Invisible Pain and Overlooked Violence

Abusive Partner Interventions in the LGBTQIA+ Community

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1. Introduction

Abusive partner intervention programs, also known as battering intervention programs, were created as part of a coordinated community response to intimate partner violence and continue to serve as the primary dispositional mandate for many criminal and family courts. Often referred to as the original coordinated community response to intimate partner violence, the Duluth Model centered structural patriarchy and male social dominance as the sources of men's use of violence against women. Many communities across the country have modeled their coordinated community responses in similar ways, adopting the curricula that focuses on men's use of violence against women.

However, over the past decade, some practitioners have deepened their understanding of the specific structural and social dynamics that perpetuate the oppression faced by marginalized communities. With this awareness and a recognition of the importance of integrating trauma-informed and anti-oppressive approaches into abusive partner intervention programs, it is important to acknowledge that offering only one curriculum, with a focus on the intergender dynamics of cis-heterosexual relationships unintentionally erases the experiences of LGBTQIA+[i] survivors, as well as those of the individuals who have caused harm in those relationships through intimate partner violence.[1]

i. Please refer to Appendix B for a glossary of terms.

Studies suggest that intimate partner violence occurs at rates equal to or greater than those observed within cis-heteronormative relationships:

- Gay men are estimated to experience violence at rates comparable to those faced by heterosexual women. (Twenty-six to thirty-three percent vs. twenty to thirty-five percent, respectively.)
- Between thirty-two to forty-four percent of lesbian women will experience harm in their lifetime.
- As many as ninety-one percent of bisexual women and eighty-seven percent of bisexual men will report intimate partner violence.
- Intimate partner violence is experienced at even greater rates among transgender individuals, with transgender women of color most likely to experience intimate partner violence within queer and trans communities.[2]

This document will provide a framework to better understand intimate partner violence that occurs within LGBTQIA+ relationships and highlight strategies specifically for abusive partner intervention programs working with LGBTQIA+ people who have caused harm as a means to gain and maintain power and control over their intimate partner. Throughout the rest of this document, the primary aggressor in LGBTQIA+ intimate partner violence relationships will be described in this way or more briefly as those who cause harm through intimate partner violence.

