



I'M YOUR MAKER: POWER, HETERONORMATIVITY AND VIOLENCE IN WOMEN'S SAME-SEX RELATIONSHIPS

by Ingrid Lynch and Nadia Sanger



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ABBREVIATIONS

CEEP	Community Engagement and Empowerment Programme
DSD	Department of Social Development
DVA	Domestic Violence Act
GBV	Gender-based violence
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HSSP	Health and Support Services Programme
IPV	Intimate partner violence
LGBTI	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex
MSM	Men who have sex with men
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
RAPP	Research, Advocacy and Policy Programme
STIs	Sexually transmitted infections
WSW	Women who have sex with women

GLOSSARY

Bisexual: A term used to refer to a person who is capable of having sexual and romantic attraction to someone of the same gender and/or someone of other genders; such attraction to different genders is not necessarily simultaneous or equal in intensity.

Butch: Lesbians with more masculine gender presentations and performances.

Cisgender: A term describing a person whose perception and expression of her or his own gender identity matches the biological sex she or he was assigned at birth.

Femme: Lesbians with more feminine gender presentations and performances.

Gay: A man who has sexual, romantic and intimate feelings for or a love relationship with another man (or men).

Gender: The socially constructed roles, behaviour, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate for women and men based on society's conceptions of femininity and masculinity.

Gender-based violence: Violence directed against a person on the basis of their sex or gender. Gender-based violence includes sexual violence, intimate violence, psychological abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, harmful traditional practices, and discriminatory practices based on gender. The term is widely understood to include violence targeting women, transgender persons, and men because of how they experience and express their genders and sexualities.

Gender identity: A person's inner sense of an authentic gendered self, which could range along a continuum from femininity to masculinity, and which varies across social spaces, i.e. locations, cultures and contexts.

Gender presentation or expression: The way in which people express their gender identity through behaviours which society deems "feminine" or "masculine". It could include language use, body language, dress, mannerisms and so forth.

1. This glossary was compiled with reference to the Domestic Violence Act (1998), Human Rights Watch (2011), Reid (2013), and Victor, Nel, Lynch and Mbatha (2014).

Heteronormativity: Related to “heterosexism” discussed below, it refers to the privileged position associated with heterosexuality based on a normative assumption that there are only two genders, that gender always reflects the person’s biological sex as assigned at birth, and that only sexual attraction between these “opposite” genders is considered normal or natural.

Heterosexism: A system of beliefs that privilege heterosexuality and discriminate against other sexual orientations. It assumes that heterosexuality is the only normal or natural option for human relationships and posits that all other sexual relationships are either subordinate to, or perversions of heterosexual relationships. In everyday life, this manifests as the assumption that everyone is heterosexual, until proven otherwise.

Homophobia: Also termed “homoprejudice”, it refers to an irrational fear of and/or hostility towards lesbian women and gay men, or same-sex sexuality more generally.

Intersectionality: The interaction of different axes of identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ability and socio-economic status, in multiple and intersecting ways, resulting in different forms of oppression impacting on a person in interrelated and often compounded ways.

Intersex: A term referring to a variety of conditions (genetic, physiological or anatomical) in which a person’s sexual and/or reproductive features and organs do not conform to dominant and typical definitions of “female” or “male”.

Intimate partner violence: This is described by the World Health Organisation, and consistent with South African policy, as “behaviour by an intimate partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including acts of physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours. This definition covers violence by both current and former spouses and other intimate partners. Other terms used to refer to this include domestic violence, wife or spouse abuse, wife/spouse battering. Dating violence is usually used to refer to intimate relationships among young people, which may be of varying duration and intensity, and do not involve cohabiting” (WHO, 2013, p. vii)

Lesbian: A woman who has sexual, romantic and intimate feelings for or a love relationship with another woman (or women).

Patriarchy: A social hierarchy that privileges men over women and masculinity over femininity.

Protection order: Anyone experiencing intimate partner violence may apply to the court for a protection order - this is an order from the court that protects the complainant (the person being abused) through stating what conduct the alleged offender (the respondent) must refrain from doing to ensure that the complainant remains safe. Such an application may be made outside of ordinary court hours and on days that are not ordinary court days. A protection order in itself does not mean

GLOSSARY cont...

the respondent will be arrested; it is only if the respondent contravenes any stipulation of the protection order, that he or she may be arrested.

Queer: An inclusive term that refers not only to lesbian and gay persons, but also to any person who feels marginalised because of her or his sexual practices, or who resists the heteronormative sex/gender/sexual identity system.

Sex: The biological and physiological characteristics socially agreed upon as defining men and women.

Sexual orientation: The way in which a person's sexual and romantic desires are directed. The term describes whether a person is attracted primarily to people of the same or other sex, or to both.

Transgender: People who have a gender identity, and often a gender expression, that is different to the sex they were assigned at birth. Some transgender people opt for gender-affirming treatment, while others choose not to, or to only partially undergo such treatment. "Transgender man" refers to a female-to-male trans person, and "transgender woman" to a male-to-female trans person. Transgender people can be heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual.

Transphobia: An irrational fear of and/or hostility towards people who are transgender or who otherwise transgress traditional gender norms.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Intimate partner violence, while previously predominantly associated with heterosexual relationships, is increasingly recognised as also occurring in same-sex relationships. There remains, however, a lack of research regarding power inequalities and abuse particularly in women's same-sex relationships. This silence is partly related to a gendered discourse that positions women as inherently non-violent and that idealises female same-sex relationships as necessarily egalitarian. A desire to avoid societal stigma and prejudice towards same-sex sexualities further silences women in speaking about their experiences of intimate partner violence and contributes to a lack of available support.

This report shares findings of research conducted by Triangle Project, aimed at responding to this knowledge gap and contributing to an improved understanding of intimate partner violence experienced by queer women in their same-sex relationships. We use the term “queer” to refer to women who identify as lesbian, bisexual or describe themselves in other ways that resist heteronormative understandings of sexual- and gender identity. The research is intended to support the organisations' continued service provision, advocacy interventions, and community mobilisation towards promoting equal access to services and full citizenship of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) persons.

Existing research: Silence and invisible violence

Intimate partner violence, regardless of the gender of the person perpetrating it, is defined as "a pattern of behaviour in which physical and emotional coercion or violence is used to gain or maintain power or control" (Ristock, 1991, p. 74). Despite growing awareness that intimate partner violence is not restricted to heterosexual relationships, there remains a lack of research exploring such violence in the relationships of LGBTI persons, and even less research specifically concerned with queer women's relationships. Violence in queer women's same-sex relationships manifests in similar ways to that experienced by heterosexual women, ranging from physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse. Compounding queer women's experiences of intimate partner violence, however, is widespread heterosexism and homophobia that limit the social support they receive. Prejudice and discrimination also contribute to frequent instances of secondary victimisation, where service providers such as the police and healthcare workers may trivialise the abuse due to it being perpetrated by

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a woman, fail to provide adequate and sensitive services, or further perpetuate abuse through homophobic comments. These overlapping factors work together to silence and erase queer women's experiences of intimate partner violence.

Intimate partner violence and the South African policy context

The South African policy context relating to intimate partner violence is markedly improved from the Apartheid period, but still deficient in dealing with the needs of diverse families, relationships and people. The 1998 Domestic Violence Act understands intimate partner violence in a broad sense that captures a wide range of possible relationships, including same-sex relationships, as well as different forms of abusive and coercive behaviour including economic abuse and, for the first time in South Africa, 'stalking'.

Despite the Domestic Violence Act (1998) making provision for intimate partner violence occurring in same-sex relationships, however, this form of violence has not received full attention in related services. Similar to the broader South African legislative environment, the policy framework responding to intimate partner violence is extensive and progressive, but its realisation and implementation lag behind. This results in inadequate and sometimes incorrect assistance being given to survivors of intimate partner violence, while not protecting particularly vulnerable groups such as women in same-sex relationships from harassment and discrimination in heterosexist contexts. Further to this, the dominant discourse of violence against women continues to define, implicitly and explicitly, that it is heterosexual women experiencing violence at the hands of their male partners. This of course corresponds to the reality that South African women experience staggeringly high levels of intimate partner violence perpetrated by men, but has the inadvertent consequence that barriers to reporting and the absence of services for queer women experiencing violence have not been addressed.

The larger South African policy context, post the Domestic Violence Act, is increasingly framed in relation to a focus on preserving the (heteronormative) family. Such a narrow framing excludes family forms and relationships that do not conform to the conventional, heteronormative ideal of the nuclear family and limits the potential for resultant policy documents and legislation to respond to violence as perpetrated or experienced by queer persons in their intimate relationships. It remains important for LGBTI people and organisations, as well as a broad range of organisations working on issues affecting women, to make their voices heard in policy processes and to refute static and damaging ideals around what families and intimate partnerships should look like.

The research context and participants

The empirical component of this project is based on a series of five focus group discussions with lesbian and bisexual women from three main study locations in the Western Cape: the rural and semi-rural areas of the West Coast and Cape Winelands, and an urban township-based area in Cape Town. Our focus was on the deliberate inclusion of areas that are characterised by differential access to health and other services as well as the relative reliance on land-based livelihoods. Rural communities are generally relatively resource poor compared to their urban counterparts. The majority of women living in rural- and semi-rural centres in the Western Cape rely on seasonal work on farms or in canning factories to sustain themselves. This in turn means that out of season, they rely on male relatives to provide for their basic needs. This dependence on men increases the vulnerability of women and limits their choices around their sexual and reproductive health.

Across rural and urban contexts there remain stark inequalities particularly around access to services such as electricity, water and sanitation. Further, there are also large income differentials that cohere around geographically and racially drawn lines; much like other South African provinces, the Western Cape's population largely remains divided between a predominantly white suburban middle-class and a working-class black and coloured population in townships and rural areas.

Lesbian and bisexual women across the three research sites were invited to participate in the research, through networks established by Triangle Project's Community Empowerment and Education Programme (CEEP). A total of 42 women, their ages ranging between 18 and 35 years, participated in the focus group discussions. The majority of participants self-identified their race as "black African" (30) followed by "coloured" (12). The focus groups explored relationship norms; definitions of intimate partner violence; factors contributing to intimate partner violence; and resources available for women who experience intimate partner violence. The transcribed data were analysed using thematic analysis informed by a feminist theoretical lens. Such a lens allows for the acknowledgement of patriarchal, heterosexist and heteronormative systems and hierarchies, and how these impact on women's lives. It also enriches the analysis by attending to intersecting oppressions based on race, class, locality, sexuality and gender.

Key research findings

Isolation, a lack of services and inadequate support

Our findings highlight frequent occurrences of intolerance, discrimination and secondary victimisation from police and health systems and a general lack of appropriate care and services for lesbian and bisexual women experiencing intimate partner violence. Similar to other studies, participants described how attempts to report violence by a woman partner were met with disbelief, a lack of understanding, ridicule, and minimising violence between women.

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A lack of access to safe and affirming services – whether from the state or private sector – appears to be particularly important for participants in peri-urban areas, which already face severe challenges around access to services and where awareness and understanding of diversity in sexual orientation is less widespread. When this perspective is added to the fact that peri-urban women in our study were more likely to be economically insecure or economically dependent on someone else, there exists a dangerous scope for abuse with limited to no recourse or assistance.

