

Domestic Violence Between Same-Sex Partners: Implications for Counseling

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Over the past 2 decades, awareness and concern about the incidence and severity of domestic violence have increased. Although information about domestic violence has grown, much of the literature does not address domestic violence between same-sex partners. This article discusses the dynamics of domestic violence between partners of the same sex. The social and cultural issues in the gay and lesbian communities play a large part in perpetuating the myths of domestic violence, which keeps the abuse hidden. This article is based on an extensive review of the literature and a clinical consensus among experts in the field.

Domestic violence is a major social and health problem in the United States that affects the family, society, and the future. Between 2 and 4 million women in the U.S. are physically battered annually by their partners, and 25% to 30% of all U.S. women are at risk of domestic violence during their lifetime (American Medical Association [AMA], 1996; Kerker, Horwitz, Leventhal, Plichta, & Leaf, 2000). In 1992, the U.S. Surgeon General declared domestic violence this nation's number one health problem (AMA, 1992). Domestic violence is also prevalent in the gay and lesbian communities, occurring with the same or even greater frequency than in heterosexual communities (Barnes, 1998; Friess, 1997; Island & Letellier, 1991; Renzetti, 1992). The National Coalition Against Domestic Violence estimates that 25% to 33% of all same-sex relationships include domestic violence.

Domestic violence is the third largest health problem facing gay men today, second to substance abuse and AIDS (Island & Letellier, 1991; Oatley, 1994). In heterosexual couples, it is estimated that the man is the abuser in 95% of the cases (Dutton, 1995; Island & Letellier, 1991; Walker, 2000). Island and Letellier reported that gay men's domestic violence might occur at a rate greater than heterosexual violence because both partners in a homosexual relationship are men and each has the same probability of being an abuser. In addition, gay men are not less violent than straight men (Island & Letellier, 1991). According to W.O.M.E.N. Inc., a San Francisco organization serving battered women, domestic violence also occurs in one of four lesbian relationships (Barnes, 1998; Friess, 1997; Oatley, 1994). For example, 50% of lesbians polled at the 1985 Michigan women's music festival said that they had been a victim of domestic violence by a female partner (Oatley, 1994). Fifty percent of those

surveyed also said they had been the abuser in a same-sex relationship. Lesbians have worked in domestic violence shelters as counselors and volunteers and have played an active role in the battered women's movement since it began (Akpodiete, 1993). They have fought against men's violent behavior against women. However, some researchers (Chung, 1995; Island & Letellier, 1991) suggested that the lesbian community chooses to believe that women are not abusive or violent. The idea of a lesbian being an abuser is considered impossible, and therefore domestic violence is largely ignored or kept quiet in the lesbian community (Friess, 1997; Island & Letellier, 1991; King, 1993; Nolan, 2000).

Besides being ignored in the gay and lesbian communities themselves, domestic violence between same-sex partners is a subject that has been largely avoided by governments, law enforcement, and society. Gay men and lesbians are less likely to report the abuse and more likely to stay with their partner because of homophobia, heterosexism, and ignorance in the community regarding domestic violence as well as homosexuality (Island & Letellier, 1991). Furthermore, some gay men and lesbians have internalized society's prejudices against them and believe they deserve to be violated (Island & Letellier, 1991; Nolan, 2000).

Although books and magazine articles regarding same-sex domestic violence issues started appearing in the late 1980s, adequate support groups, shelters, and treatment programs for this population are still not in place (Oatley, 1994). For example, as of 1997, no shelters existed for gay men, although in some cities battered men can obtain hotel vouchers from domestic violence centers (Friess, 1997; King, 1993; Oatley, 1994). Friess indicated that many support groups would not allow gay men to attend because some people believe it creates a volatile situation among men already prone to violence.

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Akpodiete (1993) and Lobel (1986) further suggested that even when lesbians go to domestic violence shelters, they are discriminated against just because the word *lesbian* produces fear in others. Depending on the degree of homophobia present within an agency, services, intake procedures, forms, and personnel in abuse shelters may be discriminatory toward gay men and lesbians.

