

GLB panel discusses domestic violence

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In the softly lit main lounge of the Center for University Ministry Wednesday night, a panel of five professionals and about 25 people discussed a new issue in the gay, lesbian and bisexual community — domestic violence.

The panel included Executive Director of Middle Way House Toby Strout, Brian Reinhardt from the IU Counseling and Psychological Services, doctorate student Keith Romaine, psychotherapist Kris Kimmel and Arlette Cooper Tinsley, director of the Human Rights Commission in Columbus, Ind.

Panelists said domestic violence in the GLB community is a hard topic to talk about because people fear they won't be supported by family and friends or other gays and lesbians.

"The GLB community is certainly in the closet about the situation," Reinhardt said. "There's a lot of denial in the community. There's the notion that it's going to further reinforce the negative stereotypes about gay male relationships: They don't last, they're promiscuous."

Reinhardt said domestic violence in GLB relationships is just as prevalent as in non-gay relationships. Many myths are involved with this issue.

"One of (the myths) is that gay men's domestic violence is mutual combat," Reinhardt said. "That when two men fight it's a fair fight — it's just boys being boys. Well, that's far from the truth. One person is the batterer, one person is the victim."

Reinhardt said another myth is gay men can get away from an abusive relationship easier than heterosexual women can. He said there are few shelters for gay men, and often they cannot go to the police for fear of "adding more fuel to the fire" with discrimination from the police.

Strout said the Middle Way

House staff has recently changed its policies to accept lesbians.

"Certainly at Middle Way House, we have always understood that we serve women — that we serve *all* women," Strout said.

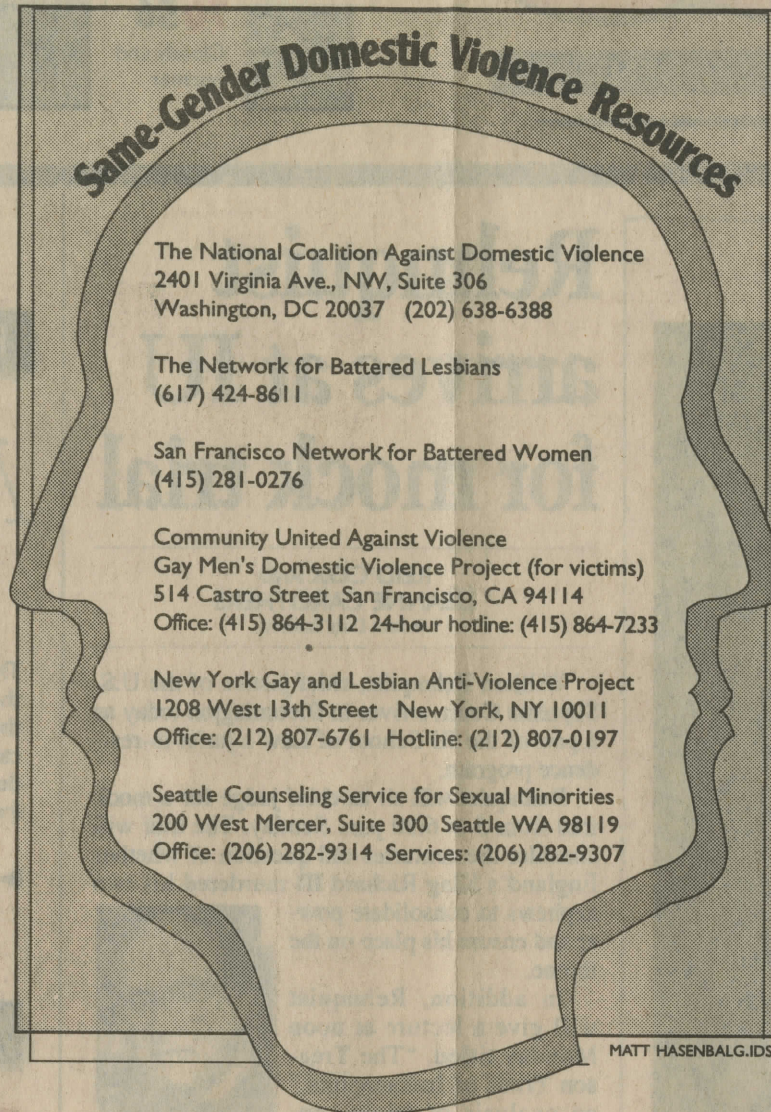
Cooper Tinsley, who worked as the Legal Program Coordinator at Middle Way House for a year, said Middle Way House never turned away gay men or lesbians while she worked there. Because Middle Way has a policy prohibiting men from being at the house to protect the women in shelter, Cooper Tinsley said discussions with gay men must

take place somewhere other than Middle Way.

Strout said Middle Way's crisis hot line is open for anyone dealing with abuse. If domestic violence occurs in a gay or lesbian relationship, the victim should call Middle Way first because it can help him or her with legal options, Cooper Tinsley said.

"The legal system is a tool to help you be safe," Cooper Tinsley said.

Cooper Tinsley said there is some good news: Indiana domestic violence laws are gender-blind. And as



of July 1, domestic violence now has tougher consequences than a regular bar fight.

But she said domestic violence laws now have to define "family," a definition with which she doesn't agree. In order for there to be a domestic violence case, the two people involved must either be married or have a child together, which doesn't include gay men or lesbians.

But Cooper Tinsley said there are other measures gays and lesbians can take, while still maintaining "a life, safety and privacy."

Cooper Tinsley also said there is no "homosexual rape" in Indiana, but there is a law called "Deviant Sexual Conduct," which is the same as rape in seriousness and burden of proof and can be used in homosexual rape cases.

Cooper Tinsley said many people think domestic violence is always a physical issue.

"(But) battery does not have to involve any kind of a bruise," Cooper Tinsley said.

Romaine, who was involved in a verbally-abusive relationship, said he didn't realize he was in an abusive relationship until his 12-year-old daughter noticed the situation.

"(She said,) 'He's not very nice,'" Romaine said. "And I thought 'I wouldn't want my daughter to be in a relationship like this.' ... But he hadn't ever hit me, and I always thought being battered meant being hit."

Kimmel discussed domestic violence among lesbians. She said the organizers wanted to include a victim on the panel, but they couldn't find one who wanted to come public with their ordeal.

"I think it's indicative of how difficult this is," Kimmel said. "As a feminist in the '70s, I couldn't imagine women hitting other women. As a therapist, indeed it's real, (although) it's been hard to get my head wrapped around this."