

In the LGBT Community

The general public's bias against members of the LGBT community provides some unique opportunities for abusers to assert power and control over their partners. Domestic violence in the LGBT community is unique because:

- ▶ Victims often believe that in order to use existing services (such as a shelter, attending support groups or calling a crisis line) they must lie or hide the gender of the batterer to be perceived (and thus accepted) as a heterosexual. Or it can mean "coming out", which is a major life decision. If lesbians, bisexuals and gays come out to service providers who are not discreet with this information, it could lead to the victim losing their home, job, custody of children, etc. This may also precipitate local and/or statewide laws to affect some of these changes, depending on the area.
- ▶ LGBT victims are often not as financially tied to their partner, which can be a benefit if they decide to end the relationship. However, if their lives are financially intertwined, such as each paying a rent or mortgage and having "built a home together", they have no legal process to assist in making sure assets are evenly divided, a process which exists for their married, heterosexual counterparts.
- ▶ Telling heterosexuals about battering in a LGBT relationship can reinforce the myth many believe that lesbian, bisexual and gay relationships are dysfunctional. This can further cause the victim to feel isolated and unsupported. As long as the community continues to pretend gays and lesbians don't experience abuse, resources will remain scarce, and outreach will continue to suffer.
- ▶ Receiving support services to help one escape a battering relationship is more difficult when there are also oppressions faced. Battered lesbians and female bisexuals automatically encounter sexism and homophobia, and gay and bisexual men encounter homophobia. Lesbian or gay people of color who are battered also face racism. These forms of social oppressions make it more difficult for these groups to get the support needed (legal, financial, social, housing, and medical, etc.) to escape and live freely from an abusive relationship.
- ▶ Lesbian, gay and bi-sexual survivors of battering may not know others who are lesbian, gay or bi-sexual, leaving the victim in total isolation.
- ▶ The LGBT community within the area may be small, and in all likelihood everyone the survivor knows will soon know of their abuse. Sides will be taken and support may be difficult to find. Anonymity is not an option, a characteristic many heterosexual survivors can draw upon in "starting a new life" for themselves within the same city.

Source: National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs