



Status of Women  
Canada

Condition féminine  
Canada

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of The Avenue Community Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity and the Advisory Committee for the "Woman to Woman Abuse Project", we would like to take this opportunity to welcome you to this workshop. We encourage you to open your hearts and your minds and take this opportunity to expand your learning curve and your day-to-day practice.

We would like to thank Status of Women of Canada for their support of this incredibly important work. We would also like to thank the members of the Advisory Committee for the support and expertise that they have offered.

We also owe a big thank-you to Peer Support Services for Abused Women (Calgary) for many of the resources that you will find in this manual.

To the many women that we hope this project will impact, we give you our support and commitment to continue to assist in the development of the support system you deserve.

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## **Agenda**

- I. Introduction
- II. Awareness Exercise
- III. Definitions
- IV. Myths
- V. Additional Factors ~ Similarities & Differences
- VI. Practical Issues ~ How To Support ~ What To Do If  
Screening ~ Intervention ~ Policy
- VII. Are You Queer Friendly?
- VIII. Questions ~ Answers
- IX. Closing Exercise

### **Goal of the Workshop**

The goal of the workshop is to create a greater understanding of our biases and how to change them. This can help us provide better and more effective services to our clients. Some of the subjects during the workshop may feel uncomfortable, like recognizing a bias within us, or hearing about the injustices and discrimination in our society. We will make every effort to ensure everyone's safety during the workshop, but it is important for you to insure you are not acting beyond your own comfort level. If you are not already "out" to your entire agency, this may not be the place to do so. The more self-reflection, self-examination and self-responsibility we adopt, the more we will gain from this workshop.

## **Workshop Guidelines**

Respect for each other and other opinions

Listen to other people with the intention of understanding & learning

Remain as open as possible to feedback

Personal privacy & stories are to be kept confidential

Sharing one's sexual orientation is a personal choice

## A Question of Perspective

These are examples of common questions asked of homosexuals. The authors have turned them into a heterosexual context. As you read through the questionnaire what are some of your reactions? This questionnaire is for all people: lesbian, gay, bisexual and straight.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual?
3. Is it possible your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex?
4. With all the problems heterosexuals face, would you want your child to be heterosexual?
5. If you've never slept with a person of the same sex, how do you know you wouldn't prefer it?
6. To who have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies?
7. Your heterosexuality doesn't bother me as long as you don't try to force it on me. Why do heterosexuals feel compelled to pressure others into their lifestyle?
8. Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Why can't you be comfortable enough with who you are, so you don't have to keep putting it in everyone's face?
9. 90% of child molesters are heterosexual. Do you really consider it safe to expose your children to a heterosexual teacher?
10. Heterosexuals are noted for assigning themselves narrowly restricted stereotyped sex-roles. Why do you cling to such unhealthy role-playing?
11. How can you enjoy a fully satisfying sexual experience or deep emotional rapport with a person of the opposite sex, when the obvious physical, biological and temperamental differences between you are so vast? How can men possibly understand what pleases a woman sexually or vice-versa?

## **Homophobia & Heterosexism Defined**

Homophobia is the irrational fear, misunderstanding, dread or hatred of homosexual people. Homophobia enforces traditional sex-role stereotyping which in turn serves male dominance. Homophobia is used as a weapon to control women and men. Heterosexism refers to the pervasive belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality. This belief has given power to heterosexuals in legal, social and economic structures.

The threat of being called a lesbian or faggot keeps many heterosexual women and men exhibiting traditional stereotyped sex-role behavior. The fear of being called a homosexual (gay) exists in straight, lesbian and gay people. Homophobia is directed at people for being homosexual OR for appearing or being perceived as homosexual. This puts everyone at risk. Who wants to risk violence, ostracism, unemployment, loss of children, family, etc?

Homophobia and heterosexism oppresses heterosexuals as well as homosexuals. It restricts sex-role behaviors, relationships and emotional closeness among members of the opposite-sex and same-sex. Relationships between members of the same-sex are curtailed because of the fear of being labeled homosexuals. Friendships and intimate relationships between the opposite-sex are stunted because of the restrictive roles of each gender. Homophobia destroys families. If a family member feels they are homosexual, the family may reject them. However, if the person stays closeted, they may end up destroying themselves. In a society where the achievements of lesbian, gay and bisexual people are hidden, heterosexuals get a distorted view of reality. The opportunity to learn from homosexuals is denied. The experiences, skills and knowledge of lesbians, gays and bisexuals can enrich other people's lives. Finally, the denial of equal rights to any lesbian, gay or bisexual person inevitably leads to limitations on the rights of all. Oppressive governments think they have the right to limit people's rights based on their own personal fears/biases and can target any group for discrimination.

## Examples of Homophobia & Heterosexism

- ▽ Expecting a lesbian to change her public identity or affectionate habits or mode of dress.
- ▽ Looking at a lesbian and automatically thinking of her sexually rather than seeing her as a whole woman.
- ▽ Failing to be supportive when your lesbian friend is sad about a quarrel or break-up.
- ▽ Changing your seat in a meeting because a lesbian sat in the chair next to yours.
- ▽ Thinking you can “spot one”.
- ▽ Worrying about the effect a lesbian volunteer/co-worker will have on your anti-violence program.
- ▽ Using the term “lesbian” as accusatory or derogatory.
- ▽ Not asking about a woman’s female lover, although you regularly ask, “How is your husband or boyfriend?” when you run in to a heterosexual friend.
- ▽ Kissing a friend, but being afraid to kiss a lesbian friend.
- ▽ Thinking that if a lesbian touches you she is making sexual advances.
- ▽ Stereotyping lesbians as “man-haters”, separatists or radicals.
- ▽ Feeling repulsed by public displays of affection between lesbians and accepting them between heterosexuals.
- ▽ Wondering which one is the “man” in a lesbian couple.
- ▽ Believing all lesbian couples are made up of a “femme” and a “butch”.
- ▽ Including a statement like, “I have no difficulties with lesbians, but.....” in any discussions about lesbians.
- ▽ Feeling that gay people are too outspoken about gay rights.
- ▽ Feeling that lesbianism and discussions about homophobia/heterosexism are not necessary within the battered women’s movement.
- ▽ Being outspoken about gay rights, but making sure everyone knows that you’re straight.
- ▽ Feeling that a lesbian is a woman who couldn’t find a man.
- ▽ Avoiding mentioning to friends that you are involved with women’s organizations because you’re afraid that they will think that you are a lesbian.
- ▽ Not confronting heterosexist remarks for fear of being identified with lesbians.
- ▽ When a friend first “comes out”, you express concern for how hard this news is going to be on her parents, children, etc.

(From *Lesbians Working to End Violence in Lesbian Relationships*)

## Understanding Heterosexual Privilege

YES NO

- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I can talk freely about my family life and important relationships to colleagues at work, co-parishioners, etc.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ My partner and I can go shopping together, pretty well assured that we will not be harassed.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I can kiss my partner farewell at the airport, confident that onlookers will either ignore us or smile understandingly.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I can be pretty sure that our neighbors will be friendly, or at least neutral.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Our families and church community are delighted to celebrate with us the gift of our love and commitment.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I can walk into any bookstore, sure that I will find books that reflect my personal experience.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ If my partner is seriously ill, I know that I will be admitted to the intensive care unit to visit.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ If I am unemployed, I know that I have access to health care coverage through my partner's insurance.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Books that my children read in school contain stories and pictures of families much like ours.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ Organizations I belong to do not feel threatened by my membership.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I can find appropriate cards for my partner, to celebrate special occasions like anniversaries.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I grew up feeling that my loves and friendships were healthy and normal.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ If I experience violence on the street it will not be because I'm holding hands with my partner.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ We can choose public accommodations when we are traveling without having to worry about whether we are acceptable as a couple.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ If one of us dies, the other can be confident of the support and understanding of family, colleagues, church community, and friends. The obituary will not read "no immediate survivors".
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ My partner and I can be confident of being eligible for "married student housing" should one of us decide to go back to school.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ My partner is welcome to attend office parties with me.
- \_\_\_ \_\_\_ I have always known that there are other people in the world like me.

