Violence Against Women
http://vaw.sagepub.com/

No Sugar, No Spice: Reflections on Research on Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence

Lori B. Girshick

Violence Against Women 2002 8: 1500
DOI: 10.1177/107780102237967

The online version of this article can be found at:
http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/8/12/1500

Published by:
SAGE
http://www.sagepublications.com

Additional services and information for *Violence Against Women* can be found at:

Email Alerts: http://vaw.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts

Subscriptions: http://vaw.sagepub.com/subscriptions

Reprints: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav

Permissions: http://www.sagepub.com/journalsPermissions.nav

Citations: http://vaw.sagepub.com/content/8/12/1500.refs.html

>> Version of Record - Dec 1, 2002

What is This?

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

NO SUGAR, NO SPICE

Reflections on Research on Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence

LORI B. GIRSHICK
Warren Wilson College

This article discusses some of the main issues raised by woman-to-woman sexual violence. The author emphasizes the challenges of admitting that sexual violence by women occurs, changing laws to acknowledge the seriousness of woman-to-woman sexual abuse, improving agency services for lesbian and bisexual survivors of sexual abuse, and compelling the antiviolence movement to take this issue seriously. A major focus concerns the need for a feminist analysis of sexual violence that accommodates the reality of violence and abuse by females. Similarly, the homophobic, biphobic, and heterosexist context of our lives must be confronted in order to address woman-to-woman sexual violence.

Over the past several years, I conducted research and interviews with 70 lesbians and bisexual women across the United States who identified as survivors of woman-perpetrated sexual violence. This work was recently published in a book, *Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence: Does She Call it Rape?* (Girshick, 2002). The process of researching and writing this work was an early step in my thinking about a broad social-change agenda related to interpersonal violence. I believe a shift in feminist thinking about perpetrators is necessary once we admit that some women sexually violate other women. By forcing those of us who are activists in the antiviolence movement to admit that women are sometimes sexual perpetrators, by discussing a hidden and stigmatized issue, and by giving voice to survivors who have previously been silenced, our social world will be changed.

During my research, I found that there was limited work in the area of woman-to-woman sexual violence. The studies on lesbian battering that include any discussion of sexual abuse generally use a checklist of sexual acts (e.g., Renzetti, 1992). Taylor and

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, Vol. 8 No. 12, December 2002 1500-1520
DOI: 10.1177/107780102237967
© 2002 Sage Publications

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

Chandler's (1995) work includes a section on sexual abuse within the context of battering, but it only includes stories of four women. The few studies that do address woman-to-woman sexual violence offer varying reports of incidence and prevalence rates, depending on the sample.[1] A major problem with these studies is that some researchers do not ask the sex of the assailant, so we do not know if the sexual violence was perpetrated by a male or a female. Another problem is that they use differing definitions of sexual violence. This is a problem in studies of male-to-female sexual assault as well. In my book (Girshick, 2002), I define sexual violence broadly to include

> Any unwanted sexual activity. Contact sexual activities include: touching parts of the body, kissing, vaginal penetration by objects, vaginal penetration by fingers, oral sex, anal sex, rubbing, and being forced to do things to yourself. Noncontact sexual activities include forced viewing of pornography or other sexually explicit material, and being forced to watch sexual activity of others. (p. 105)

I used this broad definition because I was investigating the range of sexually abusive behaviors and how these different behaviors were perceived and labeled by survivors.

In this article, I discuss four challenges: (a) admitting (both within the broader society and within the subcommunities of lesbians and bisexual women) that sexual violence by women occurs; (b) changing laws to acknowledge the seriousness of woman-to-woman sexual abuse; (c) improving agency services for lesbian and bisexual survivors of sexual violence by women; and (d) compelling the movement to end violence against women to take this issue seriously. It is my hope that others will build upon this work. Activists need to reinvigorate our efforts at ending sexual violence to make fundamental changes in society so that we can become more effective in prevention efforts while continuing to serve women in need.

CHALLENGES TO ADMITTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY WOMEN

That a woman might be a sexual perpetrator is generally unthinkable in our society. This idea runs counter to our U.S.

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

society's understanding of female gender roles. Females are to be asked out by males, to be treated on a date by males, and are supposed to receive sexual attention from males. Of course, if you are a lesbian or bisexual woman, a woman might ask you out, and perhaps you will each pay your own way. The sexual attention will be from another woman. But all females—lesbian, bisexual, or straight—are expected to be sexually nonviolent. Females are nurturers not aggressors. To say, "my rapist was a woman" brings no image to mind for most people. Instead, the questions of "how could that be?" and "what did she actually do?" reflect people's disbelief. For most people, these questions do not have answers; it is inconceivable to them that females are sexually violent.

To admit that woman-to-woman sexual violence exists means to accept that women engage in sexual behavior with other women. Despite the fact that sexual violence is about power and control and not the act of sex, to examine female perpetrators and female survivors requires us to think about same-sex sexual behavior. This is a mental hurdle that many in society are not prepared to face. Furthermore, some of this sexual behavior does involve violence within abusive relationships, in which sexual abuse is one aspect of domestic violence. Because these are romantic relationships between lesbians or bisexual women, if we address the sexual violence, we must acknowledge and/or validate these relationships. This is a reality that, according to public opinion polls, most Americans do not want to accept (Vaid, 1995). Without achieving the legitimacy of sexual relationships and behavior between same-sex couples, advocates will not have the language to talk about consensual or abusive sexual behavior.

