

Queering Intimate Partner Violence

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Abstract This article seeks to raise awareness of intimate partner violence and abuse in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) relationships, to challenge the heteronormativity that may inform pastoral counselors and the church regarding this problem and to propose contextually appropriate responses. Queer theory provides a basis for disrupting assumptions of gender and sexuality behind feminist approaches to intimate partner violence and for looking more deeply into the power and control dynamic in abusive LGBTQ relationships. The article includes suggestions for preventing, interrupting, and responding to intimate partner violence which always requires attention to the multifaceted workings of power in relationships and their social context, especially, in this case, at the intersection of sexism and heterosexism.

Keywords Intimate partner violence, Queer theory, Power and Control

As society and churches become more open to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, paradigms for living and thinking will change. Inclusivity with justice means more than allowing new people in the doors and at the table; it means giving marginalized persons power to influence what happens inside at the table. It even means redefining the table itself. As lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) relationships become more open and visible, those who want to affirm that visibility need

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to be open to learning anew what living in relationship means. Pastoral counselors and caregivers working with lesbian and gay couples cannot unselfconsciously use heteronormative paradigms for explanatory systems or “best” practices, if they want to be justly inclusive.

The goal of this article is first to raise awareness about intimate partner violence in LGBTQ relationships, a problem that is usually thought of in terms of men and women. In some ways this article stands in between two eras of gay liberation that pastoral theologian Cody Sanders (2013) describes: we are “just like you” and “learn from us” (p.5). Although when gay rights activists argue that LGBTQ people are “just like” everyone else they usually mean in positive ways, LGBTQ persons, just like others, sometimes live in violent relationships, and those who want to end domestic violence can learn more about intimate partner violence by listening to them. Some may argue that it is too soon to talk publicly about such things, especially in the context of religious circles where discrimination still runs high, yet justice requires full-recognition; it means bringing the best and the worst, the joys and the struggles to the table, so that all might be enriched and grow together.

Queering

With this article I intend to augment resources already available to LGBTQ² affirming pastoral counselors and caregivers with tools to interpret and respond appropriately to LGBTQ intimate partner violence. Doing so requires queering, which means decentering

² In this article I use LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer) unless referring to the work of another author who uses different terms such as LGBT. I use the specific terms, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer when I intend to refer to a specific population.

heteronormative narratives and practices commonly assumed in feminist and other approaches to domestic violence work. I cautiously use the term “queering” to identify the method by which I am engaging intimate partner violence. I hope that it peaks interest, arouses discomfort, and elicits question marks and yet I am also fearful of its erasures and discursive boundary setting. Queer is often used as an umbrella or catchall term to indicate all those who identify with non-heterosexualites - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual - and as a way to avoid the continual additions to an ever-growing lettered shortcut – LGBTQIA (Cheng, 2011; Johnson, 2014; Sanders, 2013; Sullivan, 2003). I tend to avoid using the term “queer” as an umbrella term since it can erase the particular and significant differences in lives lived under each of the identities. However, queer can name the many who do not fit neatly into any of the categories or who understand themselves to live in multiple categories at once. Some identify as queer as a way to claim a more fluid sexual identity that does not get circumscribed by the already increasingly essentializing of familiar terms. Queer identity politics re-appropriates a term of derision into an identity of pride.

Emerging out of identity politics and LGBTQ emancipatory movements, queer theory deconstructs the notion of core sexual identities out of which one expresses sexuality and gender identity. Queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) argue that both sex *and* gender are social constructions enacted to maintain heterosexual hegemony. This disrupts the earlier feminist claim that gender is a social construction imposed upon sex, which is a biological given. The binary, male and female, is not an expression of that which is “natural” or God-given but rather a sedimented human construction used to uphold heteronormativity. Queer theology (Althaus-Reid, 2004;

Cheng, 2011; Johnson, 2014) follows in this vein seeking to deconstruct heteronormativity in practices and doctrines of the church. As Marcella Athaus Reid (2008) states, queer theology is “not a theology of inclusivity,” in the sense that it argues for the inclusion of LGBTQ people into the church; it is a theology of “difference” (p.94). A queer theory, a queer theology, or a queer person claims a position outside the norm, seeking not to fit into existing norms but to be recognized and valued as a challenge to the assumptions about reality that lie beneath the norms.