Pervasive heteronormative gender scripts

An overarching trend in the findings relates to power disparities within relationships that are informed by normative, taken-for-granted understandings of gender roles. In this normative understanding of gender, women have specific roles that are tied to ideas of heterosexual femininity: providing care, being responsive to others' needs, and being gentle. Men, on the other hand, are associated with roles tied to normative heterosexual masculinity: expressions of power, control, assertiveness and aggression. Participants described how these heteronormative scripts are not limited to heterosexual relationships but also shape the context in which individual roles and relationship dynamics are negotiated within same-sex relationships - often cohering around masculine "butch" and feminine "femme" lesbian identities. While adopting different gender identities are not problematic in themselves, what participants' accounts highlight are the power differentials that often accompany heteronormative gender scripts, in that these scripts contribute to relationship dynamics that centre on control and coercion (associated by participants with butch identities) and vulnerability and victimhood (associated with femme identities).

These findings demonstrate how participants do not escape the profoundly patriarchal context in which normative gender identities and roles are constructed in South Africa, and in particular the harmful ways in which "toxic" masculinities can manifest in violent relationships. Further to this, the findings also point to how conforming to socially familiar heteronormative scripts may be assigned more weight in the face of severe marginalisation. In South Africa, "black sexual minority identities in townships are formed in relation to the interlocking structural domination of race, class, gender, sexual preference, and spatial marginality" (2010, p. 299). Post-apartheid, these spatial divisions, and the marginality accompanying it, have not disappeared, with "[b]lackness in Cape Town township spaces" becoming "overlaid with an increased sense of marginality as residents experience deepening socio-economic impoverishment" (Salo et al., 2010, p. 301). A certain grammar of gender and sexuality, mapped closely onto normative heterosexuality, may develop in marginalised spaces as a means of performing respectable citizenship. Put differently, "conforming to aspects of these dominant regulatory systems affords participants access to a measure of social credibility and belonging" (Lynch & Clayton, 2016).

Alternatives to heteronormative gender binaries

While the findings point to the pervasiveness of heteronormative scripts, it was also possible to identify instances where participants are critical of such scripts. Some participants noted how it is common for queer women to treat each other gently and respectfully, i.e. to not work within heteronormative framings which may enable violence. This is a significant finding, pointing to the importance of feminist-oriented consciousness-raising (the participants mentioned related engagements facilitated by Triangle Project) which provides the space for queer African women to position themselves outside of dominant norms of gender and sexuality.

Recommendations

A wide range of responses across civil society and state actors is needed to address the causes and impacts of intimate partner violence in women's same-sex relationships, as well as reconceptualise ideals of family and intimacy outside of the heterosexist and cisgender norm. This includes the provision of inclusive and affirming services but also the reshaping of many of these interventions with a nuanced understanding of power relations and the role of heterogendered norms at their core. Key recommendations include:

Recommendations for activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The research highlights the need for several different types of information, education and communication materials related to intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships. These materials would need to serve different purposes and be directed at different audiences. First, materials aimed at lesbian and bisexual women need to focus on breaking the cycle of silence and shame linked to intimate partner violence, educating same-sex couples about their rights and how to identify toxic and potentially abusive behaviours, as well as providing information on counselling services and other resources available to them. Second, materials aimed at service providers (in particular non-LGBTI focused organisations concerned with violence against women and/or domestic violence, as well as organisations in the shelter sector) can provide information about intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships, advocate for the need to provide inclusive services to LGBTI people, and facilitate a nuanced understanding of violence and power.

Considering that the silence around intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships is not only perpetuated in broader society, but also within LGBTI contexts, there is also a need to provide information to others in the organised LGBTI sector, and noting that violence in queer women's relationships remains largely invisible, to engage LGBTI organisations in discussions around how to ensure adequate responses to the issue as it relates to queer women in particular.

Recommendations for researchers and academics

There is always a need for further research into a topic as complicated as intimate partner violence and especially when it takes place within a marginalised population

such as queer women. Further research can deepen the understanding offered by this exploratory study and extend the scope of research to men's same-sex relationships as well as relationships involving transgender and gender non-conforming persons. Available research – this report included – points to the harmful ways in which gendered norms can manifest in the relationships of LGBTI persons and so it would be vital to understand how these norms are experienced by transgender and gender non-conforming people, especially as they are impacted by different forms of transition and gender affirmation.

Further research can benefit from assuming an intersectional understanding of violence against women, as well as within their relationships, as it occurs in contexts marked by heterosexism and other power inequalities.

Recommendations for Government and policy makers

It is vital for the state and policy makers to ensure that policy is not informed by static conceptions of families and intimate partnerships. This means not just moving away from the heteronormative concept of the “ideal” family but also understanding relationships and people in their diversity. In this way, LGBTI couples should be considered as a natural part of our understanding of family and not a divergent (if acceptable) version of the ideal.

Government's role as a policymaker is a critical aspect but its role as a direct service provider and funder of service provision is perhaps more important to people facing immediate challenges. As a funder, it is important for the state to ensure that funds are being used in a way that does not exclude people outside of the heterosexual norm. It can do this by agreeing with its grantees on terms of service but this can also be achieved by broadening the kind of services for which LGBTI-focused organisations can receive funding.

Finally, the state's healthcare and law enforcement apparatus must be equipped to deal with difference and there must be sanctions for those who violate the law by denying services to LGBTI persons. Part of this work involves sensitisation and training of frontline staff in the Department of Health, Department of Social Development and the South African Police Services, but also requires that state employees are inculcated with a service ethos which does not accept discrimination and does not reinforce toxic ideas around gender norms.

Recommendations for donors

Donors can broaden their understanding of which types of organisations work on issues relating to intimate partner violence and also what kind of work is necessary. By this we mean that LGBTI organisations should be considered as grantees for this kind of work given the levels of this kind of violence and the inability of many “mainstream” organisations to provide appropriate and sensitive services to queer women.

It is also essential that this funding covers work which seeks to more address the underlying issues of power relations and gender norms that underpin violence in same-sex relationships and function to silence survivors.

1. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH

Why conduct this research?

This report is focused on intimate partner violence (IPV) as it occurs in queer women's same-sex relationships. Research about IPV has predominantly focused on heterosexual male-to-female violence without considering violence between same-sex partners. Yet, where research has included same-sex partners, it is clear that IPV occurs at the same prevalence and severity compared to violence between heterosexual partners (Messinger, 2011). There remains, however, a lack of research regarding power inequalities and abuse in same-sex relationships, particularly in the South African context.

This silence in research is especially pronounced in relation to the experiences of lesbian and bisexual women, and other queer-identified women, of violence in their intimate relationships. This lack of research has had the implication that such violence remains invisible, creating a second "closet" for queer women experiencing partner abuse. This continued silence hampers the development of interventions aimed at addressing IPV among same-sex partners broadly and queer women specifically, resulting in the further marginalisation of persons already made vulnerable in predominantly heterosexist and homophobic contexts.

This silence is related to a general inability to conceive of violence perpetrated by women, as well as an assumption that women's relationships with each other are always egalitarian. Lesbian and bisexual women may find it difficult to name violence experienced in their intimate relationships, in contexts where women are not easily conceived of as having a capacity for violence (Hardesty, Oswald, Khaw, & Fonseca, 2011). Furthermore, such violence might be downplayed out of concern for exacerbating the stigma LGBTI persons and their relationships are often subjected to. Based on a study of intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships in the United States, Dunton-Greene notes:

The reality of lesbian battering challenges the idea that lesbian relationships are more peaceful, non-violent, and egalitarian than heterosexual relationships. Those within the community may be reluctant to provide more ammunition for the homophobic majority to use against them for oppressive purposes. A victim may also be reluctant to betray the lesbian and/or gay community which is already under attack. Victims might also lose much needed support if alienated from their community for publicly acknowledging the abuse (in Chesler, 2009, p. 412).

1. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH cont...

Overview of the research

This report shares findings of research conducted by Triangle Project, aimed at responding to the lack of existing research and contributing to an improved understanding of intimate partner violence experienced by queer women in their same-sex relationships. The research is intended to support the organisations' continued service provision, advocacy interventions, and community mobilisation towards promoting equal access to services and full citizenship of LGBTI persons. In developing the report, we made use of various data sources including a review of published and unpublished research, an analysis of existing policy and legislation, and focus group discussions with lesbian and bisexual women. The aim of the report is to provide a feminist analysis of heteronormativity, power and control and how these constructs manifest as inequality and violence in women's same-sex relationships. Specific objectives include:

- a) Critically reviewing existing international and South African research regarding intimate partner violence in women's same-sex relationships**
- b) Locating intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships in the broader South African policy and legislative environment**
- c) Empirically exploring intimate partner violence and power inequalities in the narratives of queer black and coloured African women**
- d) Based on the policy, literature and empirical analyses, mapping key recommendations for different stakeholders involved in responding to intimate partner violence**

The empirical component of the research included five focus group discussions with women from three main study locations in the Western Cape: the rural and semi-rural areas of the West Coast and Cape Winelands, and an urban township-based area in Cape Town. A total of 42 women, their ages ranging between 18 and 35 years, participated in the discussions. The majority of participants self-identified as either lesbian or bisexual, with one participant identifying as queer. Participants discussed a range of topics related to sexual and reproductive health, sexual and gender identities, relationships, and power inequalities and abuse. We present the findings from the discussion groups, relevant to intimate partner violence, in section four of this report.

Why a feminist analysis of violence?

Triangle Project is informed by a feminist methodology in challenging patriarchal, heterosexist and heteronormative systems and hierarchies. In alignment with this way of working, the conceptual framework informing this report is explicitly feminist.

A feminist analysis of gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, is valuable since it foregrounds how violence can be understood as a means to exercise and maintain power. Earlier feminist theories considered power as exercised simplistically in a top-down manner, so that men who are violent are cast as oppressors who hold power, and women who are violated cast as victims who are powerless (Cannon, Lauve-Moon, & Buttell, 2015). Critical feminist theories have however expanded this understanding to also consider how power operates in interaction, i.e., in a field of relations between people (Butler, 1990; Foucault, 1980). Conceptualising power as relational makes it possible to see how different people, across sexual orientations or gender identities, “based on their social location, use tactics and strategies available to them to negotiate dynamics of power” (Cannon et al., 2015, p. 670).

This understanding of power includes the internalisation of norms that dominate within a particular social order (Foucault, 1980). For example, in societies where patriarchal gender norms predominate, individuals internalise notions of “acceptable” or socially valued masculinities and femininities and the practices associated with these. In this manner, normalised assumptions about sexuality and gendered relations shape the actions available to people in a particular context, so that violence as a gendered pattern of interaction is available not only to heterosexual men but in differing ways to all persons, based on their social location (Cannon et al., 2015).

Critical feminist theories also consider the structural character of power. Gendered power is not only negotiated in interactions between people, or internalised as gendered norms, but is also embedded throughout social life (Foucault, 1980). South Africa remains profoundly patriarchal and a heteronormative understanding of gender permeates many of the larger systems and institutions, in that manner keeping gendered power inequities in place (Lee, Lynch, & Clayton, 2013). Further to this, gender is always performed in relation to particular historical contexts and intersects with other aspects of socially constituted identities, so that gendered power intersects with other powerful systems of oppression, such as racism and classism (Butler, 1990; Lugones, 2010).

If gendered power is regarded as something that is constructed in relation to others – described by critical feminist theorists such as Butler (1990) as “doing gender” – then it is also possible to “undo gender”. While structural gendered arrangements may often be more enduring and pervasive, such as the manner in which government or institutional policies typically still privilege a normative heterosexual gender binary, it is possible to bring about smaller ruptures or shifts in gender norms (Morison & Macleod, 2013; Van Lenning, 2004).

1. INTRODUCING THE RESEARCH cont...

These smaller changes, such as challenging heteronormative relationship dynamics to be more egalitarian, may contribute to larger transformations that may “undo” gender over time.

