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**Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities:**  
What We Know and What We Need to Know

June 11, 2015

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**Introductions**

- Who I am and how I approach this work
- What we know: Overview of research
- Implications for practice and training

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### How I approach this work

Perspectives:

Feminist

Anti-oppressive

Social determinants of health

Strengths perspectives

LGBT Affirmative

Queer

Intersectional

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### A word about terminology

◦ **RAINBOW COMMUNITIES:** Diverse communities encompassing individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, same gender loving, transgender, queer, questioning, two-spirited, and others (commonly referred to as the LGBTQ community)

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gay\\_Canada\\_flag.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gay_Canada_flag.png)

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### Myths

**"We know nothing about IPV in rainbow communities"**

- Over the last 20+ years, a large body of literature (empirical, theoretical, and practical) has been published
- To say that "we know nothing" is no longer accurate...we actually now know quite a bit

**Gaps that remain...**

- IPV in transgender communities
- IPV against socially, economically, and racially marginalized LGBT persons
- Empirical evaluations of LGBT specific models of IPV prevention and intervention

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## Challenges

- Barriers to research and dialogue:

The diagram consists of three overlapping circles. The top circle is labeled 'Political: Fears of harming rainbow communities'. The bottom-left circle is labeled 'Social: Stigma and shame'. The bottom-right circle is labeled 'Methodological: Sampling and measurement'. All three circles overlap in a central area.

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## Strengths and possibilities

- Despite challenges, research has shown that LGBTQ communities play a powerful role in supporting survivors of IPV (Bornstein et al, 2006; Hequembourg & Brallier, 2009; Jauk, 2013):

Social support	Sense of community and belonging	Refuge from larger contexts of oppression
Socializing, recreation, and stress release	Empowerment via political activism	Personal and collective coping

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## What We Know: Research

Prevalence, Contexts, and Dynamics of Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities

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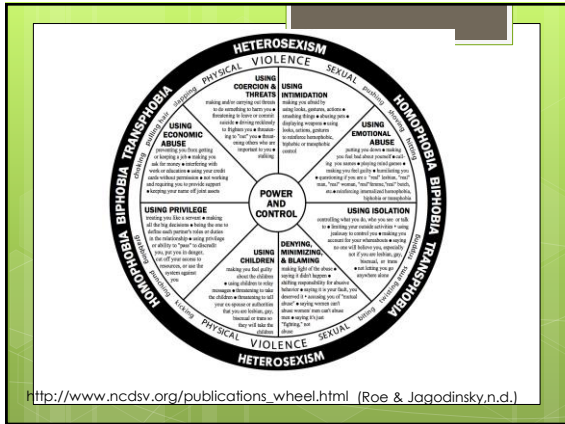
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### How common is LGBT IPV?

- Short answer: We don't really know
- A wide range of prevalence estimates based on different samples, methods used, and specific kinds of abuse assessed
- Thus, claims that IPV occurs more (or less) frequently in rainbow communities than in cissexual heterosexual communities are premature

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### For example

- Studies assessing prevalence of IPV in large **LGBTQ specific** samples have yield a wide range of estimates

**9 out of 10** LGBTQ persons experience IPV (any form of IPV; Turrell & Cornell-Swanson, 2005; N=250)

**1 out of 5** LGBTQ persons experience IPV (physical forms of IPV; Bimbi, Palmadessa, & Parsons, 2007; N =1048)

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### Further contradictions

- Studies assessing the intersection of **gender and sexual orientation**
  - Sexual minority women at higher risk than sexual minority men**  
(Bimbi et al, 2007; Gudalupe-Diaz, 2013; Turrell, 2000)
  - No differences between sexual minority men and women**  
(Carvalho et al, 2011)
  - Bisexuals, particularly bisexual women, at highest risk**  
(Barnett & St. Pierre, 2013; Hughes et al 2010, Walters et al, 2013)
  - Bisexuals are at lower risk than gay men and lesbians**  
(Turrell, 2000)

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### Severity

- Studies examining severity of LGBTQ IPV
  - Injury**
    - Between 1 in 4 (26%, Craft & Serovich, 2005) and 3 out of 4 (79%, Merrill & Wolfe, 2000) survivors experienced injuries
  - Medical care**
    - 1 in 3 (30%) survivors required hospitalization or medical care (Kuehne & Sullivan, 2003)
  - PTSD**
    - 1 in 5 lesbians (20%) and almost half (46%) of bisexual survivors reported at least one symptom of PTSD (Walters et al, 2013)

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### Frequency

- Studies have yielded **contradictory findings** about the frequency with which IPV occurs within abusive relationships
- Stanely et al (2006) found that the frequency was low, with most survivors reporting **only one** incident of violence in their relationships [gay men]
- McClennen, Summers, & Daley (2002) found that violence occurred more frequently in abusive relationships, with 38% of survivors reporting **daily or almost daily** violence [lesbian women]

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## Children, pets, and IPV

- Children:
  - Merrill & Wolfe (2000) found that **50%** of the gay male survivors they studied who had responsibility for children reported that their partner had **physically abused the children**
  - McClennen, Summers, & Vaughn (2002) found that **19%** of the gay male survivors in their study with children had been abused or demeaned **in front of their children**
- Pets:
  - McClennen et al (2002) found that **12.5%** of gay male survivors had experienced the abuse of their pets