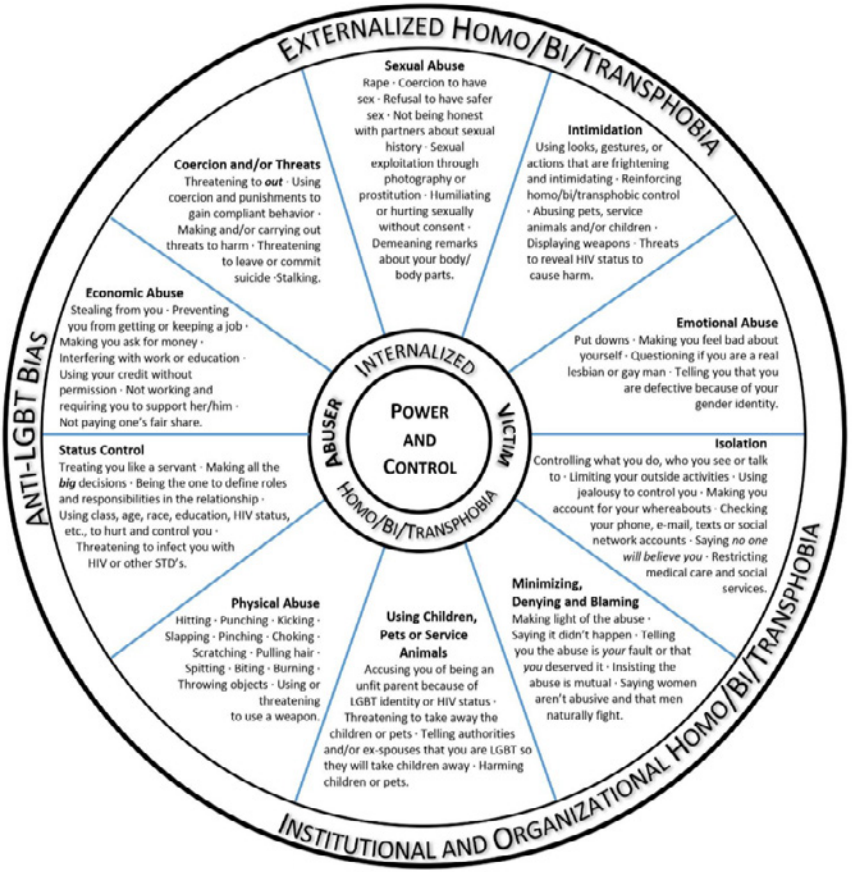
2. Reconsidering Power and Control

Meyer's minority stress model, a theory that suggests that hostile social environments particularly impact and lead to lower health outcomes among minority populations, can be applied to better understand intimate partner violence within LGBTQIA+ relationships.[3]

The model considers factors disproportionately experienced by queer and trans communities (e.g., lack of social support; bias, discrimination, and violence faced when attempting to access safety, support, and services; familial rejection; fears of being outed; HIV status etc.) as related to survivors' inability to leave abusive relationships, in addition to the already understood factors experienced in heteronormative relationships (e.g., fear, isolation, lack of financial resources).[4] The stressors outlined in the model also create barriers for people who cause harm through intimate partner violence to access a process of change and healing.

> *The gender binary that we get attached to... where cis-gender men batter cis-gender women... is how we think about intimate partner violence... that effectively makes anyone who has experienced intimate partner violence outside of that paradigm invisible and... it erases most of our communities' experiences in many ways.*
>
> — CAT SHUGRUE DOS SANTOS
> *NYC Anti-Violence Project*

LGBT* Power and Control Wheel



*=Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender

LGBT* Power and Control Wheel (continued)

Anti-LGBT bias: Conscious or unconscious feelings and/or beliefs that inhibit a person's capacity for impartial judgment. An unfair act or policy which results in prejudicial mindset against LGBT people.

Heterosexism: The belief that heterosexuality is superior to homosexuality.

Homophobia: The irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination again homosexuality or homosexuals, bisexuals (biphobia) and transgender persons (transphobia). Research indicates that homophobia is not an actual phobia. Findings suggest that social conditions and attitude rather than physical factors, create homophobia.

Externalized/Institutionalized/Organizational homophobia: Heterosexism and anti-LGBT bias that are entrenched with society's institutions (schools, government, religion, etc.).

Internal homo/bi/transphobia and/or Internalized homo/bi/transphobia: The internalization of myths and stereotypes about and bias against LGBT people.

Using the minority stress model to examine social oppression as it relates to intimate partner violence in queer and transgender relationships, mainstream understandings of power and control in intimate partner violence need to be reconsidered. While these dynamics remain at the core of intimate partner violence within the queer and trans community, they're not derived from or limited to male social

and structural dominance, but rather institutional, organizational, internalized, and externalized homo/bi/transphobia.

Negative experiences with law enforcement, a history of social exclusion leading to greater rates of poverty, and racial discrimination not only further contribute to increased rates of violence, but also lead to underreporting, suggesting that the rates themselves may underestimate the scope of intimate partner violence within queer and trans communities. Further, compared to cis-heterosexual intimate partner violence, primary aggressor assessments are often misapplied to queer and trans survivors of intimate partner violence contributing to higher rates of survivor criminalization, as well as inadequate support and responses from the criminal legal system.[5]

Agencies like the Los Angeles LGBT Center have adapted the Duluth curriculum's Wheel of Power and Control (pictured above and included in the appendix) to better reflect the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals. The adapted wheel identifies how an abusive partner in a same sex relationship may wield violence differently, such as threats to "out" a partner or using society bias around a partner's gender identity to shame or belittle them. While facets of this violence may be similar to violence experienced in cisgender-heterosexual relationships, it is important to acknowledge the disparate roots of this violence and move away from traditional gender paradigms, which rely on stereotypes around masculinity, femininity, and presume a gender binary. This analysis can help abusive partner intervention services offer interventions that are more responsive to the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals and better support the safety of the survivor, the rehabilitation and accountability of the partner causing harm through intimate partner violence, and the restoration of hope and dignity to all involved.

