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## **Myths about Violence within Gay and Lesbian Relationships**

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

Truth: There is no reason to assume that gay men and lesbians are less violent than heterosexual men and women. What little research there is on same sex domestic violence shows that best estimates of same sex domestic violence can be derived properly from the well-known statistics for domestic violence in the straight community.

### **Myth #2: It isn't really violence when a same sex couple fights. It is just a "lover's quarrel" between equals.**

Truth: This myth draws on our inability to see violence between two people of the same sex as a violent situation where one person is obviously the victim. This myth is based on the idea that domestic violence is really two people battling in a boxing ring and is completely false. There is nothing equal or fair about domestic violence. Being knocked against a wall or enduring endless criticism from an angry lover does not entail fairness. Further, dismissing domestic violence as "just a lover's quarrel" trivializes the violence and gives tacit consent for it to continue. Finally, this myth completely overlooks psychological abuse or material destruction.

### **Myth #3: The perpetrator will always be butch, bigger, stronger. The victim will always be femme, smaller, weaker.**

Truth: This myth grew out of what people think victims look like and unfortunately focuses on the narrow stereotype that gay and lesbian domestic violence is physical and strength related. This is simply not true. Size, weight, butchness, femmeness, queeniness or any other physical attribute or role is not an indicator of whether or not a person will be a victim or a perpetrator. A person who is 158cms, prone to violence and very angry can do a lot of damage to someone who may be taller, heavier, stronger and non-violent. A perpetrator does not need to be 193cms and built like a rugby player to smash your compact discs, destroy your clothing or tell everyone in your workplace that you are "really a queer."

### **Myth#4: People who are abusive under the influence of drugs or alcohol are not responsible for their actions.**

Truth: Violence is a choice, and there are better choices. Every sane person is always responsible for every action taken. Drugs and alcohol are excuses for battering. Studies of perpetrators in treatment show that they decide to batter their partners significantly prior to deciding to drink. In fact, there is evidence to show that perpetrators who abuse drugs and alcohol are equally likely to batter while sober. If a person who batters is on drugs or alcohol, that person has two serious and very separate problems. Being on drugs does NOT relieve a person of responsibility for his/her own conduct.

### **Myth #5: Lesbian and Gay domestic violence is sexual behaviour—a version of S&M. The victims actually like it.**

Truth: Domestic Violence is not sexual behaviour. In S&M relationships, there is usually some contract or agreement about the limits or boundaries of the behaviour, 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. Its perpetuation permits trivialization and denial of the

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victim's cries for help. Domestic Violence cannot ever be dismissed as sexual behaviour. There is no similarity whatsoever.

**Myth #6: The law does not and will not protect victims of lesbian and gay men's domestic violence.**

Truth: It depends somewhat on where you live, but heterosexuality is not a criterion for protection under the law. Gay persons may have to demand equal rights and one of those rights is protection from a violent person, regardless of the nature of the relationship. Violence is a crime. So is much of psychological abuse and destruction of personal possessions. Police sometimes have been unwilling to recognize same sex relationships as domestic, and it is difficult for police to see men as victims of domestic violence. For too long they have mislabelled same sex violence as "mutual combat." Despite the probability of encountering homophobia and further victimization by police, it is still important to report all incidents to the police and insist that your rights are protected. Available within the NSW police are Gay and Lesbian Liaison Officers who can be contacted to discuss any issue relating to gay men and lesbians including domestic violence.

**Myth#7: Domestic violence occurs primarily among gay men and lesbians who hang out at bars, are poor, or are people of colour.**

Truth: Domestic violence is a non-discriminatory phenomenon. Perpetrators come from all walks of life, all ethnic groups, all socio-economic strata, and all educational levels. This myth grows out of the higher visibility in social services that some groups have and the corresponding lower visibility that other groups have, giving the illusion that nourishes this false idea. Gay males and lesbian domestic violence does not adhere to cultural and economic boundaries. It 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."**

Truth: This is absolutely untrue. This myth perpetuates the idea that victims are responsible for the violence done to them, that somehow victims cause the perpetrators to become violent. Violent behaviour is solely the responsibility of the violent person. Perpetrators choose violence; victims do not "provoke" it. This myth is common among both perpetrators 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.**

Truth: Gay and lesbian couples are as intertwined and involved in each others' lives as are heterosexual couples. It is also possible that lesbians and gays are more couple/family oriented than their heterosexual counterparts, as many are alienated from their own families.

**Myth#10: Victims exaggerate the violence that happens to them. If it were really that bad, they would just leave.**

Truth: This myth is 100% backwards. Most victims tend to minimize the violence that happens to them because of guilt, shame, embarrassment and self-blame. Leaving is often the hardest thing for a victim to accomplish—harder for instance than staying. Perpetrators threaten their victims with more violence (including threats of murder) if they leave. Incidence of domestic violence actually increases after a victim leaves. Leaving also requires strength, self-confidence, self-reliance, and a healthy self esteem. Those qualities have been eroded by life with an abuser. Leaving a violent partner may also mean leaving one's home, community, or city.

Adapted from <http://www.ncweb.com/org/rapecrisis/gaymyths.html>