(From *Lesbians Working to End Violence in Lesbian Relationships*)

## **List of Heterosexual Privileges**

1. The right to kiss and display affection on the street.
2. The right to talk openly about your relationship.
3. The right to not question normalcy.
4. The right to show pain openly when a relationship ends.
5. The right to have children without any questions.
6. The right to be open about apartment hunting with a significant other.
7. The right to be validated by your religion.
8. The right to be socially accepted by your neighborhood.
9. The right to feel comfortable in children's school, with children's teachers and at school activities.
10. The right to dress without worrying about what it represents.
11. The right to have in-laws.
12. The right not to hide friends and social activities geared to same sex.
13. The right not to resent media for heterosexual reference base (or feel excluded).
14. The right to share holidays with lover and families.
15. The right to openly discuss politics without fear of someone making negative assumptions.
16. The right for your children to feel comfortable talking about their family with friends and to have their friends in your home.
17. The right to family support.
18. The right to have access to sitcoms, songs, books, magazines, etc. with your affectional preference as the core of the plot.
19. The right to access libraries, art institutes, radio stations, movies, etc. with heterosexual plots.
20. The right to health insurance & benefits through spouse/partner's employment/health plan.
21. The right to not explain your sexual preference.
22. The right to not be nervous about "coming out" to family/friends.
23. The right to not feel compelled to disprove the myths of your own heterosexuality.
24. The right to not fear that your sexuality may become a major point in a smear campaign that may affect the custody of your child, the job you want, the house you would like to buy, the way you are treated by neighbours, friends and family.
25. The right to purchase items with a partner with no questions asked or implied (e.g. houses, cars, property).

## LEVELS OF ATTITUDE

Homophobia is defined clinically as an intense, irrational fear of same-sex relationships. In common usage, homophobia is the fear of people who have intimate relationships with persons of the same sex. Many people are not homophobic, but have a strong heterosexual bias. The effect on gay/lesbian/bisexual people is similar.

### Homophobic Levels Of Attitude

- Repulsion** Homosexuality is seen as a “crime against nature.” Gays are sick, crazy, immoral, sinful, wicked, etc. and anything is justified to change them: prison, hospitalization, negative behaviour therapy including electric shock treatments.
- Pity** Heterosexual chauvinism. Heterosexuality is more mature and certainly to be preferred. Any possibility of becoming straight should be reinforced and those who seem to be “born that way” should be pitied, “the poor dears.”
- Tolerance** Homosexuality is just a phase of adolescent development that many people go through and most people “grow out of”. Thus, gays are less mature than straights and should be treated with the protectiveness and indulgence one uses with a child. Gays and lesbians should not be given positions of authority because they are still working through adolescent behaviour.
- Tokenism** This still implies there is something to accept, characterized by such statements as “You’re not gay to me, you’re a person.” “What you do in bed is your own business.” “That’s fine as long as you don’t flaunt it.” The pain of invisibility and the stress of closet behaviour are ignored. “Flaunt” usually means to say or do anything that makes people aware of a person’s sexual orientation.

### Positive Levels of Attitude

- Support** This is the basic civil liberties approach. They work to safeguard the rights of gays and lesbians. Such people may be uncomfortable themselves, but they are aware of the irrational unfairness.
- Admiration** Acknowledgement is given that being gay or lesbian in our society requires strength. Such people are willing to truly look at themselves and work on their own attitudes.
- Appreciation** The diversity of people is valued and gays are seen as a valid part of that diversity. These people are willing to combat homophobia in themselves and in others.
- Nurturance** Gay and lesbian people are seen as important in society. They view gays with genuine affection and delight and are willing to be gay advocates.

*Adapted from Dr. Dorothy Riddle, Tucson, Arizona*

## Small Group Questions

### Myths & Stereotypes

1. What myths and stereotypes have you heard about lesbian/bisexual women?
2. How do you think myths and stereotypes effect your work with this population?
3. What are the things that you hear about lesbian or bisexual women, their relationships or families that you are not sure are true or false?

### Heterosexual Privilege

1. What actions or behaviours do heterosexual individuals or couples take for granted that lesbian/bisexual women would not easily be able to do? What actions or behaviours would you feel uncomfortable with if you saw lesbian or bisexual women engage in?
2. What institutions or traditions are designed for only heterosexual individuals, couples or families?
3. What benefits are available to only heterosexual individuals, couples or families?
4. Where is it assumed that an individual, couple or family is heterosexual?

### Battering Differences

1. Given what you now know about the myths, stereotypes and heterosexual privilege, what possible differences could there be in same-sex domestic violence?
2. What reactions do you think those in the helping profession have when they first learn about same-sex domestic violence?
3. What differences would there be in the level between same-sex domestic violence and heterosexual domestic violence?
4. What differences in same-sex domestic violence seem to contradict what we know from heterosexual domestic violence?

### Evaluating Your Services

1. How would you change your agencies to make them more accessible to lesbian or bisexual women?
2. How would you know if the agencies you refer to are accessible to lesbian or bisexual women?
3. What is the first step you or your agency could take to become more accessible to lesbian or bisexual women?
4. What areas of your agency would you look at to see if they reflect accessibility to lesbian or bisexual women?

## Definition of Domestic Abuse

Domestic abuse is the attempt, act or intent of someone within an adult to adult (18+ years) relationship, where the relationship is characterized by intimacy, dependency or trust, to intimidate either by threat or by the use of physical force on another person or property. The purpose of the abuse is to control and/or exploit through neglect, intimidation and inducement of fear or by inflicting pain. Abusive behaviour can take many forms, including verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, emotional, spiritual, economic and the violation of rights. All forms of abusive behaviour are ways in which one human being attempts to have control and/or exploit or have power over another.

This includes the following relationships:

- ∇ Girlfriend or boyfriend – not cohabitating
- ∇ Sister or brother – birth, step or adopted
- ∇ Cohabiting partner – same or opposite sex
- ∇ Common law husband or wife
- ∇ Ex-boyfriend or girlfriend – never cohabitated
- ∇ Ex-common law husband or wife
- ∇ Father or mother – birth, step or adopted
- ∇ Foster parent – guardian
- ∇ Foster son or daughter
- ∇ Foster brother or sister
- ∇ Grandmother or grandfather
- ∇ Husband or wife
- ∇ Son or daughter, uncle or aunt
- ∇ Extended family – e.g. nephew/niece, father-in-law, etc.
- ∇ Caregiver

*From the Calgary Domestic Violence Committee, 2000*

## Facts about Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence

- ∇ Approximately 25 – 35% of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons (1997) are abused by their partners according to NCAVP (National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs) – included 3327 reported cases from agencies in 12 states.
- ∇ Coleman quotes 28 – 55% of lesbians experience domestic violence within their relationships (1994).
- ∇ A study by Brand and Kidd (1986) quoted by Linda Bernhard says 25% of lesbians experience abuse from their same-sex partners – the study included 55 lesbians and 75 straight women.
- ∇ According to O Hanlan et.al, The National Lesbian Health Care Survey reported 11% of lesbians had been victims of domestic violence by their partner and 15 – 25% of gay males (1996).
- ∇ West quotes as much as 50% of lesbians have been abused by their female partners.
- ∇ Lockhart et. al, states, “Violence in lesbian relationships had not been well-documented.”
- ∇ Bogard also believes there are few reliable statistics on domestic violence in same-sex relationships (1999).
- ∇ Lesbian battering cuts across ALL socio-economic lines.
- ∇ Lesbian victims can be as economically dependent upon their abusive partners as straight women.
- ∇ Lesbian victims are less likely to use important resources (e.g. shelters, medical services, etc.) because they are afraid of re-victimization and/or being “outed”.
- ∇ Lesbians have children and will need parental support while dealing with the abuse.
- ∇ Children of lesbian victims will need support.
- ∇ Children of lesbians may also be closeted and need support coming out.