My hope is to disrupt and decenter prevailing heterosexist norms in current modes of thinking about and responding to intimate partner violence. Consonant with queer theorist Nikki Sullivan (2003) I am using “queer” as a verb, but I am aware that if queering is an activity that intends “to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize” (p. iv), it is also at the same time constructing and positing new frameworks for thinking and acting. I am hoping to disrupt some of the assumptions found in intimate partner violence discourse based on what LGBTQ people have to teach us from their experience of intimate partner violence on their own terms and with the expectation and hope of further disruptions.

Prevalence

The usual estimate is that in their lifetime twenty-five to fifty percent of all women will experience violence at the hands of an intimate. This violence is 95% of the time perpetrated by men against women or their male partners (Tjaden & Thoennes, 2000). Early measures on the prevalence of intimate partner violence in LGBTQ relationships indicated rates comparable to heterosexual relationships, about 33 percent of all couples

(Donovan & Hester, 2014; Hattery & Smith, 2012; Ristock, 2002). Recent reports (National Coalition of Anti-violence, 2014; Walters, Chen, & Breiding, 2013) show that violence between intimates is a significant problem for LGBTQ persons, especially for gay men, youth, transgender persons, and bisexual persons. About 44% of self-identified lesbians report severe physical abuse in their lifetime, but much of it was perpetrated by men, not their lesbian partners (Walters et al., 2013).

Statistical data is usually required by funding sources and needed to convince the public that intimate partner violence is a social problem worthy of their attention and resources, but prevalence statistics have been a site of contention in the field of domestic violence (for more discussion see DeKeseredy, 2011; Stark, 2007). Statistics gathered through police reports can give information on incidents of violent crime, but only those actually reported to or interpreted by the police as violence between intimate partners are reported as such. Since many LGBTQ persons are reluctant to interact with police and may not be willing to identify the perpetrator of a crime as an intimate partner, these statistics are of limited use. Broader surveys on lifetime experience are more helpful in estimating prevalence but until very recently they were not adept at capturing LGBTQ experience. LGBTQ experience is not represented when surveyors ask respondents to identify with one of two possible genders, or when they offer a limited range of sexual orientations and gender identities, or when they do not ask about the sex, gender identity or orientation of the abuser. A clearer picture of the prevalence and demographics of intimate partner violence requires much more contextualization; nevertheless it is clear that intimate partner violence is a significant problem in LGBTQ relationships.

Queering Gender

Pastoral counselors have excellent resources available to them on the subject of intimate partner violence, including resources by the Faith Trust Institute and work by Marie Fortune (1987, 2005), Carol Adams (1995), Pamela Cooper-White (2012), James Poling (1991, 1999, 2003), and Al Miles (2011).³ These authors follow the trajectory established by the early battered women's movement that understands intimate partner violence as one manifestation of women's oppression. In the 1970's feminists began garnering social attention to the problem of domestic violence and battered women. Early feminist frameworks argued that battering was a manifestation of gender inequality under patriarchy, perpetrated by individual men against their wives and girlfriends but sustained by a social system that allowed, and perhaps encouraged, them to use violence to dominate and control women. Lenore Walker (1979) and others (Schechter, 1982) routinely pointed out that the two primary characteristics of batterers were that they were men and that they held stereotypical traditional notions of gender roles. Challenging boundaries between public and private, women's movements brought what was once considered a private family matter into social discourse. Campaigns emerged to raise awareness, provide funding, train health care and criminal professionals, and pass new laws that would protect and care for victims and hold batterers accountable. It is now rare in the United States to hear any public person suggest that it is acceptable or understandable for a man to beat his wife. This can be counted as a mark of the influence of the battered women's movements.

