

LGBTQ Domestic Violence
Technical Assistance and Training Project

**Serving LGBTQ Victims/Survivors:
An Overview of Accessibility Issues and
Recommended Practices**



Terms Associated with LGBTQ Identities and LGBTQ Communities

Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

- **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender.
 - **Gender identity** describes the gender with which a person identifies (i.e, whether one perceives oneself to be a man, a woman, or describes oneself in other ways).
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What does LGBTQ mean?

- **The L: Lesbian** – A woman who is predominately or exclusively attracted to women emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.
- **The G: Gay** – A term identifying a man who is predominantly or exclusively attracted to men emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.
- **The B: Bisexual** – A term identifying a person who is attracted to men and women emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.
- ✓ Note: The L, G and B relate to a person's sexual orientation.

What does LGBTQ mean?

- **The T: Transgender** – An umbrella term used to describe a continuum of individuals whose gender identity and how its expressed, to varying degrees, does not correspond to their biological sex.
 - ✓ Note: The T relates to a person's gender identity.



What fall under the umbrella of “Transgender”?

- **Transsexual** – A person who has gone through any part of the process of Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) and identifies as the gender they feel they are.
- **Female to Male (FTM)** – a person born female who transitions to live and identify full time as a male/man.
- **Male to Female (MTF)** – a person born male who transitions to live and identify full time as a female/woman.

What falls under the umbrella of “Transgender”?, continued...

- **Cross-dresser** – person who wears clothing opposite their assigned gender, usually not all the time. Does not identify as the opposite gender identity.
- **Drag Queen** – person, sometimes gay men, impersonating famous females, usually for performance.
- **Drag King** – person, sometimes lesbians, impersonating famous males, usually for performance.

What does LGBTQ mean?, continued...

- **The Q: Questioning** -Refers to people who are exploring or questioning their sexual feelings, orientation, and/or sexual identity, and who may be experiencing lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender feelings or urges.

Discussion Question

- What kind of terms do LGBTQ people in your community use to describe their identities?



What's most important?

- LGBTQ individuals are incredibly diverse and come from all racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.
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What's most important?

- Respect how people self-identify however that may be:
....queer, a man who sleeps with men (MSM), a woman who sleeps with women (WSW), genderqueer, two-spirit, dyke, etc...
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The Impact of Oppression on LGBTQ Domestic Violence Victims/Survivors

What is homophobia?

- **Homophobia** is the fear of feelings of love for and/or sexual attraction between members of the same sex.
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What is biphobia?

- **Biphobia** is the fear of feelings of love for and/or sexual attraction to both sexes.
 - ✓ Note: Homophobia and biphobia refer to the many ways that people are oppressed on the basis of sexual orientation.
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What is transphobia?

- **Transphobia** is the fear of people who transgress social expectations of gender conformity.
 - ✓ Note: Transphobia refers to the many ways that people are oppressed on the basis of gender identity and expression.
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What is heterosexism?

- **Heterosexism** is a belief that male/female sexuality is the only natural or moral mode of sexual behavior.
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The Three “I”s of Oppression

- **Internalized:** Within the oppressed individual. *Ex: A gay man sees two men holding hands in public and feels ashamed.*
- **Interpersonal:** Prejudice and discrimination across individuals. *Ex: A transgender woman is rejected by her friends and family after transitioning from male to female*
- **Institutional:** Oppression that is encoded into and characteristic of the major social, cultural, and economic institutions of society. *Ex: Businesses refuse to hire transgender individuals.*

The Impact of Oppression

“*The issues surrounding personal, family, and social acceptance of sexual orientation can place a significant burden on mental health and personal safety* [5].”

- Research on the negative results of homophobia on gays, lesbians and bisexuals (GLB) showed that GLBs had a shorter life expectancy and faced health risks and social problems at a greater rate than the heterosexual population [6].

[5] US. Department of Health and Human Services. [Health People 2010. 2nd ed. With Understanding and Improving Health, and Objectives for Improving Health.](#) 2 Vols. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November 2000.

[6] Banks, C. (2003). [The cost of homophobia: literature review on the human impact on homophobia in Canada.](#) Gay and Lesbian Health Services of Saskatoon: Saskatoon, SK, Canada.

The Impact of Oppression

- In general, the **chronic stress** of coping with social stigmatization and societal hatred is the primary reason for the negative effects of homophobia. More specifically, the reasons for the harmful effects of homophobia are:
 - Lack of support and helping resources
 - Distress from internalized homophobia
 - Stress from self-concealment of sexual orientation
 - Stress from altering behavior
 - Coming out stress
 - Harmful coping behaviors [7]

[7] Banks, C. (2003). The cost of homophobia: literature review on the human impact on homophobia in Canada. Gay and Lesbian Health Services of Saskatoon: Saskatoon, SK, Canada.