## Abuse in Lesbian Relationships – True?? Or False??

Circle either T (true) or F (false)

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| T | F | 1. It is almost impossible for a woman to inflict serious physical injury upon another woman.  |
| T | F | 2. Open communication will resolve the violence in an abusive lesbian relationship.  |
| T | F | 3. A lesbian may be an abuser in one intimate relationship and then a victim in her next intimate relationship.  |
| T | F | 4. In a lesbian couple, the bigger one is usually the abuser.  |
| T | F | 5. Some issues of same sex partner abuse are different than any other partner abuse.   |
| T | F | 6. Within the lesbian community there are few support systems in place to deal with partner abuse.   |
| T | F | 7. Heterosexual service providers should not attempt to deal with issues of abuse in lesbian relationships because only lesbians truly understand the issue. |
| T | F | 8. In Butch/Femme lesbian relationships, it is the Butch who is usually the abuser.  |
| T | F | 9. Agencies cannot effectively provide services to lesbians when their lesbian staff is not out.   |

*(From Lesbians Working to End Violence in Lesbian Relationships, 1997)*

## Similarities and Differences in Lesbian and Straight Domestic Violence

### What Is The Same:

- ∇ Abuse is always the responsibility of the abuser and is always a choice.
- ∇ Victims are often blamed for the abuse by partners and sometimes even family, friends and professionals can excuse or minimize the abusive behaviour.
- ∇ It is difficult for victims to leave abusive relationships.
- ∇ Abuse is not an acceptable or healthy way to solve difficulties in relationships.
- ∇ Victims feel responsible for their partner's violence and their partner's emotional state, hoping to prevent further violence.
- ∇ Abuse usually worsens over time.
- ∇ The abuser is often apologetic after abusing, giving false hope that the abuse will stop.
- ∇ Some or all of the following effects of abuse may be present: shame, self-blame, physical injuries, short and long-term health problems, sleep disturbances, constantly on guard, social withdrawal, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, feelings of hopelessness, shock and dissociative states.

### What Is Different:

“There is an important difference between the battered lesbian and the battered non-lesbian: the battered non-lesbian experiences violence within the context of a misogynist world; the lesbian experiences violence within the context of a world that is not only woman-hating, but is also homophobic.” (Pharr, 1986)

- ∇ Can leave an abusive relationship, but not a homophobic society and culture.
- ∇ Not only self-blame for the abuse, but also self-blame for being gay (i.e. Maybe gay people are sick and thus I deserve this)
- ∇ Very limited services exist specifically for abused and abusive lesbians.
- ∇ Lesbians often experience a lack of understanding of the seriousness of the abuse when reporting incidences of violence to a therapist, police or medical personnel.
- ∇ Homophobia in society denies the reality of lesbian's lives, including the existence of lesbian relationships, let alone abusive ones. When abuse exists, attitudes often range from “who cares” to “these relationships are generally unstable or unhealthy”.
- ∇ Shelters for abused women may not be sensitive to same-sex abuse (theoretically, shelters are open to all women and therefore, a same-sex victim may not feel safe as her abuser may also have access to the shelter).
- ∇ In lesbian relationships, there may be additional fears of losing the relationship, which confirms one's sexual orientation; fears of not being believed about the abuse and fears of losing friends and support within the lesbian community.
- ∇ Most domestic violence statutes do not include lesbians.

## Common Myths About Abuse in Same Sex Relationships

“Women are NOT abusive ~ only men are.”

**Anyone can choose to be abusive or not.**

“Same sex couples are always equal in relationships. It is not abuse, it is a relationship struggle.”

**Two women/men in a relationship do not automatically guarantee equality. Relationship struggles are never equal if abuse is involved.**

“Abusive lesbians are more “butch,” larger, apolitical or have social lives that revolve around the bar culture.”

**Abuse occurs regardless of race, class, religion, age, political affiliation, lifestyle, or physical attributes.**

“Same sex violence is caused by drugs, alcohol, stress, childhood abuse.”

**While these factors can be important, they do not excuse the abuse.**

“Lesbian abusers have been abused/oppresed by men and are therefore not as responsible for what they do.”

**This is an excuse; abuse will only stop when responsibility is taken for the abuse.**

“It is easier for someone in a same sex relationship to leave their abusive partner than it is for a heterosexual to leave their abusive partner.”

**It is NEVER easy to leave an abusive relationship. In fact, in most instances of same sex violence it is harder for the abused partner to leave the relationship due to an absence of services and societal homophobic barriers.**

## **Signs of a Battering Personality**

1. Quick Involvement
2. Jealousy
3. Controlling Behaviour
4. Unrealistic Expectations
5. Isolation
6. Projects Responsibility
7. Blames Others for Her Problems
8. Hypersensitivity
9. Public Display of Anger or Violence
10. Cruelty to Children or Animals
11. "Playful" Use of Force in Sex
12. Verbal Abuse
13. Dr. Jekyll & Ms. Hyde
14. Guns, Knives and Other Weapons

## Who is the Abuser? A Screening Challenge

By Tiffany Veinot

*“[Violence in gay and lesbian relationships] appropriately pushes us to look more closely to the [person] who is seeking our assistance. It is from the compassionate looking and listening and not our preconceived notions of the types of people who are ‘victims’ and ‘batterers’, that we will learn to provide appropriate and safe places for healing.”*

While it is often quite obvious who is abusing and who is being abused in relationships, including same-sex relationships, there can be cases where service providers are unsure. In these cases, screening procedures can help service providers gain greater clarity. Some examples of when this could be helpful include: “where a batterer presents as a victim because she really does feel victimized but is in fact controlling [their] partner, or where a victim feels like an abuser because she has used physical violence to defend [themselves].” The latter situation may be common. In fact, in one study, 78% of abused lesbians reported that they had either defended themselves or fought back against an abusive partner. In addition, most abuse victims do not draw distinctions between fighting back and acting in self-defense. As well, gay and male socialization processes may cause abused gay men who act self-defensively to deny their victimization.

It is important for service providers to clearly identify batterer and victim because service to each group is necessarily different. While intervention with those being abused must address their personal safety concerns first and foremost, interventions with abusers should focus on holding them accountable and ensuring the safety of the person they are victimizing. In addition, the presence of a batterer in services for victims can present safety concerns for participants, as well as undermine the benefits of the program.

If there is confusion about who is the abuser, service providers may wish to ask some specific questions in conjunction with screening processes already in place. Services specifically for gay men and lesbians may also wish to develop screening tools for this population. Although in some cases services may require more information to grasp the dynamics of violence in same-sex

relationships, they must be careful not to subject gay or lesbian clients to excessive questioning. Remember that gay men and lesbians who are being abused are as vulnerable when they share their stories, as in need of support and potentially in as much danger as their heterosexual counterparts. As always, questioning should be respectful and tactful and address immediate safety needs. While questions may not always yield ‘answers’, they may elicit a pattern of responses that provide information upon which to base decisions or recommendations. Often, these patterns help service providers determine who is in control and the consequences of this behaviour on the victim. However, because there is only one published screening tool in the area and no validated assessment tools, service providers may need to be very ‘creative’ in responding to the complexities of the issue.