DEFINITIONS

Domestic violence is a pattern of violent and coercive behaviors whereby one attempts to control the thoughts, beliefs, or behaviors of an intimate partner or to punish the partner for resisting one's control (Ashcraft, 2000; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Lobel, 1986). This control over another person is gained through fear and intimidation (Robertson, 1999; Walker, 2000). The Domestic Violence Legal Definition (1995) is "any assault, battery, sexual assault, sexual battery, or any criminal offense resulting in physical injury or death of one family or household member by another who is or was residing in the same single dwelling unit" (Title XLIII, Chapter 741, Statute 741.28). Dutton (1995) has argued that domestic violence is a learned behavior including any action or words that hurt another person. This is achieved by the use of threats; force; and physical, sexual, emotional, economic, and verbal abuse (Ashcraft, 2000; Davis, 1988; Liddle, 1989).

TYPES OF ABUSE

Renzetti (1992) conducted a groundbreaking nationwide study on lesbian battering using 100 female participants who identified themselves as victims of lesbian battering. According to Renzetti, there are three types of abusive lesbian relationships: situational battering, chronic battering, and emotional or psychological battering. *Situational battering* occurs once or twice as a result of some situational event and is the least common. *Chronic battering* is when physical abuse has occurred more than two times and escalates over time. The *emotional battering* relationship is one in which the abuse is verbal or psychological rather than physical. Many times a relationship consists of physical and psychological battering. In Renzetti's study, 87% of the women reported both physical and psychological abuse; however, psychological abuse was more frequent. Most forms of physical and psychological abuse in lesbian relationships are similar to those in heterosexual relationships (Barnes, 1998). Table 1 summarizes some common abusive behaviors. However, in same-sex relationships, abusers may also threaten to expose their partner's sexual preference to their friends, family, community, church, or employer (Chung, 1995; Island & Letellier, 1991; Renzetti, 1992). This is even more of a problem for bisexuals, who run the risk of being unwillingly exposed to both the heterosexual and the homosexual communities.

Physical Abuse

An abuser uses not only physical abuse but also emotional, sexual, and/or economic abuse, as well as other behaviors that assert control and power (Ashcraft, 2000; Fine, 1989;

TABLE 1
Types of Abuse and Behaviors

Type of Abuse	Behaviors
Physical abuse	Punching, shoving, slapping, biting, kicking, using a weapon against partner, throwing items, breaking items, pulling hair, restraining partner
Emotional/verbal abuse	Putting partner down, calling names, criticizing, playing mind games, humiliating partner, making partner feel guilty, reinforcing internalized homophobia
Financial dependency	Keeping partner from getting a job, getting partner fired from job, making partner ask for money or taking partner's money, expecting partner to support them
Social isolation	Controlling who partner sees and talks to and where partner goes, limiting partner's involvement in gay and lesbian community
Sexual abuse	Forcing partner to perform sexual acts that are uncomfortable to him or her, engaging in affairs, telling partner he or she asked for the abuse (in S&M relationship), telling partner what to wear, accusing partner of affairs, criticizing sexual performance, withholding affection
Minimizing/denying	Making light of abuse, saying abuse did not happen, saying the abuse was mutual, blaming partner for abuse
Coercion/threats/intimidation	Making partner afraid by looks or gestures; destroying property; hurting pets; displaying weapons; threatening to leave, take children, or commit suicide; threatening to reveal homosexuality to community, employer, family, or ex-spouse

Note. S&M = sadomasochism.

Hegde, 1996; Schechter, 1982; Walker, 2000). Physical abuse occurs when one threatens, hits, kicks, chokes, scratches, pushes, shoves, pulls hair, slaps, punches, throws something, or uses a weapon against another. Walker cited other examples of physical abuse, which include refusing to help someone who is injured or sick, restraining another or preventing them from leaving, abandoning someone in a dangerous place, and locking someone out of his or her home.