There are also other advantages of applying a feminist lens to researching IPV in same-sex relationships:

- Violence between same-sex partners cannot be isolated from the patriarchal and violent contexts in which LGBTI persons live and love (Lee et al., 2013). An analysis that excludes the impact of patriarchy on LGBTI lives will be incomplete and limited in its application.
- A feminist analysis allows for the acknowledgement of intersectionality (Lugones, 2010). The interplay of intersecting oppressions based on race, class, sexuality and gender can be traced historically. Disrupting these forms of oppressive power requires an analysis that takes into account how interlocking systems of oppression contribute to the particular ways in which patriarchy and heteronormativity mark our bodies. In a post-apartheid patriarchal society such an intersectional approach has clear relevance, where heteronormative scripts provide access to "respectable" and familiar citizenship, particularly so for women occupying marginal sexual and gender identities (Salo, Ribas, Lopes, & Zamboni, 2010).
- A feminist analysis can assist in transcending single-issue identity politics – significant since the impact of heteronormativity and patriarchy is not restricted to LGBTI lives. For example, restrictions of gender and sexual rights are evident in staggeringly high levels of sexual- and gender-based violence and female homicide in intimate heterosexual relationships (Hirschowitz, Worku & Orkin, 2000; Jewkes et al., 2009; Mathews, Jewkes & Abrahams, 2011).

In the section that follows we summarise existing research about intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships.

2. INVISIBLE VIOLENCE?

A REVIEW OF EXISTING RESEARCH

Naming violence is a political act (Irwin, 2008, p. 200)



This review is focused on research about IPV as it occurs in women's same-sex relationships. Violence in LGBTI persons' relationships is severely under-researched, in South Africa and internationally. In the sections that follow we discuss the small body of available research.

2. INVISIBLE VIOLENCE? cont...

Commonalities with IPV in heterosexual relationships

While historically receiving little attention, a small but growing body of international research indicates that violence between lesbian partners is at least as frequent and severe as it is between heterosexual partners (Alexander, 2002; Burke, Jordan, & Owen, 2002; Messinger, 2011; Renzetti, 1999). Ristock (1991, p. 74) provides a definition of abuse in women's same-sex relationships as "a pattern of behaviour in which physical and emotional coercion or violence is used to gain or maintain power or control" - noting that this definition is similar to what constitutes abuse in heterosexual relationships. Previous studies also indicate that IPV manifests in similar forms across heterosexual and same-sex relationships; these include physical abuse (e.g. hitting, punching, choking), sexual abuse (e.g. forcing sexual acts, sexual assaults with objects), psychological abuse (e.g. repetitive and excessive criticising, degradation, humiliation, threats), and economic abuse (e.g. controlling finances, creating debt) and property destruction (Ristock, 1991; Renzetti, 1992).

Other experiences of IPV common to heterosexual women as well as women in same-sex relationships, include the finding that psychological abuse is the most prevalent form of abuse (Greenwood et al., 2002; Irwin, 2008); that sexual abuse and physical abuse generally co-occur (Greenwood et al., 2002; Tjaden, Thoennes, & Allison, 1999); and that IPV is more commonly experienced by younger persons (Greenwood et al., 2002). Another similarity is the "spiral of violence" associated with on-going abuse, in that without effective intervention the abuse generally grows in frequency and severity over time (Tully, 1999).

Factors compounding women's experiences of IPV in same-sex relationships

While authors generally emphasise that IPV in women's same-sex relationships share many commonalities with abuse as it occurs in heterosexual relationships, there are some elements that compound lesbian and bisexual women's experience of partner abuse in particular ways. The first is that of widespread homophobia in the social contexts in which lesbian and bisexual women find themselves. In such contexts, if the partner being abused has not disclosed her sexual identity to family, friends or her employer, it enables the abusive partner to use the threat of "outing" her to others as a means of intimidation and control (Renzetti, 1992). Further to this, many lesbian and bisexual women experience rejection by their families due to their sexual orientation, which increases their social marginalisation and isolation (Kaschak, 2001). This makes it difficult to find the necessary support in order to end an abusive relationship and

can also be used by an abusive partner to maintain control, particularly so if their partner is financially dependent on them (Hardesty, Oswald, Khaw, & Fonseca, 2011; Irwin, 2008).

A number of other factors make it particularly difficult for lesbian and bisexual women to access supportive services when experiencing IPV. Predominantly homophobic (and heterosexist) environments complicate or negate access to supportive services through the police, women's shelters or other victim support services (Pattavina, Hirschel, Buzawa, Faggiani, & Bentley, 2007). As discussed in the section that follows, the South African Domestic Violence Act (1998) stipulates that partner abuse is not restricted to opposite-sex relationships, with the implication that service providers such as the police are able to issue protection orders to women who report abuse in a same-sex relationship. However, lesbian and bisexual women may fear secondary victimisation and international research points to low reporting of IPV incidents in same-sex relationships to authorities (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003). When cases are indeed reported, research paints a picture of inadequate and at times even homophobic police responses, such as minimising the seriousness of the case and trivialising the abuse because it is perpetrated by a woman (Jablow, 2000; Vickers, 1996); dismissing the violence as mutual abuse (likely due to relying on a heterosexist understanding of IPV, resulting in ambiguity around who the perpetrator is when a simplistic positioning of men as aggressors and women as victims cannot be applied) (McClennen, 2005); and failure to intervene or arrest the perpetrator (Comstock, 1991).

The lack of recognition of same-sex IPV by LGBTI communities further increases the isolation and marginalisation experienced by lesbian and bisexual women who experience abuse (Irwin, 2008). This silence regarding power inequalities and abuse in women's same-sex relationships is partly related to a gendered discourse that positions women as inherently non-violent creating an inability to "imagine" violence between two women, informed by the normative view of women as nurturing and loving: heteronormative discourses intersect with "discourses idealising lesbian relationships and discourses of femininity – constituting women as passive, gentle and loving but certainly not violent", further erasing the ability to recognise violence between women (Irwin, 2008, p. 206).

The lack of recognition of same-sex violence between women is also related to lesbian feminist political messaging that idealises female same-sex relationships as necessarily egalitarian, a discourse historically advanced by activists in attempts to secure equal rights for the LGBTI sector (Ristock, 1991). In a similar manner, a desire to avoid societal stigma and prejudice towards same-sex sexualities further silences women in speaking about their experiences of intimate partner violence and contributes to a lack of available support. To this end, Irwin (2008) notes, "for many of the women in this study identification with the lesbian community generated a strong personal sense of identity and belonging, and a supportive structure of activities and relationships. Despite this, however, many women expressed frustration that the community did not take any action and responsibility to address domestic violence" (p. 211). McClennen (2005) notes that the lack of appropriate and responsive professional support services

2. INVISIBLE VIOLENCE? cont...

can contribute to lesbian and bisexual women remaining in abusive relationships as they do not believe that they will receive help if they speak out about their abuse.

Authors such as Irwin (2008) describe coping mechanisms drawn on by women who experience IPV in a same-sex relationship. These strategies include: Minimising or denying their partner's violent behaviour; normalising, forgetting or blocking out violent incidents; adjusting their behaviour to avoid violence, and/or fighting back. Irwin (2008) notes that fighting back is a controversial issue, as referred to earlier in this report, since it is often constructed as mutual abuse in order to minimise the serious nature of violence in same-sex relationships.

Mental and physical health consequences of IPV

Apart from the obvious psychological and physical injury and even death caused by intimate partner violence, women who experience IPV are also at risk of other mental and physical health consequences. International research indicates that lesbian and bisexual women experiencing IPV have an increased likelihood of experiencing depression (Tuel & Russell, 1998), deliberate self-harm (Blosnich & Bossarte, 2012), and substance abuse (Fortunata & Kohn, 2003). These findings resonate with studies documenting the mental health consequences of IPV for women in heterosexual relationships (e.g. Campbell, 2002; Coker et al., 2002). Negative mental health outcomes for lesbian and bisexual women who experience partner abuse are amplified in contexts where they receive limited social support, which is often the case in contexts marked by widespread homophobia and heterosexism (McClennen, 2005).

Previous research also indicates a negative impact on the sexual health of lesbian and bisexual women who experience IPV. For example Sandfort, Baumann, Matebeni, Reddy and Southey-Swartz (2013) found that forced sex, perpetrated by either a male or female partner, is associated with greater HIV risk among lesbian and bisexual women in their Southern African research. Also here, this finding is similar to that of studies concerned with IPV in heterosexual relationships - e.g. a South African study by Dunkle et al. (2004) found that women experiencing abuse by their male partner have an increased risk of acquiring HIV.

Gendered identities, power and intimate partner violence

A final area that has received some research attention is the manner in which heteronormative gendered scripts might inform violence in same-sex relationships, similar to what has been described in abusive heterosexual relationships. Kaschak

(2001), reflecting on abuse in women's same-sex relationships, notes that "while neither partner in a lesbian relationship enjoys male privilege and power, we all live in a society that promotes hierarchy, power differential, inequality and, yes, violence. These are endemic to patriarchy and why should they not find their way into relationships lived in this cultural milieu?" (p. 2).

While some authors focus on the performance of traditional roles of violence based on gender expression, there are also several research studies that emphasise that IPV in same-sex relationships is not limited to gendered power differentials. Irwin (2008) notes that a simplistic analysis of gender power differentials in same-sex relationships is widely critiqued stating that "approaches that focus only on gender are heterocentric because they propose that those lesbians who internalise socially feminine behaviours are likely to be victimised and those who internalise socially masculine behaviours are likely to be abusive" (p. 201-202). McClennen (2005) provides a more nuanced description of participants' experience of power differentials in an abusive relationship, noting a combination of factors such as the "perpetrators' lack of communication and social skills, perpetrators' experiencing intergenerational transmission of violence and exhibiting substance abuse and faked illnesses, victims' internalized homophobia, and couples' status differentials" (p. 151).

To date there has, however, been very little feminist research considering power and abuse in women's same-sex relationships and this report responds to that knowledge gap.

South African research

Existing South African research about IPV among same-sex partners is restricted to four studies exploring gay-male violence (Henderson, 2012; Henderson & Shefer, 2013; Moodley, in press; Stephenson, De Voux, & Sullivan, 2011) and two studies considering IPV among lesbian women as part of broader research regarding lesbian sexual health (Triangle Project & PRISM, 1998) and gender-based violence (Muthien, 2004). The first of the grouping of studies concerned with IPV in male same-sex relationships is a quantitative study investigating IPV and sexual risk-taking among men who have sex with men (MSM) in South Africa, through an online survey (Stephenson et al., 2011). This study, while somewhat limited in its reliance on online sampling, indicates a relationship between IPV and experiences of homophobia and social isolation, where experiencing homophobia was significantly related to increased reporting of sexual IPV.

The other three South Africa studies are qualitative in nature and include two studies exploring narratives of power and abuse among gay men (Henderson, 2012; Henderson & Shefer, 2013) and one study investigating constructions of violence by men who have experienced IPV within gay-male relationships (Moodley, 2013). Participants in these studies noted that heteronormative masculine and feminine gender roles structured their relationship and appeared to facilitate abuse, in that older,

2. INVISIBLE VIOLENCE? cont...

more masculine partners take on a stereotypical and heteronormative masculine role through controlling and violent behaviour directed at the more feminine-presenting partner. Further to this, power is also implicated in sexual practices – “othering” and disempowering of persons in the “feminine” position performing as “bottom” during sex (Henderson, 2012). Moodley similarly states that “some participants adopted hetero-patriarchal gender roles such that the abuser was constructed as the ‘masculine’ partner and the abused as the ‘feminine’ partner, which seemed to replicate gendered power relations” (Khan & Moodley, 2013, p. 244). Henderson and Shefer (2013) conclude that “stereotypical gendered role-playing by gay men is likely, as it does in traditional gendered heterosexual partners, to lead to power differentials and abusive behaviour” (p. 9). Another South African study - of isiXhosa-speaking gay men - however cautions against a simplistic binary reading of power, illustrating how “‘passive’ gay men (skesanas) hold considerable power in their sexual interactions with ‘active’ gay men (injongas)” (McClean & Ngcobo, 1994).

