominant discourses about domestic violence in heterosexual and same-sex/gender relationships, both rely on this assumption about hidden violence in the privacy of the home. In this article I explore the racialized exclusions in the public/private dichotomy in community-based educational discourses about lesbian domestic

*Email: cindyleeholmes@shaw.ca

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violence.[1] I examine how the public/private dichotomy masks how the construction of each space, and the violence within them, depend on one another.

For over two decades Western feminist anti-violence activists and theorists have disrupted hegemonic assumptions about violence and public/private spaces. They have contested the notion of the home (private sphere) as a place of safety and support for women and the street (public sphere) as a place of danger and the primary site of violence against women (Pain 1991; McDowell 1999; Warrington 2001), by showing the high prevalence rates of violence against women perpetrated by someone known (most often an intimate partner) and the greater risks of experiencing violence in the home than on the street (Pain 1991). This article contributes to this literature about the private/public dichotomy and violence against women, but argues that while this conceptualization has been politically effective and salient for some women, it has produced another 'regime of truth' (Foucault 1984, 74) that makes it difficult to see or imagine certain forms of violence enacted on certain bodies, thereby making it difficult to understand the way different forms of violence sustain one another. For example, certain forms of violence, such as the very public violence of colonialism and nation building, are normalized as something other than violence and thus erased or made invisible (Razack 2002; Jiwani 2006). I am interested in exploring how the mobilization of certain analytical frameworks and discursive strategies supports this central feature of a white settler mythology – the denial and 'disavowal of conquest, genocide, slavery, and the exploitation of the labour of peoples of colour' (Razack 2002, 2). A white settler mythology also depends on specific stories about sexuality and gender, which disguise the violent processes of heterosexualization and the dependent and interlocking relationships between these processes and colonial nation building. The dominant feminist analysis of domestic violence has focused on the private oppression of white, middle-class heterosexual women in the home and has ignored the public forms of violence that shape the lives of women of colour, Indigenous women, poor women, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, as well as how systemic and intimate forms of violence intersect and interlock (Almeida et al. 1994; Bhattacharjee 2001; Critical Resistance and Incite! 2003; Jiwani 2006).

Following from this, I use an interlocking and relational analysis to explore how socially constructed categories and spaces depend on one another and how certain constructs mask this relational quality; for example, the relational nature of identities and violence in spaces constructed as private and public, or of white lesbian and bisexual subjectivities and lesbian and bisexual women of colour and Two-Spirit women.[2] A central question for me is how hegemonic norms (most specifically whiteness) are produced through these oppositional or so-called liberatory discourses and what strategies might be useful for dismantling them. I am interested in how the ideological scripting of domestic violence as private and domestic makes it hard to recognize certain forms of violence on certain bodies as violence. While maintaining a steady gaze on *lesbian* domestic violence discourse, my analysis about the public/private dichotomy applies also to a feminist heterosexual domestic violence discourse and the way multiple forms of violence in the lives of women of colour, Indigenous women, low-income and poor women, young women, transgender women, and sex trade workers are erased through hegemonic frameworks. In this article, I am extending the work of scholars who have exposed this universality to highlight a spatial analysis and to problematize the way white homonormativity is produced through discourses that are positioned as liberatory or oppositional. Although I recognize race, class, gender, sexuality and dis/ability as interlocking categories, this article focuses specifically on processes of racialization and the way whiteness structures lesbian abuse education. Whiteness produces differently classed subjects and 'is not a monolithic construct and does not hold the same level of power and prestige in all its embodiments' (Lopez 2005, 18). I focus here on the way whiteness is produced in homonormative discourses to highlight

'the extent to which *whiteness as a concept* remains wedded to cultural imperatives that have historically been complicit in the oppression, colonization and outright genocide of nonwhite peoples the world over' (Lopez 2005, 18).

Methods and research context

In order to address these questions, I used multiple research methods including an analysis of three key Canadian educational texts (pamphlets and booklets) and semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group with five white, lesbian and queer-identified feminist anti-violence educators who deliver community-based workshops on abuse in women's same-sex/gender relationships.[3] This research was conducted in 1999 in Vancouver, British Columbia, a large and diverse urban centre in Canada. Nearly a decade after the data was collected, the educational practices and conceptual frameworks revealed through this research are still prevalent in North American feminist anti-violence and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) organizations. This is largely due to tight material constraints (lack of funding and subsequent time to develop and change materials and frameworks) as well as investments in maintaining an analysis that reflects and privileges the lives of queer women from socially dominant groups.

Context of violence in lesbian relationships

Over the past 20 years, violence in lesbian relationships has gradually been named as an important issue facing lesbian and bisexual women's communities. This naming has not occurred, however, without resistance and fear. Due to pervasive homophobia, heterosexism and investment in a model of gender-based oppression and male violence against women, many feminist anti-violence organizations have been reluctant to discuss abuse in same-sex/gender relationships or provide services to a woman abused by her female partner (Ristock 1994, 2002). As well, feminist organizations have been afraid to acknowledge and respond to the violence for fear that it will be used to articulate an anti-feminist backlash to prove that women are as violent as men (Ristock 2002). Many women have been hesitant to speak about the violence for fear it will be used to fuel harmful heterosexist stereotypes about lesbians as abnormal, violent, pathological or masculine (Ristock 1997, 2002). For many queer women of colour and Two-Spirit women, racist stereotypes about violence, racist-heterosexist barriers to accessing support or criminal justice system response combined with the reality of small friendship circles contribute to complex consequences for queer women of colour and Two-Spirit women speaking out about relationship abuse.