Oppression is the Problem, Not Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

“*Being GLB is not genetically or biologically hazardous to one’s physical or psychological health* (O’Hanlan, 1995; Remafedi, French, Story, Resnick & Blum, 1998; Ross Paulsen & Stalstrom, 1988; Wayment & Peplau, 1995) [8].”

- A client’s sexual orientation or gender identity is never to blame for violence from a partner.
- Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexism in society and in the abusive relationship are the problems, not the sexual orientation or gender identity of the survivor.

[8] As cited in Banks, C. (2003). The cost of homophobia: literature review on the human impact on homophobia in Canada. Gay and Lesbian Health Services of Saskatoon: Saskatoon, SK, Canada.

Issues and Challenges LGBTQ Domestic Violence Victims/Survivors Might Face

Myth and Reality

- **Myth:** Battering in LGBTQ relationships are not as prevalent, harmful or dangerous as battering in relationships of non-transgender heterosexual people.
 - **Reality:** Current research confirms that battering is just as prevalent (occurring in 25-33% of relationships) and just as harmful and dangerous among LGBT people as among non-transgender heterosexual people (NCAVP, 2002 National Domestic Violence Report).
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Myths and Reality

- **Myth:** Women are less capable of being violent than men. Gay men are not real men and therefore also not as capable of being violent as heterosexual men. In other words, *“You fight like a girl.”*
- **Reality:** Incidences reported by female, male and transgender survivors to staff at Domestic Violence Legal Advocacy Project (DVLAP) at the LA Gay & Lesbian Center include emotional and psychological abuse as well as... Feet hammered while asleep; Hit in the head by a brick; Eardrum ruptured by blows to the head with a shovel; Gunshot wound to shoulder - not allowed to seek medical assistance for hours; Ribs broken and then gun held to head for 2 hours.

-- Video ---

“My Girlfriend Did It”

“My Girlfriend Did It” Discussion

1. What was described in the beginning of the segment as the main difference between women-to-women domestic violence and heterosexual domestic violence?
2. What were some of the fears that the survivors talked about?
3. What were some of the common problematic responses to woman-to-woman domestic violence among service providers, police and courts?



LGBTQ Cycle of Violence

- See handout “*LGBT Cycle of Violence*”
 - The LGBTQ cycle of violence is exacerbated by internalized and externalized oppression. These present additional challenges to safety and help seeking.
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LGBTQ Power and Control Wheel

- See handout “*LGBT Power and Control Wheel*”
 - The LGBTQ power and control wheel is also exacerbated by internalized and externalized oppression that also present additional challenges to safety and help seeking.
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Summary of Issues and Challenges

- Fear that the abuse will not be taken seriously because it is occurring within an LGBTQ relationship.
- Lack of acknowledgement and support from other LGBTQ individuals who may not be aware of the fact that DV in LGBTQ relationships occurs and is dangerous.
- Fear of re-victimization by law enforcement, criminal justice, and social service workers based on one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Fear of being outed to friends, family, employers and/or employees.
- Fear that the abuser will convince people that they are the victim.

Discussion Questions

- Among the issues and challenges mentioned, which do you think are most relevant to LGBTQ DV victims/survivors in your community?
- How do these dynamics play out in your community?
- Are there additional issues or challenges LGBTQ DV victims/survivors in your community might face?



Recommended Practices

Respect a Client's Self-Determination to Be "Out" or Not...

- Many LGBTQ people will prefer to “**pass**” or “**be closeted**” with others, unless or until a relationship of trust has been established.
 - **Passing**”: Behavior used to avoid being identified as LGBTQ
 - **“Being closeted”**: When an LGBTQ person does not reveal their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to others [11]

[11] Langley, L. (2001.) Developing anti-oppressive empowering social work practice with older lesbian women and gay men. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31: 917-932.

Am I Welcome Here?

“To welcome”:

- To accept gladly
- To greet upon arrival
- To receive with pleasure



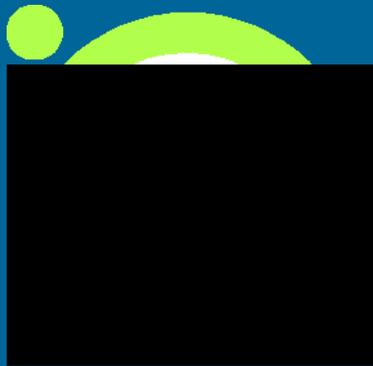
Discussion: When you go into a new environment, what makes you feel that you are welcome?

What if you are LGBTQ?