### Screening

The most important thing service providers can do is listen carefully and be aware of their own biases and judgments. Learn as much about the situation as possible by encouraging the client to tell their story without any leading or direction. Open-ended questions can elicit information about the situation, how the client views the situation and what the client needs.

If you are not sure whether the client is the abuser or victim and have a strong suspicion that the individual presenting as a victim might be an abuser, another method to elicit information is to ask the client to ‘slow down’ their story. As Laurie Chesley describes, “[I] slow down their description of the events involved in any particular abusive incident, starting with what exactly happened leading up to the event – even an hour ahead: what were they feeling, doing, thinking, then what happened, who said what and so on, asking for lots of detail and keeping the discussion chronological. This tends to give me a pretty good picture of what went on and sometimes surprisingly gets at information about the victim’s behaviour as well as the abuser’s.” This method should be used carefully and only in those cases where there is real ambiguity. To apply this method to all clients could promote victim blaming because to ask a victim questions about what s/he was doing prior to an abusive incident could imply mutual responsibility.

When screening to distinguish between abuser and abused, service providers can apply specific questions to client responses. Some questions to help assess the power dynamics in the situation include:

1. Is this a pattern of behaviour? Does the accuser claim that the partner has committed one or more of the acts more than once?
2. Who seems to be more in control of the other person? Who seems to make most of the decisions? Who gets their way most of the time?
3. Has one partner changed their job, friends, socialization patterns, ideas and activities in response to the other person's requirements?
4. Who is afraid of whom? Without prompting, has the client indicated she is afraid of their partner? Are they afraid to stay in their home with their partner? Are they afraid to fight or disagree with their partner?
5. What have the consequences been if they have a disagreement or the authority of the accused is challenged?
6. How does the client describe the impact that the abuse has had on them? How do they feel about themselves, their ability/need to please their partner?
7. Does either partner admit to abuse/violence against their partner and how do they explain it? Is there blame or responsibility taken?
8. Who initiated the violent incident? (It is important to remember here that although someone may strike the first 'blow' they may have done so because a past pattern of abuse alerted them to imminent violence.)
9. Distinguish between abusive and assertive behaviour. Some people label any behaviour that they dislike, or that they find painful 'abuse'. Find out exactly what happened before labeling their behaviour.

(Questions adapted with permission from the New Jersey Coalition of Battered Women)

In addition, if you are concerned about a client's own violent behaviour, some further questions can be posed, including:

1. What was the intent behind their violent behaviour? Was it to: control the partner or cause their partner to change their behavior? Hurt or injure their partner? To retaliate against their partner who was abusive in the past? To protect themselves?
2. Have they ever inflicted an injury on their partner (either emotional or physical)? How severe were those injuries? What was the effect of this violent behaviour on their partner?
3. Was the person's use of physical or verbal aggression a pattern of behaviour or an isolated incident?
4. What was the sequence of events leading to the violence? What do they see as being the cause of the violence?
5. Has their style of 'fighting' changed over time and how has it changed?
6. Have they ever had a previous violent relationship and how do they describe that relationship?
7. How do they feel about the violent incident? Who do they see as being to blame or responsible?

If you determine that a client is acting in self-defense, information from victims about their own aggression – helps – work with them about how to deal effectively with their own and very inevitable anger about being in an abusive relationship.

If you determine that the client is behaving violently in retaliation, and clearly in a way which exceeds self-defense (i.e. they are trying to hurt or injure their partner, are doing so over a period of time, etc.) a different approach may be necessary. As Chris Heer asserts, "We have an obligation to challenge the use of violence in all situations but self-defense. Responding to an abusive situation with abuse could get the victim arrested and could lead the batterer to escalate violence against the victim and doesn't solve the problem at all." In these cases, intervention with the client should focus on both safety/support and promoting accountability.

### **Limitations, Risks & Making Mistakes**

Sometimes, it just will be impossible to know whom to believe, even after screening processes. This is because violence in same-sex relationships can be complex and challenges current systems responses. For

example, “where women have had experiences of being abused in one relationship and abusive in the next, or where power dynamics shift within one relationship, services sometimes feel that they do not have appropriate protocols for these situations and that they are figuring out things as they go along.” In these cases, services should try to ensure that they respond to the needs of people who are at risk and in need. It may be the case that a victimized client has retaliated systematically or that their self-defensive behaviours have crossed a line – and this may require challenge. However, requiring that a person be ‘innocent’ of ever having behaved violently themselves in order to receive services may create a system which excludes a lot of vulnerable people, as well as have unintended effects on clients.

An example of unintended effects is Karen, a lesbian who is emotionally abused by her partner. Karen was recently excluded from a group for lesbian abuse survivors after a screening process because they labeled her behaviour as ‘mutually abusive’. As she says, “They asked questions about behaviours but did not inquire about the intensity and frequency of behaviours. So my partner can yell at me for five hours and then I will finally yell back out of frustration, and then I was told that it was mutual – they refused to let me in the group because they said that the other women would feel endangered by me. Since this rejection by the group, I have become more passive because I have been labeled ‘abusive’ – as a result, my partner has longer episodes of yelling at me, calling me ‘stupid’, depriving me of sleep – I have to wait for her to run out of steam.”

If a service discovers that they have made an incorrect assessment about who is an abuser or who is victimized, they should be willing to address it with the safest solution possible for the victim. For example, “if we find that both victim and batterer end up in the same support group, we may want to recommend individual counseling for both. If a lesbian has been sheltered and it is determined that she is a batterer, she can be asked to leave. And if the victim needs protection she can get a restraining order, or if she wants shelter, she can be referred to a shelter whose location is unknown to the batterer.”

*Tiffany Veinot is Coordinator of Information Services at Education Wife Assault.*

## AABL/ The Northwest Assessment Tool

The following is a list of behaviours that may occur in relationships in which abuse is present. AABL uses this checklist as a jumping off place to discuss what has been happening in the lives of survivors. It is **NOT** designed to be used as a traditional “checklist” where the behaviours are tallied up and whoever has the most checks must certainly be the abuser. We respectfully ask other advocates not to use it in this fashion. Rather than simply determining who has done what to whom, we have found that assessing who is establishing systematic power and control in a relationship has much more to do with the **CONTEXT** in which the behaviour occurred (e.g. hitting someone because she wouldn’t let you out of the car), the **INTENT** of its’ use (e.g. establishing control vs. regaining control over oneself, self-defense, etc.) and the **EFFECT** of the behaviour (e.g. “the result was that my life became smaller and smaller until it was a fishbowl,” or “I began to dread coming home, answering the phone, seeing a friend in public – everything would have to be answered for.”) It is our experience that virtually any behaviour can be employed by a person to survive abuse or used by a person to abuse. The behaviour itself is not the point – determining who is systematically taking power and control over their partner is.

You may ask the following questions with regard to current and past relationships. Ask about what was going on with each response. There is no expectation of going through every question. Remember, context is most important. Take notes.