Biphobia and internalized biphobia are also blocks for understanding woman-to-woman sexual violence. For a woman to come out as bisexual means that she risks being discredited by potential partners as someone who does not know what she wants; she may be perceived as promiscuous or untrustworthy. Biphobia can be used as a weapon by abusive partners, as the following example from Maureen's story (Girshick, 2002) shows.[2] Maureen's partner was jealous over a man Maureen knew as a friend.

> On several occasions her jealousy was out of control and she took it out on me sexually, by holding me down on the bed, grabbing my

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

> breasts, and trying to force something into my vagina, insisting that "this is what you want from him" or words to that effect. (p. 68)

A bisexual woman sexually violated by another woman may deny or doubt her bisexuality, feeling that her abuse was caused by her orientation. This could also prevent her from seeking help for the abuse she experienced.

Same-sex sexual violence outside of intimate relationships, such as acquaintance rape, professional abuse (i.e., abuse committed by a therapist, clergy person, police officer, or some other professional), or sexual harassment by coworkers requires us to acknowledge that women in any setting—at work, when seeking professional services, or spending time with our friends—could potentially be abusive. Living with that kind of uncertainty and threat is destabilizing. Women already live with the fear of sexual assault by men. To add women to this pool of potential predators means that no place is inherently safe. Denial of this threat is a major coping mechanism for women to feel any measure of safety as constructed in a heterosexist, patriarchal society. If women internalize the societal notions that females are inherently nurturing and nonviolent, then it becomes crucial to cling to what Aileen, a study participant, referred to in calling women's space "safe space." She felt "there's a shared something there. You need to trust somebody. . . . [Ending denial] completely cracks apart the belief in lesbian utopia" (Girshick, 2002, p. 49). And Marcia stated, "Women are supposed to travel in packs. You're supposed to protect each other. And it's just never mentioned that a woman could attack you the same way that a man could" (Girshick, 2002, p. 49).

Denial of the threat of sexual violence within lesbian and bisexual communities also runs deep. The myth of lesbian utopia wherein relationships between women are based on nonviolence and egalitarianism allows no room for interpersonal violence. Meyers (1999) writes, "Lesbians felt that our relationships were utopian since they did not involve men. We did not want to imagine that women could do harm to another woman in a relationship" (p. 241). During the early second wave of feminism, theories on violence against women were based on the premise that men used violence to maintain power, control, and privilege. Consequently, if power and control are linked to males, the assumption was that two women together should mean the absence of abuse.

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

Christy, a study participant, echoes this sentiment: "I think also coming from a feminist perspective, I didn't want to see that a woman would do that [be sexually violent], so I was denying it" (Girshick, 2002, p. 56).

Admitting that women can be sexually violent with other women demands that we—both the traditional antiviolence movements and gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender (GLBT) communities—come up with solutions in order to adequately respond to this violence. How will we confront the female rapists or abusers? How can we adequately deal with backlash against lesbians and bisexual women while we endeavor to confront the painful reality of violent behaviors of some in our communities? Speaking of community accountability is difficult when lesbians and bisexual women have significantly different experiences than gay men or heterosexual transgendered people. And certainly, lesbians and bisexual women have differences (particularly regarding the acceptability of male sex partners) within the lesbian/bi category. However, considering that resources such as community centers, health centers, hate-crime reporting agencies, some domestic violence agencies, political lobbies, and pride organizations frequently address the many concerns of these different groups under one umbrella, there is a certain logic to also drawing upon those resources and organizations on this issue. Interpersonal violence will also be found among gay men and transgendered people. Much of the banding together is a self-protective measure to strengthen our communities against heterosexist backlash. Battering and sexual violence need to be addressed within our communities in order to effectively reach community members. An additional consideration of the notion of community is that some people decry fixed sexual identity labeling and experience the fluidity of sexual identities. The one transgendered respondent in my study (Girshick, 2002), for example, experienced her sexual violence at a time when she labeled herself lesbian.

Once we start on this path of giving voice to what was previously hidden, we have opened Pandora's box. And rightly so. We cannot sacrifice our sisters to live in isolation, while perpetrators are free to move on to their next victim. The short-term and long-term emotional impacts of sexual violence are severe. The most common adjective I heard from women I talked with was "devastating." Bea felt "very vulnerable, insignificant, dehumanized,

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

disrespected, confused, guilty, ashamed, dirty, weak, stupid, wary, untrusting, angry, betrayed" (Girshick, 2002, p. 127). Others struggled with depression and suicidal feelings. Some women had to stop driving or change jobs. One woman carried a gun around with her for a week and took self-defense classes (Girshick, 2002). Silence has meant survivors of this violence have not received the help and support services they need. The sexual violations affected their sense of self, their sexual behaviors, and their ability to be in relationships. Of the women I talked to, 71% were incest survivors, and 51% had been raped by a male at least once (Girshick, 2002, p. 119). The issues of sexual revictimization are unique to survivors' core sense of self and certainly have an impact on the women in a way that verbal or economic abuse does not. Physical violence within a battering relationship is the most similar in impact, and these types of abuse often merge because sexual violation is also a physical act. For example, Evon said that "a lot of the sexual assaults blended into my mind as domestic violence or went missing altogether. . . . I remember being hurt physically on many occasions while engaging in sex" (Girshick, 2002, p. 65).