Of the two South African studies that investigate IPV among women in same-sex relationships, the first is a mixed methodology study conducted by Triangle Project and PRISM (1998), focused on rural lesbian women's sexual health with a sub-section of the research exploring participants' experiences of IPV. It is noted in the report that “it was not the intention of this research to gather information on abuse in lesbian relationships. As a result there were no questions on the issue. However the issue is of such concern to the respondents that they identified it as an issue of importance that they feel they need skills to address. Of the forty five respondents, twenty eight talked about it in response to other questions” (Triangle Project & PRISM, 1998, p. 29). The study names the influence of “butch” and “femme” lesbian identities on IPV, with participants making reference to butch-identified partners abusing their femme-identified partners, but notes that abuse in women's same-sex relationships is not restricted to such a binary. Motivations for abuse identified by participants include attempts to control one's partner, anger at suspected or real infidelity and the fear of being abandoned, with alcohol being cited as exacerbating violence. Participants' accounts predominantly focused on physical violence, including accounts of violence that were severe enough to require hospitalisation, but also mentioned sexual, emotional, and economic abuse (Triangle Project & PRISM, 1998).

The second, conducted by Muthien (2004), is concerned with intersections between gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS in South Africa broadly, but includes some discussion of women's experiences of violence and abuse within their same-sex relationships. Muthien (2004) notes that lesbian and bisexual women experiencing IPV and seeking support often encounter service providers that assume women are heterosexual and that violence is limited to a heteronormative male-to-female dynamic. She recommends that gender-based violence organisations break down

heteronormative assumptions about violence and instead cater for all women regardless of sexual identification; further to that, her research also emphasises the need for LGBTI organisations to address IPV.

Concluding reflections

In summary, existing research has generally focused on "making a case" for the importance of this research area (e.g. research indicating that prevalence is at least as high as among heterosexual persons; that the impact of IPV in same-sex relationships is compounded by heterosexism and homophobia, social marginalisation, lack of appropriate services). Existing research also emphasises the inadequate response by service providers such as police, contributing to widespread underreporting of such violence. The review of the limited number of South African studies indicated that available local research is predominantly focused on male same-sex relationships and that the few studies identified that included a focus on women, did so as one component of a broader research agenda; to date there is no South African research specifically focused on IPV among women in same-sex relationships and the current report attempts to respond to this lack of research. South African activists have called for the focus on violence in the form of LGBTI-related hate crimes to be expanded to also consider violence among same-sex partners (Moothoo-Padayachie, 2004). IPV in same-sex relationships is also identified as a research priority in a report outlining a South African agenda for research on gender-based violence targeting lesbian and bisexual women (Holland-Muter, 2012).

As a final observation, existing research generally does not assume an intersectional approach to analysing women's experiences of intimate partner violence. Further to this, there is a lack of research employing a feminist lens in exploring power and abuse in same-sex relationships. An important implication of this is that much of the existing research is limited to viewing IPV through an individualistic perspective, mirroring the focus in early domestic violence policies. Such a lens does not fully consider the contribution of structural factors to power inequalities, where violence between same-sex partners is shaped by dominant patriarchal contexts of oppressive power. We explore the policy and legislative context in South Africa, as it relates to intimate partner violence, more fully in the section that follows.



3. INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICY

The state is under a series of constitutional mandates which include the obligation to deal with domestic violence: to protect both the rights of everyone to enjoy freedom and security of the person and to bodily and psychological integrity. (S v Baloyi 2000 (1) BCLR 86 (CC) at para 11).

This section of the report locates intimate partner violence, as it occurs in same-sex relationships, within the broader South African policy and legislative environment. While policy development is only one area of influence, the recourse made possible through appropriate legal and policy reform is significant and can determine the level of services ultimately available to LGBTI persons. Further to that, the particular emphases and silences in policies can be indicative of dominant modes of thinking in societies. This process is of course not one-directional and "policy as a formal mode of social discourse has immense power to shape the way we think and function in society" (Hochfeld, 2007, p. 80). In what follows we outline policy development from the point where the apartheid government first considered intimate partner violence as requiring a legal response, up to the current moment where LGBTI rights are enshrined in the Constitution along with multiple legal reforms, including the Domestic Violence Act (1998), to reflect this Constitutional mandate.

3. INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE cont...

The Prevention of Family Violence Act (1993)

In 1993 the Prevention of Family Violence Act signalled the first legal recourse for women experiencing violence in their intimate relationships. Previously, violence against women by their intimate partners was considered a "private" matter and reduced to an individualised response with little consideration of the gendered and socio-political factors fuelling such violence (Vetten, 2014). While this Act finally provided a legal mechanism to address intimate partner violence, it was however still shaped by patriarchal ideology and had as its aim to "promote family unity rather than protect women, which once again subordinated women's individual rights to their roles as wives, mothers and home-makers" (Vetten, 2014, p. 50). Further to this, an obvious limitation for LGBTI persons was that the Act made no mention of violence between same-sex partners and defined intimate partner violence narrowly as violence committed in the "matrimonial home", including violence between a man and a woman in a long-term relationship who are not married to each other by law, but live together as husband and wife (Section 2, Act 133 of 1993):

Any reference in this Act to the parties to a marriage shall be construed as including a man and a woman who are or were married to each other according to any law or custom and also a man and a woman who ordinarily live or lived together as husband and wife, although not married to each other.

The 1993 Act makes provision for the following behaviours and prohibits and enjoins the person perpetrating abuse:

- a) not to assault or threaten the applicant or a child living with the parties or with either of them;
- b) not to enter the matrimonial home or other place where the applicant is resident, or a specified part of such home or place or a specified area in which such home or place is situated;
- c) not to prevent the applicant or a child who ordinarily lives in the matrimonial home from entering and remaining in the matrimonial home or a specified part of the matrimonial home; or
- d) not to commit any other act specified in the interdict.

The Domestic Violence Act (1998)

Post-1994 - with the Constitution and its Bill of Rights prohibiting discrimination on several grounds including gender, sex, and sexual orientation - a range of legislative and policy reforms ensued that sought to remove barriers to the full realisation of equality for LGBTI persons. This was reflected in the Domestic Violence Act (116 of 1998), which provides a broader definition of the intimate relationships in which intimate partner violence can occur, with specific mention of same-sex partnerships. The Act defines a domestic relationship as follows (Domestic Violence Act, 1998, p. 2, own emphasis):

S1(vii) defines “Domestic relationship” as a relationship between a complainant and a respondent in any of the following ways:

- a) They are or were married to each other, including marriage according to any law, custom or religion;
- b) They (whether they are of the same or of the opposite sex) live or lived together in a relationship in the nature of marriage, although they are not, or were not, married to each other, or are not able to be married to each other;
- c) They are the parents of a child or are persons who have or had parental responsibility for that child (whether or not at the same time);
- d) They are family members related by consanguinity, affinity or adoption;
- e) They are or were in an engagement, dating or customary relationship including an actual or perceived romantic, intimate or sexual relationship of any duration; or
- f) They share or recently shared the same residence.

The Domestic Violence Act, through positioning violence against women within a rights framework - in emphasising women's right to freedom and security - moved the State response out of the confines of the earlier language of protecting the family, to instead considering women as deserving protection in their own right. Women were now regarded as individual rights bearers and not simply in relation to traditional familial roles and duties (Vetten, 2014). Further to this, the Act rejects the heteronormative language of the Prevention of Family Violence Act (1993) and instead accounts for the different relationship configurations in which IPV can occur. The Act also does not uncritically replicate the assumption that only women can experience IPV by allowing for recognition of men who experience violence in their intimate relationships. Through its more progressive framing, the Act grants queer women experiencing partner abuse the same rights and protections as heterosexual women, such as having the abusive partner arrested or for the abused partner to obtain a protection order against her abusive partner. There are, however, significant barriers to queer women experiencing IPV seeking help, such as refraining from reporting violence out of fear of secondary victimisation by the police, and the Act does not provide any measures to address such barriers.

3. INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE cont...

The Domestic Violence Act (1998) goes on to describe the different actions and forms of abuse included in its definition of intimate partner violence:

- a) Physical abuse;
- b) Sexual abuse;
- c) Emotional, verbal and psychological abuse;
- d) Economic abuse;
- e) Intimidation;
- f) Harassment;
- g) Stalking;
- h) Damage to property:
- i) Entry into the complainant's residence without consent, where the parties do not share the same residence; or
- j) Any other controlling or abusive behaviour towards a complainant, where such conduct harms, or may cause imminent harm to, the safety, health or wellbeing of the complainant.

Most of these offences retain their common-law definition, but harassment, stalking, economic abuse and emotional, verbal and psychological abuse are all defined in more detail in the Domestic Violence Act (1998):

"Harassment" means engaging in a pattern of conduct that induces the fear of harm to a complainant including:

- a) repeatedly watching, or loitering outside of or near the building or place where the complainant resides, works, carries on business, studies or happens to be;
- b) repeatedly making telephone calls or inducing another person to make telephone calls to the complainant, whether or not conversation ensues;
- c) repeatedly sending, delivering or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages, facsimiles, electronic mail or other objects to the complainant;

"Stalking" means repeatedly following, pursuing, or accosting the complainant.

"Economic abuse" is:

- a) the unreasonable deprivation of economic or financial resources to which a complainant is entitled under law or which the complainant requires out of necessity, including household necessities for the complainant, and mortgage bond repayments or payment of rent in respect of the shared residence;
- b) the unreasonable disposal of household effects or other property in which the complainant has an interest

"Emotional, verbal and psychological abuse" means a pattern of degrading or humiliating conduct towards a complainant, including:

- a) repeated insults, ridicule or name calling;
- b) repeated threats to cause emotional pain; or
- c) the repeated exhibition of obsessive possessiveness or jealousy, which is such as to constitute a serious invasion of the complainant's privacy, liberty, integrity or security

A return to "preserving the family"

Following the Domestic Violence Act – with its expanded legal definition of intimate partner violence to include violence between same-sex partners, violence occurring in non-marital relationships, and intimate partner violence experienced by men – South African policy development returned to the pre-1994 emphasis on "preserving the family". The family form that is the focus of such policies is implicitly based on the conventional heterosexual, nuclear structure, with little or only token inclusion of other diverse family forms and intimate relationships. For example, the Integrated Social Crime Prevention Strategy (2011) developed by DSD names "dysfunctional families" as a key factor in perpetuating a cycle of crime and violence and states as one of its six strategic objectives the improvement of "social fabric and cohesion within families" (p. 9). A similar emphasis on the family as the site of moral regeneration is reflected in the development of a Green Paper on Families (2011) drafted by DSD. The focus of the Green Paper is summarised as follows (DSD, 2011, p. 3):

In this Green Paper, Government is putting forward proposals on how South African families should be supported, in order to flourish and function optimally. It calls for families to play a central role in the national development pursuits of the country and the building of a better South Africa. For this ideal to be realised, family life and the strengthening of the family should be promoted in the country. Government recognises that many social ills in South Africa are the result of either weak family systems or non-existent families, altogether. It also understands that the family is facing a fundamental crisis, which needs to be remedied immediately. It is for this reason that this endeavour was launched, in order to provide guidelines and strategies for promoting family life and strengthening families.

