Women & Therapy
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/wwat20

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Published online: 13 Oct 2008.

To cite this article: Erin M. McLaughlin MS & Patricia D. Rozee PhD (2001) Knowledge About Heterosexual versus Lesbian Battering Among Lesbians, Women & Therapy, 23:3, 39-58, DOI: 10.1300/J015v23n03_04

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1300/J015v23n03_04

Knowledge About Heterosexual versus Lesbian Battering Among Lesbians

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SUMMARY. There is growing evidence to suggest that abuse in lesbian relationships does exist and may occur on a greater scale than most people are aware of. This paper will define battering in lesbian relationships, its prevalence and characteristics, critique the ability of traditional feminist models to explain lesbian battering, and address the consequent lack of community response to battered lesbians. We will also present results of a study indicating that the silence about lesbian battering among both feminist theorists and activists and the gay/lesbian community has contributed to the invisibility of lesbian battering, and thus lesbians' own lack of knowledge about lesbian battering. The results of this study support the hypothesis that the lesbian community is more familiar with phenomena associated with domestic violence in heterosexual relationships than with

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[Haworth co-indexing entry note]: "Knowledge About Heterosexual versus Lesbian Battering Among Lesbians." McLaughlin, Erin M., and Patricia D. Rozee. Co-published simultaneously in *Women & Therapy* (The Haworth Press, Inc.) Vol. 23, No. 3, 2001, pp. 39-58; and: *Intimate Betrayal: Domestic Violence in Lesbian Relationships* (ed: Ellyn Kaschak) The Haworth Press, Inc., 2001, pp. 39-58. Single or multiple copies of this article are available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service [1-800-342-9678, 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. (EST). E-mail address: getinfo@haworthpressinc.com].

violence in intimate lesbian relationships. Community and clinical implications of the findings are discussed.

KEYWORDS. Domestic violence, lesbian battering, same-sex violence

Within the scant research available, there is growing evidence to suggest that abuse in lesbian relationships does exist. Not only does this abuse reside within the lesbian community, but also it occurs on a greater scale than anyone in the gay or lesbian movement has acknowledged. This paper will define battering in lesbian relationships, its prevalence and characteristics, critique the ability of traditional feminist models to explain lesbian battering, and address the consequent lack of community response to battered lesbians. We will also present results of a study indicating that the silence about lesbian battering among both feminist theorists and activists and the gay/lesbian community has contributed to the invisibility of lesbian battering, and thus lesbians' own lack of knowledge about lesbian battering.

Relationship violence as it occurs for lesbians, is similar to the way it occurs for heterosexual women. Domestic violence in lesbian relationships involves almost identical patterns of physical, sexual and emotional abuse (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989). In her article on lesbian victims of intimate violence, Hammond (1989) defines battering as "a pattern of physical abuse or intimidation in which the batterer uses the actuality or threat of physical force, or violence, to exert control over the victim, thereby increasing the batterer's sense of power in the relationship" (p. 90). Physical battering itself can include a wide range of behaviors such as punching, kicking, rape, slapping, stabbing, hitting with objects, etc. One may think of woman-to-woman violence as less serious than males inflicting violence on females, but research contradicts this myth. As suggested by Hammond (1989), when this misconception is applied to battered lesbians, the impact of abuse in these relationships becomes misunderstood and minimized. To illustrate her assertion, Hammond (1989) points out that not only have battering experiences in lesbian relationships been intense enough to cause post-traumatic stress disorder, but also some lesbian batterers have killed their partners.

Lesbian relationships may, however, contain a higher rate of emotional abuse than heterosexual relationships (Brand & Kidd, 1986). Psychological abuse in

violent lesbian relationships tends to be reported by researchers as more frequent than physical abuse (Renzetti, 1989; Renzetti, 1992; Lockhart, White, Causby & Isaac, 1994). This may be linked to the batterer's use of "outing" and homophobia to maintain power and control. For example, a lesbian's partner may threaten to expose the survivor's sexual orientation to homophobic family members if she attempts to leave the abusive relationship. The lesbian survivor of abuse may be unwilling to risk the possible loss of family members (because of exposure of her sexual orientation), giving the abuser a means of control in the relationship. Morrow and Hawxhurst (1989) concur with this statement, claiming that homophobic control is used by batterers in situations where they will tell their victims they deserve no better than to be abused or will never be able to find help because she is "just a lesbian." Hart (1986) asserts that the use of homophobic control by the batterer can extend to making statements about her victim not being a "real" lesbian because she had slept with men before. The message remains clear: both homosexual and heterosexual relationships have common aspects of batterers using violence, intimidation, and emotional abuse to exert power and control over their victims.