Lesbian/bisexual-specific anti-violence initiatives exist in only a few major cities in North America within a context of tight material constraints. Some domestic violence organizations and LGBT organizations in large urban centres have provided support, advocacy and outreach initiatives and public education campaigns including the development of pamphlets, manuals and websites. Until recently most community education in Canada has been funded through short-term grants and mostly on a part-time basis.[4]

Lesbian domestic violence education takes four main forms – pamphlets and booklets; support groups for survivors; forums or training workshops; and web-based materials – and is directed at three main audiences: LGBT communities;[5] feminist anti-violence counsellors and advocates; and social service and health care providers and criminal justice system personnel. Short training workshops usually incorporate an anti-homophobia component (Lobel 1986; Elliot 1990; Balan, Chorney, and Ristock 1995) and in some cases are part of a larger anti-oppression training.[6]

Over the last 20 years a dominant discourse – the one granted the status of truth, the agreed-upon framework of language and meaning (Marecek 1999) – about violence in lesbian relationships has developed drawing on feminist heterosexual domestic violence discourses. Although not unified, static or stable, this dominant discourse can be seen in educational materials and workshops. It is not that this is the only discourse, but rather that power moves through discourses and that hierarchical power relations affect which knowledge is legitimized or subjugated**.**

Tensions and points of rupture in the dominant lesbian domestic violence discourse can sometimes be heard in workshops, public forums, conferences and organizing committees and more recently can be seen in some web, print and workshop material (for example, Ristock 2002; Chung and Lee 2002; Queer People of Colour Caucus 2004; Ristock and Timbang 2005; Northwest Network 2006; Safe Choices 2007). These often speak to how essentialist (and at times biological) constructions of 'lesbian' and 'woman' marginalize bisexual women and transgender people, and how racialized assumptions keep whiteness at the centre and miss the multiple forms of violence in the lives of queer women of colour and Indigenous women. In this article, I pay attention to the discursive and material conditions that determine and regulate what can be named and known, as well as what is unspeakable at specific historical points and socio-cultural and spatial locations.

The grand narrative of violence against women

Deconstructing violence against women as a public sphere problem has been an important feminist strategy in contesting heteropatriarchal ideologies that make invisible the pervasive violence occurring in women's intimate relationships and the spaces of their homes. Feminist theorists and activists have disrupted this persistent and hegemonic narrative that constructs public spaces as the primary site of violence and danger for women and the private space of the home as a place of safety. Similarly, feminist geographers have challenged masculinist ideological frameworks by demonstrating how the private space of the home is as important to understanding social and economic relations as 'the public spaces on which geographers have traditionally focused' (Pain 2001, 127).

While effective in disrupting some hegemonic narratives, these ideological moves have had multiple and contradictory effects. By focusing exclusively or primarily on gender in the private sphere (home) and paying little attention to the socio-historical, spatial and political contexts in which the violence against women occurs (for example, white supremacy, colonialism, globalization), white Western feminist theories of violence against women have positioned white women at the centre (Davis 1987; Kanuha 1990, 1996; Allard 1991; Bannerji 1995; Monture-Angus 1995; Lawrence 1996; Bhattacharjee 1997, 2001; Razack 1998; Chung and Lee 2002; Almeida et al. 1994; Massaquoi 2005; Smith 2005; Jiwani 2006). Also this grand narrative of violence has assumed a male perpetrator and a heterosexual relationship, thus constructing heterosexuality and heterosexual women's experiences of violence as universal (Lobel 1986; Faulkner 1991, 1998; Eaton 1994; Almeida et al. 1994; Ristock and Pennell 1996; Chung and Lee 2002; Ristock 2002; Van Natta 2005).

Like discourses on heterosexual partner violence, lesbian abuse discourses have often relied on an additive versus interlocking analytical framework. Additive models of analyzing social oppression

> are firmly rooted in the either/or dichotomous thinking of Eurocentric, masculinist thought … This emphasis on quantification and categorization occurs in conjunction with the belief that either/or categories must be ranked … Privilege becomes defined in relation to its other. (Hill-Collins 1990, 225)

An interlocking approach differs in that it traces how systems of oppression, categories, identities and spaces come into being in and through each other, or in other words how they depend on one another to function (Hill-Collins 1990; Razack 1998, 2002).

Contrary to its intent, heteronormativity is reproduced in much of the research about violence in lesbian relationships where 'domestic violence' is conceptualized as similar regardless of the sexual identities of those involved (Kaye-Kantrowitz 1987; Ristock 1994, 2002; Faulkner 1998). By simply adding lesbians to the existing dominant heterosexual domestic violence framework, heterosexual women's experiences become the norm (Faulkner 1991; Ristock 2002; Van Natta 2005). This additive approach is also evident in the way race, class and dis/ability are addressed in lesbian abuse education producing a white homonormative middle-class and ableist discourse. When differences or oppressions based on race, class and dis/ability are added onto an existing and essential lesbian experience the result is the construction of a universal woman who identifies as lesbian, who is white, middle-class and able-bodied.

The term homonormativity was first introduced by Lisa Duggan (2003) to refer to discursive and socio-material practices articulated by gays and lesbians that support rather than resist heteronormative neo-liberal projects. Recently postcolonial queer scholars have expanded the analysis to show how homonormativity is implicated in imperialism and whiteness (Puar 2006, 2007). I am using the term this way, and to refer to the way a dominant lesbian abuse discourse relies on normative frameworks (Ristock 2002) that have been used to describe violence in heterosexual relationships, and to highlight the way whiteness is reinscribed through so-called emancipatory lesbian feminist discourses. While the dominant discourse disrupts some heteronormative assumptions, it simultaneously relies on *white* feminist heteronormative domestic violence frameworks. Similarly, Janice Ristock (2002) has illustrated how feminist service providers and researchers addressing lesbian relationship violence rely on white heteronormative feminist categories and frameworks. I want to emphasize how processes of normalization are implicated in hegemonic racial and class-based exclusions and explore the multiple and often contradictory impulses and effects of these white lesbian feminist discourses.