Emotional and Verbal Abuse

Emotional abuse occurs when one ridicules, insults, blames, humiliates, criticizes, and ignores another purposefully. Other examples of emotional abuse, according to Walker (2000), include withholding approval or affection, threatening to leave or harm someone or their children, interrupting sleep, manipulating with lies, and continually finding fault with another. Another example is the abuser who uses his or her culture or race to intimidate, hurt, and manipulate by using racial slurs or putting down the other's culture or beliefs (Chung, 1995). Along with emotional abuse, verbal abuse is also part of domestic violence (Ashcraft, 2000; Davis, 1988; Liddle, 1989; Walker, 2000). Verbal abuse occurs when the abuser says blatantly hurtful things, criticizes, calls his or her partner names, or constantly puts a partner down (Ashcraft, 2000). For example, victims are often told that

they are incompetent, ugly, useless, or stupid (Dutton, 1995). Victims believe this and therefore do not have the self-esteem and confidence to leave or to pursue financial independence.

Financial Abuse

According to Dutton (1995), abusers may try to keep their victims financially dependent on them. The victims may be kept in debt, at home, or in a low-paying job. Also, abusers usually control the money and resources and keep everything in their name. Abusers may make the partner ask for money and demand that they account for every penny. Many victims do not have the job skills to support themselves and any children they may have, or they may have a disability. In sum, many victims believe that they must rely totally on the batterer to survive.

Social Isolation

As well as keeping their partners financially dependent, abusers may keep their partners socially isolated (Ashcraft, 2000; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Abusers exhibit traits of jealousy and possessiveness and attempt to control their partner's associates and friends. The abuser's goal is to keep his or her partner socially isolated (Ashcraft, 2000; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Renzetti, 1992). Victims are interrogated about their daily routines including where they have been, with whom they have been, and why they went to a certain place. Abusers may try to prevent their partner from interacting with family and friends or from having a job. To make sure their partner remains isolated, abusers may also monitor phone calls and deny access to a car. In addition, they may try to move their partner away from familiar surroundings and people to make them more vulnerable. It is easier for abusers to isolate their same-sex partner because of the homophobic society in which gay men and lesbians live (Chung, 1995; Nolan, 2000; Renzetti, 1992). Isolation is even more severe for minority victims who are already part of a smaller community. Chung held that the abuser may tell the victim that society in general will not believe him or her, will not help him or her, and will always hate him or her. This type of abuse works because the victim feels isolated and, therefore, dependent on the batterer.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse frequently occurs in relationships in which other forms of abuse are also present (Ferris, Norton, Dunn, Gort, & Degani, 1997). Sexual abuse is also a form of domestic violence (Walker, 2000). Sex is used as a means of manipulation and gaining power. Walker listed many behaviors of sexual abuse: raping, exhibiting jealousy, accusing the partner of affairs, treating the partner as a sex object, withholding sex, using sexual names, having affairs, and coercing the partner sexually.

THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

Lenore Walker (2000) developed the Cycle of Violence model in the late 1970s. It describes a succession of moods and

behaviors that are usually experienced in an abusive relationship. The Cycle of Violence has three phases that vary in both time and intensity. In Phase 1, the *tension building stage*, minor battering, including verbal and emotional abuse, occurs. This phase can last for days, weeks, or months. Partners try to calm batterers through nurturing, compliance, attempting to relieve their stress, or staying out of the way. Victims also believe that they can help their battering partners overcome their anger and do so by trying not to antagonize or provoke the batterer. Renzetti's (1992) study showed that abused lesbians often allowed their partners to make more decisions in an effort to please them and prevent further abuse. Therefore, the victim takes on the responsibility for the abuse. Any withdrawal on the part of the victim results in the batterer remaining oppressively close. The tension becomes unbearable and once started, nothing the victim can do will stop the abuse from occurring (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998).

The result is Phase 2, the *acute battering incident*, which is usually brief but can result in serious physical and psychological harm. The batterer is aware that the abusive behavior is inappropriate and thus it is not likely to occur in public. After a violent incident occurs, victims are shaken, nervous, afraid, disoriented, dazed, and shocked that their partner is capable of hurting them. Both partners tend to rationalize and minimize the incident of abuse (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Many victims believe the violence is a one-time mistake, tend to forgive the perpetrators, and fail to label it abuse. During this time, victims are unable to make decisions to report the abuse, to leave their partner, or to take legal action. When victims feel helpless and hopeless that their situation will never change, they feel trapped and will stop trying to break the cycle of domestic violence (Island & Letellier, 1991; Walker, 2000).