³ Most of these resources make a brief mention of same-sex domestic violence. One pastoral theologian, Joretta Marshall (1997) devotes a chapter to domestic violence in lesbian relationships. David Kundtz and Bernard Schlager (2007) also give some attention to domestic violence in queer relationships.

In the 1990's the feminist approach to battering was fiercely challenged by an approach to domestic violence that focused on individual personalities and pathologies, not gender, as the primary factor in violent relationships. This perspective found some of its basis in an early broad-based survey of families, the Conflict Tactics Scale (Gelles & Straus, 1988; Straus & Gelles, 1990), which found that violence was used as often by women as it was by men and suggested that most violence between intimates was "mutual." Critics of feminist approaches were also quick to suggest that lesbian partner violence undermined the idea that women were always victims and feminists were compelled to respond to women's use of violence (Lamb, 1999). Thorough critiques of the Conflict Tactics Scale (DeKeseredy, 2000; Stark, 2007) say, among other things, that the scale does not account for the context of the violence and whether it was used in self-defense, that it measures only discreet incidents, and that it does not ask about the level of severity. These convincing critiques do not, however, erase the reality that not all perpetrators are men and not all victims are women, a point that is necessarily highlighted when LGBTQ intimate partner violence is included in the discussion. We must seriously engage the question of gender's role in intimate partner violence.

Shared concern for social structures of discrimination and oppression of marginalized people suggests a natural affinity between feminist and queer approaches to domestic violence. There is an increasing awareness of LGBTQ partner violence but as Janice Haaken (2010) reports, "In a typical series of training sessions at a shelter, one session may focus on domestic violence as a singularly male form of power and control while the next session may focus on the "hidden epidemic" of lesbian battering, without discussion of the apparent contradiction" (p.94). If it is "singularly" male, how can it also

include lesbian or transgender women? To gloss over or trivialize intimate partner violence in LGBTQ relationships is to further marginalize LGBTQ people. However, queer rights movements and theories seek to disrupt the very social structure on which the feminist framework rests – gender, which on the surface makes it appear as though feminist and queer are, in this case, at odds.

The strong heteronormative gender narrative in shelter based domestic violence programs invites some of those with commitments to feminist movements, to solve the cognitive dissonance of a female perpetrator or male victim by making the situation fit with the dominant feminist narrative. Working from a paradigm that equates being a victim with being female, shelter workers may identify victims by looking for traditional feminine characteristics, such as passivity, emotionality, caretaking behavior, dependency, and identify perpetrators as those with traditionally masculine characteristics, such as independence, rationality, and aggressiveness. Service providers and others try to force lesbian and gay couples into a heteronormative structure by categorizing individuals by their masculine or feminine traits. Intimate partner violence can then be understood as a result of internalized patriarchy that plays itself out regardless of the sexual identity of the partners. Many people assume that lesbian and gay couples mimic traditional gender roles, with one in the couple playing the “man” and the other playing the “woman” but while this may seem apparent on the surface of some lesbian and gay relationships, it is not the norm. First, more contextualized studies in LGBTQ intimate partner violence (Ristock, 2002) reveal that the more “masculine” partner is often not the abuser and the more “feminine” partner is often not the victim. Second, most LGBTQ people do not live in relationships that fit the narrative of assigned

gender roles, nor, as queer theorists point out, do they always live neatly in the assigned male or female sex binary. Lesbians who wear lipstick and jewelry may also be jocks and drag queens may also be construction workers. Trans couples may be perceived (but not necessarily self-identified) as lesbian one day and straight the next. Counselors, service providers, and police are often compelled to quickly categorize victims and perpetrators as such, because most services are oriented toward either one or the other. Shelters or programs serving only victims must first decide who the victim is. The masculine perpetrator and feminine victim has been a helpful, often unconscious, template to expedite this process, but it is based on false assumptions and can have devastating consequences. For example, gay, bisexual, trans men, or “butch” lesbians are at risk of not being believed when they present themselves for victim services and perpetrators can end up in shelters for victims.