CHALLENGES TO LAWS

One of the major challenges to adequate legal redress and equal protection under the law as applied to lesbians and bisexual women has to do with the heterosexist understanding of sexual assault and battering. Due to the heterosexist presumption built into laws governing domestic violence in many states, reflecting traditional notions of who is a perpetrator and who is a victim, the stories of lesbians and bisexual women do not sound "familiar" to court personnel, many of whom are homophobic. The accepted subtext is heterosexist: Perpetrators are male and victims are female. Even when not explicitly stated this way, people in the criminal legal system interpret the laws in a heterosexist way. A woman is not supposed to be a sexual perpetrator or batterer. Without the perpetrator, there cannot be a victim; hence, women cannot be victims of assaults by other women.

In some cases of same-sex interpersonal violence, lesbians and bisexual women are expressly denied legal protection. For example, nine states specifically exclude same-sex partners from

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

domestic violence statutes by either applying only to female-male relationships or to married or formerly married partners.[3] Only 15 states and the District of Columbia specifically articulate statutory protection for same-sex domestic violence regarding both criminal charges and civil protection.[4] The ambiguous language of many states' restraining orders (where one category of eligibility is current or former household members) might seem like it would open the door for lesbians and bisexual women. Until cases are ruled upon and then appealed in appellate court, however, there is no guarantee of how the court will actually interpret this language.

The reform of rape laws in the late 1970s and early 1980s was a step forward in rape prosecutions in many ways (e.g., a woman's past sexual history could no longer be introduced as evidence). However, although many believed new gender-neutral language meant women could press charges for rape or sexual assault against their female perpetrators, this was not the case. Instead, these changes often meant that now men could press charges against women for rape. For example, in Massachusetts, where sexual intercourse is defined as penile-vaginal intercourse, a male or a female could be the perpetrator, but only in a heterosexual situation.[5] This contrasts with the truly gender-neutral language of Connecticut, where the statute specifies vaginal intercourse, oral sex, and anal sex between persons, "regardless of sex."[6] Generally, however, rape was, and is still, seen as an act involving vaginal penetration by a penis. Whereas most legal statutes expand the meaning to include oral and anal penetration, the penetration itself is still viewed as something men do to women (or to other men). Consequently, the forced finger penetration experienced by many lesbians and bisexual women might be a misdemeanor sexual offense rather than a felony rape. The prioritizing of male sexual violations against women also results in the prioritizing of sodomy—again, acts generally by men against others—over sexual violations by women against women, even when those assaults may include forced object penetration vaginally or anally.

Many sexual activities that are normal acts between women are defined in many states as "deviate sexual acts" under the law, such as oral sex,[7] object penetration,[8] or in Pennsylvania, even finger penetration.[9] When these acts are the result of force, a criminal

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

conviction (if charges were even pressed, which they rarely are) would end in lesser penalties, meaning that survivors of same-sex rape could not expect to have their violations taken as seriously by the courts as a heterosexual woman might expect if she were raped by a male. I am sure it comes as no surprise that there are few cases actually brought to the courts of woman-to-woman sexual violence.

Another major problem in seeking legal protection is that in 16 states there are sodomy laws, often referred to as "crimes against nature."[10] Although these laws theoretically are applied to sex between opposite-sex as well as same-sex partners, and in some states to consensual as well as forced sex, the application is such that a lesbian or bisexual woman who comes forward as a victim of rape by another woman could possibly be charged with a crime. Facing a criminal charge is yet another strong disincentive to coming forward as a victim.

Women—survivors and perpetrators—realize that woman-to-woman sexual assaults are not deemed by law to be serious violations. For the survivor, to come forward is to risk more loss than gain. Homophobia and biphobia among police, prosecutors, juries, and judges is a major reason why lesbians and bisexual women might stay away from the criminal justice system. Contemptuous treatment, having to be "out" in court, and subjecting themselves to snide remarks or negative rulings based on biases are reasons to avoid it. Lesbians and bisexual women may have already lost children in custody cases, may have no legal protection against employment discrimination, have no legal rights of marriage, and may have experienced bar raids and other police harassment. For the perpetrator, the heterosexist legal system can be used to her advantage because these assaults are not taken seriously and it is unlikely she will ever see the inside of a courtroom.

Perpetrators generally deny they are sexual abusers, as in Roxanne's case where she reported, "And when I said to her, 'You raped me,' she just laughed at me. She said, 'That's impossible' " (Girshick, 2002, p. 100). After Deirdre's partner raped her by fisting (inserting the whole hand into the vagina), she recounted (in Girshick, 2002)

> Later that evening when she came back to say something to me, I looked at her and said, "You raped me." And she looked at me and

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

> said, "I gave you exactly what you wanted and exactly what you deserved." (p. 97)

Although many male rapists certainly deny that they have raped, there is at least a legal context for the behavior and a language with which to discuss the acts. Female perpetrators' denial is supported by our society.