INCIDENCE AND PREVALENCE OF LESBIAN BATTERING

It is estimated that three to four million American heterosexual women are battered each year by their husbands or partners (Stark, 1981). We simply do not know the rate of battering in the lesbian community. Because of the stigmatization of lesbians in society, and the stigmatization of battered lesbians in the gay and lesbian community, non-random samples have been the only feasible way to accomplish research on battered lesbians (Renzetti, 1992). Such research, while informative about the process of lesbian battering from a survivor perspective, has not yet yielded practical prevalence information. Prevalence information that has been reported is highly subject to characteristics of methods of data collection in a given study, and often it is not clear whether incidence or prevalence is being reported (current vs. lifetime rates). Coleman (1994) reports rates from 25% to 52%, while a later review reports rates of 25% to 75% (see Waldner-Haugrud, Gratch, & Magruder, 1997, for an analysis of the issues). In contrast to the plethora of convenience studies on lesbian battering, one recent nationally representative sample found the lifetime prevalence of same-sex partner abuse was 11.4% versus 20.3% for opposite-sex partner abuse (Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 1999). This study also notes that lesbians were more than twice as likely to report being victimized by male intimate partners than by females over their lifetime (30.4% vs. 11.4%).

TRADITIONAL FEMINIST MODELS OF BATTERING

Feminist theory is often used to guide interventions for battered women and to direct programs for men who batter them (Gelles, 1995). Services such as shelters, safe homes, support groups for survivors, and legal advocacy are typically created to meet the needs of women battered by male abusers (Hammond, 1989). The epistemology of domestic violence from some feminist perspectives considers battering to be a result of gender role inequality in heterosexual relationships. Liberal, social, radical, Marxist, and other feminist theorists differ on the origins of patriarchy and how it is perpetuated. Most would purport that patriarchy provides the structural and ideological support for male violence against women (Smith, 1990). This analysis becomes problematic when one takes into account both white battered lesbians and battered lesbians of color. Those working in the battered women's movement fought for society's recognition of battered women and of gender inequality. With the constant threat of losing recognition and credibility, the battered women's movement may not be quick to acknowledge battered lesbians because their presence challenges the analysis of gender inequality (Hammond, 1989). Traditional feminist analysis purports that domestic violence is created and perpetuated primarily by sexism in mainstream society. However, if one considers power structures as constant and emanating from multiple points, the one-sided and distorted nature of these analyses becomes apparent. Consequently, the application of the disparities in these analyses blocks white lesbians' and lesbians of colors' access to society's resources, resulting in the disempowerment of these individuals. It is probable that traditional feminist theories of battering have contributed to lack of acknowledgement of lesbian battering, as well as to lack of services to battered lesbians due to adherence of most domestic violence programs to traditional feminist explanatory models. What is needed is a new paradigm through which to view the phenomenon of domestic violence in our society. This paradigm should equally incorporate the issues of sexism, racism, homophobia, and heterosexism for a more encompassing understanding of domestic violence.

POWER AND BATTERING

Postmodernist feminist theory may also be helpful in reconceptualizing power for the purposes of understanding lesbian battering. Postmodernism refers to multiple centers of power, meanings of words, interpretations of reality, and identities so that there is a resistance towards universality in theory (Grant, 1993). This philosophy enables one to address power relations, gender, oppres-

sion, and freedom while avoiding essentialism. Power relations are considered constant, and emanating from multiple points within our social structure, as opposed to the critique of power as a monolithic structure, as exemplified in some feminist analyses of patriarchy (Grant, 1993). The postmodern feminist critique looks primarily at power relations, with gender as a sub-component of these relations. In other words, female oppression is only one out of many possible oppressions created by a web of power structures including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, capitalism, heterosexism, and homophobia. The interaction of gender systems with other power systems does not mean that all women experience gender as their primary oppression; nor do all women experience gender in the same way.

In order to fully understand lesbian battering, it is important to consider forms of power other than male dominance. Goode (1971) describes power as the ability to impose one's will upon another, with or without consent or resistance. Hence, force, or its threat, is merely one method among many to obtain compliance (Goode, 1971). Renzetti (1989) reports significant correlations between some indicators of power imbalance and violence in lesbian relationships. For example, class difference between partners was related to an increase in the number of abusive events in violent lesbian relationships (Renzetti, 1989). Further, Lockhart, White, Causby, and Isaac (1994) reported that physical abuse tended to be triggered by issues of power imbalance or a struggle for different levels of interdependence and autonomy in lesbian relationships. These studies confirm the results of Babcock, Waltz, Jacobson and Gottman (1993) who found that husbands' lower decision-making power, as assessed by the Who Does What Questionnaire (WDW), was related to increased violence. Babcock et al. (1993) suggest that when the husband is in a less powerful position than his wife, has a past history of physical violence, and possesses poor communication skills, the only effective method the perpetrator may have of asserting a dominant position might be through physical aggression. The use of power and control seems to be a common link among batterers regardless of circumstances of sexual orientation.