3. The Guiding Principles in Context

To better support people who cause harm and their survivors, as well as guide evidence-based and holistic, trauma-informed abusive partner intervention, the Abusive Partner Accountability and Engagement Training and Technical Assistance Project, a collaboration led by the Center for Court Innovation and Futures Without Violence, identified five guiding principles for use in practice by abusive partner intervention programs. These principles may be applied to and operationalized for abusive partner intervention work within LGBTQIA+ communities in the following ways:

Survivor voices are centered

The core value of this principle is the acknowledgement that safety, healing, and justice ought to be defined by the survivors of intimate partner violence. More than understanding the needs of victims, abusive partner intervention programs seeking to work within the LGBTQIA+ community should acknowledge the roles institutional homo/bi/transphobia and heterosexism play in survivors' lives while being inclusive of survivors' experiences. In practice, providers can center LGBTQIA+ survivor voices—and their safety—by:

- Develop your *coordinated community response* with consultation and support from partners in the community with expertise on the queer and trans communities and survivors of violence. This is especially important for mainstream programs seeking to expand their programming to be inclusive of queer and trans individuals who cause harm through intimate partner violence.

- As LGBTQIA+ survivors of intimate partner violence are less likely to file reports with the police, there may be fewer court-referred or mandated participants requiring treatment. If your agency provides services other than abusive partner intervention programs, *consider screening new intakes for intimate partner violence* like Anti-Violence Project and the Los Angeles LGBT Center. Additionally, consider conducting outreach in the community to increase referrals outside the criminal legal system.

Accountability is active and relational

Intimate partner violence does not exist in a vacuum; this is especially true within marginalized communities. Similarly, accountability exists not only at the individual level, but systemically and within the community. Abusive partner intervention programs addressing intimate partner violence in the LGBTQIA+ community should work to remove the persistent barriers to justice that impact both the survivors of violence and those who cause harm to gain and maintain power and control over their intimate partners and recognize that accountability and justice ought to be personally defined by survivors of intimate partner violence.

- Mary Case, of the Los Angeles LGBT Center, suggets that group facilitators must understand, acknowledge, and address how binary (cis-heteronormative) gender roles have been internalized by all group members—as well as facilitators—and how these roles effect their behaviors with their partners, their use of power and control, and to how it relates to the lack of power they feel within themselves. This process supports moving past stigma and shame, which creates pathways to accountability.

- Programs should regularly solicit feedback from LGBTQIA+ participants to ensure programming material is salient, responsive to their needs, and supportive of pathways to accountability.

Hope and dignity are restored

Despite the harm they've caused, abusive partners are deserving of dignity and respect. This should be taken into special consideration with queer and trans people who cause harm, acknowledging the oppression and marginalization that has contributed to their identification of intimate partner violence as a valid and acceptable tool to use in their relationships.

- Mainstream programs that develop services which are inclusive of queer and trans experiences should make sure these spaces are safe and supportive, and promote healing. Program language, content, and curricula should be adapted to reflect their identities (e.g., using gender-inclusive language in case studies).

- The Anti-Violence Project in NYC and the Los Angeles LGBT Center recommend the creation of mixed-gender groups to more effectively support queer and trans people who use force to increase gender inclusivity as well as recognize that the cis-heteropatriarchal paradigm of cis-heterosexual men abusing cis-heterosexual women often erases the experience and the unique power and control dynamics that are relevant in LGBTQIA+ intimate partner violence.