### PARTNER DID TO YOU

### YOU DID TO PARTNER

1. Discussed issue calmly
2. Stomped out to punish
3. Slammed doors
4. Shouted
5. Sulked or refused to talk
6. Swore / Cursed
7. Called names
8. Put down ability to make decisions or take care of self
9. Insisted on certain clothing or hairstyle
10. Ridiculed identity – bisexual, trans, butch, femme
11. Insulted, faulted, put-down
12. Put down racial, cultural or class background
13. Lied
14. Interrupted or kept from eating or sleeping
15. Insisted you must give up friends / family
16. Threatened to expose a secret or “out” sexual orientation
17. Threatened suicide
18. Accused of being unfaithful
19. Pressured to have sex or withheld sex
20. Threatened pet
21. Took keys or property to keep from leaving
22. Took money or cheque book

23. Controlled use of money
24. Locked out of house
25. Made to account for “free” time
26. Threw something or punched wall
27. Drove recklessly
28. Destroyed property
29. Pushed, grabbed, carried against will
30. Hurt or directed anger at children
31. Threatened
32. Restrained
33. Spit
34. Bit or scratched
35. Punched or kicked
36. Slapped
37. Forced sex
38. Choked or strangled
39. Threatened with weapon
40. Beat until unconscious
41. Used weapon
42. Kicked / hit / hurt when pregnant
43. Injured enough to need treatment
44. Refused to allow medical treatment
45. Broke bones, caused hospitalization
46. Other
47. Which behaviours were taken in self-defense? \_\_\_\_\_
48. Which behaviours did the partner take in self-defense? \_\_\_\_\_
49. What percentage of the time do you feel you were / are responsible for the abuse?  
\_\_\_\_\_%

What percentage of the time do you feel your partner was / is responsible for the abuse? \_\_\_\_\_%

(Even though mutual abuse is a myth, we ask this question because the response is very telling. People who are abusing their partners often answer one of two ways – “fifty – fifty” or “it’s 100% my partner.” Both answers mean that the abusive person does not want to take responsibility and change. Survivors are generally much harder on themselves. They answer in a variety of ways, sometimes even naming themselves as having a higher percentage. It’s related to self-blame and willingness to be accountable.

## Risk Assessment

If an individual discloses that s/he is experiencing abuse, it is important to assist her/him in determining the risk presently being experienced. This information may help to make a more appropriate plan for safety of the abused individual and her/his children. The research on factors that can increase the risk of danger in domestic violence cases is clear and consistent. Existing research reveals there is high risk of serious injury or death of the woman, the man and also their children when:

1. **The abusive person has made repeated threats of homicide or suicide.** The batterer who has threatened to kill him/herself, his/her partner, the children or his/her relatives must be considered extremely dangerous.
2. **The abusive person has developed detailed plans or has fantasies about homicide or suicide.** The more an abusive person has developed a fantasy about whom, how, when and/or where to kill, the more dangerous s/he may be. The abusive person who has previously acted out part of a homicide or suicide fantasy may be invested in killing as a viable “solution” to his/her problems.
3. **The abusive person is seriously depressed.** Where an abusive person has been acutely depressed and sees little hope for moving beyond the depression, s/he may be a candidate for homicide or suicide.
4. **There are weapons in the home.** Where an abusive person possesses weapons and has used them or has threatened to use them in the past in the assaults on the abused person, the children or him/herself, his/her access to those weapons increases his/her potential for lethal assault.
5. **Obsessiveness about partner and family.** An abusive person who is obsessed about his/her partner, who either idolizes him/her and feels that s/he cannot live without her/him or believes s/he is entitled to her/him, is more likely to be life endangering.
6. **Centrality of the abused person.** If the loss of the abused person represents or precipitates a total loss of hope for a positive future, an abusive person may choose to kill.
7. **Drug or alcohol consumption.** Although drug or alcohol use does not cause the abuse, the consumption of drugs or alcohol when in a state of despair or fury can elevate the risk of lethality.
8. **Pet abuse.** Those abusive people who assault and mutilate pets are more likely to kill or maim family members.
9. **The partners have recently separated.** Recent separation or belief by an abusive partner that his/her partner will leave is a high risk factor. Murder of a female partner is most likely to occur in the context of a marital separation or divorce. This risk factor challenges the common sense assumption most people make that the woman will be out of danger if she would just leave.
10. **Other risk factors may include:**
  - ∇ There are no family members or friends nearby to give social support.
  - ∇ There is extreme denial or minimization of the history of assault, even though there is other evidence of repeated assaults.
  - ∇ The police have been called to the home more than once.
  - ∇ The abused person has been treated for injuries more than once.

- ∇ The female victim is pregnant.
- ∇ The abusive person has a history of assault of other people, intimate partners, strangers, friends or acquaintances.
- ∇ The abusive person has violated “no contact” conditions.
- ∇ The abuser was abused in their childhood.

Lethality assessments are not foolproof and there is no one-time measure of who will kill. An assessment must be made every time the police, courts, shelter workers, hospital workers or other front line workers deal with the abusive person or the victim.

### **Same Sex Relationships**

Victims experiencing domestic violence within same sex relationships are equally at risk of serious injury or death and are often more isolated because of lack of support and acceptance of their sexual orientation. Also, the victim may not want to access services because they will have to out themselves in order to receive effective support. However, if a person comes ‘out’ they may lose their job or their children and/or they may lose family and friends. Coming out can be harder than enduring the abuse.

### **Women with Disabilities**

Women with disabilities are often at greater risk of severe violence. This observation is supported by existing research on the abuse of women with disabilities. It appears women with disabilities are at greater risk of violence and there is some evidence they may be at greater risk of serious violence. This is partly because of their isolation and the lack of available and accessible resources.

### **Geographically Remote & Culturally Isolated Communities**

Most people working to prevent violence are aware of the ways that living in geographically remote or isolate locations can increase risk. There are fewer services in such areas. There are few or no neighbours to provide support or to overhear the abuse and can call the police. Even if the victim or a neighbour does call the police, response times in isolated areas naturally tend to be longer. Often one or more police officers are responsible for a large geographic area with few inhabitants. The importance of cultural isolation is not always as well recognized, even though cultural isolation can be as profound a form of isolation as living in a remote area. Cultural isolation can be a risk factor in a densely populated city or town as well as in a rural or isolated region. Women, children and men who are members of a minority cultural, language or religious group may have few or no friends or relatives near them. They may be ignored or rejected by their neighbours because they are different. They may not speak or read the language spoken by most people in their community. All these factors increase their isolation and may keep them unfamiliar with the services and options available to them.

## **Limitations to Risk Assessment Tools**

There are several potential problems with using risk assessment tools. These problems must be taken into account before utilizing risk assessment tools as part of an intervention strategy in domestic violence cases.

- ∇ Risk assessments should not be considered as “recipes” or quick answers and time savers. Service providers should not totally rely on risk assessment instruments to make good judgments about danger and safety.
- ∇ Risk assessment instruments focus attention on the level of danger but not on how to reduce the danger and create safety. They provide some assistance in defining the seriousness of the problem, but provide no guidance concerning what to do about a high-risk situation.
- ∇ By focusing on individuals, risk assessment instruments ignore the effects that inadequate or inappropriate services can have on increasing risk.
- ∇ Risk assessment instruments can actually increase risk when they are not used as part of a coordinated safety planning process.

**Therefore, risk assessment instruments are not able to provide the whole answer. Instead, risk assessment tools should be used as a reminder of the factors that should be considered.**

*(From Safety from Domestic Violence – Public Legal Education Network of Alberta)*

## **A Standard Safety Planning When Choosing to Stay in an Abusive Relationship or Situation**

Safety plans must be developed to take into account the specific circumstances and abilities of each individual. All or some of this information may be helpful in planning for your safety. For a personalized safety plan, please contact an emergency shelter for assistance.

