

AGGRESSION IN LESBIAN AND BISEXUAL RELATIONSHIPS

by

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ABSTRACT

For years, researchers, clinicians, and those working with victims/survivors of domestic abuse have overlooked the issue of same-sex partner aggression among lesbians and bisexual women. Through in-depth interviews with 19 women who identify themselves as either lesbian or bisexual, information was documented in this study demonstrating the severity of issues of power and control among some same-sex partners, as well as some of the dynamics that are unique to same-sex abusive relationships. Patterns of abuse within same-sex relationships often mirror those that are so commonly associated with partner aggression among heterosexual couples, and therefore demonstrate not only the need for further research on the topic of same-sex partner abuse, but also the urgency to provide more assistance to the victims/survivors of domestic violence.

This thesis is dedicated to all of the women who participated in this study. I am truly grateful for your candidness and sincerely thank you for your willingness to take part.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	7
Same-sex Female Partner Aggression	8
Violent and Coercive Behaviors Used in Same-sex Partner Battering.....	12
Response by Law Enforcement	13
Intervention and Treatment.....	19
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	22
Sampling Issues	24
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS	26
Multiple Types of Abuse	27
Isolation from Friends.....	32
Violent and Emotionally Abusive Behavior.....	33
Financial Abuse	35

Suicide Threats.....	36
Jealousy and Controlling Behavior.....	37
Multiple Victimization.....	38
Victims’ Help Seeking Behaviors.....	44
Abuse of Pets	48
Bisexual Female Partners and Abuse.....	49
Mutual Abuse.....	50
The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence.....	51
Leaving	53
Summary	54
CHAPTER FIVE: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH	57
APPENDIX A RESEARCH INSTRUMENT	61
APPENDIX B INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	65
LIST OF REFERENCES	67

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence is an exceedingly important issue that affects thousands of individuals each year. To date, when domestic violence is researched, it tends to exclude those who do not fit the description of a stereotypical battering victim. Among the groups that often fall outside of the typical victim profile are lesbians and bisexual women. Conservatively estimating, approximately 500,000 lesbians are victims of partner abuse annually (McClennen, Summers, & Daley, 2002: 277; Island & Letellier, 1991). Therefore, a study pertaining to same-sex battering is imperative at this time, particularly because people are “more likely to be killed, physically assaulted, hit, beat up, slapped, or spanked in their own homes by other family members than anywhere else, or by anyone else, in our society” (Gelles, 1997: 1). While both men and women are responsible for abusing their intimate partners, researchers have largely ignored the subject of women who batter, particularly lesbians who abuse their same-sex partners. Lesbians are “an invisible minority” that many persons do not consider in the violence statistics and “tacitly assume the statistics refer to heterosexual women only” (Bernhard, 2000: 68). However, as more research is conducted on the lesbian and bisexual population in regards to domestic violence and aggression, it is becoming increasingly evident that women who are involved in same-sex relationships are not immune to partner abuse. As such, it is important to recognize that women

do have the capacity for violent or aggressive behavior. One way of demonstrating this is through the conduction of in-depth qualitative research. However, it important to note that not everyone who has been abused considers himself or herself a victim. One of the key elements to studying aggression among lesbian partners is to therefore clearly define what constitutes abuse in relation to the study at hand. As Schwartz (2000) points out, specific terms, such as “retaliation” and “self-protection” might mean different things to different people.

Claire M. Renzetti’s 1992 study utilized Hart’s (1986; 173) definition of lesbian battering as a “pattern of violent [or] coercive behaviors whereby a lesbian seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs, or conduct of her intimate partner or to punish the intimate for resisting the perpetrator’s control” (Renzetti 1992; 7). Throughout her study, Renzetti used a feminist participatory research model to help advocate a “reciprocal rather than hierarchical relationship between researcher and researched” (Renzetti, 1992; 9). The study, which was conducted by Claire M. Renzetti and the Working Group on Lesbian Battering, was carried out to help provide a better understanding of issues surrounding same-sex violence among lesbians. Renzetti and her colleagues administered a survey to a relatively low sample size of 100 women, each who identified herself as a victim of lesbian battering, in order to explore issues of domestic abuse among lesbian couples. As she hypothesized, her study revealed that lesbian battering is a very real, serious issue that emulates abuse among heterosexual couples in many ways, yet also takes on several characteristics applicable to lesbian relationships only.

More women are being arrested for domestic violence than ever before in the United States. “The arrest of women who have used violence against their partners has become a significant problem in recent years” (Shepard & Pence, 1999; 197). However, despite the increase in recognition that women often abuse their partners, lesbians continue to be excluded from batterer treatment programs, shelters, and other sources of support. According to Renzetti (1989), with a few exceptions, a thorough examination of lesbian battering is absent from scientific literature. Available literature suggests that lesbians are at greater risk of hate violence than heterosexual women, and therefore may experience more violence than heterosexual women (Bernhard, 2000). However, lesbians are offered only a fraction of the support that is offered to heterosexual women. Additionally, lesbians and bisexual women have additional barriers to overcome, including homophobia and other forms of discrimination.

Many of the barriers lesbians encounter contribute to them not to seeking help regarding abusive situations. “Abused lesbians and bisexual women often do not come forward because they themselves have difficulty identifying their experience as abuse or as a violation, given the lack of acknowledgement and advocacy regarding same-sex abuse” (Girshick, 2002: 1510). As Girshick (2002) points out, many lesbians live in areas with a small lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community. Therefore, there is often no community support system available for battered lesbians. Furthermore, some members of the lesbian community may actually discourage research on domestic violence among same-sex partners because of the negative association it may cause within an already stigmatized segment of the population.

Much of the current research on conflict and partner aggression, such as Straus's (1998) study, suggests that women are capable of exhibiting violent and aggressive behavior. Furthermore, it is clear that domestic violence is a serious issue facing heterosexual domestic partners, as well. Regarding heterosexual married men and women, Murray A. Straus and Richard J. Gelles conducted surveys of both sexes, excluding verbal abuse and rape as types of violence, and found that one in eight men engage in domestic abuse against their female partners (McGlen & O'Connor, 1998). Straus and Gelles report that while the majority of the violence measured in the study is not life threatening, severe physical violence by men may occur in three out of one hundred marriages in a single year (McGlen & O'Connor, 1998). Therefore, because existing research suggests that rates of domestic abuse among same-sex partners correlates with the rates of violence among opposite-sex partner relationships, it can be concluded that similar data could be gathered in regards to male same-sex relationships as was reported by Straus and Gelles. To determine the rates of same-sex female partner abuse in relation to heterosexual abuse, more research is needed. However, some individuals continue to discourage research specific to same-sex female partner aggression. "When we challenge the myth that lesbian relationships are nonviolent, we are opening all women up to 'backlash'; now accusations can fly that women are as violent as men. Some worry that this will somehow discredit all the work antidomestic violence and sexual assault advocates and activists have struggled for these past 30 years" (Girshick, 2002: 1512). However, despite the obvious feminist opposition to the transference of research related to battered lesbians, the conduction of such research is necessary,

particularly because of the different dynamics that are present within same-sex relationships opposed to heterosexual partnerships. As Schwartz (2000) points out, many women and men are raised in the same society, hear the same messages, and develop some of the same attitudes. Thus, they often do not view minor acts of physical violence within a marital context as criminal assault (Schwartz, 2000; Straus, 1999). Although lesbians are not able to legally marry in most of the United States, these women often grow up with the same views as heterosexual men and women in regards to relationship violence.

Partner aggression among lesbians and bisexual women is a sensitive topic, meaning it “potentially poses for those involved a substantial threat, the emergence of which renders problematic for the researcher and/or the researched...” (Lee & Renzetti, 1990: 512). “Sensitive topics also raise wider issues related to the ethics, politics, and legal aspects of research” (Lee & Renzetti, 1990: 53). Minorities are particularly susceptible to discrimination and therefore, may be hesitant to participate in a study. Moreover, minority group members may experience oppression by both the dominant society and other minority groups of perceived higher status. “The double or triple oppression is particularly salient for those who belong to multiple minority groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals of color” (Nabors et al., 2001: 101).

The purpose of this study was to use in-depth personal interviews with self-identified lesbians or bisexual women who have been abused by their intimate partners to help social service providers and researchers alike gain a better understanding of abuse within same-sex

relationships. The study should be a helpful guide to understanding the motives behind and issues related to issues of aggression, control, and abuse, among same-sex female partners.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

“It is estimated that domestic violence costs \$67 million per year. Thus, it is imperative that clinicians have a basic understanding of domestic violence as well as knowledge of basic intervention strategies, in order to help their patients understand and break the cycle of abuse and avoid future injury” (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001: 163). When examining homosexual relationships it is necessary to acknowledge the factors that could possibly serve as contributors. While many of the factors are the same as those associated with heterosexual relationships, such as the imbalance between partners; substance abuse; violence or abuse in at least one partner’s past, usually the family of origin; over dependency on one partner by the other; and personality disorders, other factors, such as internalized homophobia are specific to homosexual relationships and should also be considered.

In Bernhard’s (2000) sample of 215 adult women (136 lesbians and 79 heterosexual women) from a Midwest urban area, nearly 65% of the lesbians and 53% of the heterosexual women reported that they had experienced some type of violence. The women in Bernhard’s (2000) study were generally educated, with lesbians having slightly more education than heterosexual women but reporting lower incomes. Of the participants, 54% of the lesbians had experienced at least one experience of sexual violence and 51% experienced nonsexual physical

violence (Bernhard, 2000). Of the lesbian respondents, 35% reported violence perpetrated against them by females (Bernhard, 2000). When examining domestic abuse among same-sex female partners, it is important to recognize that sexual violence is a serious issue that needs to be addressed, as well. In order to admit that woman-to-woman sexual violence exists, one must accept that women engage in sexual behavior with other women. “Despite the fact that sexual violence is about power and control and not the act of sex, to examine female perpetrators and female survivors requires us to think about same-sex sexual behavior” (Girshick, 2002: 1502).