It is not, however, only counselors and service providers who operate out of the gendered narrative to explain domestic violence, LGBTQ people also live under the assumption that battering is something that happens when a man abuses a woman. Lesbian women and gay men often do not see themselves in the picture of domestic violence that has been painted in the social arena. They struggle to name what they experience as “abuse” (Davis & Glass, 2011; Mendoza & Dolan-Soto, 2011; Ristock, 2002). Lesbians may also resist that label out of loyalty to feminist movements. Gay men may have a hard time seeing themselves as victims if they identify with dominant male social positions. If a person does not identify as being victimized and does not describe their experience of violence as abuse, then service providers and others will not respond with the resources and knowledge developed to protect victims and stop abuse. While the

heteronormative categories in domestic violence discourse and practice need expanding to include LGBTQ people as victims and perpetrators, it is also important that LGBTQ persons are encouraged to name their experience of violence between intimates on their own terms. It could be that intimate partner violence is not gendered, but it could also be that what LGBTQ persons experience is not intimate partner abuse as it has been understood but a different phenomenon altogether. It appears to me that there are enough similarities to suggest that what heterosexual partners experience as intimate partner violence is not entirely different from what LGBTQ people experience but there are enough differences to suggest more thorough analysis is needed. Queering intimate partner violence necessitates exploring the intersectionality of complex culturally ascribed identities and the systems of power out of which they emerge and in which they operate.

Intersection of sexism and heterosexism

One strategy for addressing the gender dilemma is to focus on the dynamic of power and control in abusive relationships, irrespective of gender. Feminist approaches to intimate partner violence do not argue that gender in and of itself causes or exacerbates violence but rather that the social construction of gender in a system of patriarchy supports men's violence against women. Patriarchy is a sociocultural system of male domination under which male and ascribed masculine characteristics are privileged over female and feminine. For example, reason is privileged over emotion and rules over relationship. Sex and gender under patriarchy become a primary basis for identity, one of the first ways a person is categorized, even in the womb, and along with it is assigned a host of

“naturalized” characteristics. Social power and privilege comes with being identified as male, and the more masculine the better. Policing of gender is evident at a young age when boys fear being called “fags” or “sissies,” which equates them to girls, and continues as men have to assert their masculinity as being over and against femininity, which is then later proven through heterosexual relations. Gender inequality is also evident when girls who act like (tom)boys do not meet the same vehement ridicule, though they do have to continually deal with accusations of being a lesbian if they show too many of the characteristics assigned to men (Allen, 2007). Some men, not most, turn to violence against women to maintain or assert their position.

Some early feminists argued that “natural” gender characteristics are not natural at all but rather are social constructions of gender assigned unnecessarily to male or female sex categories. Others argued that the characteristics assigned as feminine should be valued as equal to or better than those assigned as masculine. Butler and other queer theorists complexify these discussions by suggesting that the very notion that there are “naturally” two sexes upon which gender is constructed is a fallacy constructed to support heterosexual privilege. Sexism supports heterosexism in that heterosexuality relies on the idea of a complementary sex binary, male and female, which then requires a careful and complex system of gender categorization.⁴ According to this system “real men” have sex with women and “real women” have sex with men. Sexism and heterosexism operate in multifaceted interrelated operations and structures of power that support, among other things, intimate partner violence through continual reassertion of dominance.

⁴ For further discussion of the evolution of thought on sexism and heterosexism in practical theology see Hoelt, 2012.