Phase 3 is the *honeymoon phase*, which brings peaceful, loving, and kind behavior. Batterers usually beg for forgiveness, profess their love, and promise to never abuse their partner again. This is the period of time when a victim is most likely to leave. However, batterers begin to use guilt to keep the victim in the relationship and convince the victim that something awful will happen if the victim leaves, such as threatening to commit suicide (Walker, 2000). The victimization is then complete as the victim remains in the relationship and finds that the kind, loving behavior gives way to more verbal and emotional abuse and a new cycle of violence begins.

TRAITS OF BATTERERS

Domestic violence is not about strength; it is a pattern of behaviors designed to control another (Robertson, 1999; Walker, 2000). Consequently, women as well as men are capable of physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and economic abuse and other controlling behaviors. There is no profile of a "typical" batterer. In other words, all batterers will not exhibit the same behavior or the same thought patterns. However, they usually believe the following: They are en-

titled to control their partner, violence is permissible, violence will produce the desired effect, violence will not unduly endanger them (Huss & Langhinrichsen-Rohling, 2000; Lobel, 1986). Batterers want or need to have power and control over their partner; therefore, they will resort to intimidation, threats, coercion, and violence to obtain this power (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Some research reveals that abusers are more likely to have been victimized or to have witnessed domestic violence as children; still, half of the abusers grew up in nonviolent homes (Dutton, 1995; Renzetti, 1992).

According to Gondolf (1992), there are three types of batterers. The first type, the *typical batterer*, usually has no diagnosable mental illness or personality disorder, is no more likely than anyone else to have substance abuse issues, is not violent to people outside the family, and has no criminal record. *Sociopathic batterers* view violence as an acceptable way of dealing with problems, may have a diagnosable personality disorder, and are likely to have a problem with substance abuse (Gondolf, 1992). However, they are unlikely to have a criminal record because they do not "get caught" very often. Their violence is likely to be more severe than that of the "typical batterer," and they will more likely use weapons or severely injure their victims. The sociopathic batterer is not apologetic, often threatens to kill the victim or do more violence, and has a tendency to make sexual demands after violence. The batterers may justify the violence with religious beliefs and use power and control in many areas of their lives (Gondolf, 1992). *Antisocial batterers* usually have diagnosable mental illnesses or personality disorders, substance abuse problems, and criminal records (Gondolf, 1992). Their violence is far more severe and frequent than that of other batterers. As a result, they are more likely to get caught and to have a criminal record.

Abusers come from every social, economic, ethnic, professional, educational, and religious group (Selinger, 1996). Most abusers do not have criminal records and are almost never violent with anyone except their partner (Dutton, 1995; Robertson, 1999). To those outside the relationship, abusers usually appear to be decent human beings, attentive partners/lovers, and law-abiding citizens. Nevertheless, they usually have a dualistic personality referred to as a Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde personality and are manipulative, unpredictable, possessive, jealous, unrealistic, and controlling (Dutton, 1995; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Although abusers seek power and control, feelings of powerlessness might be present (Robertson, 1999; Robinson, 1999); thus, self-esteem issues can play a part in the behavior and thoughts of abusers (Dutton, 1995; Robertson, 1999). Abusers frequently believe everyone else is to blame for their problems, which can result in refusal to admit that they are the problem. When abusers fear abandonment, separation, or imagined infidelity by their partner, they resort to violence, intimidation, or manipulation instead of looking for another solution to the problem (Dutton, 1995; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Robertson, 1999). Also, according to Lobel (1986), some gay men and lesbians in same-sex relationships strive to

obtain control over their partner due to their feelings of self-hatred and victimization by the homophobic world.

TRAITS OF VICTIMS

Like the abusers, victims who are battered come from all walks of life. Although there is no psychological profile of those who will be battered, there are common characteristics of victims once they have been abused. All victims of domestic violence experience shame, embarrassment, isolation, and repressed feelings (Akpodiete, 1993; Walker, 2000). Neisen (1993) wrote that similar traits are seen in those suffering from heterosexism and in victims of domestic violence. Therefore, gay and lesbian victims of domestic violence may be suffering from victimization by society as well as their partner. A number of researchers have found a high correlation between a history of family violence and the potential to become a victim of domestic violence (Lobel, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Walker, 2000). However, Renzetti's study of lesbian victims did not show a high incidence of abuse in their family of origin. Victims of domestic violence are from every ethnic, religious, economic, professional, educational, and social background and are of varying ages (Selinger, 1996).