In my study (Girshick, 2002), only 4 out of 91 different types of sexual violence situations were pursued in the legal system in any way by the survivors.[11] In two cases, women filed a rape report but did not press charges. They wanted the reports "for the record." In another case where an employee was sexually violated by her supervisor, a civil suit was filed against the supervisor and the agency (which helped women get out of prostitution). This case was ultimately settled out of court, and the perpetrator did not have to admit guilt. She moved on to another position in the antiviolence movement. In the last case, Leigh had been held against her will for 3 days and was forced into sexual acts by a woman friend and the woman's boyfriend. The two assailants were also using drugs at the time. When Leigh escaped and the two were arrested, there were multiple charges against them, including a forced oral copulation charge. By the time the perpetrators got to trial, the forced sex charge had been dropped by the district attorney, and the only charges that remained were the drug charges; the two were remanded to drug treatment.

Facing woman-to-woman sexual violence means challenging the heterosexism found throughout the justice system. Issues of homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism in the larger society must simultaneously be addressed. Without such work to end oppression, there will be no way to eliminate the heterosexist understanding of sexual violence so that juries, judges, and others in court will be able to view the woman survivor of woman-perpetrated rape as having been victimized in a manner similar to the woman survivor of male-perpetrated rape. Without challenging the views that the sexual acts that are normal to same-sex couples are deviate, there will be no way to change laws that criminalize or otherwise stigmatize these behaviors. This is obviously a huge undertaking, but one with the enormous potential to change an institutional framework affecting the lives and well being of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people.

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

CHALLENGE TO SERVICES

Rape crisis agencies have not yet addressed the issue of woman-to-woman sexual violence in a substantive way. When I spoke to agency staff across the country, I was told repeatedly that they had never heard of woman-to-woman sexual violence (Girshick, 2002). There were no clients, so there must be no problem. There was almost no literature, few targeted programs, and little staff training on the issue. Staff were largely unaware of the few studies on the subject that appeared in academic journals. Advocates in the anti-sexual assault movement had not named—or claimed—the issue. In many ways, agencies' responses to the issue of woman-to-woman sexual violence echoed their responses to women who have been sexually assaulted and raped by their husbands (Bergen, 1996), yet homophobia and heterosexism leave lesbian and bisexual survivors of rape and sexual assaults by an intimate partner even more invisible.

Although a number of advocates for battered lesbians in antidomestic violence agencies across the country have been working for years to raise awareness about battering in lesbian relationships (e.g., Lobel, 1986), many obstacles to adequately addressing lesbian battering remain (Leventhal & Lundy, 1999). The obstacles to addressing sexual abuse by same-sex partners is compounded by the fact that sexual abuse has traditionally not been a major focus of the antidomestic violence movement, even when it occurs within intimate relationships (Bergen, 1996). We need advocates from both the antisexual assault and antidomestic violence movements—those with the expertise, the communications channels, and legitimacy in the field—to establish sexual violence by women against women as a serious social problem. With this acknowledgement comes the impetus to modify services and create new outreach strategies.

Studies show that survivors of same-sex violence turn most often to therapists and friends for support (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 1991). They do not usually utilize agency services such as hotlines, support groups, or legal advocacy. Lesbians and bisexual women report that they do not feel these agencies are open to them; rather, they perceive these services are for heterosexual women abused by men (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992). There is good reason for this perception. Public service

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

announcements for services rarely mention the word lesbian or bisexual, picture same-sex couples, or list lesbian- or bi-specific services. Trainings for staff and volunteers may have a section on diversity but almost never cover same-sex sexual abuse or battering or discuss female perpetrators.

What lesbian and bisexual women survivors of interpersonal violence most want are lesbian-specific or lesbian- and bi-friendly services (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992). Services offered to lesbians by lesbians feel the safest to survivors, with the least risk of homophobic reactions. Literature such as pamphlets, brochures, and handouts need to be geared to the experiences of lesbians and bisexual women. Agencies with lesbians and bisexual women on staff help lesbian and bisexual women clients feel more comfortable. Yet with this knowledge of what services are preferred, will agencies find the resources for an adequate response?

It is not only finding the resources for programs. Traditional sexual assault and domestic violence agencies might fear loss of funding if conservative funders (state governments and foundations) are homophobic. Agency staff might themselves feel uncomfortable with lesbian and bisexual clients. They might worry about the homophobia of their heterosexual clients in support groups, counseling groups, or shelters. Some might be defensive about addressing same-sex violence because they may feel it challenges their analysis of interpersonal violence (if they rely on a gender-based understanding of abuses of power and control).

Abused lesbians and bisexual women often do not come forward because they themselves have difficulty identifying their experience as abuse or as a violation, given the lack of acknowledgement and advocacy regarding same-sex abuse. For many who live where the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community is small, survivors may fear the word will spread among the community about what has happened to them. They may worry about their confidentiality. In rural areas, women are often isolated from services, and the next town or city may be too far to drive to. In my study (Girshick, 2002), a few women mentioned they did not seek any services regarding their experiences of abuse until they moved to a larger city.