Same-sex Female Partner Aggression

Van Wormer and Bartollas (2000) suggest that lesbian battering is, according to what limited research is available, “at least as common as heterosexual partner battering, although the use of small sample sizes in most such studies casts doubt on the findings” (120). The number of cases of lesbian domestic violence could plausibly be much higher than what has been reported in recent years. “Lesbian battering is an issue which has been largely ignored, both in the lesbian community and by the battered women’s movement” (Lobel, 1986: 77). According to Renzetti (1997), partner abuse in same-sex relationships does indeed occur and is not so infrequent as to be anomalous. Furthermore, available research suggests that it is unlikely that most violence in same-sex relationships is a one-time situational event (Renzetti, 1997). Similar to heterosexual partner violence, same-sex domestic abuse is often linked to social factors, such as

socioeconomic status, family background, and society's view of homosexuality. West (1998a) notes that same-sex violence is linked to violence in the family, as well as to homophobia in the society and alcohol abuse. According to Renzetti (1992), lesbian relationships are not characterized by the power struggles that plague heterosexual relationships. However, battered lesbians are often isolated and stigmatized because of their status as lesbians coupled with the fact that they are battered women (Renzetti, 1992). Furthermore, in regards to help seeking, Morrow and Hawxhurst (1989) point out that as a group, battered women sometimes encounter difficulty seeking help or leaving abusive partners; additional pressures that increase difficulties finding assistance often characterize same-sex relationships. Similarly, lesbian victims of domestic abuse do not have a plethora of places to turn to for aid. This may be partially due to the overwhelming lack of extensive research on the topic of same-sex female partner aggression.

Younglove, Kerr, and Vitello (2002) contend that, "Interest in same sex domestic violence is increasing, but the available research continues to be sparse" (Younglove, Kerr, & Vitello, 2002: 762). In a study conducted by Schilit et al. (1991), results of a survey of 174 self-identified lesbians in Arizona regarding how often they reported aggressive past relationships demonstrated that 73.4% of the women who reported being intimately involved with another woman had experienced an aggressive act against them (Schilit et al., 1991). The fact that homosexual relationships are "stigmatized and devalued in our society" also contributes to the problem (Renzetti, 1989). Because of the negative connotation associated with homosexuality, homosexuals may choose not to seek assistance with a domestic abuse issue because of a fear of

being discriminated against, and therefore, many cases may go unreported.

Regardless of whether lesbian and bisexual battering victims and/or their abusers seek help, available research suggests that lesbian battering is an issue with relatively high prevalence rates in comparison to heterosexual incidents of battering. As such, it should be addressed as a serious issue and not disregarded. According to the 1995 Lieberman Poll (Klein et al., 1997), most respondents (93%) said in reaction to the O.J. Simpson trial in the early 1990s, that they had learned that domestic violence is a serious problem, while the majority (91%) also stated that the family and friends of abused women “need to learn more about how to help victims of domestic violence” (p. 8). It is therefore apparent that a great deal of concern has arisen in recent years about domestic abuse and the safety and well-being of victims/survivors. However, lesbians and bisexual women are often not only excluded from research pertaining to domestic violence, but also not offered the same services in regards to help, despite data that suggests that these women are as likely to experience partner abuse as heterosexual women.

In her study of 100 self-identified lesbians, Renzetti (1992) found that almost two thirds (65%) of the participants were involved in an abusive relationship for one to five years, while 21% were involved for less than one year and 14% remained involved in abusive lesbian relationships for more than five years. For 77% of the participants, the first incident of abuse they experienced occurred less than six months after the relationship began (Renzetti, 1992).

A population that tends not to be included as readily in studies on lesbian battering is the elderly. In general, older adults in American society are often stigmatized and stereotyped, as are

homosexuals. Members of society sometimes view the elderly similarly to children, in that they are not capable of making proper decisions on their own, or that they are incompetent in certain respects. Elder mistreatment, which is defined by Fulmer and Paveza (1998) as “that which causes unnecessary pain and suffering among elders”, is a serious problem facing older adults and is one that encompasses various types of abuse. Because the majority of victims of elder abuse and neglect are women (Sengstock, 1991), it is important to include older adults in studies pertaining to intimate partner violence. As such, when studying lesbian battering, it is important to recognize that domestic violence issues affect older lesbians, as well. As of 1980, data suggests that women over 65 who comprise the elderly lesbian population may number over 834,000 (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998). However, older adult lesbians for the most part, are hidden from mainstream society (Ollenburger & Moore, 1998). According to Ollenburger and Moore (1998), an older lesbian woman experiences a triple jeopardy-as a woman, as an older person, and as a lesbian. Political rhetoric concerning definitions of the family that are linked to antigay campaigns focusing on homosexuality as the enemy of the patriarchal family and the American way of life (Lindsey, 1997) is one possible cause of such seclusion from society. Furthermore, this rhetoric may also relate to the way society views older adults as asexual. However, additional negative stereotypical myths regarding same-sex relationships, such as that that homosexual relationships have one partner in the dominant, breadwinning, sexually active “male” role and one in the subservient, sexually passive, “female” role (Lindsey 1997; Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Harry, 1991; Kitzinger, 1988; Houston & Schwarts, 1996) also contribute to the

negative image of same-sex relationships, thereby making it increasingly more difficult for homosexuals to disclose their sexual orientation to others.

Violent and Coercive Behaviors Used in Same-sex Partner Battering

In order to successfully study aggression among same-sex female partners, one must understand the dynamics that exist within many lesbian and bisexual relationships. “It is not unlikely that the partners of battered lesbians will claim to be ‘emotionally battered’ when their lovers withdraw and shut down in response to the physical abuse. An abuser might also claim to be battered if her lover fought back” (Lobel, 1986:83). “If violence in gay and lesbian relationships is recognized at all, there is the assumption that the nature of the violence conforms to stereotypical roles that gays and lesbians are believed to play in the relationship” (Gelles, 1997: 120). As a result, the offender in a lesbian relationship is often believed to be the masculine or “butch” partner, and the victim is the “fem” or feminine partner (Gelles, 1997: 120). Not only do the dynamics within lesbian relationships differ from many heterosexual relationships, but several of the abusive behaviors differ as well. “There is no ‘typical’ form of abuse, even though some types of abuse may be inflicted more often than others” (Renzetti, 1992: 23). Furthermore, studies of battered women often show that their strong commitment to their partners “inhibits them from leaving the abusive relationship” (Renzetti, 1992: 77).

Response by Law Enforcement

Victims of domestic violence have been treated with indifference and insensitivity by the criminal justice system (Buzawa & Buzawa, 1996; Gelles & Straus, 1988). Furthermore, many victims experience victim blaming, meaning that the victim “asked for it”-by police and other criminal justice practitioners (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). Unfortunately, the response by law enforcement personnel to domestic violence is very limited and virtually nonexistent for same-sex domestic violence (Younglove, Kerr, & Vitello, 2002). “In some cases of same-sex interpersonal violence, lesbians and bisexual women are expressly denied legal protection” (Girshick, 2002: 1505). “When the criminal justice system is often hostile and/or unresponsive to lesbians, legal options available to heterosexual women are often not realistically available to lesbians, i.e., judges not issuing and police not enforcing protection orders for lesbian victims” (Lobel, 1986: 108).

Contrary to false assumptions regarding same-sex relationships, an egalitarian arrangement is more common in homosexual than heterosexual relationships (Lindsey, 1997). However, despite the increase in equality in lesbian relationships, available literature concerning the problem of domestic violence and homosexuals indicates that abuse is experienced in approximately 25-33% of all same-sex relationships (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001; Renzetti, 1992), which, corresponds to prevalence rates regarding heterosexual relationships and domestic violence (Pitt, 2001). Additionally, The National Coalition on Domestic Violence estimates that almost one out of every three same-sex relationships is abusive (Van Wormer & Bartollas, 2000;

Ingrassia & Beck, 1994). Similarly, as in heterosexual relationships, the most commonly reported reasons why people in same-sex relationships remain with their abusive partners are a hope for change and a love for their partner (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000).

According to Pitt and Dolan-Soto (2001), “Most incidents of abuse are acted out with the specific intent of gaining control over one’s partner” (p 164). However, certain types of abuse can be specific to homosexual relationships. For example, Pitt and Dolan-Soto (2001) suggest that homosexual abusers might use homophobic language to intimidate and demean as well as to deter the victim from seeking help; this is a form of homophobic control, and should be a focus of research on same-sex partner abuse.

The San Francisco-based National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs released a study in 1998 stating that homosexual domestic violence mirrors heterosexual violence in society, both in type and prevalence (Barnes, 1998). However, the coalition, consisting of 25 advocacy groups for gays and lesbians, also reported that homosexuals receive fewer protections than do other victims (Barnes, 1998). In fact, while few states will recognize a same-sex marriage, North Carolina, for example, defines a domestic relationship as partners who must be persons of the opposite sex who live together or have lived together or who share a minor child in common (Barnes, 1998). It was not until November 30, 1994 that same-sex couples in California were included under the state’s domestic violence laws (Younglove, Kerr, & Vitello, 2002: 760). Furthermore, Arizona and Indiana require that partners must be “spouses” or “former spouses” (Barnes, 1998), which automatically excluded homosexuals because their union is not legally

recognized as a marriage in those states. Therefore, not only is it difficult for homosexual domestic violence victims to seek assistance in general, but in certain areas of the United States, their situation is not recognized as domestic abuse, increasing the burden on the victim and perhaps, reducing their chances of seeking or receiving assistance. Unfortunately, the minimal amount of services available to victims of same-sex abuse does not correlate to the number of incidents of abuse. It is also important to take into account that the number of reported incidents of domestic violence is most likely lower than the actual number of abusive incidents against homosexuals.