WHY THEY STAY

Both abusers and their partners can be extremely dependent on each other as a result of negative self-images (Dutton, 1995; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Renzetti's (1992) study showed that when an abusive lesbian becomes more dependent on the victim and the victim becomes more autonomous, the abuse increases. The fear of more abuse keeps victims isolated and prevents them from telling anyone about the abuse they have endured (Island & Letellier, 1991; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998). Also, many persons who are gay or lesbian do not want anyone to know of the abuse for they fear society thinking that the homosexual community is "sick," "violent," or "uncontrollable" (Lobel, 1986; Oatley, 1994).

Therefore, gay women usually only receive emotional support from the lesbian community (Lobel, 1986; Oatley, 1994). Because many lesbian couples share close friends, a victim may be in a dilemma regarding the choice or availability of those she is able to confide in. She must choose between embarrassing and alienating her partner and the risk of abandonment by her friends if they take her partner's side. Also, after a battering incident, the batterer frequently is the sole source of support and comfort for the victim due to isolation. When victims have been isolated, they feel that they have no control over their life (Walker, 2000). This perpetuates the cycle of abuse as they move into the honeymoon phase in which the abuser is remorseful, apologetic, and affectionate (Walker, 2000).

Other reasons named by lesbians and gay men that keep them in an abusive relationship are similar to those that heterosexual women give for staying in such a situation (Lobel, 1986). Victims stay with their abusive partners because of fear, love, hope, pride, embarrassment, loyalty, financial dependence,

low self-esteem, religious beliefs, children, and ignorance (Ferris et al., 1997; Island & Letellier, 1991; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). In Renzetti's (1992) study of lesbian victims, love is the primary reason they stay in the relationship, combined with the hope that their partner will change. In addition, homosexual victims do not want their partners arrested for the same reasons given by heterosexual victims. The arrest can lead to embarrassment, financial loss, retaliation, and homophobic abusive treatment by the police, the judicial system, and the press.

Most important, victims stay because they fear retaliation by an angry and humiliated partner. There is genuine fear of worse physical violence or death if one leaves, calls the police, or gets a restraining order (Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Lobel, 1986). Research reveals that violence usually escalates after a separation or the threat of a separation (Island & Letellier, 1991; Jacobson & Gottman, 1998; Walker, 2000). Consequently, victims are usually worried about their health and well-being because they are very aware that danger will likely increase if they attempt to leave (Shea, Mahoney, & Lacey, 1997; Walker, 2000).

Some victims do not know where to find help. According to Renzetti (1992), lesbians seek help from friends, counselors, relatives, police, a religious advisor, and a hotline or shelter in that order. Only one third of the participants in Renzetti's study sought help from their family members. Many indicated that family members did not know of their sexual preference or they disapproved of their lifestyle and/or partner. In addition, some victims are not able to seek help from family and friends who fear getting involved or believe they should stay out of the situation (Walker, 2000). In some cases, family and friends fear the abuser themselves. In fact, abusers regularly track down their partners at the home of family and friends and at their place of employment and continue to assault them. Some lesbian abusers will present themselves as a victim to a shelter or support group in hopes of finding their partners (Leventhal, 1999). Also, these abusers may contact the program before the partner does in order to prevent them from obtaining services. Gay men have fewer resources available because there are very few domestic violence shelters that accept male victims, although some shelters will offer them hotel vouchers (Friess, 1997).

THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE IN SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

Homophobia and Heterosexism

Heterosexism is the belief that it is more natural or normal in society to be heterosexual. Heterosexism is a social disease, which is pervasive throughout the family, media, and much of society, including professionals to whom gays and lesbians would turn for help (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997; G. Griffin, 1998). Heterosexism leads to homophobia, which is an emotional reaction of fear, disgust, anger, discomfort, and aversion to homosexuals (Berkman & Zinberg, 1997). Due to a homophobic society, the homosexual community tends to feel responsible for protecting one another because they may have been cut off from family, friends, and church

as a result of their sexual preference (Island & Letellier, 1991). Therefore, they may choose to protect their partner and actually refuse help from anyone (Akpodiete, 1993). In addition, domestic violence is sometimes a shared secret between just the victim and the abuser who are bound together by shame, guilt, and a desire to keep the violence a secret. Also, if a lesbian reports her partner's abuse, she may be accused of being a traitor to lesbianism or feminism (Oatley, 1994). As a result, both partners tend to deny or minimize the scope and severity of the violence in their relationship (Dutton, 1995; King, 1993).