Renzetti (1992) found that differences in power-giving resources such as social class, intelligence, and earning power were not significant predictors of relationship violence for lesbians. Several researchers have suggested the importance of relational factors such as dependency and fusion or jealousy as causally related to lesbian battering (Renzetti, 1992; Waldner-Haugrud et al., 1997). Dutton (1994) suggests that intimacy generates dependency, jealousy and anger, and may result in violence in relationships. The lack of a substantive body of research on the issue precludes conclusions as to causality. But it is important to note that research on lesbian battering cautions us to expand our thinking past

single explanatory factors of domestic violence toward more complex, multiply-determined explanations.

THE GAY AND LESBIAN COMMUNITY

The gay and lesbian community also veils lesbian battering in silence. This is apparent when considering that although battered lesbians are coming forward in alarmingly increasing numbers, the gay and lesbian community offers very few resources or acknowledgment in response. For example, the gay and lesbian community often does not have available hotlines for domestic violence, and generally no support groups for survivors of same sex violence, while there usually are resources for issues of alcoholism, co-dependency, networking, incest, and so on. Benowitz (1986) analyzes how homophobia affects the lesbian community's response to violence in lesbian relationships. She maintains that silence about abuse reflects an acute awareness of societal homophobia. By talking openly about lesbian battering, the lesbian community fears fueling society's hatred and myths about lesbians. Homophobia may affect the gay and lesbian community's response to lesbian battering because of the inherent belief that, by bringing up the subject of domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships, what results is a negative reflection on the gay and lesbian community as a whole.

For the lesbian of color, the issue of lack of support from mainstream society may be further compounded by racism in the gay and lesbian community. Kanuha (1990) purports that lesbian culture is mainly represented in the cultural artifacts of music, art, and literature, which are supposed to represent the whole community. In actuality, representations have been predominantly of white lesbian culture. As a part of larger society, lesbian culture is not excluded from being affected by racism. This racism is evident in the absence of lesbians of color perspectives in social, political, economic, and academic institutions. For example, as of 1992 only two published studies on anti-lesbian and anti-gay victimization and violence have examined racial and ethnic differences in rates of victimization (Herek & Berrill, 1992). Both found that lesbians and gays of color are at a greater risk for violent attack because of their sexual orientation. This lack of attention to lesbian and gay men of color issues may be related to a tendency for the gay and lesbian community to consider homophobia as the main oppression its members must face, thus minimizing the important interconnections among racism, sexism, and homophobia (Kanuha, 1990).

The gay and lesbian community may also have their own myths surrounding lesbian relationships. These include the myth of the "utopia" of lesbian relation-

ships, where women do not oppress, and certainly do not beat up, other women. Hammond (1989) suggests that lesbians may also internalize sexist stereotypes, which imply women are not big or strong enough to really hurt each other. Feminist/lesbian communities can make it especially difficult for abuse victims to find help because of the belief in the myth that lesbian relationships are egalitarian, loving, and passionate, but never violent (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989).

Caldwell and Peplau (1984) reported that although a majority of the lesbians in their research (97%) expressed support for the ideal of equal power in their relationships, 39% reported an imbalance in power, where one partner had greater resources (such as higher education or income) than the other. Lesbians were defined as unequal in status if they were more involved in the relationship than their partner, and if they had less education or income than the partner did (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984). Reilly and Lynch (1990) found in their survey of 70 lesbian couples that although egalitarianism was the ideal in most relationships, this ideal had not been achieved to that degree. These researchers found that 55% of the subjects surveyed perceived an actual power imbalance. For those couples who agreed a power inequity existed in their relationships, a significant disparity was found in financial assets (Reilly & Lynch, 1990).

The gay and lesbian community is very close-knit in terms of its circle of socialization. Friends often support the lesbian and become like family, which is important because lesbians may lose their own families as a result of prejudice against their sexual orientation. If the battered lesbian chooses to end her relationship with the abuser, she may lose "custody" of the friends, and hence lose her own support system (Hammond, 1989). Also, the lesbian community can be so small that the battered lesbian may not feel safe in many gay or lesbian establishments, or events, because of a high probability that she may encounter her abuser (Hammond, 1989). The need for safety and support systems for battered lesbians may be greater than for battered heterosexual women, because of the nature of these close-knit communities.