Scholars who disrupt this grand narrative have suggested that feminist anti-violence theories must incorporate an analysis of multiple and interlocking forms of violence including: racist immigration laws (Carraway 1991; Jiwani 2006); history and processes of globalization (Grewal and Kaplan 1994; Bhattacharjee 1997; Razack 1998; Bhattacharjee 2001; Ristock and Timbang 2005; Smith 2005); law enforcement (including all forms of policing and jailing) (Bhattacharjee 2001; Critical Resistance and Incite! 2003); colonialism (Almeida et al. 1994; Monture-Angus 1995; Lawrence 1996; Razack 1998; Ristock and Timbang 2005; Smith 2005; Jiwani 2006); poverty/economic oppression (Carraway 1991; Monture-Angus 1995; Lawrence 1996); militarism and tourism (Trask 2004); violence experienced by transgender people (Namaste 1996; Courvant and Cook-Daniels 2000; Lombardi et al. 2001; White and Goldberg 2006); and heterosexism and same-sex/gender relationship abuse (Kanuha 1990; Faulkner 1991, 1998; Eaton 1994; Ristock 1994, 2002; Waldron 1996; Ristock and Timbang 2005; Van Natta 2005). These theorists (the vast majority of whom are feminists of colour and Indigenous women) emphasize the importance of expanding the existing narrow definition of violence against women (which not only excludes some experiences but naturalizes certain forms of violence), and to address interpersonal and state violence simultaneously (Razack 1998; Bhattacharjee 2001; Chung and Lee 2002; Massaquoi 2005; Smith 2005; Jiwani 2006; Nayak and Suchland 2006).

A central theme evident – but not explicit – in the work of these scholars is the need to break down the discursive construction of public and private spaces. Although not necessarily articulated as such, in different ways they are calling for a spatial analysis of violence, that is,

that we pay attention to the violence enacted on women's bodies at different sites and from multiple sources.

Some scholars have specifically identified their use of a spatial analysis drawing on theoretical tools from feminist and critical geography to examine violence against women. These scholars have explored the social construction of violence (Valentine 1989, 1992; Pain 1991), the links between spatial constructions, identity and fear of violence (Pain 1991, 2001), the construction of public spaces as dangerous (Valentine 1992), the relationship between identity and space in acts of gendered racial violence (Razack 2002), heterosexual male violence against women in the home (Valentine 1992; Pain 1997; Warrington 2001) and the multiple meanings of home for immigrant women experiencing violence (Bhattacharjee 1997). Although there are some references to different axes of identity, most of this work has not integrated an analysis of race or an analysis of the relational nature of violence in public and private spaces (with the exception of Pain 1991, 2001; Bhattacharjee 1997; Duncan 1996; Razack 2002). As well, some feminist geographers have argued that the home is the primary site of violence against women (Pain 1991; Warrington 2001). As I argued earlier, while advancing this feminist analysis has been important in challenging the notion that the violence takes place primarily in public spaces such as the street and is perpetrated by strangers – it has multiple effects, one of which has been the production of hegemonic norms and the re-centring of whiteness.

Before moving into a discussion about the public/private dichotomy, I want to acknowledge how I am using the concept of space. Drawing on the work of poststructuralist, postcolonial, feminist and queer geographers I am referring to space as a social product that is discursively constructed through social practices and processes (for example, see Duncan 1996; Valentine 1996; McDowell 1999; Brown 2000; Razack 2002; Browne 2004; Puar 2006). In different ways, these theorists challenge the notion of space as natural, static and innocent and explore the relationships between symbolic meanings produced through discourse, social practices and material relations in the constitution of a space (Razack 2002). I am using a Foucauldian understanding of discourse that not only examines how meanings are produced but also refers to the way power and knowledge are constituted in and through each other (Foucault 1978). According to Foucault (1984) power operates through the construction of knowledge producing 'regimes of truth' that legitimize and normalize certain knowledges while delegitimizing, obscuring or subjugating others. I am examining '"space" as a dimension of all social relations by which … power/knowledge gets materialized in the world' (Brown 2000, 2–3; Razack 2002). Drawing on the work of Judith Butler (1990), performative geographies have emerged showing how the production of space as white, or heterosexual, or male is a performative act – it is naturalized through repetition and regulation, and is continuously (re)created (Bell, Binnie, and Valentine 1994; McDowell 1995; Valentine 1996; Brown 2000; Browne 2004; Puar 2006). As Jasbir Puar (2006, 68) has argued 'imaginative geographies are performative: they produce the effect that they name and describe'. I argue that white hegemonic norms are performatively reinscribed through the repetitive discursive move of naming violence against women as a private sphere problem. Like the work of the scholars above, I explore the symbolic meaning of spaces, paying close attention to the relationship between the discursive and material in the constitution of spaces.

Theorizing the public/private dichotomy

The public/private dichotomy represents ideological divisions, which are fluid and shifting in time and space. Linda McDowell (1999, 72–3) has rightly pointed out that 'a focus on the social relations within a domestic space crosses the boundary between the private and the public, between the particular and the general, and is not, as is often incorrectly asserted, a focus on the

"merely" domestic or private sphere'. While others have also asserted the blurry division between public and private spheres and that these spaces are not unrelated (MacKinnon 1989; Bhattacharjee 1997; Boyd 1997; Pain 2001), this spatial dichotomy continues to shape how we think about violence and our responses to it. When violence against women is assumed to occur only in the home, 'other forms of violence are conceptually erased' (Price 2002, 41).

Emphasizing the way public and private spaces are not fixed but fluid and shifting has been important to a number of theorists; for example showing the way spaces can be rearticulated to disrupt hegemonic norms, such as heterosexing of space (Valentine 1996) or the way spaces are multiply signified, such as for domestic workers, or for immigrants whose consciousnesses are shaped by migration (Bhattacharjee 1997).