If you choose to stay, there are some steps that can be taken to increase your safety if an abusive incident occurs. Even if all the precautions are followed, your safety cannot be guaranteed. **Remember you do not deserve to be hurt or threatened.**

1. If an abusive situation seems likely, try to avoid rooms with access to potential weapons (i.e. knives, heavy objects) and with only one exit. Avoid the kitchen and bathroom areas.
2. Do not run to where your children are as they may be hurt as well.
3. If possible, pre-program emergency numbers into your phone. Keep a phone in a room you can lock from the inside.
4. Talk to your neighbour or friend that you can trust and arrange a signal or code for when you need them to get help.
5. Teach your children not to intervene in the violence. Instead, teach them a code for when you need them to get help.
6. Have an emergency bag packed and hidden in an accessible location. Include numbers of emergency shelters and police; identification; and a few items of clothing and money for phone calls and/or transportation. Have an extra set of car keys or enough money for a taxi or bus. Keep your important papers for you and children, including health cards, birth certificates, custody agreements, social insurance numbers and citizenship and immigration papers.
7. Ensure that some form of emergency transportation is available upon request. This may be through a friend or through community supporters.
8. Have an escape route out of your home. Teach and practice it with your children.
9. Work out a code word that can be used on the phone with a person that is trusted. The code could mean to contact police or to inform them that you are leaving. It may also be important to develop signals or codes for neighbors to call the police, such as banging on the floor or wall in case of an emergency.
10. Look at options for safe places (i.e. friends, neighbours, a relative, motel or emergency shelter). If you can do so safely, contact the people in advance to let them know you are coming. This allows them to watch for you and call for help if needed. Do NOT go to a friend or relative's house if your partner/caregiver is likely to try to find you there. This can be dangerous for both you and those trying to assist you.
11. A life-call system can be a part of a personalized safety plan. The shelters have more information on this system.

12. Whenever calling a shelter or other resources, phone another number or press several numbers randomly immediately afterwards, so that your partner/caregiver cannot press the redial button and find out whom you were speaking with.
13. Children should be told that violence is not right, even if the abusive person is someone they love. Tell your children that the targets of violence are not at fault. Neither you nor they caused the violence. The most important thing is for you and your children to be protected.
14. Review your safety plan monthly.

The abused may wonder whether to tell their partner/caregiver they are leaving. In cases where there has been physical abuse or extremely controlling behaviour, telling the abuser can seriously endanger the abused. Abusers can become increasingly violent when they fear their partner is leaving or they are losing their control over them.

*(From Safety from Domestic Violence – Public Legal Education Network of Alberta)*

## Standard Safety Planning for Leaving an Abusive Relationship or Situation

Safety plans must be developed to take into account the specific circumstances and abilities of each individual. All or some of this information may be helpful in planning for your safety. For a personalized safety plan, please contact an emergency shelter for assistance.

1. If possible, pre-program emergency numbers into your phone.
2. Keep a phone in a room you can lock from the inside.
3. Plan an escape route out of your home. Teach and practice it with your children.
4. Try to put away a little money at every opportunity, even enough for a phone call.
5. If possible, try to keep an extra key to a vehicle hidden.
6. Gather important papers (both your own and your children's), such as birth certificates, social insurance numbers, citizenship and immigration papers, health care cards, immunization records, etc. Put these in a safe place, preferably outside your home, such as a safety deposit box or with a trusted friend.
7. Put together a suitcase of essential items such as clothing and medicines and store them in a safe place. Make plans for any pets that you have that you are unable to take and that you cannot leave behind. If you have no place to leave your pets and this will prevent you from leaving, mention this to the shelter when you call.
8. Have a list of shelters and phone numbers accessible, but hidden. If you are ready to leave, keep checking to see if there is space for you and your children. If possible, check to see if the shelters are barrier free for your needs.
9. Ensure that some form of emergency transportation is available upon request. This may be through a trusted friend or through community supports.
10. Work out a code word that can be used on the phone with a person that is trusted. The code could mean to contact the police or to inform them that you are leaving. **It may be important to develop signals or codes for neighbours to call the police, such as banging on the floor or wall in case of emergency.**
11. Look at options for safe places (i.e. friends, a neighbour, relative, motel or emergency shelter). If you can do so safely, contact the people in advance to let them know you are coming. This allows them to watch for you and call for help if needed. Do not go to a friend or relative's house if your partner/caregiver is likely to try to find you there. This can be dangerous for both you and those trying to assist you.
12. Whenever calling a shelter or other resources, phone another number or press several numbers randomly immediately afterwards, so that your partner/caregiver cannot press the redial button and find out whom you were speaking with.
13. If you have a support person that your partner/caregiver is not aware of, keep that person's name and address confidential.
14. Review your safety plan monthly.

### **If you have left the abusive situation or relationship you need to:**

1. Call the police immediately if the abusive person tries to contact you.
2. Develop an escape plan and practice with your children.
3. Change door locks, add dead bolts, if possible, install motion sensor lights in the yard or install a security system. Ensure all entrances are well lit and keep doors and windows securely locked. Ask for your landlord's assistance if possible.

4. Keep a telephone in a room that locks from the inside. If possible, purchase a cellular phone and keep it nearby (i.e. purse, pocket, etc. or in an accessible hiding place).
5. Obtain a private or unlisted telephone number. If possible, pre-program emergency numbers into the telephone's directory.
6. Consider renting a post office box for your mail – addresses may be listed on legal orders and police reports and can be accessed by the abusive person.
7. Develop signals or codes for neighbours and friends to call the police, such as banging on the floor or wall in case of an emergency.
8. Have a safety plan for the children. Teach your children not to let the abusive person in the home. Prepare the children to respond to the abusive person who comes to their school or day care centre. If a protection order includes provisions about the children, give a copy to the children's school or childcare facility.
9. If it is not safe where you live, choose a safe place to go (i.e. trusted friend or relative, motel, emergency shelter, etc.) Check to see which shelters are barrier free for you and if they have accessible the support you require. Do NOT go to a friend's or relative's house if the abusive person is likely to look for you there. This can be dangerous for both you and those trying to assist you.
10. Keep a copy of all protection orders and custody orders with you all the time.
11. Change any appointments the abusive person was aware of (i.e. medical or dental appointments).
12. Shop at different stores and frequent different social spots so that the abusive person will be less likely to find you.
13. Call the telephone company and ask about "Caller ID", so that you can identify the number of anyone attempting to call you. Ask that your number be blocked, so that if you make the phone call, no one will be able to get your new, unlisted phone number. In some areas, you can press \*67 before dialing, which will block your number from appearing on the phone you are calling.
14. Review your safety plan monthly.

*(From Safety from Violence – Public Education Network of Alberta)*

## **Safety Planning for Staff**

### **Planning for safe contact with clients**

Contacting the client by telephone:

1. Block identification of your telephone number by dialing \*67 before dialing the client's telephone number.
2. Ask to speak to the client and only speak to the client.
3. Do not leave messages for the client with other members of the household, on answering machines, voice mail or e-mail unless directed to do so by the client.
4. If questioned by someone other than the client, do not indicate who you are or which agency you are calling from.

Speaking with the client on the telephone:

1. Ask if it is a safe time to talk.
2. Ask if you should call the police.

Contacting the client through the mail:

1. Do not send mail to the client without obtaining from the client that it is safe to do so.

### **Safety Plan for Staff**

Be aware of your safety. Staff should always take precautions to ensure their own safety. If you are concerned about meeting with a client, for whatever reason, take the following precautions:

1. Talk to a supervisor or co-worker about your concerns.
2. See the client with another staff person.
3. Meet with the client in a space that can be seen by others or leave the door to your office slightly ajar so that any signs of distress can be heard by other staff.
4. Sit close to the door so that the client cannot block your exit.
5. Make arrangements for another staff person to call you at pre-arranged intervals to ensure your safety.
6. Have a signal or code to use if you require help.
7. Do not meet with the client outside of your office or after hours.
8. Have another staff person or the security guard walk you to your car if you are concerned that the client may attempt to speak with you outside of the office.