- If the creation of a mixed gender group is not feasible, support and validate program participants by allowing

their placement within the group that matches their gender identity or personal choice; however, if participant safety is of concern due to homo/bi/transphobia or other issues, consider using individual sessions, led by a clinician with specific experience working with individuals who cause harm to gain power and control through intimate partner violence, as alternative programming.

Culture and community are reflected and valued

Abusive partner intervention programs committed to intervening upon LGBTQIA+ individuals who cause harm through intimate partner violence should consider the unique social history, structural gaps in history, and areas of risk and strength specific to this community—while similarly recognizing that the LGBTQIA+ community is not monolithic and is composed of different experiences; socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial backgrounds; and identities.

- The barriers that prevent healing and accountability for LGBTQIA+ people who cause harm worsen at the intersection of sexual orientation, race, and gender identity. Both people who cause harm through intimate partner violence and survivors are more than their sexual orientation and gender identity—and the program content of abusive partner interventions within these communities should reflect the various identities, cultures, and communities they may also belong to.

- Safety—both emotional and physical—is an important consideration when integrating services for LGBTQIA+ people who cause harm into existing programming; prepare your agency, program, and its participants by

establishing and communicating expectations about language, non-discrimination, and boundaries during the intake process. It's further important to not speak of this in broad terms, but specifically address and prohibit open displays of homo/bi/transphobia.

» *We see LGBTQIA+ people's experience of intimate partner violence is impacted by the anti-LGBTQIA+ bias, discrimination, and violence they have experienced. This is much the same way that when people of color are experiencing intimate partner violence or engaging in harming their partner, the structural racism that they experience and other sorts of intersectional oppression that they experience. This impacts both the survivor of the violence and the person who is causing harm and is impacting the way that they're able to cope with life, to live their lives and to engage in relationships.*

— CAT SHUGRUE DOS SANTOS
NYC Anti-Violence Project

Interventions and engagement strategies respond to the needs and strengths of abusive partners

Integral to the guiding principles, and reflected repeatedly through this publication is the acknowledgement that not all survivors nor all people who use harm are in need of the same interventions. More often than not, they require dissimilar and individualized services. Trauma is not an excuse for the use of violence against intimate partners, but should be acknowledged and addressed during treatment in order to better provide for the rehabilitation of the person using harm and promote the safety of the survivor.

Recognizing, uncovering, and addressing past harms is positive prevention work against future violence. As curricula and program content are developed, it's important for programs to integrate the social determinants of abuse specific to queer and trans relationships.

- Make space within abusive partner interventions to discuss the systems of oppression and disenfranchisement—as well as the role abusive partners may have had in perpetuating them—during the group process.

- Integrate training not only on intimate partner violence within the LGBTQIA+ community, but on the community itself to ensure your staff operates with compassion and cultural humility.

- Assess your agency or program's readiness to work with and support queer and trans individuals who cause harm through I intimate partner violence; inclusivity readiness

checklists can be especially helpful in preparing your agency to work with members of the LGBTQIA+ community.[6]

- After an abusive partner has demonstrated the ability to utilize behavioral tools for self regulation in order not to act out abusively with their partners, and demonstrates accountability, then individual sessions may be considered to uproot historical trauma as a pathway to promote further healing. Exploring in-depth trauma prior to this can exacerbate the violence within the relationship.

- With the higher rates of queer and trans survivor criminalization compared to cis-hetero survivors of intimate partner violence, specialized groups for LGBTQIA+ survivor-defendents should be developed with considerations not only of the use of resistive violence, but also of the impacts anti-LGBTQIA+ bias by the criminal-legal system has in perpetuating their exposure to intimate partner violence.

  » *In working with folks who cause harm and who are survivors... there's a spectrum within experiences of violence and trauma. It's really important that we understand that bonding and healing through processing collective trauma is a very important piece of the work that we do.*

  — MARY CASE
  Los Angeles LGBT Center

4. Snapshots from the Field

Despite the relative novelty of integrating programming for queer and trans people who cause harm through intimate partner violence into mainstream abusive partner intervention services, there are a number of agencies with rich histories of providing support and services to LGBTQIA+ people who cause harm while promoting the safety of queer and trans survivors of intimate partner violence.