Mutual Battering

It is a myth that same-sex domestic violence is associated with mutual battering or mutual abuse. Mutual battering is the idea that each partner is both a perpetrator and a victim of abuse (Renzetti, 1992). This concept actually minimizes the violence in same-sex relationships (Lobel, 1986). One major difference between women who are battered by women and women who are battered by men is that lesbian women report fighting back more often (Lobel, 1986). However, there are differences among using violence in self-defense, retaliating against a violent partner, and initiating violence. Lobel wrote that lesbians might fight back more because self-defense courses are more widespread in the feminist/lesbian community. In addition to self-defense, fighting back is usually a result of built-up rage from past abuse. The person who is the abuser in a same-sex relationship may be the physically stronger one; however, if he or she is the weaker one, he or she uses other tactics to control, intimidate, and coerce his or her partner. Also, same-sex partners can more easily fight back because their physical size tends to be closer to that of their partners' size. However, when victims fight back, they usually feel guilty for their own behavior or are told they are also abusive. Such feedback may prevent them from seeking help or reporting future incidents of abuse.

Elder Homosexuals

The incidence of abuse among the elder population is on the rise. According to the Administration on Aging (2000) fact sheet, hundreds of thousands of older persons are abused, neglected, and exploited by family members and others each year. Due to underreporting of abuse, the exact incidence of elder abuse is unknown; however, reports of domestic elder abuse to adult protective services increased 150% between 1986 and 1996. As the general population of older Americans continues to grow, it is estimated that the prevalence of elder abuse will also continue to increase.

Issues of abuse among the older population of gay men and lesbians have gained attention in the recent past (Civic Research Institute, 1999). In fact, the featured theme of a 1999 conference sponsored by Senior Action in Gay Environment was elder abuse among those in the gay community. There are several factors that may contribute to the growth of domestic violence among older gay men and lesbians. First, in order to survive in a homophobic society, many older gay

men and lesbians have become very independent, contributing to increased isolation and vulnerability in old age. Second, many gay men and lesbians may believe it is too risky to open their personal lives up to a society that has been hostile and judgmental in the past. As a result, they fear reaching out for help from domestic violence centers, law enforcement, or court personnel. Third, many who have been in long-term, same-sex relationships may have assets tied up in joint accounts, such as homes, retirement funds, savings, and so on (Chung, 1995). Should one partner desire to leave the relationship, there may be limited and questionable legal recourse available in most states resulting in a situation that could have a significant negative impact on one's financial stability in old age. To avoid a potentially difficult and costly legal case, as well as the threat of financial instability, the older homosexual may remain in an abusive relationship. Fourth, older homosexuals also may be at a greater risk for becoming or remaining victims of domestic violence due to the fear that because of their age and their isolation, they may be unable to find other partners.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELORS

Counselors should assume that domestic violence victims seeking help are basically healthy people who need understanding, information, support, and advocacy. Being abused, in itself, does not indicate a need for therapy. Also, counselors need to be aware that domestic violence issues between same-sex partners may differ from issues in heterosexual relationships. It is imperative that counselors understand that domestic violence occurs at all social class levels, at all educational levels, and in all cultural backgrounds. Also, when counseling domestic violence victims, the counselor must be nonjudgmental and be aware that the individual might choose to return to a battering relationship.