*(From Safety from Domestic Violence – Public Legal Education Network of Alberta)*

## **Clinical Treatment: Working with the Abuser & the Victim**

When abusers or victims do contact service providers, they need to be assured that they will be treated as any individual would be. As always, confidentiality and safety are primary. However, given that this is a very small community and many people know one another, it is not inconceivable that your client may know or be known by several other clients you are working with. It is key that your client feels confident that she will not run into anyone familiar in your waiting area or her group sessions. In addition, gender may afford anonymity to the abuser. In the heterosexual community the abuser is often a male and so, readily recognizable if he stalks his female partner to a group session or counselling. In a same-sex relationship an abuser may pose as another potential client or a friend to your client. Proper screening can minimize this problem (see screening). As always, the Duty to Warn procedure must be enacted. If your client is in danger of harming someone or being harmed, you must report this to the appropriate individuals, i.e. the police, other involved counselors or agencies, the potential victim(s) and their families.

As in any community, the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered community has minimized the existence and impact of same-sex domestic violence. The myths that enhance the belief that domestic violence never happens in these relationships gets in the way of community members taking a realistic look at some individuals' behaviour. Known abusers are often not talked about by their victims, their friends or those that witness the abuse or its aftermath. Potential partners are not warned or supported and abusers are not encouraged to take responsibility for their abusive behaviour and seek help. As a service provider you can help by teaching the client and the community to break the silence about same-sex domestic violence.

Supportive networks are very helpful to all abusers and victims/survivors. In this community both abuser and victim/survivor may be friends with the same people. If the abuser is able to convince these friends that she is the wronged one or has their loyalty, the victim may be left without a network of support or be further isolated from a community that has been her only place to be herself. Assist her to create other networks in the community.

For a lesbian/bisexual individual to enter therapy is to "come out" to another person. Your client cannot talk effectively about her issues of domestic violence without revealing her sexual orientation. This may be the first time that she has let someone, other than her partner, know about this part of her identity. Indeed, the rest of the world may still think about her as a heterosexual woman. It is imperative that she feels that the person she is talking to will not be homophobic or pathologize her. As a service provider you may try very hard to be free of heterosexism, but it is difficult to consistently do this when you live in a world that is 90% heterosexual in its population, laws, institutions and traditions. There may be an inordinate amount of fear about this if she has already experienced discrimination or "gay bashing" by other parts of the society. In addition, victims' partners may have used the threat of "outing" them to control their behaviour.

The age of the client may also be a factor that influences a lesbian's willingness to identify as an abuse survivor. Older lesbians have experienced the oppression the legal and medical community that actively sought to sanction and control homosexual behaviour through laws and labels from the 1930's to the 1970's.

As in all domestic violence, children can also be used to manipulate or control a victim. In same-sex relationships the abuser can threaten to expose the biological mother's [orientation] to the children's school and their father or to her work and her family/friends. If the abuser is the biological mother she can threaten to cut off contact with the children and the victim has no legal right to have access unless she has formally adopted them.

As a service provider for domestic violence clients, you will probably have dealt with many forms of relationships. In a same-sex relationship two forms, that you may have dealt with in heterosexual relationships as well, are the monogamous couple or the bondage-

domination/sado-masochistic (BDSM) couple. Non-monogamous means that the couple has chosen to allow another person to be involved in their relationship or that one or both of the partners can have outside encounters with other individuals. An estimated 5 – 10% of the general population regularly participates in behaviour that can be characterized as BDSM (Kinsey's Institute's 1990 New Report on Sex). Bondage-domination is a form of power exchange in the relationship and sado-masochism is the consensual use of pain or stimulation for the purpose of pleasure. Any of these may have been mutually agreed upon or were used as a manipulative tactic on the part of the abuser. It will be up to you to help your client to determine which was happening.

### **Cultural Differences**

Greene (1997)<sup>1</sup> indicates that many different cultures are extremely homophobic and may even see lesbian women as defective (e.g. African Canadian communities) or a threat to male dominance (e.g. Latino communities). Some cultures expect women to fulfill a specific role or to act in a particularly submissive manner (e.g. Asian or Southeast Asian communities). Other cultures have had a history of honoring gay/lesbian individuals but now are very homophobic (e.g. Native communities). This causes more restrictions on a client to have a supportive environment that they can access for safety when dealing with an abusive relationship.

*Jane Oxenbury, M. Ed., C. Psych. 2001*

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<sup>1</sup> Greene B. (1997). Lesbian women of color: triple jeopardy. In E.D. Rothblum (Ed.), Classics in Lesbian studies. Harrington Press. Binghamton. NY.

## Legal Recourse

Same-sex couples are excluded from the new Protection Against Family Violence Act. The benefits of the new act do not apply to same-sex couples.

A lesbian victim can apply for a Restraining order. A restraining order is an order stating the perpetrator is to stay a specified distance away from the victim. Restraining orders may be obtained when a lesbian has a fear that physical violence may occur. A restraining order can be obtained during regular court hours at the Court of Queen's bench. The victim can apply for an Order without a lawyer, but she may run into difficulties. For example, technically a person requesting a restraining order must have civil charges pending (e.g. assault, threats, etc.). With legal representation, a person can maneuver around this technicality. The best time to apply for a restraining order on your own is in the morning because in the afternoons the judges become busy and may not have time to hear the plea.

A restraining order can also be obtained through Calgary Legal Guidance. An order can take up to three days to put in place with Calgary Legal Guidance and the victim must have an extremely low-income to qualify for services. During the waiting period the victim must have a safe place to stay, access to a phone where she can receive phone calls, and she must be able to safely travel to Calgary Legal Guidance. Calgary Legal Guidance is a gay positive agency.

A restraining order is under civil law and not criminal law. This means the penalty for breaking the order is less severe than if it was under criminal law. Charges under criminal law carrying a criminal carry a criminal record. An emergency protection order, obtained through the new Protection Against Family Violence Act (P.A.F.V.A.), is under criminal law which means the abuser will have a criminal record and penalties for breaking the order are more severe.

A lesbian survivor may also obtain a peace bond. A peace bond orders the other person to act appropriately. Usually a peace bond is ordered after a criminal offense has been committed and charges are laid. The victims can apply on their own, with no cost. However it can take months to obtain a peace bond. For more detailed information on restraining orders and peace bonds see Appendix N: Legal Remedies Chart.

**Suggested Activity:** What are the barriers to lesbians accessing restraining orders? –  
Discuss in groups.

## **Organizational Issues: Safe & Accepting Environment**

Ensure that your office space is a safe and confidential location in which a lesbian/bisexual woman will feel secure. She needs to be able to trust that what she confides will not be overheard or shared. The waiting area can be made more inviting by the inclusion of posters and pamphlets reflecting same-sex individuals, couples and families.

Receptionists and intake workers should be trained to use non-genderized language and to be non-homophobic/non-discriminatory when answering the phone or assessing new clients. As well, all support staff and volunteers should be similarly trained, even if they will not have face-to-face contact with clients. Naturally, all counselors in the agency should be very accepting of working with this population and trained in their particular needs.

Written forms, assessments, and handouts should use non-genderized language so those lesbian/bisexual women feel that they are included too.

Board of Directors should be trained in this area so that they are sensitized to this population and their issues, and can address needed changes in their agency's focus. Boards should also include this community in the development of their mission, vision, targets, aims, beliefs, policies, and bylaws.

### **Ads & Marketing**

All ads and marketing should be "gay positive" and welcoming of clients from this community. Passing them through to a lesbian/bisexual women's consultation group first would ensure appropriateness of your marketing and develop community contacts.