The New York City Anti-Violence Project envisions a world in which all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ), and HIV-affected people are safe, respected, and live free from violence. AVP is the largest LGBTQ-specific anti-violence organization in the nation and provides free and confidential assistance to thousands of LGBTQ and HIV-affected people each year who have experienced all forms of violence, including intimate partner violence. AVP's TRANSFORM, a 15-week long gender-inclusive group supports LGBTQIA+ people who have caused harm through intimate partner and sexual violence to understand and hold themselves accountable for the harm they've caused, while helping to heal from the trauma they themselves have experienced. AVP also provides training and technical assistance to help agencies and programs work to engage LGBTQIA+ individuals who've caused harm through intimate partner violence.

For more information on the NYC Anti-Violence Project, please visit their website at avp.org.

The Los Angeles LGBT Center is the largest LGBT-specific organization in the world, having provided services to members

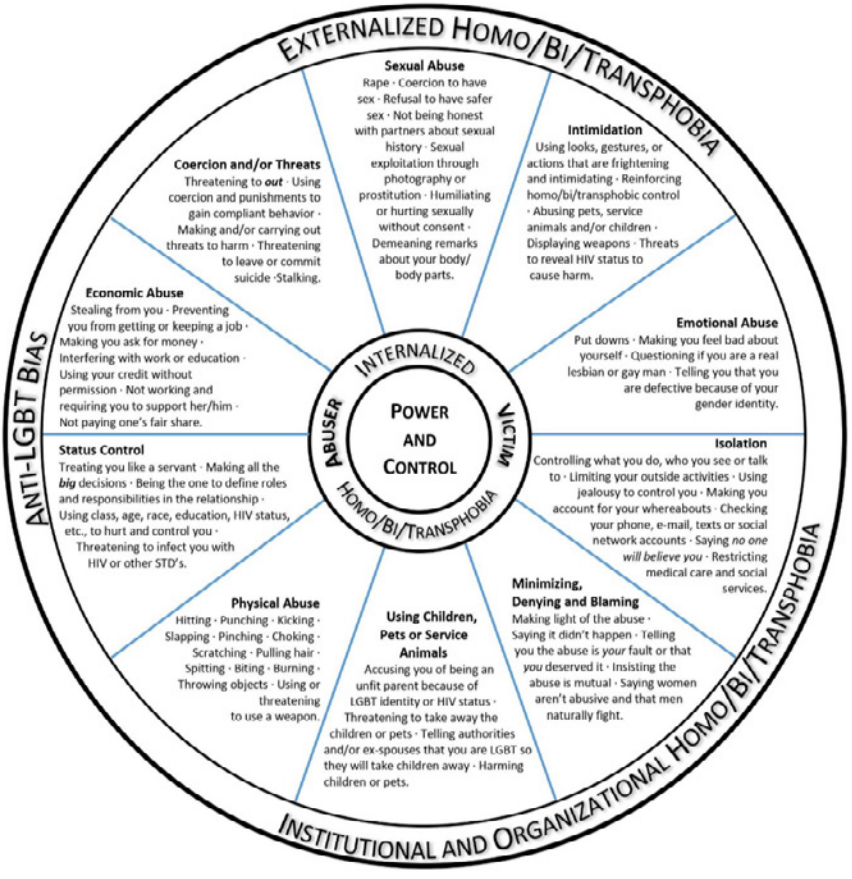
of the LGBTQIA+ community for over 50 years. In addition to providing legal services to LGBTQIA+ individuals, the organization also supports queer and trans communities by providing mental health and health services, services for both youth and seniors, and numerous other projects. Since 1996, their probation-approved, 52-week STOP Violence Program, the nation's largest and most comprehensive LGBTQIA+ specific domestic violence program, has helped queer and trans individuals who cause harm through intimate partner violence to gain and maintain power and control in their relationships find accountability for their actions and promote healing within their relationships and the wider LGBTQIA+ community.