Problematic is that the version of "family" informing these policies is one that remains based on patriarchal power inequalities along a traditional two-parent heterosexual nuclear family form. Such a view of families is depoliticised and leaches out any critical gender analysis contained in the Domestic Violence Act - in fact Vetten (2014) comments that the term "gender equality" does not feature at all in the Integrated Social Crime Prevention Strategy nor does the Strategy include any substantive engagement with how gendered power relations contribute to violence. The Green Paper on Families similarly fails to interrogate how families "have often been sites

3. INTIMATE PARTNER VIOLENCE cont...

of discrimination, exclusion and violence against many who don't conform" (Judge, 2012, para 4). The subsequent White Paper on Families, released in 2012, continues an uncritical treatment of families and requires Government initiatives to be "tilted in favour of families" (DSD, 2012, p. 46). Family diversity is superficially touted as a guiding principle of the strategy, but the tacit norm is that families comprise of "stable marital unions" referencing "men, women and children" (DSD, 2012, p. 39). The White Paper goes on to emphasise the role of traditional leaders, described as "custodians of the traditional value system" and faith-based organisations, posited as "custodians of morality... [who] advocate for healthy and functional family life as well as marital stability in the society" as partners in Government social service delivery (DSD, 2012, p. 54). Considering that traditional leaders and faith-based organisations remain largely untransformed in terms of their position on women's rights as well as the rights of LGBTI persons (De Vos & Barnard, 2007; Gouws, 2014), such an emphasis in policy aimed at improving social service delivery, including responses to intimate partner violence, is deeply problematic.

The policy context post the Domestic Violence Act, has "despite appearances to the contrary... [done] little to challenge the idea of the family as a traditional, conservative, nuclear, middle-class structure with a clear, gendered division of labour" (Hochfeld, 2007, p. 90). An inclusive document such as the Domestic Violence Act (1998) then becomes limited in its potential to bring about effective recourse for LGBTI persons experiencing intimate partner violence, when couched in a broader policy context based on conservative heteronormative discourse.

Concluding reflections

Despite the Domestic Violence Act (1998) expressly defining IPV in terms that include same-sex relationships, this form of violence has not gained full visibility in other efforts by the State. In general, the dominant discourse of violence against women continues to define, implicitly and explicitly, that it is heterosexual women experiencing violence at the hands of their male partners. This of course corresponds to the reality that South African women experience staggeringly high levels of intimate partner violence perpetrated by men, and that men killing their intimate female partners is the leading form of female homicide in SA (Abrahams, Mathews, Martin, Lombard, & Jewkes, 2013). This focus has, however, had the inadvertent consequence that LGBTI persons - a group particularly marginalised due to heterosexist and homophobic discrimination and violence - continue to be invisible in responses to intimate partner violence.

As this review of relevant policy development indicates, State policy responses across a range of policy issues post the Domestic Violence Act are increasingly articulated

within a discourse privileging the (heteronormative) family. Such framing excludes family forms and intimate relationships that do not conform to the traditional, heteronormative ideal of the nuclear family and limits the potential for resultant policy documents and legislation to respond to violence as perpetrated or experienced by LGBTI persons in their intimate relationships. This diminishes the ability for appropriate and sensitive State responses to intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships to develop; if LGBTI relationships and families are not fully included in State policies the possibility of abuse occurring in such relationships remains inconceivable.

Further to such invisibility, familialist discourse in State policies can shape State responses to be inappropriate and damaging, especially so for those who do not conform to the particular family model made visible and prioritised by the State. Judge (2012), responding to the Green Paper on the Family, poses the question: "How might a 'family perspective' be applied when a lesbian child is evicted from the home because her parents claim her sexuality doesn't accord with 'family morals'?" (para 26). Pertinent to this report, one could similarly ask how a "family perspective" would be useful when a heterosexual woman seeks a restraining order against her husband, and even more so, when a lesbian woman seeks the same against her same-sex partner?

In the section that follows we apply a feminist lens in making sense of the accounts of power inequalities, violence and abuse in women's same-sex relationships, as shared by research participants in this study.





4. NARRATIVES OF POWER, CONTROL AND ABUSE IN WOMEN'S SAME-SEX

We first describe the research process and introduce the research participants, followed by the presentation of the main findings.

The study locations

For the purpose of this study we selected three main study locations in the Western Cape: the rural and semi-rural areas of the West Coast and Cape Winelands, and an urban township-based area in Cape Town. There is little consensus on how to define rural and urban areas in South Africa. In this study, our focus was on the deliberate inclusion of areas that are characterised by differential access to health and other services as well as the relative reliance on land-based livelihoods. Rural communities are generally relatively resource poor compared to their urban counterparts. The majority of women living in rural areas and semi-rural centres in the Western Cape rely on seasonal work on farms or in canning factories to sustain themselves. This means that out of season, they rely on male relatives to provide for their basic needs. This dependence on men increases the vulnerability of women, limiting their choices around their sexual and reproductive health and placing women at particular risk. It is for this reason that Triangle Project has a specific mandate to extend our programmes and services to lesbian and bisexual women who, as a result of an intersection of social inequalities (based on aspects such as sexuality, race, socio-economic circumstances, nationality and geographic location), do not have adequate access to resources and services. Hence, the focus of this study was framed to include not only urban-based participants but also women located in rural and semi-rural areas. The selection of study locations was also informed by convenience in that the specific sites chosen were ones in which Triangle Project has on-going community-based work around the sexual and reproductive health and rights of queer women, which facilitated access to participants.

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

Based on consultations with Triangle Projects' Community Engagement and Empowerment Programme (CEEP), the following five sites in the three selected regions were identified as areas within which the organisations' community-based work is active, and formed the focus of our data collection:

Town / township	District municipality	Participants
Mbekweni (Paarl)	Cape Winelands	13
Kayamandi (Stellenbosch)	Cape Winelands	9
Touwsrivier	Cape Winelands	4
Vredendal	West Coast	8
Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Lower Cross Roads	City of Cape Town	8

Table 1: Geographic sites for data collection

Socio-economic dynamics of the study locations

Cape Winelands region

The Cape Winelands region is known particularly for its viticulture - its cellars are well known for the export quality wines it produces - and the resultant wealth of the farm owners in the region. It is the largest wine-producing region in South Africa (Western Cape Provincial Treasury, 2010). However within this social context of "rich" and "poor", farm workers have continued to lead lives locked in cycles of poverty, dependent both socially and economically on their employers. Most farm workers who live on farms have no access to public transport, limiting their access to healthcare (Human Rights Watch, 2011). The region's unemployment rate by gender is as follows: male, 14.0 per cent vs. female, 18.6 per cent (Western Cape Provincial Treasury, 2010).

Mbekweni and Kayamandi are two townships near the two prosperous semi-rural towns of Paarl and Stellenbosch respectively. Mbekweni is a black township established during apartheid to house the workers for Paarl and which now has a population of approximately 30 000 Xhosa-speaking people. Kayamandi lies on the doorstep to Stellenbosch as you enter the town from the North. It was established

as a “non-white location” for mostly Xhosa-speaking migrant labourers in the early 1940s. Currently it has a population of around 25 000 people. The rural town of Touwsrivier was developed around a railway depot in the late 19th century. It is the doorway to the Great Karoo, and lies on the main N1 highway between Cape Town and Johannesburg. The population of Touwsrivier is approximately 8 000, comprising predominantly of coloured Afrikaans-speaking people. Residents of these three townships predominantly live in informal dwellings without suitable infrastructure such as electricity, sanitation and water (StatsSA, 2001).

West Coast region

People in the West Coast region of the Western Cape have been engaged in various marine resource use activities for many generations. In this region there are low levels of education and high levels of unemployment, a lack of access to formal employment opportunities, and few opportunities for locals in the formal fishing industry. Poverty is prevalent in many households with high levels of unemployment. The region in general and the informal housing areas in particular, have low levels of basic infrastructure and bulk services.

Vredendal is a rural town on the West Coast lying in the Olifants River valley. It has a population of around 16 000 of predominantly coloured people and lies towards the coast off the main N7 freeway to Namaqualand (StatsSA, 2001).

Township-based areas in Cape Town

The city of Cape Town is the provincial capital of the Western Cape as well as the legislative capital of the country. It is the second most populous city in South Africa and known as a desirable tourist destination. As a large city it has well-developed infrastructure and has seen continued improved access to services such as education, healthcare and housing (McDonald, 2008). There remain, however, stark inequalities particularly around access to services such as electricity, water and sanitation. Further to that, there are also large income differentials that cohere around geographically and racially drawn lines; the city's population largely remains divided between a predominantly white suburban middle-class and a working-class black and coloured population in townships (McDonald, 2008).

Khayelitsha, Nyanga and Crossroads are three of the largest townships in Cape Town. Nyanga and Crossroads were established between 1950 and 1970 when black migrant workers were forced to settle on the outskirts of Cape Town (South African History Online, n.d.). Khayelitsha was established in 1985 when large numbers of black people from surrounding areas were forcibly moved there to curb overcrowding in other townships. Its establishment was also a final attempt by the apartheid authorities to enforce the Group Areas Act - legislation introduced in 1950 to segregate residential areas according to race (South African History Online, n.d.). All three areas are high-density townships with a population of more than 406 000 in Khayelitsha, 57 900 in Nyanga and 36 000 in Crossroads (StatsSA, 2012). The majority of residents are rural and urban migrant workers, predominantly from the Eastern Cape.

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

Living conditions in these areas have improved since 1994 and access to services such as healthcare is not as restricted as is the case in rural and semi-rural areas. For example, Khayelitsha has a district level hospital, several provincial government clinics as well as small municipal clinics. However, many residents report poor service delivery and LGBTI persons in particular experience high levels of stigma and discrimination from government officials such as the police and health care providers (O'Regan & Pikoli, 2014). These townships are also marked by high levels of unemployment, violence and HIV/AIDS (Ndegwa, Horner, & Esau, 2007; Walsh & Mitchell, 2006).

The research participants

The focus group discussions that inform this section of the report included 42 queer women recruited from the study locations in the Western Cape described above. Recruitment relied on convenience sampling to access initial participants and snowball sampling to identify subsequent participants, due to our focus on existing networks established through the on-going community-based work of Triangle Project in these areas. It is important to note that participants were recruited as part of a broader study concerned with sexual and reproductive health and rights of women who have sex with women (WSW) and were therefore not selected on the basis of having experienced IPV, although during data collection it emerged that many of the participants have. Women who self-identify as lesbian, bisexual, queer or consider themselves as WSW and who are 18 years and older, were invited to participate.

The table on the next page summarises the main demographic characteristics of the 42 participants.

	West Coast	Cape Winelands			City of Cape Town
	Vredendal (8)	Touwsriver (4)	Mbekweni (13)	Kayamandi (9)	Urban townships (8)
Age range	18-22	23-35	18-28	18-30	19-32
"Race"	"Coloured"	"Coloured"	"Black African"	"Black African"	"Black African"
Home language	Afrikaans	Afrikaans	isiXhosa	isiXhosa ²	isiXhosa
Gr 12 completed	2 participants	2 participants	3 participants	7 participants	3 participants\
Employed	1 participant	3 participants	1 participant	2 participants	2 participants

Table 2: Participant demographic information

2. One participant in this group identified as Sotho-speaking with the remaining participants as isiXhosa-speaking.

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

The majority of participants self-identified as either lesbian or bisexual women, with one participant identifying as queer. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 35. The majority of participants self-identified their race as "black African" (30) followed by "coloured" (12). As the table shows, this distribution of race in terms of geographical location still reflects the racially classified segregation of apartheid. Of the group of 42 participants, only nine women were employed at the time of data collection. 11 participants had completed Grade 11 or lower, 26 had completed their secondary schooling (Grade 12) and of those, nine were either enrolled for or had completed tertiary education. Thus, 43% of participants did not hold a Grade 12 certificate and 79% were unemployed at the time of data collection.