Recently feminist and queer geographers have theorized about the spatial construction and multiple meanings of home (Rose 1993; Valentine 1993; Johnston and Valentine 1995; Bhattacharjee 1997; Westwood 1997; McDowell 1999; Price 2002; Warrington 2001). This has contributed to a more nuanced perspective than that of the initial, and usually masculinist, work by human geographers who first drew attention to the spatial dimension of the home (Warrington 2001). The home is more than a physical space and is socially constructed with symbolic meaning across time and space (McDowell 1999). As discussed earlier, some feminists have deconstructed the masculinist notion of home as safety and comfort to show how the home is gendered and a site of unequal, and at times dangerous, relations for women and children (Warrington 2001). Others have in turn challenged the idea of the home as a primary site of oppression for women, noting the significance of the home (and family) as a site of resistance to societal racism for African-American women in the USA (hooks 1991; Duncan 1996) and Black women in Britain (Westwood 1997). Rachel Pain (2001, 132) has noted that the notion of home as site of oppression 'applies most specifically to white middle-class women who have entered the labour force in large numbers from the mid-20th century onwards'.

Lynda Johnston and Gill Valentine's (1995, 100) research explores the multiple meanings of home for lesbians where the heterosexual parental home is often a site of surveillance and invisibility, and where this surveillance and lack of privacy from 'the parental gaze' restricts expression of one's sexual/gender identity and creates tension for lesbians in the home. Their research is important for showing the heterosexing of the home, the threat of homophobic domestic violence from heterosexual family members and the resistance strategies lesbians employ in this context. It also emphasizes the importance of lesbians creating their own homes where they can visibly express their identity, and creating different kinds of homes such as communal houses and community networks of private lesbian homes. They articulate how a homophobic and heterosexist social and familial context can create isolation and contribute to an insular nature in some lesbian relationships, which 'can give one the power to control or dominate the other, especially if one women is just "coming out" or has less experience of a lesbian lifestyle than the other' (Johnston and Valentine 1995, 110).[7]

The notion of privacy of the home has also been criticized by anti-racist theorists who have noted that 'the private–public dichotomy is not a real opposition; the public intervenes in the private world of the family and none more so than in the case of Black families subjected to specific forms of state intervention which often break up Black families' (Westwood 1997, 173). Similarly the moral and state regulation of poor single mothers has been documented showing the pervasive and intrusive state intervention in their domestic lives (Little 1998). White and middle-class Western feminist constructions of domestic violence, as something that takes place in the privacy of the home and receiving little attention or response from the state, have been critiqued by anti-racist and anti-poverty scholars who have emphasized that much of the private lives of people of colour, Indigenous people, poor people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people is 'neither affirmed nor protected by institutions in our society' (Almeida et al. 1994,

105). Anannya Bhattarchjee (1997, 2001), Jennifer Koshan (1997), Andrea Smith (2005, 89–90) and others have challenged the myth of 'the state's non-intervention in the private sphere', arguing that there is a large amount of state regulation in domestic spaces of the family and home and that it is those who most transgress the normative model of family (white, middle-class, heterosexual) that are most heavily regulated. The state takes an active role in determining the legitimacy of families. This analysis is important in thinking about how domestic violence is constructed as private or hidden in the home.

Some research has illustrated how space and place is heterosexualized (Bell, Binnie, and Valentine 1994; Duncan 1996; Valentine 1996). The moral and social regulation of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people by the state highlights the way private lives are also public. Speaking to this point (in the context of violence in lesbian relationships) Mary Eaton (1994, 214) notes,

> the notion that a lesbian's home is her castle, so to speak, and consequently, that state respect for lesbian privacy instills or reinforces battering lesbians' sense of entitlement to abuse their partners is fanciful at best … the state has no obligation to observe boundaries separating public from private when it comes to 'homosexuality'.

Eaton argues that privacy is an inadequate conceptual device for analyzing same-sex/gender abuse where gay and lesbian people's experiences of violence traverse the public/private divide and where the state continues to regulate non-normative forms of sexuality.

By looking at the work of scholars who destabilize the dichotomy by examining the way race, class, sexuality and gender interlock and shape the conceptualization and production of public and private spaces, we can see that the lives of some women have always been public lives and that they are frequently denied the privilege of privacy through constant scrutiny, regulation and violence (Razack 1998). Additionally, specific social relations that occur within and outside different spaces contribute to how they are conceptualized and experienced as either public or private. For example, as discussed above, racism, colonialism, classism and economic regulation can in effect make the space of the home (commonly understood as private), public through scrutiny and surveillance. This highlights the relational nature of space.

Public/private dichotomy in lesbian abuse educational texts

I have illustrated elsewhere, in an examination of three frequently used Canadian educational pamphlets and booklets about lesbian abuse, that the central figure presented in the dominant discourse is a woman whose life is structured primarily by her sexuality and her private experiences of violence (Holmes 2000; Holmes and Ristock 2004).[8] The texts examined are: *Abuse in Lesbian Relationships: A Handbook of Information and Resources* by Laurie Chesley, Donna MacAuley, and Janice Ristock (1991); *Assisting Abused Lesbians: A Guide for Health Professionals and Service Providers* by Cheryl Champagne, Ruth Lapp, and Julie Lee (1994); and *Violence in Lesbian Relationships: Are Relationship Dangerous?* published by the University of British Columbia (no date). Although produced in the 1990s, all three represent a dominant discourse reflected in community-based practices today. Two of these texts (Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1992; Champagne, Lapp and Lee 1994), are currently used in organizations in Canada over a decade later and are readily available from and cited by government sources (Health Canada, Department of Justice) and numerous websites on violence against women and women's health.