For more information on the LA LGBT Center, please visit their website at lalgbtcenter.org.

Tactics and Choices (LGBTQIA+ Version) is a free class for defendants who were arraigned on intimate partner violence intimate partner violence-related offenses in New York City and placed in the Supervised Release Program. The class was originally created by Men Stopping Violence, a nationally recognized agency dedicated to the prevention of gender-based violence and based in Decatur, Georgia. Tactics and Choices (NYC) is in partnership with the NYC Anti-Violence Project to specifically address the needs of LGBTQIA+ people who cause harm through intimate partner violence. The three hour class specifically helps participants address nonviolent behavioral options and conflict resolution techniques through the use of interactive, engaging exercises.

For more information on Tactics and Choices, please contact us at tacticsandchoices@courtinnovation.org.

Appendix A
LGBT* Power and Control Wheel



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Appendix B | Glossary of Terms

with contributions from Catherine Shugrue Dos Santos (Anti-Violence Project) and Mary Case (Los Angeles LGBT Center)

TERMINOLOGY AROUND IDENTITY

LGBTQIA+ is an ever-evolving acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual—these identities refer to sexual orientation and gender identity, but are by no means exhaustive. The plus sign adds inclusivity and is meant to capture those in the community whose identity is something different than what is currently in the acronym.

Queer is a reclaimed word that is often used as an umbrella term for people in the LGBTQIA+ community whose identities cover a broad array of sexual orientations and gender identities outside the dominant culture.

The **gender binary** separates gender into two distinct and opposite categories: male and female. The concept is outdated, overly relies on sex assigned at birth to determine gender, and can erase many people who do not identify in this limited way.

Gender Identity is our external experience of our internal feelings and expressions of gender. Gender identity terms are myriad and diverse. Some you may here include:

> **Transgender** is a term people may use to describe their gender identity, when it may not match what society expects of the sex they were assigned at birth. The term is often shortened to "trans."

Cisgender is a term people may use to describe their gender identity, when it does match what society expects of the sex they were assigned at birth. The term is often shortened to "cis."

Non-Binary (NB) is a term people may use to describe their gender identity, when it does not conform to the gender binary of masculine or feminine.

Gender Expression is the way people communicate around their gender to the world. A term you may hear reflecting gender expression is:

Gender non-conforming (GNC) is a term people may use to describe their gender expression when it does not match what society expects of the sex they were assigned at birth.

Sexual Orientation refers to the experiences you have around attraction (sexual, romantic, emotional, spiritual, etc.) Sexual orientation terms include:

Gay is sometimes an umbrella term, used across genders to refer to people attracted to folks who share the same gender identity, or it can be used to modify a gender identity, e.g. gay men, gay woman, gay person.

Lesbian is a term for someone who identifies as a woman and is attracted to other women.

Bisexual and **Pansexual** are terms for someone who is attracted people of all genders.

Asexual is a term for someone whose attraction to others may not include sexual attraction. This is a broad term and those who use it have many different expressions and experiences around attraction and sex.

Someone who is **cis-heterosexual** is someone whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth (i.e., cisgender) and is also attracted to someone of the opposite gender identity. This is often shortened to "cis-het."

TERMINOLOGY AROUND OPPRESSION

Homo/bi/transphobia refers to dislike, prejudice, and bias against people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and gender nonconforming (i.e., people whose gender identity or expression does not fit within dominant gender roles or expectations). Sometimes referred to as anti-LGBTQ bias, these attitudes often result in behavior like discrimination and violence.

Heterosexism is a form of oppression stemming from the belief that heterosexuality is the norm and the superior sexuality.

Cis-heteronormativity assumes cisgender straight individuals are the norm and assigns them privilege and power in society.

Cis-heteropatriarchy is a system of oppression in which cisgender straight men hold power over others in society and are deemed superior.

Endnotes

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