- Historically, LGBTQ people were viewed as deviant or pathological by much of the health and mental health communities.
 - Many providers still do hold on to negative beliefs about LGBTQ people.
 - Not surprisingly, many LGBTQ people are wary of seeking support from any service provider, do not feel welcome to access services and decline to self-identify when they do interact with providers.
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LGBTQ People Look for Clues & Cues

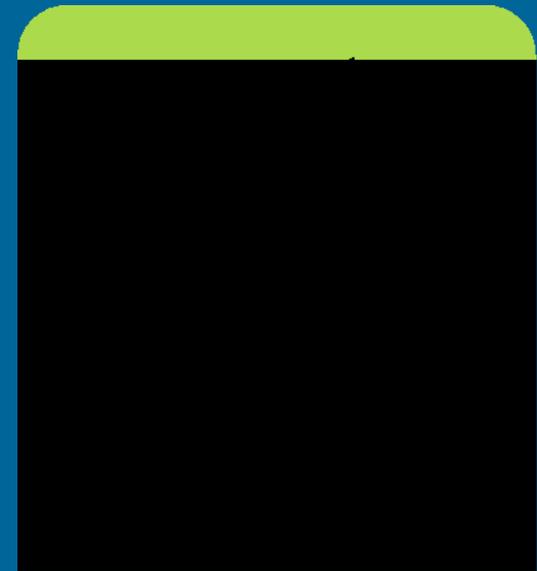
- When the majority of the public sphere is not safe or welcoming, people look for clues and cues of safety and welcome.
 - “Cue”: A signal, hint or direction
 - “Clue”: Something that serves to guide and direct



Discussion: What clues and cues might an L, G, B, T and/or Q person look for?

Clues and Cues of Safety

1. Language
 - Spoken
 - Written
2. Visual



Clues and Cues of Safety: Verbal Language

- There are no universal agreements on terminology and language and culture continually change
- Therefore, there are no rigid rules, only helpful suggestions
- Contrary to 'sticks and stones...' words do have the power to hurt AND the power to convey respect and understanding.
- *Handout: Avoiding Heterosexual Bias in Language, American Psychological Association*

Clues and Cues of Safety: Verbal Language

Generally:

- Use gender neutral language
 - Partner rather than boyfriend, husband
 - They, rather than he or she
 - Person rather than man, woman
 - Relationship status rather than marital status
 - Parent or Guardian, rather than Mother, Father

Clues and Cues of Safety: Verbal Language



With clients:

- Do not assume someone's sexual gender identity.
- Call people what they want to be called.
- Reflect back the language that clients use.
- When clients disclose they are LGBTQ, acknowledge the disclosure, thank them for their courage.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Mention commitment to non-discrimination & accessibility
- Demonstrate your knowledge of LGBTQ issues and LGBTQ community resources, as appropriate and helpful

Respect Self-Determination to Be “Out” or Not...

- “Passing” and being “closeted” are both protective measures to preserve dignity and prevent harassment and violence.

“‘Passing’ or being ‘closeted’ [also] means denying the essence of oneself and denying or disowning partners [12].”

[12] Langley, L. (2001.) Developing anti-oppressive empowering social work practice with older lesbian women and gay men. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31: 917-932.

Coming Out

- What is “**Coming out?**”: The process of telling others about your sexuality and/or gender identity; a complex, difficult and life-long series of events.

“*One of the most difficult aspects of coming out is that it is a never-ending process, each new situation requires another telling. In the main, as sexual orientation isn't visually obvious and the assumption is often made that people are all heterosexual, this is a fairly constant and exhausting process* [13].”

[13] Brown, H.C. (1998.) *Social work and sexuality: Working with lesbians and gay men.* Basingstoke, BASW/Macmillan.

Respect the Client's Choices

- Pay attention to the degree to which the survivor discloses her/his identity.
- Respect her/his choice to define her/his identity and who s/he wants to share it with. Maintain confidentiality.
- Ask and confirm if you are not certain.
- Respect anxieties about disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender identity that a client might have. This anxiety is usually based on realistic fears of discrimination and its effects on child custody, family support, job security, etc.
- At the same time, respect a client's choice if they DO want to be out. Don't discourage a client from coming out – it's their choice.



Cost Benefit Analysis of Coming Out

- Help clients assess the costs and benefits of disclosing their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or experience of abuse to other clients and staff and to other service providers. Some questions a client might consider are:
 - Does the environment appear open to my disclosure?
 - How safe is it for me to come out?
 - What might be the benefits of coming out? (e.g., potential support, etc.)
 - What might be the risks or costs of coming out? (e.g., potential bias, victim-blaming, etc.) [14]



Tracking LGBTQ Identity

- It's NOT about:
 - Screening LGBTQ people out
 - Pressuring people to disclose information

Tracking LGBTQ Identity

- It's okay to ask! It's important to ask! It's not offensive to ask!
 - Collect information about sexual orientation and gender identity as a routine practice during hotline calls (as appropriate) and during intake interviews.
 - Also, protect the rights of clients to decline to self-identify as LGBTQ.
 - Don't pressure or force disclosure.
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Tracking LGBTQ Identity

- “What is your sexual orientation?”
Responses can include:
 - Bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, questioning/unsure, or decline to answer.
- “What is your gender identity?”
Responses can include:
 - Female, male, transgender (female-to-male), transgender (male-to-female), or decline to answer.

Case example

- Please read the case example.
- Discussion will follow.

**For more information,
please contact:**

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