A survey conducted by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs of 12 member organizations in cities within the United States calculated 2,352 reported cases of domestic violence in 1996 against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals. Of the tallied incidents, 1,191 were reported by men and 1,161 by women (Barnes, 1998). Surveys, such as the one by the coalition, reinforce the notion that anyone can be the victim of abuse, regardless of sex or gender. As such, it is imperative that adequate attention be given to the plight of victims of same-sex partner aggression.

As with battering in male-female relationships, domestic abuse can be in several different forms, including, but not limited to, isolation, threats, economic control, sexual abuse, HIV-related or other disability-related abuse, threats or actual harm to pets or children, physical or psychological abuse, and destruction of property (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001). Issues of battering among homosexuals may encompass a variety of different subject matter, as well. For example,

while battering in homosexual relationships includes virtually the same kinds of physical, psychological, and sexual abuse found in heterosexual relationships, issues, such as threatening to expose the victim's sexual orientation to others or convincing the victim that he or she will never be able to find help because of being a homosexual, also known as "homophobic control" (Hart, 1986; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989), have the ability to cause severe emotional damage to victims. Additionally, certain types of abuse can be specific to homosexual relationships. In Renzetti's (1992) study, correlation analyses revealed "the greater the respondents' desire to be independent and the greater the partners' dependency, the more likely the batterer was to inflict more types of abuse with greater frequency" (Renzetti 1992, 34). Similar to dependency, jealousy also appeared to be a major factor in violent lesbian relationships. In fact, "jealousy was the most frequently cited source of conflict or strain in the relationships studied" (Renzetti 1992: 39).

More often than within relationships among younger lesbian adults (unless an illness is involved), the possibility of neglect as a form of abuse rises substantially with regard to elder abuse among lesbian individuals. Similarly, homosexual individuals are often subjected to further forms of abuse by society in general, such as homophobia and heterosexism (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2000), which causes additional stress to victims of domestic abuse, leading them to feel as though they have no source from which they can seek help.

The stress upon lesbians may be intensified by concerns related to sexual orientation (Stein & Bonuck, 2001). This stress is magnified largely for older lesbians who have either been

exposed to homophobia or have chosen to hide their identities and relationships because of fear or shame caused by the negative images society has created regarding homosexuals. According to Schilit and Lie (1991), it is important to abused lesbians that they have safe environments with culturally sensitive workers, who could help them and their batterers confront and resolve their problems.

In 1992, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) added a requirement that programs must include curriculum content on sexual orientation (Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2001; CSWE, 1992). To determine the existing amount and content of writing on lesbians and gay men during the period of 1988 through 1997, Van Voorhis and Wagner conducted an extensive review of 12 social work journals. The findings of the study suggest that the presentation of knowledge for practice with lesbian and gay clients by social work journals is not significant” (Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2001). Additionally, it is vital that there be an increase in the publication of articles on homosexuality (Van Voorhis & Wagner, 2001). By increasing awareness of the issue, social service workers, physicians, and others will be better equipped to help victims of same-sex partner abuse. This is imperative, particularly when serious medical concerns arise due to the abuse.

In same-sex relationships, researchers and clinicians cannot simply rely on gender to determine the roles (victim vs. aggressor) played by each partner in a battering incident. As a result, intimate violence among same-sex couples has often been perceived as an “equal fight” or mutual battering (Island & Letellier, 1991; Renzetti, 1992). A lesbian who has been battered

tends to believe, as apparently do some therapists and advocates, that her experiences of violence at the hands of her partner were “mutual” since she may have “knocked her partner down to escape from a room in which she was being confined or violently ejected the batterer from her apartment after the batterer broke in or perhaps picked up a baseball bat and threatened to assault the batterer if she approached one step closer or in an extreme case, she may have, in a rage, beaten the women who had been battering her” (Renzetti, 1986: 184).

Lesbian abuse victims are susceptible to being overlooked by medical professionals in terms of their state of victimization. According to Pitt and Dolan-Soto (2001), once the diagnosis of domestic violence has been made, it is the clinician’s responsibility to then assess whether the patient is the victim or abuser (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001). When situations of same-sex domestic violence arise, the practitioner cannot necessarily assume that the patient is the partner who is the victim. Unfortunately, because of the lack of data on same-sex domestic violence, affected persons and community members suffer from what Merrill and Wolfe (2000) refer to as ‘recognition failure’-that is, they fail to recognize behaviors that constitute domestic violence and, therefore, to seek help or otherwise respond appropriately. Because same-sex relationships are often more egalitarian than heterosexual relationships, roles in such relationships are less strictly defined as they sometimes are in heterosexual relationships (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001). Therefore, while a patient might identify as a victim or abuser, the individual’s representation may not be entirely accurate (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001). Lesbian victims of abuse, like heterosexual victims, may not identify abuse as the presenting problem,

and in fact, may not identify themselves as a victim of abuse at all (Pitt & Dolan-Soto, 2001).

According to Pitt and Dolan-Soto (2001), careful screening without presumption of the outcome is necessary for accurate assessment and intervention of domestic abuse within gay and lesbian relationships.

Intervention and Treatment

Research suggests that survivors of same-sex violence turn most often to therapists and friends for support rather than utilizing agency services such as hotlines, support groups, or legal advocacy (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992). However, because the victim's support system is also frequently her lover, the lesbian victim of battering often has no one to turn to among her friends. She is faced not only with embarrassing her lover in front of their friends, but she risks further violence if her lover discovers that she has told others" (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989: 58). In terms of batterer intervention and treatment programs, the inclusion of partner-assaultive women in intervention programs designed for (male) batterers would not be appropriate or efficacious (Shepard & Pence, 1999). Furthermore, assaults by women also need to be a focus of social policy because of the harm caused to children from growing up in a violent household (Straus, 1998). "Gender sensitivity cannot be sacrificed to achieve uniformity of responses in domestic violence intervention work" (Shepard & Pence, 1999: 217). Studies indicate that what lesbian and bisexual women survivors of interpersonal violence most want are lesbian-specific or

lesbian-and-bi-friendly services (Girshick, 2002; Renzetti, 1992). Research suggests that services offered to lesbians by lesbians feel the safest to survivors, with the least risk of homophobic reactions. Literature such as pamphlets, brochures, and handouts should be geared to the experiences of lesbians and bisexual women (Girshick, 2002). In order for published materials to be produced with accurate content, more research studies must be conducted pertaining to the matter of lesbian battering.

Shepard and Pence (1999) point out that in order to formulate an intervention program for women who abuse their partners, it is important to consider the following:

- Address the issue of battering and power and control on the part of both partners.
- Train appropriate personnel to understand women's use of violence holistically and contextually.
- Address the issue of substance abuse.
- Examine issues related to race, class, ethnicity, nationality, and residency status in the U.S.

When trying to create programs for victims of lesbian battering, it is necessary to recognize the difficulties associated with not only being a lesbian in today's society, but also of being a battered woman. According to Gelles (1997), in the 1970s and 1980s, traditional services for treating intimate violence were shelters for women who were victimized by men, arrest for male batterers, and treatment groups for violent men. "To be effective it is essential that counselors be guided by lesbian victims of battering, just as they have been guided by victims of battering in

heterosexual relationships, to find ways to be advocates for victims and generate education and change in the therapeutic community” (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989: 60).

In many areas, nonhomophobic resources for abused lesbians are nonexistent. Therefore, a therapist may need to perform advocacy functions, such as in-service training to shelter staffs, identification of “safe houses” within the lesbian community, or other innovative activities (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989).

Overall, not a great deal is known about partner aggression among females; however, existing research suggests that many of the same forms of abuse that occur within heterosexual relationships are often present within homosexual relationships, as well. These types of abuse may include isolation from friends and family, threats against the victim or a pet, threats of suicide on the part of the abuser, financial or psychological control, sexual abuse, destruction of property, physical abuse, and homophobic control, which may include threatening to “out” a partner as a means of maintaining control within the relationship. Most importantly, it is necessary to recognize that abuse can occur in many different forms and is not specific only to male-female relationships.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

To examine issues of domestic violence among lesbians, a questionnaire similar to that created and utilized by Claire M. Renzetti and the Working Group on Lesbian Battering during a Philadelphia-based study on lesbian battering (1992) was used as a guide for the creation of in-depth interview questions. This qualitative study included a sample size of 19 participants, all of whom identify themselves as lesbian or bisexual and who have experienced some form of physical, sexual, emotional, financial, or verbal abuse by a same-sex partner (*please see Appendix A for a list of sample interview questions*).

The study utilizes a broad definition of domestic abuse so that women who have been verbally or sexually abused, as well as those who have experienced violence at the hands of their partners, all had an opportunity to take part. A broad definition of abuse encompasses all types of maltreatment and is essential for service providers. “It would be ridiculous and unethical if service providers, such as shelters, batterer treatment programs, or marital therapists, restricted their focus to physical assaults and ignored psychological assaults, sexual coercion, subjugation, and other forms of degradation” (Straus, 1998: 37). Each woman in the study was a self-identified lesbian or bisexual woman who considers herself a victim of abuse at either at the hands of her current or a past intimate partner.

Permission to conduct the study was granted by the University of Central Florida's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB concluded that the research methods used in the study were appropriate and that human subjects involved in the study were not being put at risk (*please see Appendix B*). Furthermore, in-person interviews took place at locations that were agreed upon by both the respondent and the interviewer. The interviewer had a mobile telephone on hand at all times during the interviews in case any emergency should arise. Additionally, no interviews were conducted at personal dwellings. Unlike interviews with women who are residing in domestic violence shelters or who are currently involved in abusive relationships, the women in this study were all out of their abusive relationship(s), and therefore seemed to feel less threatened by their present situation and therefore more willing to discuss the abuse.