THE PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the idea that the lesbian community may not be conceptualizing violence in lesbian relationships as domestic violence. Due to predominant feminist theories of battering, lack of training about gay/lesbian issues, invisibility of lesbian battering both in the lesbian/gay community and the larger community, absence of resources for battered lesbians, and other factors, there simply may not be enough information for lesbians to parallel

the cycle of violence portrayed in heterosexual battering relationships to lesbian battering relationships. Thus, lesbians will tend to internalize the dominant heterosexual paradigms of domestic violence within their community. Since most domestic violence discourse is written from a "male-as-batterer" perspective, lesbians can be expected to perceive domestic violence within a mainstream paradigm including violence in their own relationships. Our hypothesis was that lesbians would be more familiar with the dynamics associated with domestic violence in heterosexual relationships than with the dynamics of domestic violence in lesbian relationships when identical phenomena are associated with each type of violence.

METHOD

Participants

The participants in this study were 297 lesbians/bisexual women within a large urban southwestern county. Surveys were distributed in front of the Gay and Lesbian Center and during the annual Gay Pride event. Participants were asked to volunteer to take part in a study about dynamics within intimate relationships.

INSTRUMENTS

Battered Woman Questionnaire

Dodge and Greene's (1991) *Battered Woman Questionnaire* (BWQ) was used to assess the lesbian community's knowledge of domestic violence in intimate relationships. The BWQ contains 18 items that were created to assess knowledge and beliefs about different aspects of domestic violence. Dodge and Greene (1991) surveyed the responses of 45 researchers, considered to be experts in the domestic violence field, to each item on the BWQ. This study found a high level of agreement among the researchers in response to items on the questionnaire, and established this consensus as an empirical measure of knowledge. Most items on the BWQ relate to aspects of the *Battered Woman Syndrome* (Walker, 1984) for which there is a general scientific concurrence in the domestic violence research literature. For example, scientific consensus supports that battered women may experience feelings of helplessness and self-blame (Greene, Raitz, & Lindblad, 1989). Other items on the questionnaire relate to Walker's (1984) contentions that the general public subscribes to myths about battered women.

Two versions developed from the BWQ were used to test the lesbian community's knowledge of domestic violence. The first version, the "Heterosexual Battered Woman Questionnaire" (HBWQ), consisted of the original 18 BWQ items. The second, the "Lesbian Battered Woman Questionnaire" (LBWQ), was a modified version of the first 18 items of the HBWQ, which replaced the term "battered woman" with "lesbian in a violent intimate relationship," and used the term "partner" to replace the term "husband." The term, "a lesbian who is a survivor of a violent intimate relationship," was used to denote the difference between perpetrator and survivor in questionnaire items.

PROCEDURE

Upon agreeing to participate in the study, all participants signed a consent form. Participants were given the demographic questionnaire assessing sexual orientation, personal experiences with domestic violence, age, income, education and ethnicity, and either the HBWQ or the LBWQ using random distribution. Volunteers completed all materials on clipboards at the distribution sites. A debriefing statement, containing information about gay and lesbian domestic violence, as well as community resources, was given to participants immediately after they completed the questionnaires.

RESULTS

Demographic Information. The demographic section showed that the sample adequately represents the demographics of the general population from which the sample was drawn. Respondents were 51% Caucasian, 20% Latina, 13% African American, 6% Asian American, 1% American Indian, and 9% other. A majority of respondents were between the ages of 18 and 33 (54.3%), 23.2% were between the ages of 34 and 41, and 23.2% were 42 or over. The sexual orientation of the sample was as follows: 41 were bisexual (of which 66% were women of color) and 256 lesbians (of which 47% were women of color). Respondents tended to be fairly well educated, 46% reported between one and three years of higher education, and 19% reported possessing a bachelor's degree. A majority of respondents were in the middle-income level: 18.3% of respondents made between $0 and $8,000 annually, 32.8% made between $17,000 and $32,000, and 19% made $45,000 or more per year.

Experience with Battering. Questions regarding personal experiences with violence in intimate relationships were also assessed. Respondents reported experiences with domestic violence in both lesbian and heterosexual relationships.

Sixty-nine percent of respondents reported knowing a victim of violence in a lesbian relationship. Eighty-seven percent reported knowing a victim of violence in a heterosexual relationship. Thirty-four percent reported having been a victim of violence in a lesbian relationship, and 25% reported having been a victim of heterosexual relationship violence. Twelve percent of respondents reported that they had been victims of domestic violence in both heterosexual and lesbian relationships.

Responses to questionnaire items were tested for significant differences between groups on the basis of reported personal experience with domestic violence. Analyses revealed that there was little difference in response to questionnaire items between subjects who experienced violence and those who did not, regardless of whether or not that violence took place in a heterosexual or lesbian context. The only question on which battered women and non-battered women differed concerned the woman leaving her batterer. Whether heterosexual or lesbian, battered women were less likely to say that the woman could just leave her batterer.

Relationship Between the HBWQ and LBWQ. The differences between responses to the Heterosexual Battered Women's Questionnaire (HBWQ), and Lesbian Battered Women's Questionnaire (LBWQ) were analyzed using a t-test. Results showed a significant difference between the two groups ($t(295) = 4.062$, $p = .000$). Respondents tended to endorse items (both agreeing and disagreeing) more strongly on the Battered Women's Questionnaire than on the Lesbian Battered Women's Questionnaire. This indicates that the lesbian community was much more likely to demonstrate knowledge regarding the dynamics of domestic violence in a heterosexual relationship than within lesbian relationships. Respondents agreed that a battered woman might believe that her husband could kill her; a battered woman might stay with her husband because she feels dependent on him; a battered woman might be persuaded to stay with her husband if he promised never to hurt her again; most battered women believe that they are helpless to stop the violence; a woman in an abusive situation might blame herself for the violence in the relationship; and battered women might believe that using deadly force against their husbands is the only way for them to stay alive. The lesbian community did not apply the same strong endorsements to battered lesbians in replicated situations.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to test the hypothesis that lesbians may not be conceptualizing violence in lesbian relationships as domestic violence in the same way as they do domestic violence in heterosexual relationships. The results

of this study support the hypothesis that the lesbian community is more familiar with phenomena associated with domestic violence in heterosexual relationships than with violence in intimate lesbian relationships. These findings may indicate that although the lesbian community shows considerable knowledge about domestic violence in heterosexual relationships, this same knowledge may not be transferred as strongly to violence in intimate lesbian relationships. Theoretical models, training, research and community practices surrounding domestic violence in social helping institutions may contribute to a lack of information for lesbians to parallel the cycle of violence portrayed in heterosexual relationships to lesbian battering relationships. The ways in which the battered women's movement has applied traditional feminist analyses of domestic violence have contributed to narrow conceptualizations of violent relationships by society's helping institutions. Lesbians do not tend to fit within traditional feminist analyses of the "battered woman," which primarily focuses upon theories of male dominance. Thus, new models to explain lesbian battering must be considered. Such models will require more complex analysis of the etiology of battering such that multicausal models can better explain lesbian battering.

Service providers need to use strategies to make their services more sensitive to the needs of lesbians in violent relationships. Renzetti (1996) suggests that there should be training for staff on lesbian battering, specific policies to address homophobia among staff, volunteers, and clients, use of inclusive language, and outreach to the gay and lesbian community through programming, advertising, and community education/media campaigns. Conducting sensitivity training on homophobia, examining service protocols for heterosexist language within battered women's shelters, and holding community forums on lesbian battering are all strategies that could lead to the empowerment of survivors (Hammond, 1989).

Access to Resources

Lesbians who are survivors of domestic violence not only need access to resources, but service providers who are adequately equipped to respond to lesbian issues. Several researchers have found that such resources and service providers are hard to find. In 1996, Renzetti conducted a survey of domestic violence resources available for, and sensitive to, battered lesbians through the 1991 National Directory of Domestic Violence Programs. From a return of 566 questionnaires, Renzetti found that only 9.7% of service providers reported outreach efforts specifically targeting lesbian victims. Efforts included things such as distributing brochures on lesbian battering, advertising services in lesbian/gay newspapers or other media, and offering support groups for battered lesbians.

Further, only 47.9% reported that their staff received specific training on domestic violence in lesbian relationships.

Homophobia may disempower battered lesbians by limiting their ability to access social resources, such as shelters, hotlines, or support groups for help in domestic violence situations. Lie and Gentlewarrier (1991) found that a majority of lesbian respondents, who experienced abuse in their relationships, indicated that they were unlikely to use resources such as shelters, support groups and medical services. This was thought by the researchers to be a result of the real and perceived homophobia and heterosexism of the mainstream community service units and providers, which cause unresponsiveness and insensitivity to the needs of battered lesbians (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991). For example, lesbians have been refused shelter for battering situations solely on the basis of their sexuality, and domestic violence hotlines often assume the heterosexuality of lesbians calling for help. Renzetti (1989) found that many sources of formal help, frequently available to heterosexual victims, are not perceived by lesbian victims to be resources of aid available to them. Few people in Renzetti's study sought help from hotlines and women's shelters. Of those seeking assistance, resources were reported to be either no help at all or only a little helpful (Renzetti, 1989).