In these texts essentialist constructions of sexual and gender identity are reinforced without reference to bisexual or transgender identities. As well, lesbian identity is often structured around whiteness with the use of additive approaches to discussing multiple identities and oppressions. 'Lesbian' is used to refer to white lesbians although never explicitly identified

as such. In the following example, an additive approach secures whiteness as the invisible centre: 'Lesbians have to face not only the sexist culture, but also a homophobic one as well. Lesbians of colour must face sexism, heterosexism and racism' (University of British Columbia n.d.). Whiteness is concealed as neutral throughout two of the texts (Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1991; University of British Columbia n.d.).

Although all three texts refer to multiple systems of oppression, the social context of violence in lesbian relationships is primarily described as patriarchy and heterosexism. One booklet discusses internalized patriarchy, heterosexism and homophobia as part of the causes and the effects of abuse (Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1991, 5, 11). Two argue that heterosexism and homophobia affect everyone – heterosexual, gay or lesbian (Champagne, Lapp and Lee 1994, 4–5; Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1991, 21) – yet all three texts describe racism and classism as issues for 'other people' (Champagne, Lapp and Lee 1994, 4) or lesbians of colour, and working-class lesbians only (Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1991, 5; University of British Columbia n.d.) Despite attempts to integrate multiple oppressions into the framework, a gender and sexuality-based analysis of power remains at the centre, thus positioning white and middle-class lesbians as universal.

The discourse in the pamphlets begins with the foundational claim that 'abuse has been hidden in Western society until recently' and specifically that abuse in lesbian relationships has been hidden or difficult to publicly acknowledge (Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1991, 1; Champagne, Lapp and Lee 1994, 2; University of British Columbia n.d.). It also states that violence in lesbian relationships is something that lesbians do not usually discuss or know about each other (University of British Columbia n.d.; Champagne, Lapp and Lee 1994, 2) and that has been 'kept behind closed doors until fairly recently' (Chesley, MacAuley and Ristock 1991, 1). Discursive strategies that highlight the invisibility or hidden nature of some forms of violence in certain lesbians' lives can have a universalizing effect rendering unintelligible the experiences of queer women whose lives are fundamentally structured by racism and classism. By focusing on hidden, domestic violence in Western society the pamphlets highlight difficulties lesbians face in naming experiences of violence in the context of heterosexism. However, the violence experienced by racialized and working-class queer women may not have been veiled in secrecy or for the same reasons. For example, in some working-class lesbian communities violence in relationships has not necessarily been hidden or kept secret, nor has the home been the primary site of the violence in cases where relationship violence often took place in spaces constructed as public, like bars (Kennedy and Davis 1993/1994). As well, it is possible that for racialized and working-class women, violence in intimate relationships may not be constructed as hidden, but visible and naturalized as evidence of the 'degeneracy of the race' (Kanuha 1990; Almeida et al. 1994). Silence about violence may be related to the fact that these groups of women do not in fact have the privilege of privacy. 'Hiding' violence in intimate relationships may be a response to the public violence of racism and its profound effects on individuals, families and communities. Thus perhaps the 'hidden abuse' narrative applies most clearly to those groups of women who have been able to claim the privilege of privacy, such as white, middle-class lesbians.

White lesbian educators speak about public/private spaces and violence

The white queer women in this study are aware of the problems with hegemonic analytical frameworks that centre white, middle-class women's experiences and to varying degrees (and with varying success) attempt to assert what Foucault (1978) calls a 'reverse discourse'.

In workshops, various approaches are used to describe the connections between oppressions such as a dominance model, a focus on marginalization and references to colonialism. Despite efforts to move away from a gender-based model of oppression, some educators do take

an additive approach to talking about racism and classism in discussions about difference or diversity and rely on the constructs 'double or triple jeopardy' or 'double or triple vulnerabilities' that have been frequently used in lesbian abuse educational materials to refer to the combined oppression that queer women face (i.e. sexism + heterosexism; or sexism + heterosexism + racism).[9] These constructs can have the effect of eliding how systems and identities are related and mutually constitutive of one another, as well as privatizing social relations where differences are seen as essential, fixed characteristics of a biological or a social condition (Razack 1998). Constructing some groups of women as 'more vulnerable' locates the problem at hand in the individual woman rather than in the social contexts of racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism and ableism that position women differently and unequally to one another, thereby privatizing the social relations that produce violence (Razack 1998). When feminist educators 'travel down the path of compound oppression – double and triple oppression – the relations between women, and the ways in which the advantages some women enjoy come at the expense of other women, are masked' (Razack 1998, 131).

In a few cases, women try to shift from an additive model by beginning with a discussion of colonialism, then naming racism and heterosexism as roots of violence in relationships. While this is an important shift, white women sometimes still refer to colonialism or racism in an additive fashion (colonialism plus patriarchy equals doubly vulnerable woman). While the white educators interviewed have an intellectual understanding of the social context of racism and classism as part of the social context (public) this is often detached from our analysis of violence in intimate same-sex/gender relationships (private) thereby leaving the hegemony of whiteness in the discourse unexamined.

Educators in this study demonstrated an awareness of many of these gaps and limitations and searched for new language and models that would capture greater complexities. However, even when we intellectually understand that systems are interlocked, white educators can continue to use these existing frameworks because they seem to account for our lives and can limit the extent to which we can see ourselves as dominant. One educator spoke about how she has relied on a white, middle-class feminist anti-violence discourse in her work with both lesbians and heterosexual women:

> What ends up happening … is that it's real easy for me to slip back into using my own way of, and analysis … coming from a very [pause] a very white, middle-class viewpoint of lesbian battering … 'cause I bring that into the work that I do around heterosexual violence … I struggle with expanding it further to a larger picture. (Cheryl, interview)

She went on to speak about how white privilege influences her own and other white lesbian feminists' analytical framework on lesbian abuse:

> …it's very easy for us to go to a place where race doesn't come into it. Even though we might be aware … it's easy for me to see lesbian battering uni-dimensionally and to really only talk about it in the context of an intimate relationship and not within a social context. (Cheryl, interview)

Another educator spoke about how privilege 'gives us blind spots' and that she finds it hard at times to make connections between different forms of oppression and said she can't think 'as quickly' around 'the corners of race and cultural differences' (Marcia, interview). These quotes highlight the way white lesbian feminist educators are able to externalize the social context and see racism and colonialism as disconnected from ourselves. This is similar to Razack's analysis cited earlier about pity and also Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) comments about white women she interviewed, viewing anti-racist work as a benevolent and optional act for the Other rather than about changing systems of domination that shape our subjectivities and lives.

The educators spoke about the limitations with the public/private construct in conceptualizations of lesbian domestic violence and gave examples where the framework's

exclusive focus on 'domestic' violence in the private sphere (home) breaks down around race. One educator described a conflict at a feminist anti-violence conference that erupted during a panel presentation by survivors of violence in lesbian relationships. The panellists had been assured that women who had been abusive would not be on the panel. Conflict arose when conference participants interrupted the panel because one panellist – a Māori survivor of lesbian abuse – also spoke about times in her life when she had been abusive and placed this in the context of colonization and a process of accountability in her community. A debate ensued about whether she was an abuser, with the Indigenous women in the audience arguing that the Māori woman was further marginalized through this process.

> [T]he Maorian [*sic*] woman had been in this whole process of the entire community of people … taking accountability for times they had used abuse and putting that in the context of colonization and … in the context of surviving. And she was coming from this perspective of having like all this support around looking holistically at this … and then we were all up to judge, 'Was she a batterer or not a batterer?' And the women of colour … a lot of the First Nations women, were saying 'She's not a batterer and you've just set her up' and a lot of the other women were saying it was just this terrible thing. (Teresa, focus group)

This powerful example shows how various dichotomies in the dominant lesbian domestic violence discourse break down around race, such as batterer/survivor and private/public. The dichotomies cannot hold the complexities of multiple forms of violence, including the possibility that someone could be both a survivor and perpetrator of violence, as well as the interconnected 'private' forms of intimate relationship violence and 'public' forms of violence of colonialism and racism. The conflict highlights how this hegemonic feminist framework excludes the violence of racism and colonialism (i.e. the Māori lesbian's experiences of victimization as a survivor of colonization were not legitimized within the category of 'survivor/batterer') and forecloses an examination of how the white lesbian survivors in the room are implicated in the structures of violence in the lives of the Māori woman, other Indigenous women and women of colour.

This illustrates the hierarchical nature of binaries and shows how 'biopower' (Foucault 1978) operates within and through the individual, ensuring that individuals regulate themselves and one another in relation to a defined norm. In this case, the norms of the dominant white hetero and homonormative domestic violence discourses – that one can be either a survivor or batterer and that the only legitimate form of violence is private. The binaries allow dominant groups to police the categories to ensure 'safety'. Yet, this space is not safe for racialized women or others whose experiences of public and private spaces do not fit the hegemonic norm. In this discourse, the public/private dichotomy, paradoxically, marks non-white bodies as Other and perpetuates hegemonic whiteness, but does so in a fashion that is invisible to white people.

Two other women spoke about a similar example where conflicts about racism and conceptualizations of public/private violence arose during the process of organizing an educational forum on woman-to-woman abuse. The organizing group was initially a group of white lesbians that took a liberal 'outreach and inclusion' approach to addressing race. Lesbians of colour challenged the white lesbians about the racism inherent in this strategy, which tokenized lesbians of colour and ignored issues of power. After discussing these issues, the group decided to hold two forums – one open to all lesbians and another organized by and for lesbians of colour and Two-Spirit women only. Secondly, lesbians of colour and Two-Spirit women challenged the focus on woman-to-woman abuse in the private sphere and emphasized the importance of expanding the analysis to include discussions about violence perpetrated by women in spaces coded as public – specifically white women's racist violence in the socio-historical context of colonialism and racism. This analytical shift felt confusing and threatening for the white women on the committee and in the sponsoring feminist organization. As Cheryl

described, one of the sponsoring feminist organizations threatened to withdraw its support and funding because of the committee's decisions to expand the definition of violence to include racist violence perpetrated by women towards other women in 'public' spaces and communities, and to hold a forum organized by and for women of colour and Two-Spirit women only.

> [White women in the organization were saying] 'Yeah you white girls can talk about what's happening, but you know, let's not really bring racism into this. Let's not really look at the breadth of the problem, let's more just look at it in a good little middle-class lesbian family, you know, lesbian homes, that's where the violence is *OK*. But when you start to bring racism into it, and you start to look at, you know, expand a bit into looking at … not *just* what goes on within the home but what goes on within our whole organizing community, then *that's* where we draw the line' … (Cheryl, focus group)

The resistance from some white feminists to expanding the dominant domestic violence framework is a good example of the way a discourse can promote a norm that threatens to render illegitimate and abject those experiences (in this case, experiences of violence) that do not comply with the dominant or normative framework. The discourse limits our thought, making some ideas unthinkable (Ristock and Pennell 1996). It also shows how white women's investments in these models and subsequent regulation of definitions of violence are tied to seeing ourselves as innocent and unimplicated in the oppression of other women. The question that must be asked is 'when, and for whom is it advantageous to stress the private sphere over the public'? (Razack 1998, 94).