Yet, when agencies do targeted outreach, make a commitment to staff education and training, and provide programs such as lesbian support groups with lesbian staff, the possibility for lesbian

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

and bisexual clients opens up. For example, Helpmate, a domestic violence agency in Asheville, N.C., was able to start a support group with six clients after they advertised their services for about 4 months. The group offers support to women battered by other women and is facilitated by a lesbian. Lesbians are welcome in the shelter. Advertisements for services are in the local lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered community newspaper, and flyers about services are up around the city. But these services have not always been in place. All of these measures were resisted for years by certain staff members who are no longer there. Now, every volunteer training has a component on lesbian battering, and staff have gone through a half-day training. Funding for the support group has come primarily through fund-raisers held within the lesbian community. What seemed to make the major difference for Helpmate was commitment by staff to advocate for the issue and partnering with members of the lesbian community to validate that there is a problem.

In the Bay area, San Francisco Women Against Rape (SFWAR) is known for being friendly to lesbians, bisexual women, and transgendered people. They have targeted literature that addresses woman-to-woman rape, and lesbians or bisexual women who contact them can request a lesbian counselor. They have not been able to sustain a specifically lesbian support group, although not for lack of lesbian rape survivors in the area; rather, they believe it is because the topic is still so sensitive that few women have requested to work in a group setting. Still, about 5% to 10% of SFWAR's clients are lesbian or bisexual. The clients avail themselves of services that include short-term individual counseling, a crisis hotline, medical advocacy, and legal advocacy.

The New York City Gay and Lesbian Anti-Violence Project provides services and programs to lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, and HIV-affected victims of crime. Domestic violence accounts for nearly half of the agency's clients. Most of the woman-to-woman sexual violence they see involves lesbians or bisexual women with female perpetrators within the context of a battering relationship. These women are seen within the domestic violence program's short-term and long-term counseling services. Support groups for lesbians and bisexual women form when there is a caseload wanting group support. They offer long-term sexual assault counseling to the few lesbians and bisexual

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

women who come to the agency for sexual assault services outside the context of domestic violence.

The Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans and Lesbian Survivors of Abuse, based in Seattle, primarily has seen clients whose sexual assault has been within a dating or intimate relationship context. Whereas they agree that at this time there is little literature and few resources available about same-sex sexual violence, they started to make an effort in 2001 to explicitly include sexual assault in their discussions of abuse. The Northwest Network provides one-on-one short- and long-term counseling, legal advocacy, domestic violence support groups, referrals, and safety planning.

As shown above, even agencies that specifically reach out to lesbians and bisexual women are in the early stages of legitimizing the issue of woman-to-woman sexual violence and creating an environment where clients feel safe to receive services. These agencies are in the forefront of the work; they are our models. But along with the work of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender-identified agencies, we need to establish the experiences of survivors of woman-to-woman sexual violence as part of the mainstream discussion of violence against women. We need to cut through the denial in society that women are never sexual perpetrators. This is especially difficult for "traditional" agencies that serve survivors of sexual and/or domestic violence because their work was founded on an analysis that largely assumed perpetrators of sexual violence were male. The earliest shelters were designed to protect women from men. The rape speak-outs involved women exposing male sexual violence. And although not all men were abusers and rapists, the acknowledged abusers and rapists were men. Even though many activists in the antidomestic violence movement have worked for years to expand advocates' analysis of battering to include lesbian battering, this gender-based analysis largely remains entrenched in our thinking and in our services.

Furthermore, when we challenge the myth that lesbian relationships are nonviolent, we are opening all women up to "backlash"; now accusations can fly that women are as violent as men. Some worry that this will somehow discredit all the work antidomestic violence and sexual assault advocates and activists have struggled for these past 30 years. How does the shift to a

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

power-based analysis affect our agencies, our analysis, and our day-to-day work? Do women end up less safe in our daily lives if we are diverted into a struggle to defend against new accusations of women's violence against men or other women?

These are some of the fears. Even though I understand these fears, I feel it is more important to make woman-to-woman sexual violence a standard component of community education and outreach efforts. Not only will such efforts contribute to educating the public—gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, as well as straight—but it will also validate the experiences of women who are survivors of same-sex sexual violence. If false accusations come to the fore about women's violence, we will have to respond to them. If new clients come to us—female or male—we should serve them. It seems to me that truth will be on our side. The antiviolence movement should be focused on serving survivors and preventing violence. I feel we need to put our fears aside and focus on doing what is right as a result of this focus.

Agencies that have trained their staff and advocates and are ready to serve lesbians and bi women need to show them that they are welcome. Outreach in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender press, at GLBT businesses, bookstores, bed and breakfasts, as well as at GLBT bars, goes a long way. Although it is true that lesbians and bisexual women are everywhere and that advertising in mainstream venues will reach lesbians, outreach at specifically lesbian and bisexual locations shows a genuine effort to be more inclusive. Public speaking at women's events and tabling at fairs or GLBT Pride marches are other ideas for raising awareness and reaching out to survivors.