Training of Helping Professionals. Heterosexism, the belief of the superiority and normalcy of being heterosexual (Lorde, 1983), enforces the invisibility of homosexuals and bisexuals through the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. Heterosexism's enforcement of invisibility is demonstrated through the absence of educational or training programs for those working in human service fields. For example, most educational programs lack specific course work and training on gay, lesbian, and bisexual issues. In 1989, a nationwide survey of counselor education programs found that fewer than 10% of counselors were required to take a course in sexuality (Harbeck, 1992). Further, surveying doctoral programs approved by the American Psychological Association, Harbeck found that only 37% offered a graduate course in human sexuality. Within the medical field, a 1991 survey of four-year medical schools in the United States found the mean amount of course time devoted to the topic of homosexuality was 3 hours, 26 minutes (Wallick, 1992). In 1991, it was estimated that a total of no more than 20 professionals in four different American cities were adequately experienced or trained to deal effectively with lesbian and gay victims of domestic violence (Island, 1991). This statistic is particularly staggering considering that domestic violence is cited as the third largest health problem facing gay men today (Island, 1991). This is second only to substance abuse and AIDS (Island, 1991).

Legal Systems. In coping with police, lawyers, and judges, the battered lesbian may have to contend not only with a system not totally sympathetic to battering

situations in general, but also with one that is racist, homophobic, and heterosexist. Kanuha (1990) maintains that because of institutionalized racism, people of color are wary of admitting to "mainstream" white society that domestic violence exists in their communities. Lesbians of color not only have problems seeking help due to fear of reprisal from white society, but also from homophobia within their own ethnic communities. Because of the powerful effect of sexism and homophobia throughout society in general, many people of color blame the existence of lesbians on white feminists (Kanuha, 1990). In order to protect themselves from increased racist attacks from white society, Kanuha (1990) asserts that people of color designate lesbians as "White-ness" and dissociate themselves from "social deviants" that white people do not even want to have among them (p. 175). Because of this homophobia, lesbians of color may choose not to disclose their sexual identity within their ethnic communities. Within our sample, women of color were more likely to describe themselves as bisexual rather than lesbian.

Castillo (1991) suggests if a Latina has less education and privilege than her Anglo counterparts, feels uncomfortable with the language of the dominant culture, and feels alienated from that culture, she is less likely to challenge the social mores of her ethnic community. Castillo (1991) states, "Above all, I believe, they [Latina lesbians] do not want to lose the love and sense of place they feel within their families and immediate communities. In light of intense Anglo alienation, this is a crucial aspect of their sense of identity" (p. 38). Therefore, with added discrimination from the ethnic community that has typically sheltered them from racism, lesbians of color may feel reluctant to seek help because of the threat of homophobic attacks and rejection from one of the few support networks available.

Homophobia and heterosexism within helping networks occur on many levels. Based on observations from her clinical practice, Hammond (1989) indicates that police called to handle an abusive episode between two women may minimize the danger the victim is in, behave in a physically intrusive manner, make homophobic comments, and fail to make appropriate referrals to available resources. Renzetti (1989) found that some subjects stated official help providers responded negatively to them instead of giving support, or confronting the batterer. As an example, Renzetti (1989) noted one subject, who reported a negative experience with a police officer responding to her call for help. This person was insulted by the officer, who called her a "queer devil," and who told the subject she deserved trouble because she was a lesbian (p. 160). Police, enforcing heterosexist laws, may charge perpetrators with battery, as opposed to domestic violence. This lack of inclusion or recognition may prevent lesbians from accessing available services for help.

Lesbians may also have to deal with laws that are heterosexist, and which provide little or no protection for them. Robson (1992) contends that feminists worked to force the legal system to recognize domestic violence in the context of marriage. Legal reforms were made, such as the battered wife's defense for the protection of battered wives. However, in the legal sense, this defense tends only to apply to heterosexual women (Robson, 1992). A battered lesbian may not be entitled to any legal relief in a state that does not consider her within the statutory definition of a victim of domestic violence. Robson (1992) uses the example of the state of Florida, where the definition of domestic violence is limited to: "any assault, battery or sexual battery by a person against the person's spouse or against any other person related by blood or marriage to the petitioner, or respondent, who is residing in the same single dwelling unit" (p. 160).

