



# Myths & Facts of Battering and Abuse

## in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Trans communities

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

**The Truth Is:** Domestic violence does exist among lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans people and in sexual minority communities. It is not a problem limited to heterosexual relationships. The extent and severity of abuse in these communities is becoming increasingly evident. A 10-year, 10-city study published in 1998 by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Projects found that 25–33% of same-sex relationships involve abuse. Despite fear and community denial, more and more LGBT folks are speaking out about abuse in their relationships. 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" or "mutual battering" between equals.**

**The Truth Is:** Abuse is about a pattern of controlling behaviors. There is nothing equal or fair about domestic violence. 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." Although either or both partners may use violence, batterers do so to increase their control over their partners. Survivors have used violence for many reasons. Some include: self-defense, desperation, anger, or to try to stop the abuse. When survivors use violence, the results are complicated. They may be arrested, disbelieved by friends about the abuse, or guilted into staying longer in the relationship to "make up for" their actions. Using violence to survive is a sign that something is wrong and making a plan to get support is important.

### **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: Factors such as substance abuse, stress, childhood violence or provocation really cause battering and abuse.**

**The Truth Is:** Alcohol and drug use may become part of the dynamics of abuse, but they do not cause domestic violence. Stopping substance abuse does not guarantee that the battering will stop. Most sexual minority people experience some kind of stress and many have experienced childhood violence, but there is no direct cause and effect relationship between these factors and DV.

#### **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. Washington State domestic violence laws protect LGBT individuals from being abused by their partner. 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 very few 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-sex 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 barriers for LGBT victims/survivors to overcome.