Reaching out to the different lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities requires other efforts. Placing ads in the paper(s) of communities of color can help reach lesbians and bisexual women of color. Bisexual women sometimes have organizations of their own, and efforts should be made to address them. If significant numbers of bisexual women seek services, an agency might consider specific bi-support groups. Other strategies, such as sending agency staff into the community to provide services or training to lesbian and bisexual women community activists to do community education, could be considered. Individuals participating in consensual sado-masochism (S/M) are not immune from abuse, even though safety is often a nego-tiated

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

part of these sexual encounters. Consensual S/M involves agreements about what behaviors are acceptable and, through the use of a safeword, when sexual acts will stop if a participant is uncomfortable. Women abused in an S/M context may seek support from S/M affirmative groups or counselors. These counselors and groups will need training on same-sex sexual violence in order to be adequately prepared to work with their clients.[12]

The discussion so far has focused on services for survivors. What about the perpetrators? There are almost no studies about women perpetrators of sexual violence against women, and relatively few about women who batter their female partners (e.g., Coleman, 1994). Women are not generally labeled "rapists," and diversion programs where convicted female sexual assaulters can go instead of serving jail time are rare. Women who batter sometimes are not identified as being batterers, but for those who are identified, there are some pretrial diversion programs and postconviction groups designed specifically for these women. (Unfortunately, with increasing arrests of women for assaulting their partners, some women who are not batterers are also being labeled batterers, and many of these women are being inappropriately court-ordered into batterers' intervention programs.) Without identification or programs, it is difficult to find women who sexually abuse their female partners to talk to and learn why they are violent or what programming needs they have. What we do know comes from what survivors say about their abusers and from the findings of the few counselors who have been working with same-sex batterers. The dynamics that have been identified include: a desire for power and control, the dependency of the abuser on the victim, jealousy, internalized homophobia, a history of childhood abuse, and alcohol and drug use (Byrne, 1996; Elliott, 1996; Girshick, 2002; Hart, 1986; Leeder, 1988; Renzetti, 1992). In my opinion, because we are all socialized in a societal structure emphasizing a power-over model and because we all know that violence gets results, it is not surprising that when these other factors enter in, some women, like some men, resort to physical and sexual violence. Thus, working with perpetrators is an urgent need and remains a serious challenge.

All of my suggestions relating to survivors will also help create the context for perpetrators to be identified and acknowledged; when we undertake such work in our communities, we are able to

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

name the perpetrators and move forward to a response. Developing a response to both survivors and perpetrators of woman-to-woman sexual violence rests upon our understanding of the issues and will take time to do. The last section of this article deals with yet more of our challenges: reexamining the feminist analysis of sexual violence and reinvigorating the social change agenda and vision of the movement to end violence against women.

CHALLENGES TO THE MOVEMENT TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

There are two major reasons for social theory: to explain phenomena and to develop responses. Second-wave feminism (the feminism that emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s) used patriarchy in its theoretical analysis of the oppression of women because sexism was the dominant form of oppression these feminists identified. Sexism and male dominance neatly explained violence against heterosexual women. Unfortunately, this ignored those women who are also oppressed by race, class, age, ability, and sexual orientation—omissions for which early feminists have been criticized. We need a broader framework that is more inclusive. This view does not downplay violence by men, but it does encourage us to examine how both men and women create and condone a culture of violence. This broader framework is still feminist and reminds us that there are many theories of feminism. To claim that patriarchy is not the prominent oppression is not to say that it is irrelevant, but rather to elevate the importance of other oppressions.

In my study, (Girshick, 2002), I did not have significant variation in the sample by race or class, and the women with disabilities were not necessarily disabled at the time of their assaults. Thus, I do not believe I can adequately address through my own work issues of the intersection of oppressions. Yet I know that the exclusion of sexual orientation from the early analysis of sexual violence has had significant impact. Lesbians were silenced, and bisexual women were completely invisible. I also know from the literature (e.g., Butler, 1999; Chung & Lee, 2000; Combahee River Collective, 1995; hooks, 1984; Kanuha, 1990, 1996; Waldron, 1996) that race, class, ability, immigration status, and age are variables

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

that make a difference in terms of treatment, access to rights, and services. For example, without adequate acknowledgement of these variables, advocates are not properly trained and cannot give accurate legal information to clients. Lack of discussion of disability, for example, makes clients with disabilities invisible, which can lead to their being treated awkwardly or inappropriately in a support group or shelter. These status variables interact, as well, with sexual orientation and violence.

hooks (1984) calls the integrated analysis of oppression the White supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal class system. Pharr (1996) refers to the politics of domination. Chesley, MacAulay, and Ristock (1998) point to the structures of dominance. My preference is to call this multidimensional theory the "hierarchical structures of dominance" because I believe it is hierarchy that allows the domination. The social controls of hierarchy are many. No matter which aspect of dominance you examine, the dynamics are similar. Whether sexism or racism, heterosexism or classism, the belief that one status group within that dimension is superior, natural, and right over and above the others keeps the others in their place. We internalize oppression and domination, reinforcing the control of the system, and we are surrounded by messages that violence, power, and control get results. Lesbians and bisexual women are not immune from the socialization of culture, and we are products of a society that values power and control.