Many victims of domestic violence have learned to be very secretive and guarded about their feelings due to embarrassment, shame, fear, or the desire to protect their family and, thus, may not communicate openly with a counselor. A patient, empathetic, understanding counselor will be more effective in helping these clients overcome their reluctance to disclose. According to Ferris et al. (1997), clients must admit to the abuse, understand that it is unacceptable, and confide in another person before they are able to receive help. Therefore, in promoting self-disclosure, the counselor should ask about the client's past history of family relationships and ask opened-ended questions about current relationships to give the client the opportunity to admit to the abuse. The counselor's questions should be direct, nonjudgmental, and nonintimidating and should be asked in a way that assures the client of the counselor's sensitivity and support. Active listening techniques such as clarifying, reflecting, and paraphrasing can be used to demonstrate such sensitivity and support (Corey, 1996; Thompson & Rudolph, 1996). Through the effective use of these techniques, counselors can communicate to clients that they have value and worth, which can be therapeutic in itself.

Domestic violence victims tend to have difficulty focusing on their feelings because they have had to use all of their energy trying to understand their partner, prevent the violence, and survive. In addition, victims of domestic violence are dealing with repressed feelings such as guilt, helplessness, dependency, and isolation. Over time, victims are not able to react to their feelings as they become immobilized by their fears. With domestic violence victims, both person-centered and Gestalt therapy work well because each approach encourages the counselor to allow the client to direct the session, thereby allowing the client to begin learning how to effectively direct his or her life.

Because victims of domestic violence have been battered in their homes, their sense of physical protection has been eroded, causing them to feel threatened, unsafe, and vulnerable. Consequently, developing a trusting relationship is of paramount importance. Unconditional positive regard, genuineness, and empathy are counselor characteristics that lend themselves to establishing a trusting relationship. As the counselor listens and demonstrates care and concern, clients may begin to feel safe, less vulnerable, and will begin to disclose their feelings. Ferris et al. (1997) reported that anger might be the first feeling expressed. When this occurs, the counselor should encourage clients to accept the anger, to acknowledge that they have a right to feel angry, and to realize that anger can be a catalyst for change (Ferris et al., 1997).

The responsibility for solving the problem and finding alternative solutions should rest principally with the client. When clients solve their own problems, they tend to be much more confident and satisfied with the solutions. In addition, they are better equipped to get out of a similar situation the next time it occurs. Counselors should not accept the responsibility to save their clients but rather should attempt to empower them by providing the necessary resources to promote independence. If a dependent relationship is established, clients will once again feel inferior and powerless and will be stripped of their autonomy. Walker (2000) stated that the victimization process to which battered persons have been subjected robs them of their personal power. They feel inadequate and unable to make decisions, due to isolation, and must regain their personal power and take back control of their own life. Therefore, the need for empowerment and independence cannot be overstated. A competent counselor will provide support and skills to these persons without holding power or authority over them.

Counselors must be prepared to provide crisis intervention to victims of domestic violence. It is important to help the victim assess the level of danger that exists within the relationship. In conducting a danger assessment, The Center Against Spouse Abuse (CASA, 2000) recommended considering the following indicators for danger: (a) abuser's ownership of the partner, (b) threats of homicide or suicide, (c) fantasies of homicide or suicide, (d) obsessiveness about partner or family, (e) life focused on the partner, (f) mental health problems, (g) the use of weapons, (h) drugs and alcohol consumption, (i) pet abuse, and (j) prior criminal history. The number of indicators observed and the intensity

of the indicators can be used to estimate the likelihood of an attack. Assessing the level of danger within the relationship should be an ongoing process.

Second, the establishment of a safety plan is a key component of crisis intervention. According to CASA (2000), two decisions must be considered in developing a safety plan: the decision to stay or to leave. If the decision is to stay, the following suggestions are offered: (a) identify a safe place in the home, being careful to avoid rooms without exits (bathrooms) or rooms with weapons (kitchen); (b) remember that the abuser may be able to trace incoming and outgoing phone calls through phone redial, caller ID, and numerous other codes; (c) develop a support system through trusted family members, friends, and coworkers; (d) call the police if there is danger; and (e) consider preparing "an emergency bag" that will allow for quick escape if the situation escalates. The emergency bag should include spare keys, extra money, copies of important papers (birth certificates, Social Security cards, driver's license, medications, and important phone numbers, including that of a local shelter when possible), and a change of clothing (CASA, 2000). However, should the victim choose to leave, he or she should (a) bear in mind that the decision to leave may increase the danger level of an abusive situation; (b) call the police if there is danger; (c) plan ahead and gather information regarding shelters, available legal protection, and type of assistance from other agencies; (d) prepare an emergency bag; and (e) begin to vary any routines regarding work, school, shopping, and so on, keeping in mind that the abuser may be looking for them.