Judges who support battered women may still perpetuate myths about battered lesbians (Hammond, 1989). Battering in these relationships is often believed by judges to be mutual. Mutual battering can be defined as both partners in a relationship acting equally as perpetrators and survivors of abuse. As a result of lack of education about same-sex domestic violence, and consequent confusion about exactly who is the perpetrator in violent lesbian relationships, judges may provide batterers with legal sanctions (Hammond, 1989). Another element in this confusion may be that the survivors themselves feel guilty about using violence in self-defense against their partners. Victims may be unclear about whether they were aggressors or victims when they resorted to aggression . . . even if it was to defend themselves (Leeder, 1988; Bush, Lie, Montagne, Reyes, & Schilit, 1991). In lesbian battering situations, there is a need to talk to both parties in the relationship. The situation usually is not mutual combat, and interviewers need to probe for who is in control within the relationship. Within the field of research on domestic violence, there are strong conclusions that the idea of mutual combat is not supported (Renzetti, 1992). However, as addressed in the literature review, mainstream service providers, as well as survivors of domestic violence themselves, seem to be more confused about the idea of mutual combat. Because there is not a visible perpetrator who fits within the mainstream interpretation of what a batterer looks like, one has to look more towards issues of power and control within lesbian relationships.

Medical Systems. The institution of medical services may also be threatening to the battered lesbian for many reasons connected to racism, heterosexism and homophobia. The lesbian seeking medical help may be faced with decisions to "come out" both as a battered woman and as a lesbian. Should she choose not to "come out," the medical staff may recognize her injuries as ones resulting from domestic violence, but assume the batterer is male (Hammond, 1989). On the

other hand, if the victim of domestic violence does identify herself as a lesbian, she may risk the recording of such information in her medical file.

Smith, Heaton and Siever (1990) identified risks and fears of coming out to health-care providers. Among these fears, many lesbians were concerned that health-care providers would violate their trust and confidentiality. Another study by Zeidenstein (1990) found one-fourth of lesbians responding to a questionnaire stated they would not come out to their health care provider if their medical records would reflect their sexual orientation.

Some lesbians of color may experience problems when attempting to utilize medical services, because of language barriers. For example, if the survivor speaks only Spanish, and medical personnel do not speak this language, the already delicate communications surrounding domestic violence in lesbian relationships may be further complicated. Racism and stereotyping of cultures could be further perpetuated in conjunction with heterosexism. For example, medical personnel, recognizing these injuries to be ones of domestic violence, may assume this is due to cultural norms surrounding issues of "machismo" in males. The assumption of both heterosexuality and stereotypes of what one believes may be a cultural norm serves to minimize and compound an already difficult issue for the battered lesbian of color.

The lesbian survivor of domestic violence may also have problems with services provided by battered women's shelters and/or programs. In seeking help from shelters or hotlines, the same racism, heterosexism, and homophobia may be apparent here as with the legal and medical systems. Leeder (1988) comments on this lack of support, acknowledging most battered women's shelters do not provide support for lesbians. Staff working in the shelters, as well as the other residents living in the shelters, may think the lesbian survivor deserved what she got because of the belief in the inherent abnormality of homosexuality (Hammond, 1989). The same problems exist with staff working hotlines, support groups, and crisis counseling.

Several researchers also address the necessity of providing culturally competent domestic violence services to lesbians. Social service agencies must consider the specific needs of different communities when planning outreach programs (Waldron, 1996). For example, advertising only in gay and lesbian newspapers may not be adequate when attempting to reach gays and lesbians of color. Service providers may also want to advertise in local papers of different ethnic communities. Further, social service providers need to network within communities of color. Organizers and leaders who have the recognition and respect of community members as people who are resources of non-traditional help should be utilized (Waldron, 1996). In terms of making services accessible to a diverse population, those providing direct services should reflect the characteristics of

the population they aim to serve (Mendez, 1996). There is also a need for culturally diverse support groups and the availability of multi-language materials/staff.

Clinical Interventions. When social service providers/clinicians are working directly with survivors of domestic violence in lesbian relationships, a myriad of concerns should be addressed. The results of this research indicate that it is unlikely that lesbian clients will recognize the physical violence and/or emotional abuse within their relationships as domestic violence. Therefore, social service providers/clinicians need to be aware of, and directly probe for, this information. As suggested by Hammond (1989), clinical intakes should have questions that specifically screen for domestic violence. Within these intakes, the extent and severity of abuse or battering should be assessed, as well as the lethality of the abusive relationship. Elements of the lethality of the batterer should include whether she/he owns a weapon, stalking behaviors, threats to take the life of the survivor, threats of batterer to take her/his own life, is the violence increasing in frequency and severity, and so on.