In understanding woman-to-woman sexual violence, the concepts of heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and misogyny stand out because they are used against all lesbians and bisexual women regardless of class, race, age, or physical ability in specific ways. Lesbian baiting is a constant reminder that to be who we are is not safe. The reluctance of women to identify as feminists and hence, be labeled lesbians by some, or the labeling of students in women's studies classes as lesbians, work to deny women choices. Furthermore, the various oppressions are factors of equal importance to sexual orientation for those lesbians and bisexual women not in privileged positions on those hierarchical dimensions. It is crucial to use a broader framework for understanding sexual violence in order not to silence lesbian and bisexual women survivors who are not members of dominant groups and in order to provide theory to explain how women can be sexual perpetrators.

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

I would argue that there is no possible way to work on any issue "alone," because we immediately are drawn into other realms—of cultural ideas, media, and institutions such as religion or law. To try to end homophobia and biphobia means working on several levels simultaneously—individual, cultural, and institutional—including addressing internalized oppression at the individual level. To figure out where to begin social change means to understand and challenge the multiple levels of our lives concurrently. At the same time, I am convinced that the values of capitalism—of profit over people's needs—are the primary obstacles to ending hierarchical domination, because capitalism creates the need for people to be pitted against each other to "make it." The vision of ending hierarchy and domination is a vision of equality and social justice.

One of the major challenges to the antiviolence movement today is to reevaluate our feminist analysis in order to be more inclusive. We need the ability to explain woman-to-woman sexual violence and battering not as an exception or an add-on, but as fully as we understand male violence. In order to achieve this, we must immediately confront the issues of homophobia, biphobia, and heterosexism. This, in turn, will bring us to confront societal attitudes and institutions. The themes I have touched on in this article—ending the denial around woman-to-woman sexual abuse, creating legal reforms, improving services to survivors, and challenging the movement to end violence against women—do not cover other equally important issues, such as the emotional impact of these sexual violations, the language needed to express and describe this violence, issues of revictimization, or even what is actually done in such sexual violence. Yet, all of these aspects must be acknowledged, understood, and incorporated into our services and strategies around sexual violence.

To deal with these challenges, I feel that we need to engage in dialogue with each of the more than 3,000 rape crisis and domestic violence agencies across the country about woman-to-woman sexual violence. Staff and advocates need to discuss their understanding and analysis of interpersonal violence. To be effective in this work, staff and advocate training on the issues of same-sex abuse as well as examination of personal homophobia and heterosexism are absolutely necessary. Viewing the efforts to serve all women as part of our collective mission and prioritizing

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

a reinvigorated, inclusive theoretical understanding will create a need for new coalition work. The aim of such a coalition will be to work against oppression toward equality, human dignity, and acceptance. Thus, it will of necessity involve groups and individuals across sexual identities and sexual orientations, races and ethnicities, different social classes, and other status dimensions. Renewed energy will infuse our movement as we take on a revitalized social change campaign.

As we work to end violence against women, we will have an impact on multiple dimensions of oppression, making our work more effective, inclusive, and far-reaching for societal change. This is my vision.

NOTES

1. The National Violence Against Women Survey is perhaps the only nationally representative sample that has included an examination of a woman's experience of sexual and physical assault by another woman. Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison (1999) report that 11% of the 79 women in the study who had a history of living with a same-sex partner reported being raped and/or physically assaulted by a female intimate partner. Unfortunately, the authors do not cite the number of women reporting being raped by their female partners separately from those reporting physical assault. Prevalence rates in nonrandom samples vary significantly. Turell (2000) found that 12% of genetic females in an ethnically diverse, nonrandom sample of lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and transgendered people in southeast Texas reported experiencing at least one sexually abusive behavior by their partner. Waterman, Dawson, & Bologna (1989) studied sexual coercion in same-sex relationships among a nonrandom sample of lesbian and gay male college students and found a prevalence rate of 31% among the women. Loulan's (1987) study of lesbians at lectures and workshops she gave revealed a 17% prevalence rate perpetrated by mates, lovers, or female friends among her nonrandom sample. Waldner-Haugrud & Vaden Gratch (1997) examined sexual coercion in gay and lesbian relationships, finding that more than half (52%) of their nonrandom sample of White lesbians and gay men reported at least one incident of sexual coercion by a same-sex partner, but they do not separate out prevalence rates for women and men.

2. All names from the study are pseudonyms.

3. Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Michigan, Montana, North Carolina, and South Carolina.

4. Alaska, California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, and West Virginia.

5. General Laws of Massachusetts, Chapter 265: Section 22. *Rape, generally; etc*.

6. Connecticut, Sec. 53a-65. *Definitions*.

7. For example, New York State Penal Law, *Sex Offenses: Definition of Terms*, sec. 130.00.

8. For example, Indiana Code 35-41-1-9, *Deviate Sexual Conduct*, sec. 9.

9. Pennsylvania Crimes Code, *Deviate Sexual Intercourse*, Sec. 3126.

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

10. Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Utah, and Virginia.

11. Seven women sought and received domestic violence restraining orders; the police were called eight times for domestic violence when no charges were filed, once when charges were filed then dropped, and three times when arrests were made.