The study was conducted via face-to-face and/or telephone interviews and consisted of a sample of residents of Orlando, Florida and the surrounding metropolitan area, as well as various other locations across the United States. Furthermore, one respondent is currently residing in London England, yet is originally from the United States. Participants ranged in age and come from various racial and ethnic backgrounds; however, future research should include a more diverse sample including the elderly and more racial minorities.

Those who chose to take part were fully informed regarding the details of the study and the intentions of the researcher. Moreover, each participant was either given an informed consent form or read one over the telephone when telephone interviews took place. The identity of the women involved remains anonymous, and pseudonyms are used in the report. An

additional goal was to determine if there is a prevalence of domestic violence in the backgrounds of the participants in the study or in their partners' backgrounds, therefore, the intergenerational transmission of violence was addressed in the interviews. Power within the relationship was also discussed to determine which partner holds the power.

Sampling Issues

Because homosexuals are considered a hidden population, gathering a sufficient sample to produce valuable results required extensive advertising. Unfortunately, because of the nature of the diverse population of the sample, a random sample survey was not utilized in the study. Therefore, in order to delve deeply into the issues surrounding same-sex violence among lesbians, a qualitative study is more appropriate. In order to attract study participants, permission was requested from several "gay friendly" Orlando, Florida establishments to advertise the study within the facilities via flyers. Additional resources, such as local domestic violence shelters, the university counseling center, and advocacy groups were utilized as well.

In addition to advertising via flyers, emails were sent through the University of Florida Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual Student Union online mailing list describing the study and asking for willing participants. A message was also posted on the GayOrlando.com online message board. Finally, many of the women who partook in the study did so because of the snowball effect, meaning that they heard about it from others. Furthermore, some of the participants were

informed of the study directly by the researcher during information sessions. For example, the interviewer attended women's meetings at a local gay and lesbian community center and announced the study to its members. Women were provided with the researcher's contact information and were welcome to contact her if they were interested in taking part. Furthermore, it was made clear that the sex of the interviewer did have an impact on some of the women's willingness to participate. In fact, a few of the women disclosed that they would not have discussed their abuse had the interviewer not been a female.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Respondents were asked a series of questions pertaining to the types of abuse they experienced while involved with a same-sex partner. Because the study was conducted in an interview format, specific questions varied somewhat on a case-by-case basis. However, specific demographic information was gathered from each participant. In total, the study consisted of three Hispanic women and sixteen Caucasian women. All of the women had at least a high school diploma, with three of the respondents holding master's level degrees. In total, the sample consists of five bisexual women and fourteen self-identified lesbians.

The following paragraphs document the experiences had and discussed by the 19 respondents in the study. The women range in age from twenty-two to thirty-nine and all classify themselves as either lesbians or bisexual women. Results from the interviews suggest that issues of power and control, jealousy, violence and aggressive behavior, and severe emotional abuse are prevalent in the relationships described by the lesbians and bisexual women interviewed. Some of the women experienced multiple victimization; others endured different types of abuse, such as emotional, physical, financial, and/or psychological. Although many of the women do not consider themselves "victims" because of the circumstances of their relationship(s), they do, however, often blame themselves to a certain extent for allowing the aggressive behavior to

occur within their relationship(s). Furthermore, several of the women in the study do not feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation to family, friends, or co-workers, which causes them additional stress and sometimes played a part in the continuation of negative relationships.

Multiple Types of Abuse

Claire Renzetti is one of the most recognized researchers of lesbian battering. According to Renzetti (1992), there are three types of abusive lesbian relationships: situational battering, chronic battering, and emotional or psychological battering. Situational battering occurs once or twice as a result of some situational event and is the least common, while chronic battering takes place when physical abuse has occurred more than two times and escalates over time. The emotional battering relationship is one in which the abuse is verbal or psychological rather than physical. Often times, a relationship consists of physical and psychological battering (Peterman & Dixon, 2003).

Of the women interviewed, the relationship of two respondents in particular demonstrates that several different forms of abuse can co-exist within a single relationship. Both partners, Maggie and Sophie were interviewed separately regarding their six-year relationship together. Sophie and Maggie are both 24-year old women. Sophie holds a master's degree, while Maggie has some college education and additional vocational education in a specialized field. The two met at the age of 16 while in high school. Both attribute their young age and fear of being open

about their sexuality to many of the problems they experienced during the course of their relationship. Sophie recalls the first incident of abuse occurring at her home when she and Maggie were approximately 17 years of age. The two engaged in an argument, which resulted in Sophie attempting to leave the house. Maggie then proceeded to chase her and throw her to the ground. Crying, she then apologized for her behavior, stating that it would never happen again.

The following report from the interviews with Maggie and Sophie are typical of many of the stories relayed from other respondents and illustrate issues of homophobic control, dependency, isolation, and physical, psychological, and financial abuse.

Homophobic Control

As suggested by the literature, homophobic control is something that is unique to same-sex partners and can have a dramatic impact on the dynamics within a relationship. “On several occasions, she would chase me down the hall of the school crying,” stated Sophie. Sophie recalled another instance when Maggie stated, “If you leave me, I will tell your mother you are gay”. Sophie viewed Maggie’s desperate attempt to keep her as flattering and a demonstration that she cared about her so much that she would do anything to keep her. Looking back now as an adult, Sophie realizes that Maggie’s comments were abusive. However, she contents that some of her behaviors towards the latter part of their relationship were very verbally combative.

Dependency

I admit that I did things to make her mad. I would say very hurtful things because I felt like it was my only defense against her. I had never imagined being in a situation like that before. I wanted everything to work out and tried all that I could to make things better. Most of the time things were good between us, but when we would fight, it would almost always get physical. She would never hit me in the face; it was kind of like a rule she had. I think that she thought as long as she didn't hit me in the face that it was acceptable that we fought like we did. It would usually follow the same pattern. I could not tell you what we were even fighting about most of the time. Things would just escalate. She would get mad and lash out and I would then retaliate with a cruel comment. She would almost always lose her temper and either hit me, kick me, prevent me from leaving by restraining me, or on some occasions, she would threaten suicide and swallow a handful of pills to get me to stay. In the beginning I would react and feel very sorry for her rather than blame her. But as time went on, I began not to get angry. My feelings began to change and I viewed her as more of an adversary than a partner. I did not want to be intimate with her because I felt that our relationship was so bad. But, at the same time, I did not want to leave her because we did share many good times, as well as bad ones. Also, she was all I had known for so long in terms of a relationship and I was scared to let that go. - *Sophie*

Isolation

She [Maggie] did not like it if I had other friends and would often do whatever necessary to ensure that the two of us spent almost all of our time together. She [Maggie] now admits to having an anger problem. She knows that she would lash out and that what she was doing was wrong. Now that we are no longer together, we are able to look back on our relationship and see all of the mistakes that we made. I know it is strange, but we are friends now. I think that we are both better people outside of our relationship. It simply was not a healthy situation. We became so comfortable with each other that we took our relationship for granted and lost all respect for each other. -*Sophie*

Financial Abuse within the Relationship

In regards to finances, I would consider Maggie to be abusive to a certain extent. For years, she did not have a job, yet expected me to buy her things constantly. She still depended on her father for money and would use his credit card frivolously. However, I did not have that privilege, yet was expected to spend several hundred dollars on random things simply because she wanted them. I always felt very pressured to buy things, even though I could not afford them; I would typically give in. -*Sophie*

Relationship Dynamics

Maggie and Sophie shared many of the same stories, yet from opposite perspectives.

Together for six years, the two experienced a great deal, including going through the “coming out” process together. Below are some of the highlights of Maggie’s interview. Each response is in reference to her relationship with Sophie.

I am from a family who is very accepting; my sister is also gay. My girlfriend was afraid to tell any friends, family, or parents. My family pretty much knew even though I didn't tell them until my senior year of high school. It was hard to pretend to be straight. I felt like our relationship was a joke to everyone because no one knew about it. We would get teased if we did anything that resembled affection. I think things would have been different if we could have shown affection. I had a lot of anger for my friends because of their behavior.

She [Sophie] is a very sweet person, but she knew exactly what to say to cut straight to my heart like a knife. She would call me virtually every word in the book; the worst things you could say to somebody. They were personal; things like, ‘you are a psycho’; ‘I would never raise kids with you’; ‘you are crazy’; ‘you give me chills when you touch me’; ‘I hate you’, and so on.

I think that everyone has a little bit of anger in them. I have a bad anger problem; I don't have it all the time. Today I can control it better. I still get angry and yell and then stop myself. I still have it; I'll always have everything I had in the past, I can just control it better. I have learned from it. I know it is not the right thing to do to the one you love. I

regret my actions; absolutely.

The way I took out my anger was to throw things...remotes, portable phones, anything I could find. At one point I had a guitar in my hand and threatened her. I did not want to smash it over her head or anything, but I did make physical contact with the guitar--that had to be one of the worst fights we had.

Our fights were mutual. She was much more verbally abusive. She knew what to say to go straight to the heart and I would take it very personally...I would absolutely consider myself a perpetrator as much as a victim.

The relationship between Maggie and Sophie demonstrates the different dynamics that can coincide within a lesbian relationship. Other women in the study relayed similar circumstances related to issues of revealing their sexuality to family and friends. A pattern also arose in terms of physical abuse almost always being preceded by verbal abuse. A few of the respondents stated to have been isolated from friends by their partner, as well. These findings are similar to many of the concerns that often arise in discussions of heterosexual abuse. For example, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse, physical violence, issues of power, control, and jealousy, are not specific to heterosexual or homosexual relationships, but rather, can be seen in both. Unlike homophobic control, which is specific to homosexual relationships, other forms of abuse and aggression, whether it is verbal or physical, appear to be universal in terms of domestic abuse.

