

Similarities & Differences: Same-Gender and Different-Gender Relationship Violence

A common question about relationship violence in same-gender relationships is how it differs from relationship violence in heterosexual couples. There is a great deal of overlap in the issues surrounding relationship violence for both heterosexual and same-gender couples. However, in other ways same-gender relationship violence differs from that experienced by heterosexual couples. These factors lead to increased power available to LGBT batterers, and less support for LGBT survivors.

How they are similar:

Forms of Abuse: Violence includes, but is not limited to physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, economic, and verbal abuse.

Control: The purpose of abuse is to get and maintain control and power over one's intimate partner.

Isolation: The survivor may feel isolated, terrified, and debilitated by the violence.

Cycle of Violence: Abuse often occurs in a cyclical fashion. Anticipated attacks are a part of the tyranny.

Impact of Psychological Abuse: The survivor may feel he/she cannot do anything right and often blames him/herself for the abuse.

Abuse Doesn't "go away": Violence generally escalates over time.

Leaving is Dangerous: When a survivor attempts to leave an abusive relationship, the abuser often threatens and/or attempts extreme violence to make survivor too afraid to leave.

Batterers are Hard to Recognize: Anyone can be a batterer. Perpetrators of abuse may work to help others, or take on other high profile political or professional work and hide the terror they wield at home.

Statistics: Violence in heterosexual, gay, and lesbian relationships occurs at approximately the same rate (one in four).

Identity is no Protection: Stereotypes of race, class, religion, politics, education, and professional or social status do not indicate whether or not abuse will take place in an intimate relationship.

Batterer Mentality: A sense of entitlement exists among perpetrators; they believe that they have the right to empower themselves by disempowering others.

Children: Abuse in the home impacts the children living in that home, whether or not they are the direct recipients of the abuse.

Legal Protection: Survivors in same-gender and different-gender relationships can get Temporary Orders of Protection (T.O.P.'s) to help protect themselves through the civil court system.

How they are different:

Services: Many times the services available are not equipped to meet the specific needs of a LGBT survivor or may not feel safe or comfortable for them. For example, no transitional, medium-term, or long-term shelters exist for battered GBT men in Montana.

Isolation: Silence about relationship violence within the LGBT community further isolates the survivor, giving more power to the batterer. Many LGBT individuals do not want to challenge the myth of community non-violence.

Heterosexist Manipulation: A batterer may threaten to "out" a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or HIV status to friends, family, co-workers, or a landlord. In addition to this, existing services may require an individual to "come out" against his or her will.

Idealized "Queer Love": The discrimination LGBT people face can lead to our over-protection of same-gender relationships, and an unwillingness to recognize abuse when it happens. Some idolize "queer love" as a deconstruction of many of the power differences in heterosexual relationships, and defend same-gender relationships against a homophobic society bent on invalidating them. This defensiveness can build community denial about abusive relationships.

LGBT SEXUAL AND RELATIONSHIP VIOLENCE

Fear of Further Oppression: As an oppressed and defamed group, the LGBT community is often hesitant to address issues that many fear will further “stain” the community. “Don’t we have enough to deal with?” is a common phrase from people unwilling to discuss relationship violence in the LGBT community.

Gender-Based Denial: The battered women’s movement often avoids the fact that women do batter, and men are victims. This denial is also present among many police, hospital workers, and people in the criminal justice system. People assume that two men in a fight must be equals. Similarly, GBT men often reject the idea that they can be victims.

Context of Historical Oppression: LGBT people often approach shelters, social service agencies, relationship violence service providers, police, and the courts with great caution. LGBT victims may fear re-victimization through homophobia, disbelief, rejection and degradation from institutions that have a history of exclusion, hostility and violence toward LGBT people.

Limited Community Space: Even in larger cities, the LGBT community can feel surprisingly small, privacy is often difficult to maintain, and leaving may be more difficult.

Barriers to seeking services:

Sexual assault and relationship violence within the LGBT community may constitute the most under-reported crimes in the nation. There are many reasons why a survivor may not seek services or leave an abusive relationship. Survivors of sexual abuse, relationship violence and/or stalking face additional barriers in LGBT relationships, including:

- Fears they will have to “come out” to friends, family and/or coworkers in order to talk about what they are experiencing
- If a survivor were to utilize resources, he/she may have to “come out” and possibly face prejudice and discrimination from service providers and law enforcement
- The LGBT community is often small and insular, making it difficult to remain anonymous
- Fears about not being believed or taken seriously by service providers due to the myth that rape, relationship violence and/or stalking cannot happen in same gender relationships
- This misconception is so strong that many lesbians and bisexual women believe that women do not commit sexual violence and are unable to name their experience as rape
- Many believe that in gay male relationships, there may be mutual fighting but it is not possible for one man to abuse another man
- There are few resources specifically for LGBT survivors of sexual and relationship violence and/or stalking, such as safe shelters for male survivors
- Fear of being accused of betraying the LGBT community. A survivor may feel caught between denial from the LGBT community and prejudice from society. This double-bind prevents many LGBT survivors from disclosing their experience or seeking services following an assault

Support & Resources in Missoula for the LGBT Community:

As a survivor of violence you have choices. No matter how you experienced that violence; in a relationship, by an acquaintance, friend or family member, a stranger, or as a hate crime, services are available.

GLBT ADVOCACY & YOUTH SERVICES HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA.....256-425-7804 ext. 140
CRISIS SERVICES OF NORTH ALABAMA.....800.691.8426
NATIONAL GAY & LESBIAN HOTLINE888.843.4564
[HTTP://WWW.LAMBDA.ORG](http://WWW.LAMBDA.ORG)
[HTTP://WWW.PFLAG.ORG](http://WWW.PFLAG.ORG)