Data collection and analysis

A series of five focus group discussions were conducted with participants in the different study locations. Discussions were conducted in the participants' language of choice (English, Afrikaans and IsiXhosa) and lasted one to two hours. Trained fieldworkers guided the groups using a semi-structured interview guide. The four focus groups in rural and semi-rural areas had a broader focus on sexual and reproductive health and explored the following: challenges faced by lesbian and bisexual women and other WSW; issues of gender identity (i.e. what does it mean to be a woman who loves another woman); sexual behaviours and practices; the use of preventive measures for HIV and STIs and the accessibility and availability of healthcare services and participants' experiences of them. For the purposes of this report we only include data relevant to participants' discussions of intimate partner violence. The urban township-based group had a more direct focus on intimate partner violence and explored the following domains: relationship norms; definitions of intimate partner violence; factors contributing to intimate partner violence; resources available for women experience intimate partner violence.

Standard ethical procedures for conducting qualitative social research were followed (HPCSA, 2006). Participants provided written informed consent prior to participating in the focus group discussions. The voluntary nature of participation was emphasised and potential participants were assured that non-participation or withdrawal from the study at any point would in no way affect their access to Triangle Project's programmes or services. Participants were informed of potentially sensitive questions beforehand and were told that they did not have to respond to questions they did not feel comfortable answering. All participants were made aware of available support services (counselling through Triangle Project's helpline and face-to-face counselling and health services provided by Triangle Project). Participants' names or other personal identifiers are not included in this report and pseudonyms were assigned to ensure anonymity. The focus group discussions were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English where necessary. We conducted a thematic analysis to generate coherent themes based on the qualitative data we collected. The process of conducting the

thematic analysis involved the following six steps: (1) familiarisation with the data; (2) generating initial codes; (3) collating codes into potential themes; (4) reviewing themes by checking themes in relation to coded extracts as well as the entire data set and generating a thematic map of the analysis; (5) generating clear definitions and names for themes; and (6) producing the integrated report (Braun & Clarke, 2012).

From a feminist poststructuralist position, the analysis is framed by the work of Salo, Ribas, Lopes and Zamboni (2010), who locate same-sex sexuality within a post-apartheid context where space, race, and class are tied to attempts at reclaiming respectable citizenship within a democracy on the margins of Cape Town. The analysis foregrounds how heteronormative³ scripts are enviable in a post-apartheid patriarchal society: Normative heterosexual roles and ways of engaging are desirable precisely because they provide the illusion of access to resources denied to black persons under apartheid:

In their efforts to assert their right to be recognised as citizens, inhabitants are asserting their display of respectable heterosexual personhood more forcefully... Yet... these township residents have historically recognised and tolerated, albeit unevenly, the assertion of same-sex desire and identity, on the social margins of townships. Consequently, sexual minorities live their lives in ambivalent and precarious ways in the spaces of home. These township residents' deepening sense of exclusion from the apparent abundance of resources in the post-apartheid present, have seen a redoubling of their efforts to assert respectable personhood exclusively associated with heterosexuality (Salo et al., 2010, p. 301).

These authors therefore provide a lens through which to understand how sexualities, mediated by other intersectional and marginal subjectivities such as race and class, operate in local spaces in post-apartheid South Africa. Consequently, such an understanding provides insight into not only how violence against lesbians becomes a possibility, but how the complexity of layers of marginality within a particular historical juncture in South Africa, helps us to understand how violence between lesbians can be understood.

Findings

In what follows we present the findings from our analysis of the focus group discussions, organised into different themes. An overarching theme present across the entire data set is that of power and control, often linked to heteronormative scripts enacted in participants' intimate relationships.

3. The Institute for Development Studies defines heteronormativity as "the idea that only heterosexual relations are normal, and that only particular kinds of heterosexual relations are normal (e.g. within marriage, between people of the same class and ethnic group, with the male partner being dominant, etc.). Exactly which relations are considered normal will vary according to time and place, but the presence of such norms and their effects in controlling and excluding people is almost universal" (2008, p. 11).

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

Framing violence between lesbians

According to Peterman and Dixon,

Domestic violence is not about strength; it is a pattern of behaviours designed to control another. Consequently, women as well as men are capable of physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, and economic abuse and other controlling behaviours (2003, p. 42).

Closer to home, Gibson, Dinan and McCall, in a study located in Lavender Hill and Vrygrond on the margins of Cape Town, usefully situate violence within its context in South Africa by noting that women live under circumstances where

Violence is only one part of the many hardships of daily life. To gain an understanding of the complexity of violent practices in the domestic sphere, it is useful to not only link it to the history of violence at macro level, but also to see the continuum of violence within the community (2005, p. 148).

In reflecting on research focused on hate crimes against lesbians, Holland-Muter highlights the homophobic context in which lesbians live:

black lesbians live under the daily threat and experience of violence, not only because of their gender, but also due to their sexual orientation and/or gender presentation (lesbians, butch lesbians)... violence against lesbians needs to be understood within the context of violence against women in general, but also point out how violence affects lesbians differently and is perpetuated for different reasons (2012, p. 11).

These “different reasons” highlighted by Holland-Muter are important to understand in order to appropriately intervene in cases of IPV between lesbians. Rose (2000) provides some context to the familial conditions that may impact on the reasons for perpetrating violence against a partner in a lesbian relationship:

Lesbian batterers are motivated to avoid feelings of loss and abandonment. Therefore, many violent incidents occur during threatened separations. Many lesbian batterers grew up in violent households and were physically, sexually, or verbally abused and/or witnessed their mothers being abused by fathers or stepfathers.

As one participant in this study expressed,

...you'll find that sometimes at home I don't get it [love] the way I want, the love I want, so at least I'm coming to you thinking that you are going to give me the love I want... And by choosing you from other people... I saw you as the person who will give me the love because I don't get it at home and in my family. I don't get it (FGD WSW Urban, participant 1).

For black lesbians, experiences of violence within their romantic relationships may be exacerbated by cultural and community ideas of sexuality and gender where identifying as lesbian is seen as deviant, shameful, and a dishonour to the family and community. This may be the case especially in a context where heterosexuality is seen as a desirable means to citizenship in the post-apartheid context, as Salo et al., (2010) point out above. The current homophobic discourse on the African continent points to the ways in which homosexuality is punishable by death, or imprisonment in some countries (see Tamale, 2011). Notions of culture as static, driven by colonial discourse in many African states, are constituted in the communities in which the participants in this study live. One participant stated in this regard that:

This thing is not [seen as] cultural or spiritual, being a lesbian. It's not accepted in our communities (FGD WSW Urban, participant 2).

The rape and murder of a number of lesbians by men they are familiar with in their communities, attest to the way in which homosexuality is understood as unacceptable, and deserving of a violent response. Echoing international research findings (see, for example, Pattavina, Hirschel, Buzawa, Faggiani, & Bentley, 2007), intolerance, stereotyping, and discrimination are rife within community-based police services meant to protect citizens from violence, and health systems meant to provide care for community members. Attempts to report violence by a woman partner, as revealed in international research (Jablow, 2000; Vickers, 1996) are at times met with disbelief, a lack of understanding, and ridicule, minimising violence in general, and violence between women, in particular. As the following conversations reveal:

Participant 3: Like that woman, she had a cut here under her armpit, that friend from Phillipi, she went to report that her girlfriend did that to her and they didn't even take note she was there. They only just laughed about it, asking why don't you take the knife and...

Facilitator: Do the same thing (FGD WSW Urban, participant 2).

Participant 3: ... you go to the police station, you couldn't fight back but they don't understand that we don't have like...

Participant 2: The same power.

That's what they say, why don't you take the knife and stab her back. If she stabbed you, why didn't you... (FGD WSW Urban, participant 3).

When you have to go and do the HIV test at the clinic they're not gonna focus on **what they should be doing... the first question they're gonna ask you is when last did you sleep with a bra [a man].** When you're responding to that and you say 'no, I'm not intimate with males, I'm dating girls', so now they're gonna start to lose what they should do at their work and start to ask you silly questions. Or they're gonna like call each other, say 'haybo nurse, can you come and hear what she's saying [laughs]. She's here for testing and sleeps with women... That's all they want to know, how do you have sex (FGD WSW Urban, participant 3).

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

The preceding conversations reveal that the community contexts in which lesbians live naturalise and condone violence. At healthcare facilities such as clinics, sexual relationships between women are understood primarily through the lens of heterosexual patriarchy, further perpetuating the anti-lesbian environment that gives rise to violence against lesbians in their communities - the spaces they call home.

Gender binaries and roles as normative

A trend in the findings relates to power disparities within relationships that are informed by normative, taken-for-granted understandings of gender roles. In this normative understanding of gender, women have specific roles that are tied to ideas of heterosexual femininity: providing care, being responsive to others' needs, and being gentle. Men, on the other hand, are associated with roles tied to normative heterosexual masculinity: expressions of power, control, assertiveness and aggression. Participants described how these heteronormative scripts are not limited to heterosexual relationships but also shape the context in which individual roles and relationship dynamics are negotiated within same-sex relationships - often cohering around masculine "butch" and feminine "femme" lesbian identities. While adopting different gender identities are not problematic in themselves, what participants' accounts highlight are the power differentials that often accompany heteronormative gender scripts, in that these scripts contribute to relationship dynamics that centre on control and coercion (associated by participants with butch identities) and vulnerability and victimhood (associated with femme identities). One participant problematised this heteronormative script, stating that:

... She used to beat me up! What complicates things, you see, is this thing of being butch and femme, separating ourselves. It's just another thing that sort of gives you more power. We say "butch" and "femme"... Maybe if there weren't such things it would be different, but they already exist. It's one of the things that ruins things... Because people become big-headed, and say that they are the man in the household which means they get to make decisions (FGD WSW Mbekweni, participant 2).

The narrative above articulates the existence of a heteronormative script that certain lesbian women may replicate. This script allows masculine women to assert power. Socially, there is clearly a missing script to do gender in alternative ways – heteronormative roles and values are built into the everyday structures that humans inhabit, and there is often little space to use one's agency in order to imagine gender roles differently. Constituent within this script was the use of essentialist heterosexist

language to describe themselves as lesbians, re-inscribing ideas of women as innately jealous, and lesbians as hypersexual:

Participant 5: ...I understand what they are like, especially lesbians, I'm not gonna lie... they sleep around a lot. Whether it's in the bathroom, whether it's just outside the club... Wherever. Wherever, whenever and whenever they get a chance they just do it.

Participant 4: ... you have to be strict about your girlfriend because you know our society is like that.

Participant 7: The reason why you keep her next to you, is because this one is gonna take my girlfriend.

Participant 6: ... they're gonna do it behind my back.

Participant 4: They've got bad habits. They've got bad habits (FGD WSW Urban).

Women expect men to play the dominant role: "Expectations come from femmes"
Certain expectations - such as who should have power and who should not - are linked to how gender roles are performed. In many ways, what the participants say below reflect how normative gender binaries are perpetuated and reinforced in relationships between lesbians:

Most of the time, and I think it again lies with the sisters who are femme, they give us that power, which says we are expecting you to act as such (FGD WSW Urban, participant 2).

Some of them (feminine girls) expect you to act the male role in the relationship, not understanding the fact you are both girls, you should both do things equally. They expect you to be more dominant than they are and you should be the one buying them everything like they would do with their boyfriends (FGD WSW Urban, participant 7).

The butch person is expected to play the role of being a father (FGD WSW Urban, participant 3).

... they are so used to the norm of being beaten up all the time that they cannot take not being beaten up. So they expect that from the previous relationships, when they come to me... But I'm very soft so I'm not gonna beat you, why should I do that? And then they expect me to and if I'm not then they say I'm soft (FGD WSW Urban, participant 5).

Violence as an expectation by feminine women, as signifiers of love and care, is not a new phenomenon. In both heterosexual and lesbian relationships, feminine women are constructed within patriarchy and many perform roles that sustain normative gender binaries. Masculine men, on the other hand, may act on "women's constructions of their personhood and the expectation that they will behave accordingly" (Gibson et al., 2005, p. 148). In the latter's study, as well as others - Maforah et al. (1999) and Henton et al. (1983) - women often linked violence to a "kind of concerned, even caring 'discipline'... where the injury sustained as a result of partner abuse was interpreted as being part of maleness, as 'physical signs' of love or caring acts of discipline" (2012, p. 163).

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

The role of the father: Patriarchal policing and control

Facilitator: When people fight back, what is that seen as?

Participant 2: Defiance

Participant 3: Woman, you are defying me!

Participant 3: Woman, who do you think you are, I'll beat the hell out of you!

Participant 5: And I will kill you girl.

Participant 2: [laughs]. Ja, it's basically defiance, defying the higher power.

Participants: The authority.

Participant 4: Which also goes back to when the mother. . . if your dad and your mom are fighting and then your mom tries to slap the dad back, it's defiance, it's disrespectful. So why should I as a butch lesbian be disrespected by you as a feminine lesbian if my dad was never disrespected like that? Then I'm weaker than my father.

Participants were not always unaware that they were performing¹ gender roles. As one participant stated, "I would say that if a girl is playing the softer role, then she can't be demanding, she shouldn't really be demanding" [laughing] (FGD WSW Vredendal, participant 1). Similarly, another participant employed essentialist understandings of masculinity, claiming that "You see, I'm butch, or I am a tomboy. We like to be in control" (FGD WSW Kayamandi). However, even though some participants may have been aware that they were performing gender roles, binary thinking was taken for granted, constructed as normative in the following conversation between two participants in Vredendal:

4. The notion of "performance" is used here to emphasise that our identities, gendered and otherwise, have no internal "core"; instead it is brought into being through the practices that construct it (Bordo, 1992). That said, gendered subject positions cannot be taken up or discarded at will like an actor would do with a role in a play, but instead are shaped and constrained by context. The implication of this is that certain subject positions may be more performable and inhabitable than others (Butler, 1990).

Participant 2: Even though we are both women, there must be one who can stand up for both of you.

Participant 4: Yes... should you be walking down the street and a man wants to mess with her, then you must stand up for her. I am not going to leave it like that - [all the participants nod their heads in agreement] - I am going to stand up for her, I won't just stand back.

Masculinity, then, was synonymous to being the protector of a weaker, feminine partner.

In a similar fashion to how dominant performances of masculinity are linked to multiple sexual partners, “butch” lesbians in the study understood that “just like the guys, like when the butch lesbians sleep around with girls, the status goes up... Her friends will come and want to sleep with me instead of the other way round” (FGD WSW Urban, participant 5). These proclamations signify an understanding of masculinity as power. Men must protect and be in control. The taking-on of a masculine identity - a “butch” identity - means the appropriation of male characteristics constructed socially as natural: control and power must be exhibited in order to express an appropriate gender role.

This also emerged in constructions of the “stone butch” lesbian.² The idea of being the enabler of sexual pleasure, the “giver” of pleasure to a feminine woman, was highlighted a number of times in discussions with participants, sometimes critically:

Participant 4: Because if I am more powerful than you, then I should penetrate you, not the other way round... And my question is, okay, fine, I understand I enjoy making you feel good, but then...

Participant 5: What about you?

Participant 4: What's in it for me? Because I mean, for me a relationship is supposed to be a 50-50 thing where we both enjoy and it makes it much more interesting and stronger like that. But now if it's going to be one sided, and then why is it a relationship, why you don't even just pay me to have sex with me.

Participant 3: Mostly when you are the one whose being touched, it feels like your power has been taken away from you.

Participant 5: Samson [laughs].

Facilitator 1: You are taking my power.

Participant 2: You are a man.

Facilitator: Now you want to be the man in the relationship.

There are exceptions where a “butch” lesbian does not see her gender identity matching her biological sex - this may impact on whether she wants to be touched during sexual

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

encounters with a partner. In situations where this is not the case and a dominant kind of heteronormative masculinity is being performed within the sexual encounter, the “stone butch” lesbian (as in the narratives above) holds power because she is the provider of pleasure. In this instance, masculinity is defined as active in the normative heterosexual binary of active/passive. This has been documented in much feminist literature on heterosexuality. As Jackson and Scott argue, “we all learn to be sexual within a society in which ‘real sex’ is defined as a quintessentially heterosexual act, vaginal intercourse, and in which sexual activity is thought of in terms of an active subject and passive object” (1996, p. 23). According to Allen (2003), an “active male and passive female sexuality are deeply embedded within social and political participation and perceived as normative” (217-218). Enacting a normative masculine sexual identity for certain “butch” lesbians may then be about subscribing to conventional heterosexual norms, impacting on the possibilities of more pleasurable sexual encounters with feminine lesbian partners.



While participants did not claim that violence was attached to the expression of a “stone butch” gender identity, such a performance of normative masculinity may, at times, be linked to other expressions of masculine identities such as aggression. This, however, did not emerge in the focus group discussions.

Violence perpetrated by 'feminine' lesbians

There were exceptions to and critiques of heteronormative discourse, particularly where feminine women perpetrated violence against more masculine partners. Participants in this study spoke of multiple reasons for why “feminine” lesbians perpetrate abuse against their more masculine partners. These ranged from jealousy, alcohol and drug consumption, as well as economic blackmail:

... most of the time I think they [physical abuse] usually goes one way. ... always people expected from me is [that] they want the butch lesbian to beat up the feminine lesbian. But then sometimes it does happen the other way round as well and sometimes it happens both sides, it's that it's just mish mash (FGD WSW Urban, participant 5).

It does happen a lot towards butch lesbians, I was once one of them so I would know that it happens, you get beaten up [laughs]. So ja, but predominantly it happens from like butch to femme (FGD WSW Urban, participant 3).

... if I'm a butch lesbian and I hit a femme lesbian, then it's like I'm this monster, but if it's the other way round, and then I'm like 'shame' (FGD WSW Urban, participant 4).

... my partner was femme but she was acting butch. ... she would call me and ask where I am, for instance. I would be with my friend and she would want to see me then and there. I would have to immediately go because if I don't rush back I know she will throw a brick at me (FGD WSW Mbekweni, participant 3).

Participants appeared to make a distinction between the kinds of violence perpetrated by “butch” and “femme” lesbians. While physical violence appeared to be largely perpetrated by “butch” lesbians, economic and emotional abuse seemed to be perpetrated by “femme” lesbians to a larger extent. One participant explained:

... it's funny how we describe being butch and being femme by the outer appearance you know. You get someone with a butch appearance who has a feminine persona, you understand. They have feminine personas and yet you find that there is emotional abuse. ... I've been in a relationship of such where I was emotionally abused. ... It was hard here. Because this person, the persona of the person is dragging you down, it's draining you (FGD WSW Urban, participant 2).

"I'm your maker": Economic violence

As revealed in the following narratives, ideas of love – giving and receiving love – were sometimes expressed through economic control where feminine women used money as a signifier of being loved by their partners. In some instances, this provided

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

masculine lesbians with power and control, as the two participants below state:

If I'm buying you clothes, I'm clothing you, I'm making you look like everyone else to fit in, then you have to bow right here. I'm your maker, that's how it goes (FGD WSW Urban, participant 1).

... she gives me everything because she says she loves me... She's gonna try to make me do whatever she wants me to do because she's buying me clothes (FGD WSW Urban, participant 3).

In other instances, participants described feminine lesbians as holding power through economic control:

... she has to take all my money 'cause she is the controller in the relationship and buys things for her not including me... Every time I take money home, and bring it to her 'cause I love her (FGD WSW Urban, participant 8).

In the following conversation, participants describe how emotional blackmail and manipulation is used by 'femme' lesbians to gain economic favour:

Facilitator: Let's say for a month you don't do that [take money home to her]...

Participant 4: You will be beaten up.

Participant 8: It's either, she's gonna create like, breaking up.

Participant 6: Or ask you, 'who are you giving the money to'?

Participant 8: Get me to find her in bed with somebody else, do something that will make me... make sure that I will take the money to her every time.

This expectation around economically providing for the needs of "feminine" lesbians was linked to normative heterosexual relationships. In speaking about how "feminine" lesbians may have expected men to be financial providers in previous heterosexual relationships, participants stated:

... she was straight before. And then to come out of that whole baggage with all the ex-boyfriends and stuff, now you're supposed to act like her ex-boyfriend because her ex-boyfriend did this for her... (FGD WSW Urban, participant 5).

... I went to her, she didn't come to me and say 'oh, I'm so in love with you', no. I approached her so now I must live up to the lifestyles of these boyfriends (FGD WSW Urban, participant 4).

It's expected that I buy for her [my femme partner] (FGD WSW Urban, participant 7).

In circumstances where the “butch” partner is unable to provide financially for the needs of the feminine partner, the latter may threaten to leave her partner. As two participants stated, “... it means she would find someone else who can do those things for her” (FGD WSW Urban, participant 3), or “... she would say ‘it’s because you can’t afford me and then you don’t afford so what am I gonna do with you. You are just a waste to me’ [laughs]” (FGD WSW Urban, participant 8).

Transactional sex

In some instances, transactional sex with men outside of relationships served as a means to acquire various resources to serve the needs of one or both partners. It became clear that not only “femme” lesbians would engage in the transaction, but also “butch” lesbians:

Participant 1: Another issue, another money issue in the relationships, there's this couple, this butch and femme and they're not working and they live together. So this butch person would say to her girlfriend - baby I am craving for braaied meat, I'm craving for bread, I'm craving for a drink, or I'm craving for something... The butch tells the femme so the femme, they're both not working, the femme would just go out for 10 minutes then comes back and when she comes back she comes with everything of that, and then I just eat.

Participant 6: Won't she be beaten up by her?

Participant 1: No, she won't be beaten because her partner is aware of what she's doing, she knows that she goes out and has sex with that outjie [man] from there. Maybe this outjie has a business of some sort. So you'll find that she would say, baby I'm craving for a braaied meat how are we going to buy because the two of us are not working. But she's gonna go out and come back with everything also with the money on her hand.

Facilitator: Are you [the group] aware of that?

Participant 1: Mmh.

Facilitator: Do you know that she's having sex with a man on the other side?

Participant 1: Mmh.

In situations where one partner is unaware of the other using transactional sex to make money, violence could become a possibility:

Facilitator: The typical example in Driftsand, a butch lesbian going out eh...with a femme partner, the butch was married before but now has come out of the closet has a partner but eh...

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

Participant 2: She always has money yet she can't afford.

Facilitator: She always has money, she has food in the house yet both are unemployed.

Participant 2: And the partner asks, 'where do you get the money?' 'No, my mother sent me the money'... All to find out that the butch lesbian is sleeping with men in order to get... the money.

Facilitator: What if you're under pressure to have the money?