Isolation from Friends

It is sometimes easy to misinterpret controlling behavior for flattery, as is evident from the findings of the study. Not unlike previous findings, respondents who mentioned being isolated from friends each described a slow escalation of events that lead to their partner's controlling behavior.

Anna, for example, is a 34 year-old Caucasian woman from Ohio. She has a master's degree and is currently working as a writer for a local newspaper in Orlando, Florida. Anna feels as though she can be open about her sexuality at work and would describe herself as "out of the closet". During her time with her aggressive partner, Anna was isolated from friends and often encouraged by her partner to distance herself from others based on the idea that they did not support the relationship. Furthermore, although Anna did not do so, her partner wanted her to quit working so that she could support her as a means of gaining full financial control. Anna's partner never hit her directly; however, she did throw objects, such as plates, at her and her pet as a means of releasing aggression.

Anna described her relationship as "borderline abusive" and stated that it was a gradual process getting to that point. Suddenly one day a "light went on," stated Anna, and she decided to leave her abusive partner. Despite her partner's charming demeanor around others, Anna had come to the realization that her relationship with her partner was in fact abusive. Friends eventually served as a support system for Anna, who was able to exit the relationship.

Other women in the study experienced isolation from friends as a result of their

relationship(s), as well. Maria, for example, shared the following:

In my last and longest lesbian relationship we did not have any separate friends. If I had them, I wasn't allowed to go out with them; it was an unspoken rule. I can remember one time I wanted to go to a candle party with coworkers. My partner became very upset and did everything she could to encourage me not to go. I felt obligated to go because they had invited me many other times and I always had an excuse, so this time I said 'yes'. I asked my partner to go with me and she said 'no, but you go'. As I was getting dressed to go she started becoming a lot more upset. She asked me not to go and I explained that I had committed to go. She started becoming angry and her voice began to get louder. By the time I was ready to go she was furious. I kissed her goodbye told her I would be coming home soon and as I was walking out of the bedroom she threw the remote control at me; it shattered as it missed me and hit the door. As I was rushing to leave the house she ran behind me and said 'bitch, you leave now you don't come back'. I rushed out because she was chasing me and then called her 10 minutes later on my cell phone. I wanted to make sure that I had a home to come back to so I apologized.

Keeping an individual isolated from friends as a means of control came up in additional interviews, as well, demonstrating that it is not an uncommon tactic used by abusers. Many of the women interviewed described incidents where their partners would discourage the making of new friends outside the circle of friends that the couple already shared. In some cases, this behavior was thought by the victim to be linked to the abuser's need to enforce control over the victim/survivor, while in other situations, the behavior was assumed to be connected to the abuser's severe insecurity.

Violent and Emotionally Abusive Behavior

As current literature suggests, many victims of physical abuse endure verbal and/or

emotional abuse, as well. Many of the respondents spoke of multiple incidents of violent acts of aggression against them. Amie, for example, is a 24 year-old assistant softball coach in New York. She identifies herself as a lesbian and is able to be open about her sexuality at work. Amie first realized that she was a lesbian at the age of 15. During her freshman year of college, she met the person with whom she would spend the next four years. Amie now describes her previous partner as possessive and controlling and believes that the relationship contained physical, emotional, financial, and psychological abuse on the part of her partner. "I would be victim of random fits of rage (physically) when circumstances were not going my partner's way," stated Amie. The relationship continued and the abuse escalated until Amie had finally had enough. One evening at Giant's Stadium in New York, Amie's partner got behind the wheel of Amie's truck and proceeded to run her over. She then backed up and was attempting to do it again when Amie was able to get out of the way. The police came to the scene, but no arrests were made. This was the conclusion to the aggression that Amie had faced for the past four years; she finally decided to leave her partner for good.

The majority of the women in the study were with their abusive partner(s) for at least one year. However, a few of the respondents ended their relationships near the onset of the abuse, even if the first incident occurred well into the relationship. For example, Nicole is 32 and works in sales in Orlando, Florida. She considers herself bisexual, but cannot be open about her sexual orientation at work. Nicole was fortunate to end her abusive relationship early on. After being slapped in the face by the woman that she had been dating for one year, Nicole decided that it

was likely that the aggression would escalate and that it was best to remove herself entirely from the situation. Other respondents, such as Denise, admit to exhibiting violent behaviors themselves outside of the relationship(s) they discussed in the interview. Denise is currently going through court proceedings for beating up her current partner's ex-girlfriend. Throughout the course of the interview, Denise readily expressed her dislike for her abusive ex-partner and acknowledges that she herself was a victim. However, she also spoke openly about her own violent behaviors outside of the context of her same-sex relationship.

Financial Abuse

People often have the misconception that women in same-sex relationships do not have the same financial ties to one another as heterosexual couples. However, the findings of this study suggest that in relationships, women often combine finances, buy vehicles and/or homes together, and purchase items, such as pets, that can be very difficult to share or divide during a break-up. Five of the nineteen women cited financial abuse as one of the main forms of controlling behavior present within their negative relationship(s). The following paragraphs in this section details the story of one of the respondents.

Denise was involved with a woman for two and a half years who was financially and emotionally abusive. When breaking up with Denise (on her twenty-first birthday), her partner took the truck that they had shared and that Denise had been making payments on, as well as a

large sum of money that belonged to Denise. Throughout their relationship, her partner was possessive of Denise and exhibited controlling behavior. However, despite her behavior, it was Denise's partner, not Denise herself, who ended the relationship and who eventually left with many of Denise's possessions.

Carrie is also a victim of financial abuse. She is originally from Weisbaden, Germany but currently resides in Orlando Florida. She is a 31 year-old bartender in Orlando who considers herself "out of the closet". For two years, Carrie was involved with a woman who took advantage of her financially. Her partner was possessive of her in regards to her relationships with friends, according to Carrie, and took advantage of her financially. Carrie did not try to seek help from others outside of the relationship, but did decide to end her partnership after spending two years together. Carrie is now very cautious in her relationships and fears being taken advantage of again financially.

Suicide Threats

One of the reoccurring themes that arose during interviews was that of using suicide as a means of guilt. Three of the respondents shared stories related to their abusive partners threatening suicide. Of course, suicide is extremely serious and mention of this behavior should not be taken lightly. However in the context of the interviews, it was clear that the respondents interpreted the suicidal discussions by their partners to be mere threats intended to "guilt" each

woman into staying with her abusive partner.

One of the respondents, Pam, said the following:

We would get into an argument and she [her partner] would threaten to commit suicide in order to get me to stay with her. I would have to hide all of the razors and medication in the house because she would threaten to kill herself. I would come home each day and check the bathtub to see if she was lying in it dead.

Pam did not think that her partner would go through with her threats of suicide; however, the woman did cut her wrist with a steak knife in front of Pam during an argument. Despite several attempts on Pam's part, her partner would not seek professional help, but continued to exhibit suicidal behaviors. It is Pam's belief that her partner was using her threats as a means of perpetuating the relationship. "She knew I was not happy and that I wanted out of the relationship. By threatening to kill herself, she knew that I would not abandon her," stated Pam. Eventually, Pam did end the relationship.

Another respondent, Maggie, relayed a similar experience. However, in her case, she was the one who contemplated suicide. Her comments are as follows:

I became suicidal. I wanted to just die. Nothing would work to fix the relationship. I felt unwanted sexually. I was so self-conscious. It was like I didn't want to live anymore.

Jealousy and Controlling Behavior

Issues of jealousy and control arise frequently in relation to partner aggression; lesbian battering is no exception to this rule. The majority of the women in the study felt as though their abusive partner(s) exhibited severe jealousy or controlling behaviors. Sophie, for example

recalled how her now ex-partner Maggie would become enraged when she [Sophie] would want to spend times with friends other than the mutual friends the couple shared. Other women, such as Beth, shared similar stories.

Beth is a 27 year-old technical trainer at an Orlando law firm who identifies herself as a bisexual woman. Beth feels as though her previous partner of five years was very possessive of her, as well as emotionally abusive. “I was in a relationship where I was emotionally abused,” she stated. “If I had stayed, I am certain it would have turned physical.” Beth attempted to get her partner to seek help via a counselor, but was unsuccessful in her efforts. “With no luck, I went on my own; it helped to vent to someone,” she said.

Multiple Victimization

Four of the nineteen women in the study were involved in more than one abusive relationship. The duration of each relationship was at least one year, regardless of when the abuse first occurred. Two of the four women, Teresa and Dawn, feel that they can be open about their sexual orientation at work. Both Maria and Pam, however, explained that their occupations as a nurse and teacher respectively prevent them from being open about issues related to homosexuality.

Teresa is 37 years old and has been in two abusive lesbian relationships. She is a self-identified lesbian living in the Central Florida area. Her first abusive partner had two young

children from a previous association. Teresa and her partner's relationship, which lasted for approximately two years, finally approached an end after Teresa awoke in the middle of the night to a cleaning product being sprayed in her face by her partner. The fight escalated, resulting in Teresa being stabbed with a knife in the leg and hit in the head with a hammer by her partner. Although she had never previously retaliated physically, Teresa did hit her partner a single time in the leg out of self-defense. By this time, her partner had already busted open Teresa's lip and burned her stomach; however, after being hit once by Teresa, her partner insisted that she was going to call the police; Teresa encouraged that the call be made. Once the police arrived, her partner was arrested. Two weeks later, Teresa could take the abuse no longer and decided to leave her permanently. This was an incredibly difficult decision for Teresa to make, particularly because of her close relationship to her partner's children. This is only one of the several incidents of abuse that Teresa endured throughout the duration of the two-year relationship. In addition to physical abuse, emotional and psychological abuse was present in the relationship, as well.

As with many of the abusers described in the study, Teresa's partner quickly began exhibiting jealous behaviors towards her in the beginning of their relationship and began to discourage Teresa from pursuing her career goals. She would "freak out", according to Teresa, and would hit her in front of customers at her place of business. Teresa was larger and much stronger than her partner, yet would not defend herself because she felt that she would hurt the woman too badly if she exerted physical force against her. Teresa believes that it was her

partner's jealousy that caused her to destroy all of Teresa's photographs, telephone numbers, and so on related to other women. Furthermore, her partner would beat Teresa in front of the children, showing no remorse.

According to Teresa, her partner felt no guilt or shame for the aggression she exhibited and refused to admit that she had a problem or that she needed to seek help. Teresa, on the other hand, sought counseling from a psychiatrist after the relationship ended. The psychiatrist was very helpful, according to Teresa. However, the next relationship she entered was abusive, as well.

Unlike many women, Teresa is fortunate to have supportive parents who have stood by her decisions. She is now 37; however, she "came out" to her parents at age 12. She has now moved on and acknowledges the abuse that was present in her relationship. However, after leaving her first abusive partner, Teresa entered into a second abusive relationship that lasted over two years. Despite having recently purchased a home with her second abusive partner, Teresa decided to exit the relationship to maintain her own well-being. Although not physically abusive, her partner exhibited aggressive verbal behavior regularly, which produced an unhealthy environment for Teresa.

Teresa is not alone in her multiple victimization. Dawn is 26 years old. She is originally from Georgia but is currently working as a delivery person in Orlando, Florida. Dawn claims to have first realized that she was attracted to women at five years of age. She is "out of the closet" and is currently in a same-sex relationship with a woman who is "out" to most people. Dawn has

been in two past relationships where her partners were mentally and physically abusive. Her most abusive relationship lasted approximately one year and was ended by Dawn. “The best help for both situations was to leave both individuals behind. So that’s what I did,” she stated.

Unlike Teresa and Dawn, Maria does not feel that she can be open about her sexuality to many people. Maria is a 31 year-old Hispanic woman from Brooklyn, New York who is currently living, attending college as a master’s student, and working as a registered nurse in the Central Florida area. As a nurse, Maria does not feel as though she can be open about her sexuality at work. Identifying herself as a bisexual woman, she is presently in a heterosexual relationship. “I was a ‘lesbian’ for 13 years; for that period I was completely ‘out’ to family and close friend”, she stated.

Maria’s last and longest lesbian relationship, lasting six years, was with a woman [“X”] who exhibited possessive, controlling, and jealous behaviors towards her. “In all my same sex relationships my partners have been possessive, controlling, and jealous,” she stated. “My last relationship lasted six years; my partner had a temper problem and severe obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) which made me walk on egg shells all of the time”. This is a comment that is often made by heterosexual victims of domestic violence, as well. Maria continued to explain that she found herself taking on a great deal of stress to try and alleviate the stress “X” was feeling because “X” became overwhelmed and angry often.

Maria, unfortunately, was in more than one abusive same-sex relationship. During the interview, she disclosed that her first female partner, which lasted four years (beginning during

her freshman year of college) became very jealous of her relationships with others, and in fact, “trapped” her in the girls’ restroom and “threatened to tell the Dean and everyone” that she was a lesbian if she was not going to be in a relationship with her. Exerting homophobic control, Maria’s partner was able to manipulate Maria. She stated, “I became very afraid of being ‘outed’ and stayed in the relationship until I could move out of the dorms and away from her”.

Almost all of my lesbian relationships had some degree of abuse. My first encounter became a nightmare because she threatened to tell everyone that I was gay. She also tried to harm me by pushing me to oncoming traffic. My second relationship was with an older lady (13 years older) and she was a recovering alcoholic. Towards the end of our relationship, she began drinking again and when she did she became very controlling and jealous. She even tried pushing and shoving me several times; she would get in my face and try and instigate physical confrontation.

After I left her, I started a new relationship with a girl I met in a gay club. We moved in together and I started noticing her mood swings and short temper. She would get enraged for very minor things such as having people over and having to clean the house. It started to carry over to our relationship. One time she got so angry (I can’t remember why) but she called me a bitch and kicked me out (as she shoved her body against mine) of her apartment. I slept in my car that night. The following day I came back to pick up my belongings and she apologized; I cried and told her I could not take any type of abuse because I had been abused when I was a child. I gave her specific instances of my childhood physical and verbal abuse and she cried with me and vowed never to do it again. It never changed, I tried everything I could to have her see how incoherent she became when she got angry and I even taped her when she became mad. She would say anything that hurt me including things I told her about my past. Ultimately this behavior made me angry and bitter towards her and I started going out and seeing other people. I told her I needed my space and moved into the spare bedroom of our house. I continued to make excuses for her behavior, such as “she is stressed because we are buying a house”. Towards the end I knew I had to leave her because it was making me very bitter and angry and that I couldn’t change her. She would only agree to seek counseling towards the end, when I had resolved to leave. I was very afraid because I didn’t want to leave my security, my house and my life. When she realized that I had already resolved to leave she became very angry and threw things at me and tried everything in her power to not let me go. It almost got physical on several occasions but I always managed to run away before it got to that. —*Maria*

Maria initiated the break-up in both relationships described above. As time went on, the abuse “escalated and became more physical towards the end, when they realized that I had no feelings for them”, she stated. Although a partner never threatened her with a weapon, both women stood at the door and blocked her from leaving or would sometimes restrain her or keep her “hostage” for a short period of time. As the aggression increased in her last relationship with “X”, Maria tried to seek couples counseling. However, “X” was very against the idea until it was too late, in Maria’s opinion.

When asked if she feels as though her relationship(s) was mutually abusive, Maria explained:

Towards the end of our relationship I started speaking back and getting very angry (which I did not like). I was more like the avoider that would try to pick up the pieces so things did not get worse.” However, when asked if she ever acted out towards her partner(s) as a means of self-defense, Maria stated, “In my first lesbian encounter I tried to run away but she physically held me. I could have fought back and hurt her but chose not to perpetuate the violence that I had grown up knowing. In my other relationships, I merely did whatever I could to get out of that situation. If I was locked in and kept hostage I would say or do anything to calm them down enough to get out of the room. When I was pushed or shoved or they got in my face, I would step down and walk away or try and calm them down by saying whatever they wanted to hear.

Like Maria, Pam does not feel as though she can be open about her sexual orientation at work. She is a 28 year-old elementary school teacher in Orlando, Florida who considers herself to be very “closeted” publicly. However, her family and friends are all aware of her sexual orientation. While in college in up-state New York, Pam became involved with a woman who later became emotionally abusive towards her. Although no physical aggression was ever

exhibited by her partner, Pam feels as though her partner's complete lack of respect or concern for her was a form of emotional abuse. Her partner constantly belittled Pam's decisions and life choices. After being hired for a teaching job in Florida, Pam and her partner moved together from New York. However, shortly after, the emotional abuse escalated, leaving Pam with no choice (in her opinion) but to end the relationship.

Pam classified her next relationship as psychologically abusive. Her partner exhibited suicidal behavior and made several attempts to perpetuate the relationship, despite Pam's blatant unwillingness to continue in the relationship. After several months of continued emotional and psychological abuse, Pam decided to move out of the apartment the two women had shared together.

Teresa, Maria, and Pam each had very different experiences; however, all three of the women were in more than one abusive relationship that contained multiple forms of abuse. While Teresa and Maria both turned to counseling for help, Pam did not seek professional guidance or support. Rather, she relied on herself and friends to get her through her difficult situation.

Victims' Help Seeking Behaviors

Victims of abuse often contact the police for help during a moment of crisis. However, the majority of battered women do not rate police responses highly (Renzetti, 1992). In fact,

studies show that in addition to the already low priority police often assign to domestic violence calls and their sexist and victim-blaming attitudes, it appears that for battered lesbians, police responses tend to be homophobic and heterosexist, as well (Renzetti, 1992; 91). The findings of the present study suggest that lesbians and bisexual women would prefer to rely on counselors, family, and friends rather than the police. Lesbians and bisexual women often rely on friends for emotional support regarding relationships and sometimes seek professional help from counselors. This perhaps stems from the inability of these women to reach out to family members due to their lack of support of the woman's lifestyle. In other instances, the woman's fear of discrimination on the part of help providers or law enforcement was apparent. None of the participants visited women's shelters and only a few ever spoke to law enforcement regarding their situation.

While both Teresa and Maria sought the help of professional counselors, many of the women in the study, such as Pam, either worked through issues related to the abuse themselves, or sought the help of friends. Although friends can be an excellent source of support, this can be difficult in situations where the partners have the same friends, such as in the case of Maggie and Sophie. Both Maggie and Sophie were interviewed for the study. Their responses demonstrate many of the difficulties associated with (1) growing up as a young lesbian, (2) sharing mutual friends who may or may not be accepting of homosexuality, (3) issues of extreme jealousy, (4) threats of suicide and 'outing', and (5) physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. Although Maggie was comfortable disclosing her sexuality to friends, family members, and co-workers,

Sophie was not, yet counseling was never sought out by either of the women. Furthermore, both Maggie and Sophie agree that Maggie was incredibly reluctant for any personal information about their relationship to be shared with friends, which made it difficult for Sophie to turn to anyone close to her for help.

Like Maggie and Sophie, Melissa made the decision on her own to end her abusive relationship. Melissa is 29 years old and works in the retail/service industry in London, England. She is currently married to a man who is verbally abusive towards her. Both have been in same-sex relationships in the past, and Melissa has been in other abusive heterosexual abusive relationships, as well. In terms of her experiences with women, she was involved with a woman whom she referred to as both controlling over her and physically and psychologically abusive. She and her same-sex partner were not living together, which made it easier for Melissa to end the relationship. However, while the two were dating, Melissa was the victim of both physical and verbal abuse. When asked if the relationship was mutually abusive, she stated that she had acted out towards her partner both physically and verbally out of self-defense. Because of her previous experiences with abuse, Melissa made the decision to end the relationship with her abusive partner.