According to Corey (1996), when people are in a crisis, they need a caring person, not someone who will placate them and tell them "everything will be all right" (p. 209). They should be given an opportunity to express themselves and should feel heard and understood. Respect, genuineness, and support from the counselor can be extremely beneficial during a crisis situation.

THE ROLE OF SUBSTANCE ABUSE

There is a need to dispel the myth that drinking, drugs, and stress cause a person to batter. The fact remains that many people under the influence of drugs and alcohol do not batter, and most people deal with stress without resorting to abuse (Walker, 2000). Although some batterers have a substance abuse disorder, most professionals recognize that alcohol or drugs are not the cause of domestic violence (Bennett, 1995; Dakis, 1995; Walker, 2000). Bennett suggested that if drugs and alcohol cause or affect battering, they do so either directly by disinhibiting normal sanctions against violence or indirectly by affecting changes in thinking, physiology, emotion, motivation to reduce tension, or motivation to increase personal power. Furthermore, research has shown that most episodes of violence do not involve alcohol or drug use by batterers or victims (Bennett, 1995). In some instances, however, the abuser, and sometimes the victim, may excuse the violence if it was done under the

influence of alcohol or drugs. Consequently, it may be said that substance abuse can make battering justifiable for the perpetrator.

It is important to note that gay men and lesbians are at a higher risk for substance abuse for the following reasons. First, the homophobia, alienation, and isolation of gay men and lesbians may contribute to their alcohol and drug consumption. Second, people tend to consume substances when they have experienced depression and loss or have become isolated from society. Third, much of their time may be spent in bars or other social situations where drinking is a focal point (Renzetti, 1992).

LEGAL ISSUES

Social services and legal systems that are designed for heterosexual couples are difficult for homosexual couples to use and access (Barnes, 1998; Oatley, 1994). Law enforcement, judges, and social workers can often be unsympathetic or even downright rude. Law enforcement officers often do not follow domestic violence procedures when same-sex partners are involved (Oatley, 1994). For example, these officers mistakenly believe that the physically larger partner is always the abusive one. As a result, it is not uncommon for police to arrest both partners or to arrest the wrong partner (Civic Research Institute, 1999; Friess, 1997). Also, if the violence involves two women, law enforcement officers may not see the severity of the situation and fail to make an arrest.

In addition, when victims try to obtain a restraining order against their partner, they may find that their state will not grant one (King, 1993). M. Griffin (1995) reported that of 48 states, 11 states did not have any provisions for same-sex, nonrelated cohabitants to obtain a restraining order against their abusive partner. Three of these states may allow a restraining order to be issued, but usually only if there are children present in the home. The other 34 states had laws that recognized same-sex relationships and are intended to promote treatment similar to that afforded heterosexual relationships in regard to domestic violence. However, courts typically do not treat same-sex domestic violence offenders as they do heterosexual offenders. For example, if the state does not press domestic violence charges against perpetrators, they can bail out more easily. In addition, judges usually do not issue "no contact" orders as a condition of release, but tend to give the perpetrator lesser penalties and seldom order them to attend counseling like other domestic violence offenders. Consequently, domestic violence victims of same-sex relationships are not equally protected in our society.

CONCLUSION

Despite the similarities, a number of differences compound the severity of domestic violence experienced by gay men and lesbians. Any person, male or female or gay or straight, has the potential to be an abuser. Regardless of whether or not the abuse is among heterosexual or same-sex partners, society has always been hesitant to intervene in domestic violence. Society and the gay and lesbian communities must

put an end to denial of abuse in same-sex relationships. Society's denial and the victims' silence due to shame, isolation, embarrassment, and fear have prevented victims from leaving abusive relationships and perpetrators from receiving help. In addition, society's ignorance of the needs of gay men and lesbian women, as proven by the lack of services available to help them, allows the abuse to continue. With acceptance, awareness, and education, domestic violence can be suppressed in all of society's populations.

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