Heterosexuality as the paradigm for intimate relationship in the U.S. is normalized and normative. Sociologists Cynthia Donovan and Marianne Hester, after a broad study of same-sex domestic violence, propose that “rules for relationship” and “practices of love” are central to the dynamic of domestic violence and should serve as a primary lens for responding to it (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Couples generally begin relationships with feelings of love and “loving” the abuser is the first reason most victims give for staying in an abusive relationship. Common understandings about what love is and how it is to be practiced are culturally constituted. For instance, LGBTQ and straight couples believe love to involve loyalty and commitment to the relationship through good times and bad. The standard images for loving relationship are heterosexual, and heterosexual in the context of gender inequality. The lack of a “public story” about same-sex relationships, healthy or otherwise, exacerbates and contributes to the difficulty of understanding the dynamics of intimate partner violence (Donovan & Hester, 2014).

Intimate partner violence can best be understood by considering the intersections of multiple structural and personal constraints under which people live (Sokoloff & Pratt, 2005). Battered women and men cannot separate what part of their experience is due to sexism and what part is due to heterosexism, racism, classism or any other way power is structured. Power operates externally and internally to reiterate structures of oppression in fine-tuned interlocking systems through social institutions, cultural practices, and symbol systems. LGBTQ people are shaped by this external and internalized norm even as they resist it. Gender inequality is an aspect of intimate partner violence for LGBTQ people but so are other systems of power and oppression that regulate the everyday life of victims and perpetrators of intimate partner violence (Bograd, 2010; Davis & Glass,

2011). Preventing, interrupting, and responding to intimate partner violence always requires attention to the multifaceted workings of power in relationships and their social context. These “intersecting identities” affect a person’s perception of whether the violence experienced in the relationship is abuse or just part of everyday life. They affect the abuser’s ability to use stereotypes and fear of discrimination as a tactic of control. They signal whether or not family and friends will collude with the abuser or assist the victim and the level of trust the victim can place in government and social agencies (Donovan & Hester, 2014).

Power and control

One of the struggles that victims and service providers face is how to name what is happening in the relationship: Is this abuse, couple fighting, or something else? Naming is key to determining the path of intervention. Early literature on gay male battering argued that battering was primarily a mental disorder and thus focused on individual pathology in the batterer and certain traits in the victim (Island & Letellier, 1991) but research has not supported this idea (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Poon, 2011; Ristock, 2002). It is not clear what makes an individual become an abuser but we do not have to find a cause in order to identify contributing factors, interpret the dynamics and plan for prevention and intervention (Poon, 2011).

According to a power and control framework, prevalent in feminist approaches, intimate partner violence is not a problem of individual pathology, communication, anger management, jealousy or sex; it is about power. Violence is one means of exerting power over another but it is not the only way and the focus on physical violence, out of the

context of other tactics of coercion and control, poses several difficulties for understanding and addressing intimate partner violence. Physical violence is wrong, harmful, and definitely needs intervention but it does not always indicate abuse; likewise abuse victims may never meet the criteria needed to file a criminal complaint for assault or show up in an emergency room.

Violence is enacted in relationships in multiple ways. Evan Stark (2007) identifies three types of intimate partner violence: couple fights, partner assaults, and coercive control. In “couple fights,” which Stark argues are the majority of the incidents reported in large population surveys, both partners use violence to address a conflict and rarely call the police or seek other assistance (p.234). In “partner assaults” one partner uses violence, threats and other tactics to “hurt and subjugate” a partner (p.236). According to Stark, both of these types of intimate partner violence can occur in same-sex relationships and can be perpetrated by men or women. However, Stark argues, in “coercive control” violence women are “entrapped” by men through a “technology” of violence, isolation, and intimidation directly fueled by male privilege and entitlement. Coercive control is the classic case of extreme battering often portrayed in the media. Though others disagree with the idea that coercive control happens only in heterosexual couples (Donovan & Hester, 2014), and much more research needs to be done to assess whether or not partner assaults and coercive control are actually two different phenomena, Stark’s categories point out the need to look beyond discreet incidents of violence to larger patterns in relationships. Violence is not always indicative of a pattern of abuse.

