

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT SAME-SEX DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Adapted from: National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation Conference, July 1990

- Abuse/battering that occurs in same-sex relationships is usually mutual.
 - ☑ FACT: True “mutual battering” is rare. A consensual “fight” is not going on. A cycle of violence that includes control and domination by one of the partners is occurring. Many victims will attempt to defend themselves by fighting back.
- Only heterosexual women get battered. Men are never victims of domestic violence.
 - ☑ FACT: Men can be victims, and women can batter. Stereotypes about gender and sexual orientation are repudiated by the fact that gay men are victims, and lesbians are batterers at roughly the same rate as heterosexuals are.
- Women do not abuse; lesbian relationships are egalitarian. When women fight, they are not violent.
 - ☑ FACT: Abuse is about power and control, and all relationships are affected by issues of power. Even though two partners may be the same sex, differences in power can come from differences in financial earning power or other factors. Anger and violent behavior are not restricted to one sex.
- Domestic violence is less common in same-sex relationships.
 - ☑ FACT: Gay men are victims and lesbians are batterers at roughly the same rate as heterosexuals are.
- It isn't really violence when a same-sex couple fights. It is just a lover's quarrel and a fair fight between equals.
 - ☑ FACT: There is nothing fair about domestic violence. This myth draws on the inability or unwillingness of many people to look at violence between two people of the same gender, particularly men, as a violent situation where one person is clearly a victim.
- It isn't really violence at all when gay men fight; it's just boys being boys.
 - ☑ FACT: The commonly held belief that it is acceptable and normal for men to be violent is false. There is nothing normal about domestic violence. This is much more than “boys being boys.” It is abuse. Unfortunately, with few positive relationship role models available, many same-gender couples view and accept violence by their partners as normal.
- The batterer will always be butch, bigger and stronger. The victim will always be femme, smaller and weaker.
 - ☑ FACT: Size, weight, butchness, queeniness, or any other physical attribute or role are not good indicators of whether or not a man will be a victim or a batterer. This myth focuses only on the physical aspects of domestic violence. A batterer does not need to be built like a linebacker to smash your compact disks, cut up all your clothing, or threaten to tell everyone at work that you are really a queer. Violence is a matter of personal choice, not body size.
- People who are abusive under the influence of drugs or alcohol are not responsible for their actions.
 - ☑ FACT: Abusers use drinking as one of the many excuses for violence, and as a way of putting responsibility for their behavior elsewhere. Stopping the drinking will not end the abuse. Both problems must be addressed. Many people under stress do not batter or abuse. Perpetrators who are stressed at work do not assault their bosses or co-workers. Victims are usually abused in private.
- Lesbian and gay domestic violence is sexual behavior, a version of sadomasochism. The victims actually like it.
 - ☑ FACT: Relationship violence is not sexual behavior. In consensual S & M, any violence, coercion, or domination occurs within the context of a contract or agreement within which there is trust and/or an agreement between parties about the limits and boundaries of behavior. In contrast, domestic violence takes place without any mutual trust or agreement, and is not consensual or pleasurable for the victim. Relationship violence involves no such contract. Relationship violence is abuse, manipulation and control that are unwanted by the victim.

- Lesbian and gay male victims exaggerate the violence that happens to them. If it were really that bad, they could and would just leave.
 - ☑ **FACT:** Most victims actually minimize the violence that happens to them because of the guilt, shame, and self-blame attached to victimization, and because others do not believe them or refuse to listen. Leaving is often the hardest thing for a victim to accomplish, and is commonly harder than staying. Batterers may threaten their victims with more violence (including murder threats) if they leave. In general, incidents of domestic violence have been found to increase in severity when a victim leaves. Leaving an abusive situation requires resources such as money, housing, transportation, and support structures, all of which may have been eroded by life with an abuser.
- It is easier for lesbian or gay victims of domestic violence to leave the abuser than it is for heterosexual battered women.
 - ☑ **FACT:** This myth is perpetuated by cultural homophobia which invalidates LGBT relationships as less significant than opposite-sex relationships. Same-gender couples are as intertwined and involved in each other's lives as are heterosexual couples. It may be harder for those in LGBT relationships to leave if they have less of a supportive network, if social service agencies and police are not prepared to serve them, if they are closeted and cut off from family or other sources of support. The false assumption that LGBT people do not have children also affects the stereotype that it is easier for LGBT people to leave.
- Domestic violence primarily occurs among gay men and lesbians who hang out at bars, are poor or are people of color.
 - ☑ **FACT:** Domestic violence is a non-discriminatory phenomenon; victims as well as violent and abusive offenders come from all walks of life, ethnic backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, and educational levels. Racist and classist stereotypes around domestic violence are common not just in the LGBT community, but also in the dominant heterosexual culture.
- Victims often provoke the violence done to them. They are getting what they deserve.
 - ☑ **FACT:** Batterers often manipulate victims to believe this myth. It perpetuates the false idea that victims are responsible for the violence done to them, that victims cause batterers to be violent. This common kind of "victim-blaming" is powerfully destructive for survivors. In reality, whatever the situation that precedes abusive behavior, there is always an alternative, non-violent way of responding. Batterers choose violence; victims do not 'provoke it.' Abuse is the sole responsibility of the violent person.
- Only men can commit rape.
 - ☑ **FACT:** Many people do not want to believe or are unaware that same-sex rape happens. If it is acknowledged, often it is thought to be "not as bad" as male-female" rape. Even lesbians and bisexual women do not want to believe they could hurt each other. Because many people define rape as penetration by a penis, woman to woman rape is not acknowledged or taken seriously. But in fact, it is estimated that 1 out of 3 lesbians have been sexually assaulted by another woman.

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