



## TEN MYTHS REGARDING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SAME SEX RELATIONSHIPS

### **Myth # 1 Domestic Violence is more common in straight relationships than it is in lesbian or gay relationships.**

The Truth Is: Do not assume that gay men and lesbians are less violent than heterosexual men and women. Best estimates of same sex domestic violence according to research and statistics gathered from the Lesbian & Gay Community is that domestic violence in Gay & Lesbian relationships is approximately 25 – 32% (basically the same percentage as in the heterosexual community). About 1 in 4 lesbians and 1 in 4 gay men have experienced domestic violence in their same gender relationships.

### **Myth #2 It isn't really violence when a same sex couple fights. It is just a "lover's quarrel" between equals.**

The Truth Is: There is nothing equal or fair about domestic violence. Being thrown against a wall or enduring endless criticism from an angry lover does not entail fairness. Further, dismissing domestic violence as "just a lover's quarrel" trivializes the violence and gives tacit consent for it to continue. Just because the two people are the same gender, does not make it a fight between "equals" Many battered gays and lesbians fight back to defend themselves – it is a myth that same-sex battering is "mutual". There is almost always a primary aggressor.

### **Myth #3 The batterer will always be butch, bigger, stronger. The victim will always be femme, smaller, weaker.**

The Truth Is: This is simply not true. Size, weight, butch, femme, or any other physical attribute or role is not an indicator of whether or not a person will be a victim or a batterer. A person who is 5'2", prone to violence and very angry can do a lot of damage to someone who may be taller, heavier, stronger and non-violent. A batterer does not need to be 6'4 and built like a rugby player to smash your compact discs, hit you with a lamp, destroy your clothing, throw things or tell everyone in your workplace that you are "really a queer."

### **Myth #4 People who are abusive & under the influence of drugs or alcohol are not responsible for their actions.**

The Truth Is: Violence is a choice, and there are better choices. Every person is responsible for every action taken. Drugs and alcohol are excuses for battering. There is evidence to show that batterers who abuse drugs and alcohol are equally likely to batter while sober. If a person who batters is on drugs or alcohol, that person has two serious and very separate problems. Using drugs or alcohol does NOT relieve a person of responsibility for his/her own conduct.

### **Myth #5 The law does not and will not protect victims of lesbian and gay men's domestic violence.**

The Truth Is: It depends somewhat on where you live, but in the United States, heterosexuality is not a criterion for protection under the law. California State domestic violence laws protect LGBT individuals from being abused by their partner. LGBT victims can get restraining orders. Domestic violence is against the law for LGBT people, too!

**Myth #6 Lesbian and Gay domestic violence is sexual behavior—a version of S&M. The victims actually like it.**

The Truth Is: Domestic Violence is not sexual behavior. In S&M relationships, there is some contract or agreement about the limits or boundaries or the behavior, even when pain is involved. Domestic violence entails no such contract. Domestic violence is abuse, manipulation and control that is unwanted by the victim. Like victims of other crimes (including rape, mugging, terrorism harassment, assault and threats), victims of domestic violence do not enjoy the violence they experience. This myth is very pervasive in the gay and lesbian community as well as the general community. Domestic Violence cannot ever be dismissed as sexual behavior. There is no similarity whatsoever.

**Myth #7 Domestic violence occurs primarily among gay men and lesbians who hang out at bars, are poor, or people of color.**

The Truth Is: Domestic violence is a non-discriminatory phenomenon. Batterers come from all walks of life, all racial/ethnic groups, all socioeconomic strata, and all educational levels. The lgbt community includes members of every other minority and majority group (ethnic, religious, racial, socioeconomic, immigration status, etc) Domestic violence occurs proportionally across all groupings and categories of people. No group is exempt.

**Myth #8 Victims often provoke the violence done to them. They're getting what they "deserve."**

The Truth Is: This is absolutely untrue. Violent behavior is solely the responsibility of the violent person. Batterers choose violence; victims do not "provoke" it. This myth is common among both batterers and victims of domestic violence, and is probably a strong force that keeps the victims in abusive relationships.

**Myth #9 It is easier for lesbian or gay victims of domestic violence to leave abusive relationships than it is for heterosexual counterparts who are married. If it were really that bad, they would just leave.**

The Truth Is: Lesbian and gay couples are as intertwined and involved in each others' lives as are heterosexual couples. Due to the lack of societal support many lesbians & gay men are more "protective" of the relationship and less likely to leave despite the abuse. Leaving is often the hardest thing for a victim to accomplish—harder for instance than staying. Batterers threaten their victims with more violence (including threats of murder) if they leave. Threatening to leave may put the victim in more danger. Leaving also requires strength, self-confidence, self-reliance, and a healthy self esteem. Those qualities have been eroded by the abuse. Leaving a violent partner also mean leaving one's home, friends, children and community. A lesbian or gay man may be extremely isolated. Because there are no programs specific to helping LGBT DV victims it may be easier to stay in the abusive relationship.

**Myth #10 Lesbian and Gay domestic violence is the same as domestic violence between a man and a woman.**

The Truth Is: The dynamics of same gender relationships are not the same as in heterosexual relationships. The stresses of being without full legal protections and the lack of societal support for their relationships are added stresses for the lesbian or gay relationship. Therefore, lesbians and gay men will not respond to stress in their relationship the same way as heterosexual individuals do. Lesbian relationships and gay men's relationships will not look like nor respond to stress & abuse within the relationship the same way as heterosexual relationships.

Compiled by Amy Caffrey, LMFT from various sources updated 7/06

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