Both of the above examples illustrate the discursive strategies of denial that show up among many white feminist anti-violence advocates. The resistance to include colonial violence or white lesbians' racism towards lesbians of colour and Two-Spirit women in the definition/discussion on 'woman-to-woman abuse' was framed by white feminists as outside of the legitimate and privileged definitions, which focus on relationship violence in the homes of white, middle-class lesbians. These examples also show how white feminists' regulation of definitions of violence can be intricately linked to seeing ourselves as innocent and unimplicated in the oppression of other women. As Mary Louise Fellows and Sherene Razack (1998, 343) argue, in feminist debates women whose dominance is challenged frequently respond with emotional attachments to innocence which can be 'linked to colonial representations of white, innocent femininity' (Saristava 2005, 36–7).[10]

As stated earlier, lesbian domestic violence education frequently conceptualizes the social context of domination as 'out there' (responsibility of men and heterosexuals) and detached from us as white lesbians, which allows us to continue to see ourselves as innocent. In her research on anti-racism initiatives within feminist organizations in Canada, Sarita Srivastava (2005, 56) argues that 'imperial histories of innocent white femininity' and 'historical constructions of a just feminist community underlie some feminists' emotional protestations of innocence'. She notes:

> Over the past two decades, as Western feminist practice has gradually integrated antiracist thought, it seems that ideas about what makes a good feminist have also shifted. My analysis finds, however, that as some white feminists move toward new ideals of antiracist feminism, they often move toward deeper self-examination rather than toward organizational change. (Srivastava 2005, 30)

My research confirms this, where participants identified their own and other white feminists' resistance to change organizational practices despite an intellectual awareness of the multiple forms of oppression.

Conclusion

My analysis highlights the contradictory narratives of white lesbian/queer feminists, showing that while the dominant lesbian abuse discourse effectively destabilizes some heteronormative

constructions of violence, it has produced a homonormative construction that is constituted through whiteness. Although this discourse *has* helped many women in abusive relationships, at the same time the familiar, taken-for-granted assumptions contained within it produce racialized exclusions. From this research I suggest that an exclusive focus on violence in the private sphere predictably breaks down around race, concealing the relationship with public forms of violence, and as a result the entire framework for understanding and responding to violence needs to be re-worked.

By highlighting the inherent exclusions in the category domestic violence, I am not suggesting that we should stop looking at abuse in intimate relationships. Rather, when we look at interpersonal violence we must critically examine our assumptions about the spaces in which the violence occurs, and explore the multiple contexts of the violence in women's lives. When we look at the home as the site of violence as separate from an ostensible public sphere, we must ask whose life and what forms of violence can be imagined or named. For example, at the anti-violence conference, the multiple forms of violence and the violence of colonialism in the life of a Māori woman were discounted. We need to question what forms of violence are erased by white lesbians when they dismiss the violence that Indigenous women experience as part of racism and colonialism, and instead valorize only private or 'domestic' violence in their analyses.

While I have focused on the production of whiteness in a homonormative discourse, it is evident that middle-class assumptions and classed power relations are also intricately intertwined with whiteness in many of the constructs and ideologies. Regardless of the classed locations of the research participants in this study, my research highlights the way white queer subjects call upon and reproduce what is at times clearly a white *middle-class* domestic violence discourse. Further research is needed to examine the nuances and complexities of white middle-class homonormative anti-violence discourses.

This research urges us to unsettle familiar everyday notions about violence, space and identity and ask 'how spaces come to be, and to trace what they produce as well as what produces them' (Razack 2002, 7). By demystifying and deconstructing the spatial metaphors that circulate in anti-violence discourses, we would seek to 'queer the space' – that is to think outside of white middle-class hetero/homonormative notions of home and family and public spaces. In speaking about the limitations with binary thinking in same-sex/gender domestic violence work, Jasbir Puar (2000) and others (Chung and Lee 2002; Ristock 2002) argue that we need to seek alternative strategies for safety and accountability that actively involve queer community members rather than solely relying on social service providers. This calls for an examination and destabilization of white, middle-class hetero/homonormative assumptions about home and kinship. As Puar (2000, 12) explains, developing these alternative strategies to address violence in same-sex/gender relationships 'also radically rewrites the space of the domestic, queers it, because it rethinks the structure of the family, the function of a house, and the kinship patterns that are normally assumed to fit into that house'. This suggests that we must pay greater attention to the way meanings (of abuse, the home, the family, safety and public for example) are constructed and reconstructed depending on which voices are highlighted (Ristock and Pennell 1996). Narrow conceptualizations and constructs limit our ability to see or imagine certain forms of violence or strategies for safety.

Taking direction from Sherene Razack's (2002) exploration of the spaces of gendered racial violence, I argue we must focus on denaturalizing the spaces and subjectivities described in our feminist educational initiatives and theorizing. She argues we must 'uncover the hierarchies that are protected and the violence that is hidden when we believe such spatial relations and subjects to be naturally occurring' (Razack 2002, 128) and to explore the relationship between identity and space.

In theorizing violence in women's same-sex/gender relationships from an anti-colonial queer spatial perspective we must pay attention to the violence enacted on bodies at different

sites and from multiple sources and examine the relational nature of violence, spaces, bodies and identities. We need to create practices and models that sustain accountability, that foreground the interlocking nature of colonial, state, economic, gender, ableist and heteronormative violence and that enable us to develop non-hegemonic subjectivities. We must interrogate the whiteness that is constituted in homonormative lesbian domestic violence discourses so as to dislodge it from its taken-for-granted position of normalcy and universality – in other words to 'make whiteness strange' (Dyer 2002, 12).

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Notes on contributor

Cindy Holmes is a PhD student and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) doctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Her dissertation research draws on feminist, anti-colonial and interlocking theories of violence to examine the spatial and discursive production of violence on non-heteronormative, gender non-conforming and racialized bodies. Her other research interests include: intimate relationship violence; racial violence within white settler societies; moral geographies; processes of normalization; whiteness, heteronormativity and space; citizenship and nation-building; and critical pedagogy. Alongside her academic work, she has worked with community groups in the areas of violence against women, same-gender/sex relationship violence, health promotion, anti-oppression education and other social justice issues.