Other women in the study, such as Jamie, shared experiences where they sought the assistance of law enforcement. The findings of this study suggest that more training is necessary for law enforcement in general in regards to handling issues related to same-sex domestic violence.

Jamie is a Dental Assistant in Winter Park, Florida. She is currently happily involved in a long-term same-sex relationship. However, for six years of her life, Jamie lived with an extremely abusive woman who controlled her both physically and emotionally. Jamie was hit and verbally abused by her partner. The violence escalated to such a severe degree that Jamie incurred severe injury and a broken nose. When speaking to Jamie, it was apparent that she disagreed with her partner's actions. However, she repeatedly contended that she too did things to "push her buttons". As with other women in the study, Jamie helped justify her partner's actions by taking on some of the responsibility herself. This is a theme that often arises with heterosexual victims of domestic abuse, as well. During interviews for this study, it was apparent that several of the women felt that taking on a portion of the blame themselves helped them feel as though they were not necessarily victims, but rather, that they had some control over the abusive situation.

During a physical altercation, Jamie called the police to the scene. She notes that the incident occurred several years back and that things may have changed since, but her experience supports the research that demonstrates that law enforcement is not on the side of the same-sex victim. According to Jamie, no legal repercussions were taken, and the officer simply treated the incident as a family dispute that might take place between sisters. Having no family support, Jamie felt her only option was to stay with her abusive partner. Finally, when things reached a breaking point, Jamie sought help from a local gay/lesbian community center and was able to leave her abusive partner.

Abuse of Pets

Three of the women interviewed stated that their partners were abusive towards their pet and one respondent reported acting abusively towards a partner's pet as a means of hurting her abuser indirectly. This abuse was viewed as a means of retaliating against the respondent for actions that the abuser disagreed with. For example, Mary's partner of three years actually beat Mary's dog as an indirect means of hurting Mary. While other stories were not as severe, abuse of pets is an element of violence that is apparent within some same-sex partnerships, as it is in heterosexual relationships, as well. This added element places an additional burden on victims who wish to seek help outside of the home but do not feel comfortable leaving their pet(s) behind with the abusive partner.

When asked if either of her partners ever threatened or harmed her pets, Maria explained that in her first relationship she harmed her partner's ferret several times behind her partner's back because she knew that the ferret was loved by her partner. "She was hurting me and I had to hurt her back." She continued to state, "I regret that very much (I never killed a pet or put them in the hospital or anything like that)".

Pet abuse is a topic that has been widely overlooked in the area of domestic violence. As is evident from this study, it is not necessarily only the abusive partner who uses negative behavior towards a loved one's pet as a means of control. In some cases, a victim may act out towards a pet as a means of trying to retaliate against an abuser. Similarly, another area that tends to be disregarded in studies pertaining to partner aggression is bisexual female partner

abuse.

Bisexual Female Partners and Abuse

The study consisted of four bisexual women; each who had experienced some form of abuse during a relationship. The following paragraphs document some of the women's experiences.

Katie is a 24 year-old bisexual woman from Central Florida. She is currently attending college to obtain a bachelor's degree in Psychology and works in a local coffee shop. Katie typically dates men; however, she had a very negative experience with a woman when she became sexually involved with her and the woman's long-term boyfriend. The relationship began as a "very casual affair". However, as time went on, the couple became very possessive of Katie. In fact, at one point, the woman she was seeing threatened to break the windshield of Katie's car. The aggression escalated to the point where Katie, who was currently living next door to the couple, felt that moving out of the building was the only solution. Katie moved out of her apartment and cut off all communication with the couple.

Shanna's story is somewhat different from the other women in the study, but is a reflection of the severity of different forms of abuse that are present in our society, and therefore was included in the findings. She is a 28 year-old Puerto Rican woman from Brooklyn, New York. She classifies herself as bisexual and has been involved in more than one same-sex

relationship. However, the abuse she endured during a previous four-year relationship was at the hands of a male whom she dated from ages 16 to 19. Shanna endured physical, emotional, and psychological abuse by her male partner, primarily attributed to issues related to her sexuality and attraction to women. Although her boyfriend encouraged her relationships with women at first, he soon became overwhelmingly jealous and possessive of Shanna. Her heterosexual partner was Columbian, which Shanna credits for playing a role in his “macho” behavior. The height of the abuse came when the couple was traveling in a vehicle with the male at the wheel. Shanna did not feel safe with the way her partner was driving and exited the car. Her boyfriend then got out of the car, grabbed her, and hit her. “I am nobody’s punching bag,” stated Shanna regarding the incident.

Mutual Abuse

Mutual abuse is often questionable. Abusers and survivors alike sometimes claim a situation is mutually abusive when one person may have actually been acting out of self-defense, not combative behavior. Sophie, for example, recalled instances where her partner would physically push her continuously while stating, “hit me back” and using physical and verbal force to intimidate her. After enduring the abuse for several minutes, Sophie would push back as a means of exiting the situation. According to Sophie, Maggie would then state, “See, you are just as bad as I am.”

Other women in the study believed their situation was one of mutual abuse, as well. For example, Lana is 28 years old and identifies herself as a lesbian. Her situation is one that she considered mutually abusive. Lana and her now ex-partner were dating for over one year when she discovered that not only had her partner been cheating on her with both men and women, but that she had also contracted herpes from one of her other partners and not disclosed this information to Lana. In addition, Lana's partner began using drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, regularly. The relationship became volatile and on one occasion, the woman drove to Lana's parents' house to initiate an argument with Lana, where she then proceeded to "shoot up" heroin in their driveway. Enraged, Lana punched her partner in the face; the two then ended their relationship. However, within a month, they had reunited. The problems that had plagued their relationship continued, and Lana eventually decided to end the relationship for good after discovering her partner had once again been unfaithful.

The Intergenerational Transmission of Violence

The intergenerational transmission of violence is an ongoing topic of debate. However, research suggests that there is a connection between abuse witnessed or experienced as a child and one's actions in relation to abuse as an adult. Two of the women in the study went into detail about their experiences with abuse as children. One of the respondents, Maggie, answered as follows:

I had anger issues. I did have a controlling problem, which I still do to

this day and I have to stop myself. That all goes back to my childhood where my dad would control me and still does, actually. I have always had it. I have shown it with my current partner. I have stopped myself. I still find myself doing things and I stop myself. I know it's wrong. My sister is three and a half years older than me and I was the one who got picked on. She pushed, hit, threatened, kicked, and controlled me. She totally controlled me. I had to deal with it until I was lucky enough for her to go to college.

While Maggie attributes some of her own behavior to her relationship with her family as a child, another respondent, Maria, attributes her victimization to much of the violence she witnessed and experienced as a child. The final question asked of Maria was, "From your own experiences, what advice would you give other women who are in abusive relationships?" She responded as follows:

I have too much baggage with regards to abuse. I was severely physically and mentally abused and tortured as a child. I watched my father knock my mother unconscious many times. I grew up knowing that I would never put up with physical abuse; however, I took verbal abuse many times. I would tell others not to take any type of abuse whether verbal or physical. My experiences have taught me time and time again that verbal abuse is just the beginning of the abuse cycle and that eventually it will escalate to physical if not addressed or stopped.

Maria believes there is a definite connection between the abuse she experienced as a child and her involvement in abusive adult relationships. She currently attends group counseling sessions, which she feels has helped her gain a better understanding of the patterns and behaviors associated with abuse, as well as to validate her own feelings regarding the situations she was involved in.

Leaving

Ending the abusive relationship(s) was more difficult for some respondents than others in this study. Although same-sex relationships are presumably more egalitarian than most heterosexual relationships, several of the women not only had close emotional ties to their partner(s), but financial and familiar (i.e. children) ties, as well. Individuals such as Maggie and Sophie, for example, owned a home together and shared a joint bank account. It was made clear during interviews with each of them that their break-up was incredibly difficult due not only to the emotional strain that was felt by both women, but also due to the fact that their financial commitments together had to be severed. While heterosexual married couples can go through a legal divorce to settle such matters, same-sex couples do not have the law to fall back on in regards to legal separations in most states and must typically work through such matters on their own. Similarly, when children are involved, such as in the case of Teresa, leaving an abusive situation can be incredibly complicated. If a lesbian is not the biological parent and leaves the partner with whom she has helped raise children with, she does not have the same legal parental rights to that child as a parent within a heterosexual relationship would have. As such, a decision to leave an abusive partner could quite possibly result in losing all visitation rights to see a child that the woman may consider her own.

The women in this study are no longer in the abusive relationships discussed, and therefore, may find it easier to discuss their experiences. However, the findings would suggest that egalitarian relationships where there is no homophobic control, severe financial ties, or

children involved, are in fact easier to exit. Furthermore, unique dynamics exist within same-sex relationships that do not have the same levels of power and control that may be involved in an abusive heterosexual relationship. It is also important to note that the women in this study are all employed, most having some level of college education, which goes against what most literature states about domestic violence most often occurring within relationships where individuals have low incomes and little education.

Summary

This study consisted of a sample of 19 women who all identify themselves as either homosexual or bisexual and have experienced some form of aggression by an intimate partner. Overall, the findings draw a parallel to the power and control wheel for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered individuals. As with the heterosexual power and control wheel that is commonly used in domestic violence research, the homosexual power and control wheel refers to such issues as the use or emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, among other things, in regards to abusive relationships. This study uncovered several of the issues discussed in the wheel. Issues related to homophobic control, dependency, isolation, physical, emotional, psychological, and financial abuse, suicide threats, jealousy and control, multiple victimization, help-seeking behaviors, pet abuse, abuse of bisexual females, mutual abuse, and the intergenerational

transmission of violence were all present in the study and discussed in the findings. Results from the interviews suggest that lesbian relationships tend to be egalitarian, yet issues of jealousy and control are major themes within abusive same-sex relationships. Whenever physical abuse was present, it was most often preceded by verbal/emotional abuse. Furthermore, while violence was not always present in the relationships discussed, it is evident that emotional and psychological abuse can be just as powerful and have a serious impact on victims/survivors of abuse. Additionally, issues of homophobic control, which are unique to homosexual relationships, are apparent, particularly in discussions related to relationships that took place when the woman being interviewed was younger.