Abuse is an ongoing pattern of behaviors used by one partner to coerce and control the other, which may or may not involve physical violence, but certainly does occur in LGBTQ relationships. Recognizing and assessing intimate partner abuse requires carefully tracing the everyday workings of power in a relationship. Power, as the capacity to influence, moves in every interaction through multiple paths. As Michel Foucault (1988) reminds us, “Power is everywhere” (p.93). Power is not a substance or identity status that one possesses, but a dynamic of relationship, known only as it is exercised and produces an effect. One’s capacity for influencing a situation or person is a function of multiple factors, perhaps gender, sexual orientation, race, or economic position, but also information and expertise that coalesce in any particular moment. Power is always moving back and forth, no one is completely powerless, but clearly in any interaction one may have more influence than another while in another context that same person may have very little influence. Power in intimate relationships of mutual respect will be exercised back and forth, in giving and receiving, each having an effect or influence on the other. In abusive relationships the primary dynamic is more unidirectional, one person acts to effect their will and resists being affected by the one being acted upon (Hoeft, 2009, 2011). The central concern in abusive relationships is the will of the abuser, not the needs of the victim.

This does not mean that victims are simply passive receivers of abuse. Wherever power is being exercised there is assertion and resistance. Those on the receiving end of an abuser’s actions always act in resistance, though the effect of that resistance is modified by many factors, such as severity, chronicity, frequency of the violence, and available support. When a victim hits an abuser, this action, hitting, in and of itself may

look like an act of abuse, but if the hitting came as a response to a series of threats or insults, that happen day-in and day-out, and was followed by a rant that accused the victim of being the real abuser, then we can understand the hitting as both an act of violence (but not abuse) that is also an act of resistance to abuse (Hoeft, 2009). Victims actively manage situations at home to lessen the chance of a violent outburst by the abuser; and usually when abuse escalates, they become more active in seeking help.

Exploring the full context of LGBTQ abusive relationships emphasizes the need for attending carefully to the complex dynamics of power in relationship because the individual traits of victims and perpetrators do not conform to the stereotypes about who is powerful and who is not. Both people in the relationship may be educated, financially well off and have charismatic personalities. The victim may have social status outside the relationship and the perpetrator very little, but within the relationship the power is reversed. For instance, a more experienced partner may use experience and knowledge of the LGBTQ community as a means to control the partner who is just coming out. In the context of the outside world the perpetrator may have little recognition and may in fact be seen largely as a victim of homophobia and heterosexism, but within the relationship and LGBTQ community the perpetrator has more standing and is able to exercise more influence. Some abusers may even work in the domestic violence movement. Victim and perpetrator are not stable identity categories that hold across time and place. No victim is totally helpless, passive or without a role in the relationship, and no perpetrator is totally evil. Victims find ways to gain some sense of control over their lives and perpetrators may indeed be both abusive and caring (Hoeft, 2009; Poon, 2011). This does not mean that perpetrators should not be held responsible for their actions, it does mean that quick

categorizations into either victim or perpetrator are not likely to yield an accurate or helpful view of the situation (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Poon, 2011). LGBTQ intimate partner abuse requires us to look for patterns of behavior rather than personal characteristics or discrete acts and reminds us to look for similar complexities in straight relationships.

The Power and Control Wheel developed by the Domestic Abuse Intervention Project (available at www.duluthmodel.org) is often used as a resource for identifying the variety of behaviors that can be used by abusive partners, including minor acts of violence such as grabbing to more serious acts such as attacking with a weapon. Stark (2007) groups the coercive tactics used by abusers into four groups: violence, intimidation, isolation, and control. They may hit, sexually assault, push and shove; they may stalk, restrict access to people, money, transportation or information; they may humiliate, belittle, threaten and manipulate. Emotional and verbal abuse are the most common tactics while the most common acts of violence are pushing and shoving, with men more likely to use physical violence and sexual assault than women (Donovan & Hester, 2014; Mendoza & Dolan-Soto, 2011; Renzetti, 1992; Ristock, 2002). All of these tactics function to keep abusers' will and power at the center. Donovan and Hester (2014) characterize the center of the wheel with the two primary rules for the relationship: 1. [T]he relationship is for the abusive partner and on their terms. 2. [T]he victim/survivor is responsible for the care of the abusive partner, the relationship, their children, if they have them, and the household, if they cohabit (p.155). These rules are enforced through the many tactics of coercion and control.