12. Agencies with S/M affirmative materials include the Northwest Network of Bisexual, Trans and Lesbian Survivors of Abuse in Seattle, and the Buckeye Region Anti-Violence Organization in Columbus, Ohio. A good Web site with information on S/M and domestic violence issues is www.gloria-brame.com.

REFERENCES

Bergen, R. K. (1996). *Wife rape: Understanding the response of survivors and service providers*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Butler, L. (1999). African American lesbian women experiencing partner abuse. In J. C. McClennen & J. Gunther (Eds.), *A professional's guide to understanding gay and lesbian domestic violence: Understanding practice interventions* (pp. 181-205). Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen.

Byrne, D. (1996). Clinical models for the treatment of gay male perpetrators of domestic violence. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, *4*, 107-116.

Chesley, L., MacAulay, D., & Ristock, J. (1998). *Abuse in lesbian relationships: Information and resources*. Ontario, Canada: Health Canada.

Chung, C., & Lee, S. (2000). *(Re)action: Queer Asian women's responses to relationship violence*. San Francisco: Family Violence Prevention Fund.

Coleman, V. (1994). Lesbian battering: The relationship between personality and the perpetration of violence. *Violence and Victims*, *9*, 139-152.

Combahee River Collective. (1995). A Black feminist statement. In B. Guy-Sheftall (Ed.), *Words of fire: An anthology of African-American feminist thought* (pp. 232-240). New York: The New Press.

Elliott, P. (1996). Shattering illusions: Same-sex domestic violence. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, *4*, 1-8.

Girshick, L. B. (2002). *Woman-to-woman sexual violence: Does she call it rape?* Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Hart, B. (1986). Lesbian battering: An examination. In K. Lobel (Ed.), *Naming the violence: Speaking out about lesbian battering* (pp. 173-189). Seattle: Seal Press.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist theory: From margin to center*. Boston: South End Press.

Kanuha, V. (1990). Compounding the triple jeopardy: Battering in lesbian of color relationships. *Women and Therapy*, *9*, 169-184.

Kanuha, V. (1996). Domestic violence, racism, and the battered women's movement in the United States. In J. L. Edleson & Z. C. Eisikovits (Eds.), *Future interventions with battered women and their families* (pp. 34-50). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Leeder, E. (1988). Enmeshed in pain: Counseling the lesbian battering couple . *Women and Therapy*, *7*, 81-99.

Leventhal, B., & Lundy, S. E. (Eds.). (1999). *Same-sex domestic violence: Strategies for change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Lobel, K. (Ed.). (1986). *Naming the violence: Speaking out about lesbian battering*. Seattle: Seal Press.

Loulan, J. (1987). *Lesbian passion: Loving ourselves and each other*. San Francisco: Spinsters.

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014

Meyers, E. A. (1999). Developing a successful community outreach program: A look at criminal justice and the lesbian and gay community. In J. C. McClennen & J. Gunther (Eds.), *A professional's guide to understanding gay and lesbian domestic violence: Understanding practice interventions* (pp. 239-247). Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen.

Pharr, S. (1996). *In the time of the right: Reflections on liberation*. Berkeley, CA: Chardon Press.

Renzetti, C. M. (1992). *Violent betrayal: Partner abuse in lesbian relationships*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Ristock, J. L. (1991). Understanding violence in lesbian relationships: An examination of misogyny and homophobia. In S. Kirby, D. Daniels, K. McKenna, M. Pujol, & M. Valiquette (Eds.), *Women changing academe: The proceedings of the 1990 Canadian women's studies association conference* (pp. 113-121). Winnipeg: Sororal Publishing.

Taylor, J., & Chandler, T. (1995). *Lesbians talk violent relationships*. London: Scarlet Press.

Tjaden, P., Thoennes, N., & Allison, C. J. (1999). Comparing violence over the life span in samples of same-sex and opposite sex cohabitants. *Violence and Victims*, *14*, 413-425.

Turell, S. C. (2000). A descriptive analysis of same-sex relationship violence for a diverse sample. *Journal of Family Violence*, *15*, 281-293.

Vaid, U. (1995). *Virtual equality*. New York: Anchor Books.

Waldner-Haugrud, L. K., & Vaden Gratch, L. (1997). Sexual coercion in gay/lesbian relationships: Descriptives and gender differences. *Violence and Victims*, *12*, 87-98.

Waldron, C. M. (1996). Lesbians of color and the domestic violence movement. *Journal of Gay and Lesbian Social Services*, *4*, 43-51.

Waterman, C. K., Dawson, L. J., & Bologna, M. J. (1989). Sexual coercion in gay male and lesbian relationships: Predictors and implications for support services. *Journal of Sex Research*, *26*, 118-24.

Lori B. Girshick, Ph.D., is a community activist and sociologist who has worked with battered women for more than 10 years. Her other work has been with women in prison, criminal justice issues, and issues related to gender. She teaches sociology and is chair of Women's Studies at Warren Wilson College in North Carolina. She has written three books. The latest is Woman-to-Woman Sexual Violence: Does She Call it Rape? (*Northeastern University Press, 2002).*

Downloaded from vaw.sagepub.com at PORTLAND STATE UNIV on April 15, 2014