Researchers have found that the most dangerous time for survivors of domestic violence is when first they leave their batterers. U.S. Department of Justice statistics in 1986 have shown that 70% of domestic violence occurs after the relationship has ended (Stahly, 2000). Further, most homicides that involve domestic violence occur when survivors leave their batterers (Hammond, 1989; Stahly, 2000). In light of such danger, one of the most important aspects of working with survivors within a social services/clinical setting is their safety. Therapists should be knowledgeable of safety planning not only for survivors who have just left their batterers, but also for ones still within their relationships. Safety planning should include such things as planning escape routes in the areas the batterer could be encountered, information about restraining orders, changing locks in a household, informing neighbors and co-workers of the domestically violent situation, changing regular travelling patterns, parking cars in hidden locations, etc. Particularly for survivors who choose to remain with the batterer, social service providers should teach the survivor how to assess and act on the degree of lethality in their situation (Peled, Eisikovits, Enosh, & Winstok, 2000).

Lesbian survivors of domestic violence often experience intense isolation. A part of emotional abuse that batterers typically perpetrate against survivors includes cutting them off from friends, family, and people in the outside world. Homophobia implemented as a method of power and control often compounds isolation, particularly if the survivor is not "out" (identified as a lesbian to others), or if friends and/or family have abandoned her already as a result of her sexual orientation. The batterer may use the threat of exposing the survivor's sexual orientation as a method of controlling her. For example, the batterer may threaten

to tell the survivor's boss she is a lesbian, risking her employment, if she does not do as she is told (Burstow, 1992). As a clinician/social service provider, another important part of empowering a survivor may include assisting her with establishing a support network and reducing the sense of isolation (Burstow, 1992; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989).

At first, the therapist/social service provider may be the only system of support available for the lesbian survivor of domestic violence (Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991). Familiarization with outside resources, such as gay and lesbian centers, shelters, hotlines, low cost/free individual counseling, support groups, domestic assault response teams, and legal aide, is crucial to supporting domestic violence survivors. Therapists may also have to advocate for survivors by initiating training shelter staff and identifying shelters that are lesbian-sensitive (Burstow, 1992; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989).

Part of empowering battered lesbians includes not only conducting outreach, education, safety planning and networking, but also avoiding re-victimizing survivors as social service providers. Service providers should take conscious precautions to safeguard survivors' confidentiality, particularly as it relates to their sexual orientation. In many environments, lesbians whose sexual orientation becomes known to others risk the loss of things such as their employment, residence, and children (Garnets, Herek, & Levy, 1990).

Couples counseling should be avoided when domestic violence is present. Couples counseling can escalate the violence in the relationships and put the survivor at risk (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989). The batterer oftentimes uses what the survivor expresses in couples therapy as ammunition to abuse her, and consequently, the survivor does not have a safe environment within the therapeutic context to express herself. Similarly, a batterer and survivor should not see the same therapist in individual counseling (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989). The same dynamics that occur in couples counseling for domestically violent partners tend to occur with couples who have the same individual counselor. For example, batterers may use real or perceived disclosures in therapy as ammunition to attack the survivor.

Therapists and social service providers should become well-versed not only with the cycle of abuse, dynamics of power and control, and the multiple points of power relations (sexism, heterosexism, homophobia and racism), but be prepared to educate survivors regarding them. Above all else the provider must be aware of any misconceptions he/she may have about battered lesbians. For example, the myth that violence within lesbian relationships is less serious than violence perpetrated by males upon females may result in a minimization of the violence the survivor is experiencing, and may put the battered lesbian at risk. Acknowledgement of the extent and severity of the violence the battered lesbian

survived, as well as navigating the survivor through PTSD symptoms, may be an important part of the path to recovery.

Community psychologist Julian Rappaport (1981) advocated a "pursuit of paradox" in his field of research. This pursuit incorporated looking for contradictions in theory, or finding places in social and community institutions that have become one-sided, with the purpose of changing them to encompass a more empowering solution. Rappaport's assertions seem particularly relevant to the field of domestic violence. The ways in which the battered women's movement has applied traditional feminist analyses of domestic violence has contributed to narrow conceptualizations of violent relationships by society's helping institutions. The case of the battered lesbian is prima facie evidence that battering is not created and perpetuated only by sexism in mainstream society. Institutionalized racism, heterosexism, and homophobia permeate the battered lesbian's experience with police, lawyers, judges, medical personnel, and domestic violence shelters. If one considers power structures as constant and emanating from multiple points, the one-sided and distorted nature of these analyses becomes apparent. New, more complex and encompassing models are needed to truly impact the incidence of battering in women's lives.

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