Participant 2: To maintain the standard of living [laughs]... Ja, to maintain the relationship to maintain like for instance cohabiting, it's worse and it's very common... Living together you as a couple, and mind you mind you, our backgrounds cultural this thing is not cultural or spiritual, being a lesbian. It's not accepted in our communities. Now, okay fine, now I go and live with my girlfriend. But we're both not working and we need bread on the table, water, electricity, rent, all these things. So you're telling me now you are able to maintain us but you're not working, how are you maintaining us?

Participant 1: But the problem is some people agree to doing this [transactional/commercial sex], others agree because they have nothing. It's a reality guys, we need to look at it from different angles because the two of us are not working.

Participant 1: They don't have boyfriends, but they just have sex with them but on the other side they do sleep with them and both are aware of that.

Salo et al. note that “black sexual minority identities in townships are formed in relation to the interlocking structural domination of race, class, gender, sexual preference, and spatial marginality” (2010, p. 299). Post-apartheid, these spatial divisions, and the marginality accompanying it, have not disappeared, with “[b]lackness in Cape Town township spaces” becoming “overlaid with an increased sense of marginality as residents experience deepening socio-economic impoverishment” (Salo et al., 2010, p. 301). These authors state that

... whilst it may appear that the old apartheid laws have now been replaced by a new constitution, the substantive meaning of rights and citizenship, at least for black sexual minorities who live in the townships still have to be realised. This lack is due to the continued socio-economic deprivation and the physical separation of the townships from the vibrant economic and social city centre (p. 301).

A certain grammar of gender and sexuality, mapped closely onto normative heterosexuality, may develop in marginalised spaces as a means of performing respectable citizenship, a “moral economy” that is imagined to provide possibilities of deriving access to resources. Within a context of poverty, or at the least, economic struggle, perceived gender differences operate alongside struggles to survive with little

economic resources. In light of the participants' narratives above, for black lesbians as marginalised subjects in terms of space and sexuality, transactional sex with men makes economic resources available within the relationship.

Heteronormativity is existent in every facet of daily life, institutionalised within the media, religious systems, and in the education system. Correa points out how “religious, scientific, political and cultural arguments deployed throughout history and across borders... naturalise and enforce heterosexuality” (in IDS, 2008, p. 12). In that manner, heteronormativity operates as one leg of a tripod inextricably linked to sex essentialism and binary gender thinking. Heteronormativity does not exist in isolation as a system of oppression for the participants in this study. Race and space work as intersecting dynamics with sexuality so that experiences of violence against black lesbians, and between black lesbians, are not simply about heteronormativity. Cathy Cohen and Tamara Jones (1999, p. 88, in Hill-Collins, 2005) argue for a “deep understanding of how heterosexism operates as a system of oppression, both independently and in conjunction with other such systems.” This understanding, according to Patricia Hill-Collins (2005), means examining the mutual construction of racism and heterosexism.

Alternatives to gender binary thinking and behaviour

While the findings discussed so far largely point to the pervasiveness of heteronormative scripts, it was also possible to identify instances where participants were critical of such scripts. Some participants noted how it is common for queer women to treat each other gently and respectfully, i.e. to not work within heteronormative framings which may enable violence. Many participants were generally concerned about the difficulty in changing behavioural patterns – including violent ways of engaging within lesbian relationships – despite having access to safe spaces such as Triangle Project, where they are provided with knowledge and skills around gender and sexuality:

Participant 2: ... I don't know how long now that I've been involved with Triangle and stuff, and within the safe spaces I feel that we are educated and we know these things.

Participant 7: Hmm

Participant 2: But our behaviour is still the same.

Participant 2: And [Triangle Project] camps and stuff and you find, for instance, for me the social media groups it's really the things that happen on the social media, like people, you know, saying negative things against each other and stuff. People asking how a lesbian sleeps with men and stuff. You know it really bothers me because we have been taught these things, we have been grilled but yet our behaviour... doesn't want to change and we [are] fighting each other. There's homophobia within homosexuality (FGD WSW Urban).

Some participants placed lesbian relationships in context, recognising how patriarchal heteronormativity impacts on how lesbians live and love within their relationships. Choice, then, is about using one's agency to do relationships differently.

4. NARRATIVES OF POWER cont...

A conversation in the Kayamandi focus group revealed:

Participant 1: When a man hits, he hits, but we actually feel for each other.

Participant 2: Yes, I agree we as lesbians, we have respect for each other.

Participant 3: Yes men differ, but they are always violent.

Participant 4: In many relationships where there is a man and a woman, there is that belief that if a guy says something to a girl, that's it. The guy draws the line. When it comes to us as lesbians we do sit down and talk about issues and we try to understand each other.

In Mbekweni, participants similarly felt that:

Participant 2: Guys don't consider our feelings, whereas when you're dating a girl it's better because we think alike as emotional beings, which means that you don't do what you would not like to be done to you. A woman would never beat another woman. It's very rare that you get abusive relationships with lesbians.

Participant 1: Men have the assumption that they can always have sex with their previous girlfriends while they are in a relationship with someone else. With us lesbians it's totally opposite.

The above extracts point to how, for these participants, a same-sex relationship provides the possibility of "doing" their relationships differently - a possibility they do not imagine for themselves in relation to men, described here as inherently violent.

How the body is used to present gender emerged as an alternative way of complicating binaries. One participant noted:

But it's about personality you see, so there are relationships whereby it [violence perpetrated by butch lesbians] doesn't happen this way of 'just because you're butch I want you to be the father of the house', you understand. Your butchness is just your style or clothing or how you wear your clothes, we are only in love as both girls (FGD WSW Urban, participant 2).

Similarly, a different participant spoke about how heteronormative values are imposed on butch lesbians who do not perform hegemonic masculinity:

When you're supposed to be butch, you're supposed to be masculine and you're supposed to be dominant, but now when a guy as a butch, a masculine guy, and he turns out to be feminine and then we say he's gay right (FGD WSW Urban, participant 7).

These findings, where participants critically reflect on the constraints posed by heteronormative scripts, point to the importance of feminist-oriented consciousness-raising such as the Triangle Project programming participants referred to, which provides spaces for queer African women to position themselves outside of dominant norms of gender and sexuality.

Concluding reflections

For many women and men, violence today is “at least as pervasive as before the political changes in South Africa” (Gibson et al., 2005, p. 148). South Africa’s high rates of violence generally, against women specifically, and violence that is perpetuated on the basis on perceived gender and sex difference, mean that lesbians live in a context where acts of violence are considered relatively normative in engagement between human beings. In communities that are under-resourced, tied to spatial divisions based on racial legislation under apartheid, various kinds of violence become an acceptable way to engage others. For black lesbians in particular, the added layers of not being able to access reasonable levels of support and resources from the criminal and health systems in a patriarchal and anti-lesbian environment impact on how violence - as a means of communicating frustration and marginalisation, for example - may become a possibility in a relationship between two women. Intersecting these realities are the gender roles scripted through heterosexual norms, which are imagined to provide black people in under-resourced communities with access to the fruits of democracy.

It is not clear whether there are differences in the levels of violence between lesbians across the communities where the participants in this study live. For instance, it is likely that in urban spaces, constraints in economic resources impacts differently on lesbian women who live in Khayelitsha, for instance, (and have access to Triangle Project), and lesbian women who live in Kayamandi, Vredendal, Mbekweni and Touwsrivier. Spatial inequalities and wealth distribution in Cape Town are more evident in the geography of the city; people from various communities share common spaces through unequal labour relationships. Competing intersections of gender, sexuality, class and race therefore work differently in different spaces. This is an area that needs more research.

In the section that follows we provide recommendations based on the research findings.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

A wide range of responses across civil society and state actors is needed to address the causes and impacts of intimate partner violence in women's same-sex relationships, as well as reconceptualise ideals of family and intimacy outside of the heterosexist and cisgender norm. This includes the provision of inclusive and affirming services but also the reshaping of many of these interventions with a nuanced understanding of power relations and the role of heterogendered norms at their core. Key recommendations include:

5. RECOMMENDATIONS cont...

Recommendations for activists and non-governmental organisations (NGOs)

The research highlights the need for several different types of information, education and communication materials related to intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships. These materials would need to serve different purposes and be directed at different audiences. First, materials aimed at lesbian and bisexual women need to focus on breaking the cycle of silence and shame linked to intimate partner violence, educating same-sex couples about their rights and how to identify toxic and potentially abusive behaviours, as well as providing information on counselling services and other resources available to them. Second, materials aimed at service providers (in particular non-LGBTI focused organisations concerned with violence against women and/or domestic violence, as well as organisations in the shelter sector) can provide information about intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships, advocate for the need to provide inclusive services to LGBTI people, and facilitate a nuanced understanding of violence and power.

Considering that the silence around intimate partner violence in same-sex relationships is not only perpetuated in broader society, but also within LGBTI contexts, there is also a need to provide information to others in the organised LGBTI sector, and noting that violence in queer women's relationships remains largely invisible, to engage LGBTI organisations in discussions around how to ensure adequate responses to the issue as it relates to queer women in particular.

Recommendations for researchers and academics

There is always a need for further research into a topic as complicated as intimate partner violence and especially when it takes place within a marginalised population such as queer women. Further research can deepen the understanding offered by this exploratory study and extend the scope of research to men's same-sex relationships as well as relationships involving transgender and gender non-conforming persons. Available research – this report included – points to the harmful ways in which gendered norms can manifest in the relationships of LGBTI persons and so it would be vital to understand how these norms are experienced by transgender and gender non-conforming people, especially as they are impacted by different forms of transition and gender affirmation.

Further research can benefit from assuming an intersectional understanding of violence against women, as well as within their relationships, as it occurs in contexts marked by heterosexism and other power inequalities.

Recommendations for Government and policy makers

It is vital for the state and policy makers to ensure that policy is not informed by static conceptions of families and intimate partnerships. This means not just moving away from the heteronormative concept of the “ideal” family but also understanding relationships and people in their diversity. In this way, LGBTI couples should be considered as a natural part of our understanding of family and not a divergent (if acceptable) version of the ideal.

Government’s role as a policymaker is a critical aspect but its role as a direct service provider and funder of service provision is perhaps more important to people facing immediate challenges. As a funder, it is important for the state to ensure that funds are being used in a way that does not exclude people outside of the heterosexual norm. It can do this by agreeing with its grantees on terms of service but this can also be achieved by broadening the kind of services for which LGBTI-focused organisations can receive funding.

Finally, the state’s healthcare and law enforcement apparatus must be equipped to deal with difference and there must be sanctions for those who violate the law by denying services to LGBTI persons. Part of this work involves sensitisation and training of frontline staff in the Department of Health, Department of Social Development and the South African Police Services, but also requires that state employees are inculcated with a service ethos which does not accept discrimination and does not reinforce toxic ideas around gender norms.

Recommendations for donors

Donors can broaden their understanding of which types of organisations work on issues relating to intimate partner violence and also what kind of work is necessary. By this we mean that LGBTI organisations should be considered as grantees for this kind of work given the levels of this kind of violence and the inability of many “mainstream” organisations to provide appropriate and sensitive services to queer women.

It is also essential that this funding covers work which seeks to more address the underlying issues of power relations and gender norms that underpin violence in same-sex relationships and function to silence survivors.

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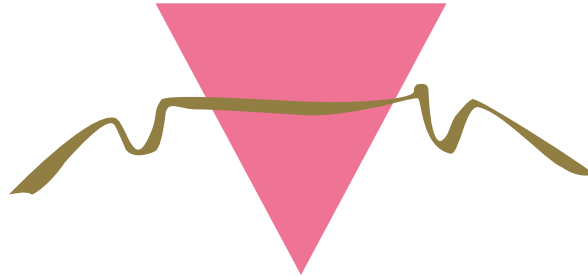
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triangle project

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