Notes

1. Violence in lesbian relationships may be referred to as partner abuse, intimate relationship violence, woman-to-woman abuse or same-sex or same-gender domestic violence. Many lesbian, bisexual, queer or transgender women may not use the language of 'domestic violence' to define their experiences because of the heteronormative and gendered assumptions implied within the category (Chung and Lee 2002). Despite this, the term domestic violence continues to be used by some researchers and community groups to describe violence in intimate same-gender/sex relationships and to draw parallels to violence in heterosexual relationships (Ristock and Timbang 2005).
2. The term 'Two-Spirit' is often used by lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) people of Aboriginal descent in both the US and Canada. It is 'presently used to describe Aboriginal people with different roles or identities, including gays, lesbians, other genders (not-men, not-women), those of multiple genders (hermaphrodites and bisexuals), transvestites, transsexuals, transgendered people, drag queens and butches. The term is also used to refer to heterosexual people who have a unique place on the gender continuum, and who are seen to have a more expanded view of the world, as a result of their ability to mediate between, and see through the eyes of both sexes' (Meyer-Cook and Labelle 2004, 30–31).
3. Given my experience as a queer anti-violence educator, I had a research assistant interview me as well. The transcript from my individual interview was included as data in my analysis. I interviewed five white women although one woman also identified with a specific ethnic identity (not mentioned for reasons of confidentiality). Three women identified as middle-class, one as 'mixed-class' and the other as working-class. Throughout the article, I have used the words 'us', 'we' and 'ourselves' to refer to white lesbian feminists, deliberately including myself as I am not outside the analysis and am implicated in the discussion about whiteness.
4. Recent exceptions are the Safe Choices Program in Vancouver funded by the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority and the Coalition Against Same-Sex Partner Abuse in Toronto funded by the Ontario Ministry of Attorney General. The state frequently funds organizations dominated by white, middle-class professionals to do outreach to immigrant women, women of colour and Aboriginal women rather than providing ongoing core funding to these communities directly (Shin 1991). These

state practices and hierarchical social relations affect the production of knowledge – such as who is funded, hired, published, and whose analysis is legitimized.

5. Most focus primarily (or exclusively) on lesbian identity, although there have been recent efforts to include women who identify as bisexual, queer, Two-Spirit, and/or transgender, or who do not claim any of these identities. Although most materials are not directed towards transgender communities, some recent educational materials have tried to be trans-inclusive. There are also debates within communities about the strengths and limitations with a LGBT model that can problematically conflate gender identity and sexual orientation.
6. Although workshops range anywhere in length from two hours to two days, most last from three to five hours.
7. These kinds of relations were confirmed in Janice Ristock's (2002) research, where she found that more than half of the women she interviewed had been abused in their first lesbian relationship, and many spoke of a similar dynamic to the one that Johnston and Valentine (1995) describe.
8. This section draws on my work in Holmes and Ristock (2004).
9. This may stem from its usage in an influential article by Valli Kanuha (1990), 'Compounding the Triple Jeopardy: Battering in Lesbian of Colour Relationships', reprinted in a training manual on lesbian battering, *Confronting Lesbian Battering: A Manual for the Battered Women's Movement* (Elliot 1990). Kanuha's (1990) important article does not privatize the experiences of lesbians of colour experiencing abuse and clearly locates the issues within the social and political context of racism and heterosexism. Her article addresses racism within lesbian and feminist communities and the complexities of experiences of lesbians of colour who are being abused or abusive.
10. Srivastava (2005, 36–7) explains: 'just as first-wave feminism was shaped by the backdrop of imperialism and nation building, contemporary feminist communities have been similarly shaped by representations of morality rooted in racist and imperial histories'.

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ABSTRACT TRANSLATION

Desestabilizando la homonormatividad y la dicotomía público/privado en los discursos de violencia doméstica en parejas lesbianas norteamericanas

Desarrollar y circular material educativo comunitario y ofrecer talleres son formas comunes en el feminismo para encarar la violencia en las relaciones lesbianas. Este artículo explora las exclusiones racializadas en la dicotomía público/privado en los discursos educativos

comunitarios sobre “violencia doméstica lesbiana”. Un examen de los materiales educativos comunitarios y de entrevistas con educadores y educadoras feministas, lesbianas y queer, ilustra cómo la dicotomía público/privado produce exclusiones y hace impensables e ininteligibles a ciertas formas de violencia ejercida sobre ciertos cuerpos. Mientras estos discursos desafían a las construcciones de violencia heteronormativas, se han apoyado en un marco conceptual simple que ha tenido el efecto de promover una narrativa o régimen dominante de verdad, privilegiando las experiencias de lesbianas blancas y de clase media. Este artículo intenta desestabilizar las construcciones homonormativas argumentando a favor de un análisis espacial feminista anticolonial de la violencia en las relaciones de personas del mismo sexo/género.

Palabras claves: violencia doméstica; lesbianismo; homonormatividad; blanquedad; público/privado

同性恋规范的动摇和北美女同性恋家庭暴力论述的公/私二分法

以社区为基础的教育材料的开发和流通以及主办研讨会是女权主义者常用来解决女同性恋关系中的暴力问题的方法。本文探讨了以社区为基础关于‘女同性恋家庭暴力’的教育论述，并揭露个中所呈现的公/私二分法存有种族排斥。本文参考了以社区为基础的教育材料以及与同性恋和女权主义教育者所做的访谈，以说明公/私二分法产生排斥并使到某些躯体所承受的某些形式的暴力变得无法想象和难以理解。虽然这些论述挑战了以异性恋为基准的暴力行为内容的建构，但是它们却依赖于一个简单的概念框架。而这个框架促使了偏向白种，中产阶级女同性恋的经历的主导叙事或真理的制度的形成。这篇文章试图通过一个反殖民主义和女权主义思维来对同性关系中发生的暴力问题作出空间分析，以便动摇以同性恋为基准的建构。

关键词：家庭暴力，女同性恋，同性恋规范，白种人文化，公/私