In general, the women in this study recognize that the negative behaviors exhibited by their abusive partner(s) were wrong; however, issues of self-blame did arise in some interviews. Furthermore, whether instances were related to mutual abuse or self-defense continues to be questionable, particularly on the part of the respondent herself. In regards to dependency, research with lesbians involved in intimate relationships “shows them to have a higher level of dyadic attachment or commitment to their partners than do gay men, and in some studies, than do heterosexual partners (Renzetti, 1992: 30). Respondents Maggie and Sophie in this study help demonstrate issues of dependency versus autonomy. Throughout the interviews, it was revealed that when Sophie would try to exit a situation that was turning abusive, or if she simply wanted to go out with other friends, Maggie’s dependency on Sophie would intensify, causing her to “trap” Sophie and prevent her from leaving, or on some occasions, use a combination of physical

and verbal abuse, preventing Sophie from exerting her independence. Both women stated to have an intense emotional commitment to the other, despite the sometimes-negative dynamics of their relationship. The issues demonstrated by these particular respondents, combined with the myriad of other relevant subjects discussed throughout the interviews with respondents, clearly demonstrates that same-sex partner abuse among females is a very serious, often complex topic that deserves much more attention than it has been given to date.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Studying women who are victims of same-sex partner aggression or who commit violent and/or abusive acts against their intimate same-sex partners is something that is relatively new, yet vital to the overall study of domestic violence. When studying same-sex female partner aggression, one must acknowledge that homophobic control can play a prominent factor in the abuse. Furthermore, it is “doubtful that one could obtain a truly random sample of a group as hidden and highly stigmatized as battered lesbians” (Renzetti, 1992: 13). As a result, it is often difficult to conduct a study with lesbians in the sample that is generalizable to the larger population. However, despite the limitations, it remains necessary that research continue to be conducted on women perpetrators who abuse their same-sex partners.

Because partner aggression among same-sex female partners is a very serious and complex matter with issues that often mirror patterns of abuse within heterosexual relationships, the purpose of this study was to provide a more detailed look at some of the issues related to abuse that take place within lesbian and bisexual female relationships, and therefore, to help better expose the incredible need for more assistance to victims/survivors of partner aggression. Many of the women in the study chose not to seek help from law enforcement out of fear of discrimination. These women often turned to family, friends, or counselors for support. As

Peterman and Dixon (2003) point out, domestic violence victims are usually healthy people who need “understanding, information, support, and advocacy” (p 45). The women interviewed for this study were all educated, at least at the high school level, typically with some college or vocational education. Several of the respondents stated that despite their education and their knowledge that their relationship was abusive, they remained with their partner out of a hope that things would change. As with Renzetti’s (2001) findings, this study demonstrates that it is counselors and friends from whom victims of same-sex abuse most often seek help. Of the respondents who sought help in this study, counselors appear to have been the most helpful, which is consistent with Renzetti’s (2001) study, as well. None of the women in the present study went to a domestic violence shelter for help. However, one respondent is currently involved in group therapy sessions at a university counseling center, which she believes has helped her dramatically in terms of dealing with past issues of abuse. Another woman visited a local gay and lesbian community center for support. It is therefore evident that support systems need to be in place to assist lesbian and bisexual victims of same-sex abuse.

Unfortunately, domestic violence victims are often uncomfortable discussing their abuse or even admitting that their relationship could be characterized as abusive. Furthermore, victims sometimes find it difficult focusing on their own feelings because they have spent so much time and energy trying to comprehend their partner, prevent the violence, and survive (Peterman & Dixon, 2003). However, when victims do decide to seek help, it is imperative that help is available to them. Proper assistance, whether it be clinical, legal, or otherwise, needs to be made

more readily available to women who have in the past or who are currently experiencing abuse within their relationships, despite their sexual orientation.

Although the present study was qualitative, it is evident from the findings that several of the topics that arose throughout the course of the interviews, such as issues related to physical, emotional, and psychological abuse, as well as isolation from friends, the harming of pets as a means of retaliation, and matters of power, control, and jealousy, are not specific only to heterosexual relationships. Each occurrence of violence or aggression that was discussed supports the hypothesis that domestic violence among same-sex partners is equivalent in stature to that among heterosexual partners. However, in addition to the burdens heterosexual women face in regards to partner aggression, lesbians and bisexual women must also cope with homophobia and isolation from mainstream society.

Lesbian relationships continue to be stigmatized and devalued in American society (Renzetti, 2001). Some respondents attributed several instances of anger and aggression within their relationships to issues related to concealing either one or both of the partner's sexual orientation. If one partner is more open about her homosexuality, this may cause increased levels of stress within the other partner due to fear that she will be "outed" despite her unwillingness. Specifically, this study found that in relationships where a partner threatens to tell others about the relationship against the other partner's will, particularly as a means of forcing the woman to stay in the relationship, the unwilling partner tends to adhere to her partner's wishes rather than ending the relationship. Peplau, Cochran, Rook, and Padesky's (1978) study reinforces that an

intense need for attachment and intimacy, coupled with the need for autonomy and independence, causes a particularly acute conflict among lesbian couples (Renzetti 2001). Being forced to find validation within their relationship and the relatively small lesbian community may increase the likelihood of extensive abusive relationships. Findings from this study show that abusive lesbian relationships typically last for at least one year, regardless of at what point the abuse began.

Future research on same-sex partner aggression should include a larger sample size including elderly lesbians and a more diverse ethnic population. A possible focus of further studies might include additional questions pertaining to alcohol and drug use in relation to the same-sex partner aggression. Through the course of the study, it became evident with the present sample that it was not uncommon for the victims/survivors, as well as their abusive partners, to consume alcoholic beverages several times per week. Furthermore, a more thorough examination of the intergenerational transmission of violence in relation to same-sex partner aggression would be beneficial to demonstrate the cycle of violence. Finally, it is important that whenever possible, both parties involved in the abusive relationship are interviewed. As is evident from the discussions pertaining to Maggie and Sophie in this study, having the ability to hear both accounts of what occurred and why it occurred can lead to a better understanding of the dynamics within the abusive situation.

APPENDIX A | RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Below is a list of questions based loosely upon Claire M. Renzetti's (1992) *Survey on Lesbian Battering*. The first several questions help establish personal characteristics about the participant, her abuser, and their relationship to one another. The latter questions deal with particular aspects of the participant's relationship with her batterer. Because it is an interview, questions arose throughout the conversations that are not documented below. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in a conversational style. Prior to beginning the interview, study participants were thanked for taking part in the study and informed about the seriousness of same-sex battering, as well as how by participating, they will be helping members of the lesbian and bisexual community. Furthermore, each woman was assured that her answers will be completely confidential and that her identity will not be revealed to the public. All identifying information was deleted for analysis and does not appear in the final report of the findings.

Interview Questions on Same-sex Female Partner Aggression

1. What is your date of birth?
2. What is your place of birth (city/state)?
3. Where is your current residence (city/state)?
4. What is your occupation?
5. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
6. Which of the following do you identify yourself as: lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, or other? Please specify.

7. Would you describe yourself as “out of the closet”?
8. If you are in a relationship, do you have friends separate from those of your partner?
9. Have you ever been in a relationship where you consider your partner to be possessive, controlling, or jealous of you? If yes, which behavior(s) were demonstrated? Please give examples.
10. If you were in an abusive relationship, did you try to seek help? If so, please describe the experience.

The following questions will focus on aspects of your relationship with your batterer in relation to the battering itself:

1. What is (was) the length of your relationship with your batterer?
2. Were you living with the abusive partner?
3. Has the relationship ended? If the relationship has ended, who initiated the break-up?
4. At what point in the relationship did your batterer first abuse you?
5. Do you recall any incidents that foreshadowed the abuse?
6. Please describe the first incidence of battering and how you reacted to it.
7. Did the battering increase over time?
8. Is there a pattern to the abuse? For instance, did it typically occur at a particular time or at a specific location?
9. Have you ever been threatened with or without a weapon? If a weapon was used, what was it?
10. Have you ever retaliated the abuse either physically or verbally?
11. Do you feel as though your relationship(s) was mutually abusive? Meaning, did *you* ever act abusively towards your partner physically, emotionally, psychologically, financially, etc.?

12. Please share with me any experiences that you feel comfortable discussing related to the abuse in your relationship.
13. Did you ever act out towards your partner as a means of self-defense? If so, please explain.
14. Did your partner ever abuse or threaten to abuse your pet(s)? If so, please explain.

APPENDIX B | INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



Office of Research

November 6, 2003

Jennifer Parham
2501 Kilgore Street
Orlando, FL 32803

Dear Ms. Parham:

With reference to your protocol entitled, "Aggression in Lesbian and Bi-Sexual Relationships," I am enclosing for your records the approved, executed document of the UCFIRB Form you had submitted to our office.

Please be advised that this approval is given for one year. Should there be any addendums or administrative changes to the already approved protocol, they must also be submitted to the Board. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Further, should there be a need to extend this protocol, a renewal form must be submitted for approval at least one month prior to the anniversary date of the most recent approval and is the responsibility of the investigator (UCF).

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me at 823-2901.

Please accept our best wishes for the success of your endeavors.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Grayson".

Chris Grayson
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Copies: Tracy Dietz, Ph.D.
IRB File

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