Location of ads should be considered when running campaigns or informing the public of available services. For instance, ads could be placed in local gay & lesbian directories or newspapers. Posters and pamphlets could be left where the gay & lesbian community frequents.

Alliances with other "gay positive" agencies could increase visibility and be a source of referrals. Collaboration with specific gay/lesbian agencies could also assist with your training and sensitization, as well as build trust with this community.

In addition, if an individual has come from a culture that has a history of being discriminated against, their community may have always been a haven from the cruelties of the outside world. To "come out" and risk the loss of the only safe place that they've known in their life would leave them exposed and vulnerable.

If your client is dealing with multiple discriminations, they may have even fewer resources to turn to. They could be lesbian, an individual of color, and handicapped/differently abled.

## **Ideas on How to Improve Accessibility**

- Having posters, pamphlets, etc. which invites lesbians to use your services (provide posters and pamphlets on same-sex abuse)
- Ongoing employee training (including support staff) and workshops on heterosexism, homophobia and diversity.
- Assess agency intake and assessment forms for inclusiveness.
- Provide books for children with same-sex parents (e.g. Heather has Two Mommies)
- Ensure it is safe for staff to be 'out' at work.
- Thinking about affirmative action plans to ensure diverse representation.
- Using inclusive language comfortably – it is important to remember to use the language the client is most comfortable with. She may not want to be labeled as lesbian or bisexual.
- Sensitize the Board of Directors on the need for accessible services for ALL people.
- Do not assume the abuser is a he – use gender-neutral language (e.g. partner, abuser, they, etc).

## Evaluating Your Service for Accessibility to Lesbians

0 – No or Unknown

1 – Kind of or Yes, But could use improvement

2 – Yes

**All written materials use inclusive language (no pronouns) and address the issue of abuse in lesbian relationships:**

- Mission Statement
- Philosophy Statement
- Brochures/Pamphlets
- Arrival & Departure Forms
- House Guidelines/Rules
- Crisis Line Record Forms
- Lesbian or “same sex” is an option when asking any questions about marital status, next of kin and/or family support on pertinent forms.

**Heterosexism is identified as oppression and a form of violence:**

- In the Philosophy Statement
- In the House Guidelines/Rules
- In the Personnel Policies
- In Training Manuals

**Resources & Physical Surroundings:**

- There are children’s books that reflect the lives of lesbians.
- There are books, videos, magazines, music that reflect the lives of lesbians.
- There is information, books, articles, videos, dealing with the issue of abuse in lesbian relationships and heterosexism.
- There are posters, pictures and art work that depict positive lesbian relationships (not just anti-bashing posters and AIDS posters).

**Services:**

- Welcome/orientation material for residents or clients clearly states the unacceptability of heterosexist behaviour, language, remarks, written material, or symbols and the consequences of engaging in such behavior.
- A process is established by which clients can specifically address heterosexist behaviour, language, written materials, symbols, and remarks directed at them by other clients, staff, volunteers, students and board members.
- Referral sources are available to lesbians that have been assessed for being lesbian positive and knowledgeable about abuse in lesbian relationships (lawyers, doctors, clinics, teachers, counsellors, clergy/spiritual support, daycare centres, etc.)
- Information on agency’s services is distributed so that it will reach lesbians.

**Staff, Board Members, Volunteers & Students:**

- The effects of heterosexism on lesbians are addressed in initial and ongoing orientation and training for staff, board, volunteers and students.
- A forum exists for heterosexual women to educate themselves around their own heterosexism and heterosexual privilege within the workplace.
- Advertised qualifications for job openings and board positions include a commitment to confront heterosexism on both a personal and organizational level.

- \_\_\_ Employment equity statements on job postings include sexual orientation.
- \_\_\_ Advertisements for job, volunteer and board positions are placed in publications, resource centres and agencies that will reach lesbians.
- \_\_\_ Interview process screens and prioritizes candidates for anti-heterosexual attitudes and beliefs.
- \_\_\_ Agency has a commitment to lesbian involvement at all levels of the organization.

**Personnel policies:**

- \_\_\_ Health/dental benefits are available for same-sex partners.
- \_\_\_ Compassionate and bereavement leaves allow for same-sex partners.
- \_\_\_ Sick days taken for children allow for children of same-sex partner.
- \_\_\_ Acts of heterosexism are grounds for disciplinary actions.
- \_\_\_ A process is established by which lesbian staff can address heterosexist behaviour, language, written materials, symbols and remarks directed at them by other staff, volunteers, students, clients, board members and outside sources.
- \_\_\_ Lesbian staff are assured that being 'out' to clients, community, staff, etc. is their right and will be respected regardless of the reaction of clients, staff & the community.

**Evaluations:**

- \_\_\_ Staff evaluations and supervisions include questions about or goals for heterosexist work.
- \_\_\_ Staff, students, volunteers, and board members are periodically asked to assess the agency's anti-heterosexist policies and practices.
- \_\_\_ A mechanism is in place to ensure continual input from clients to assess the agency's anti-heterosexist policies and practices.
- \_\_\_ Programs are periodically assessed based on input from workers, clients, and through lesbian community consultations to ensure accessibility to lesbians.

\_\_\_ **TOTAL POINTS**

**50-66 Congratulations, you probably have a lesbian positive service**

**26-49 You're getting there, keep up the work.**

**0-25 You are NOT accessible to lesbians.**

## Lesbian Domestic Violence Resources

- Balan, A., Chorney, R., & Ristock, J. (1995).** Training and education project for responding to abuse in lesbian relationships: Final report. Winnipeg: Coalition of Lesbians on Support and Education.
- Bonnycastle, K., & Rigakos, G. (Eds.). (1998).** Unsettling truths: Battered women, policy, politics and contemporary research. Vancouver: Collective Press.
- Davies, D., & Neal, C. (Eds.). (1996).** Pink Therapy: Guide for counsellors and therapists working with lesbian, gay and bisexual clients. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Elliot P. (1990).** Confronting lesbian battering: A manual for the battered women's movement. Minneapolis: Minnesota Coalition for Battered Women.
- Gershick, L. (2002).** Woman-to-Woman sexual violence: Does she call it rape? Boston: Northeastern University Press.
- Kaschak, E. (Ed.). (2001).** Intimate betrayal: Domestic violence in lesbian relationships. Binghamton: Haworth Press.
- Leventhal, B., & Lundy, S. (1999).** Same-sex domestic violence: Strategies for change. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- McClennen, J., & Gunther, J. (Eds.). (1999).** A professional's guide to understanding gay and lesbian domestic violence: Understanding practice interventions. Lewiston: Edwin Mellen.
- McKenney, C. (1998).** Working toward accessibility: Eliminating barriers to women with disabilities and lesbians. Ottawa: Ad hoc Committee of Accessibility and Lesbian Issues.
- Osier, M. (2001, October).** Lesbian battering dynamics: A new approach. Off our backs, 36-39.
- Poore, G. (Director). (1995).** Voices Heard, Sisters Unseen. [Video]. Shakti Productions.
- Renzetti, C., & Miley, C. (Eds.). (1996).** Violence in gay and lesbian domestic partnerships. Binghamton: Harrington Park Press.
- Ristock, J. (2002).** Responding to lesbian relationship violence: An ethical challenge. In L. Tutty & C. Goard (Eds.), Reclaiming self: Issues and resources for women abused by intimate partners. Halifax: Fernwood.
- White, E. (1994).** Chain chain change: For black women in abusive relationships. Seattle: Seal Press.
- Wingspan Domestic Violence Project. (1998).** Abuse and violence in same-gender relationships: A resource for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities. Tucson: Wingspan Domestic Violence Project.