Many of the control tactics used in heterosexual relationships are also used in LGBTQ relationships, and these behaviors are enacted in and supported by structures of social inequality, including sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia. Abusive partners in LGBTQ relationships often use the threat of outing a partner. Coming out is not a one time, once and for all act, it is a constantly negotiated process experienced in various levels of visibility. Ristock (2002) found especially vulnerable first relationships where one partner may be out longer, may have more connections to the LGBTQ community and claim a special knowledge of what an LGBTQ relationship is like. An abusive partner can exploit homophobia by calling into question whether or not the other is “really” lesbian or gay. LGBTQ people often live in tight knit small communities of friends, perhaps estranged from family. Some have little social support and may fear being left without a partner or without friends, a fear that is easily exploited by an abuser (National Coalition of Anti-violence, 2014). Ongoing discrimination and homophobia ensure that LGBTQ people live under the threat of violence every day. Both victim and perpetrator understand that seeking help requires the victim to out him/herself to those from whom help is sought, which adds to the victim’s vulnerability.

Responses

Perhaps the most significant difference between heterosexual and LGBTQ experiences of intimate partner abuse is the response of the community. Help-seeking by victims is hampered by the heteronormative narrative that makes it difficult for victims to identify themselves as abused, by what it means to have to continually out themselves in order to get help, and by the expectation that they will encounter discrimination, hostility and lack

of appropriate services. These are failures of the community, not of individual victims. LGBTQ survivors of intimate partner abuse turn first to friends, rather than family, and then to counselors (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Counselors educated in the heteronormative narrative of domestic violence often make the mistake of treating abusive LGBTQ couples as a couple or diagnosing the abuse as a mental disorder in either the victim or perpetrator. In cases of intimate partner abuse counseling can be helpful when done in collaboration with domestic violence programs and in a context that recognizes the larger social context. In many small towns and cities, counselors familiar with LGBTQ issues are scarce and victims may feel the pressure to educate straight counselors about LGBTQ life. Clergy are significantly unresponsive to heterosexual domestic violence (Hoeft, 2011) and, though I can find no research on the issue, if an LGBTQ person experiencing intimate partner abuse were to seek the help of a pastor, I suspect that in most churches the response would be inadequate at best and hostile at worst. There is no doubt that the lack of appropriate community response and the history of exclusion, hostility and violence toward LGBTQ peoples colludes with the abuser's tactics of control.

In the last forty years the battered women's movement successfully led establishment of domestic violence programs and shelters in every state. Most LGBTQ specific programs have been incorporated into these established programs or, in larger cities, developed out of LGBTQ Anti-violence programs that also address hate-crimes. In a 2010 study of 648 programs in a variety of departments, 94% of the respondents said they did not serve LGBTQ survivors (National Coalition of Anti-violence, 2014). When LGBTQ survivors do try to access domestic violence programs they are immediately

faced with the intake process that assesses whether or not the person is really a victim and not a perpetrator. Shelters need to take every precaution to admitting a perpetrator but often have poor mechanisms for making those distinctions. Trans survivors face additional challenges as they encounter the power of the sex/gender binary and may face intrusive questions about their transitions and surgeries. Shelters or programs for gay male survivors of intimate partner abuse are almost non-existent except in the largest metropolitan areas, making them, along with transgender persons, unlikely to get the protection and support they need.

Police and the criminal justice system are often a resource for heterosexual victims of intimate partner violence, but one of the least likely resources sought by LGBTQ persons. Trans people are especially unlikely to call the police, as police perpetrate much of the violence against trans people (Allen, 2007). When police are called to the scene of violence between two women or two men their first assumption is not that it is a case of intimate partner violence, as they might if it were a man and a woman fighting. Most states have laws specifically related to domestic violence, and these are especially relevant when survivors seek orders of protection, but not all of those states have clear guidelines that include LGBTQ relationships.

Most batterers in batterer treatment programs are there through court order, but if LGBTQ persons are not likely to call the police, LGBTQ abusers are not likely to find their way to batterer's treatment. Batterer's treatment programs face the same heteronormativity faced by programs for victims – they are generally geared toward men who abuse women. Whether for victims or perpetrators, programs that try to include both

men and women in the same program find the effectiveness of the program challenged by the tension between men and women in a group (Mendoza & Dolan-Soto, 2011).

Pastoral counselors and caregivers who want to provide support and guidance to victims and perpetrators of intimate partner abuse must educate themselves about LGBTQ life, in all of its diversity, and monitor heteronormative assumptions, even if they are a member of the LGBTQ community. Lesbian women and gay men must be especially aware of the exclusions of transgender and other queer people within the LGBTQ community. Assessing, preventing, and intervening in intimate partner abuse requires a vigilant analysis of power relations and intersectionality in individual lives. The first step is to heighten awareness that intimate partner abuse happens in LGBTQ relationships and to proclaim clearly that abuse is wrong in any relationship.

Responses to intimate partner violence require interventions that empower the victim and hold perpetrators accountable, without putting victims at further risk. Once an abusive relationship between intimates is revealed, a pastoral counselor's first concern should be the safety of the victim, which may include developing a safety plan, finding shelter, calling the police and getting a protection order, but close attention must be given to the survivor's wishes and fears related to involving others. In addition the victim should be given as much information and autonomy as possible to make informed choices about the path ahead.

Most survivors want help for their abusers and this should be respected, not as a sign of pathology but as a sign of care and compassion. This does not mean, however, that survivors should take responsibility for getting the batterer the treatment needed. It does mean that the rules of the relationship must change so that both are getting their

needs met. Couples counseling is not appropriate in cases of intimate partner abuse because the victim cannot speak truthfully with equal standing in the relationship when the threat of violence hangs over every interaction. Abusers must work on their use of power and sense of entitlement, this requires more than anger management programs but it may be especially difficult to find appropriate help for LGBTQ batterers. Pastoral counselors, caregivers and churches that are serious about addressing this problem can be active participants in developing community programs, such as LGBTQ Anti-Violence programs, that are essential to ending intimate partner abuse.

Responses to intimate partner abuse always require a mix of internal work and sociocultural analysis to help survivors, abusers, and counselor see the intersections of systemic relational power as it operates for more oppression and bondage or more justice and love. LGBTQ persons experiencing abuse in their most intimate relationships also need spiritual support and guidance. Experience of abuse raises many theological questions about love, sacrifice, forgiveness, and suffering (Fortune 1987, 1995, 2005; Poling 1991; Cooper-White, 2012). But in the midst of crisis and relational struggle many LGBTQ persons of Christian faith will question their worthiness of a fulfilled life; many will remember the shame they felt about their sexuality and ask if God is punishing them. There are still too few models for being fully “gay” and Christian. Care for those LGBTQ persons experiencing intimate partner abuse, victims and perpetrators, must begin with the assurance that diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities is one of God’s gifts to creation (Cheng, 2011; Johnson, 2014).

Increasing love and justice in the world through inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer people requires queering the theology and practices of

the church, including those of pastoral counselors and caregivers. Even those of us with long-standing relationships within the LGBTQ community need to continually challenge our own heteronormative assumptions. The larger strategy for preventing abuse requires us to continually seek new models for intimate relationships and new paths for living peacefully and abundantly with one another.

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