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## Protecting children

- Research with **lesbian mothers** in abusive relationships has documented numerous strategies mothers undertook to keep their children safe (Hardesty et al, 2008):

Hiding the violence	Consoling their children	Talking openly with their children about what was happening
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## Increased vulnerabilities

- Studies which have examined **variations in risk** within LGBTQ samples have identified factors that increase risk:

Lower levels of education (Greenwood et al, 2002; Stephenson et al, 2011)	Physical or mental limitations (Barrett & St. Pierre, 2013)	Younger in age (Siemieniuk et al, 2013)
HIV positive status (Greenwood et al, 2002)	Poor physical health (Siemieniuk et al, 2013)	Mixed findings regarding racial variations

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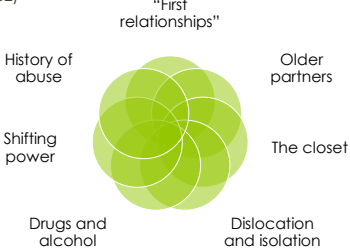
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### Contexts of violence

- Qualitative research with lesbian survivors (Ristock, 2002)

"First relationships"



History of abuse

Shifting power

Drugs and alcohol

Older partners

The closet

Dislocation and isolation

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### Barriers to leaving

- Qualitative research with gay male survivors (Cruz, 2003); fourteen themes including:

Financial dependence	Inexperience	Love
Hopeful partner would change	Loneliness	Fear of leaving
Attraction to partner	"Trapped"	"Cycle of violence"

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### Number of attempts

- Similar to research on heterosexual women's attempts at leaving abusive relationships, research shows that LGBTQ survivors often make **multiple attempts** at leaving before permanently terminating an abusive relationship
- In a study of gay male survivors of IPV, it was found that **over 60%** of survivors made **more than three** significant attempts at leaving before they left for good (Merrill & Wolfe, 2000)

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### Pulling it all together

- Although many studies have now been done on IPV in rainbow communities, a coalesced picture has yet to emerge regarding its prevalence
- Available data suggests that while there are some similarities to the patterns of IPV in same sex relationships and heterosexual relationships, there are also important differences
- Continued collaboration and partnerships between VAW and LGBTQ researchers and sectors may help us to better untangle these complexities

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### Making it Relevant to Your Work:

Recommendations from the Literature for Practice and Training

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### Help seeking

- Studies have documented fears among survivors in rainbow communities that **non-LGBTQ specific** services will lack the specific knowledge of LGBTQ communities to provide effective support (St. Pierre & Senn, 2010, Turell & Herman, 2008)
- Stated preference for informal forms of support, with **friends most common** sources from which support is sought (McClenne, Summers, & Vaughan, 2002; Ristock, 2002)
- Documented association between help seeking and extent to which one is **"out"** (St. Pierre & Senn, 2010)

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## Perceptions

Ratings of non-LGBT specific service providers:



**Counselors** rated as most frequently used and most helpful (Ristock, 2002; Scherzer, 1998)

**VAW agencies and police** rated as least frequently used and least helpful (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003; Turrell & Cornell-Swanson, 2005)

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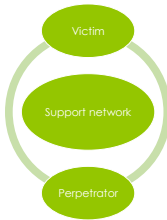
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## Barriers to help seeking

Victims and perpetrators often share the **same support network**



For LGBT persons of color, this may be more complicated because racism within LGBTQ communities and homophobia in some communities of color render **social connections among LGBTQ people of color** particularly powerful sources of support (Butler, 1999)

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## Promising models

- **Friends** uniquely positioned to disrupt violence but there are challenges to friends as support providers (Butler, 1999; Turrell & Hermann, 20008; Ristock, 2002):
  - Divided loyalties
  - Confidentiality concerns
  - Minimization as "drama"
- **Bystander intervention training** within LGBTQ communities specific to LGBTQ partner violence can help to support the ability of friends to effectively identify abuse and support survivors

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## Barriers to identification

- The myth of "mutual combat"
- Complicated because research has shown that it is not uncommon for both partners in a relationship to use violence (e.g. Carvalho et al, 2011; Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Ristock, 2002)
- Complicated because relative similar size/similar strength may obscure other power differentials in a relationship and imply that violence is mutual when in fact it is not (Ristock & Tambang, 2005)

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## Mutual violence?

<b>Self-defense</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Immediate protection in a single incident</li><li>• (Merrill &amp; Wolfe, 2000; Renzetti, 1988)</li></ul>
<b>"Fighting back"</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Established pattern not isolated to a single incident</li><li>• (Marrujo &amp; Kreger, 1996)</li></ul>
<b>Retaliation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Re-assertion of power</li><li>• (Ristock, 2002)</li></ul>

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## Strategies for professionals

Importance of phone screening, as both partners may present for services

Get name of partner to ensure partners are not placed in same setting/service

Importance of assessment to determine dynamics

Do not give information about location and services immediately

(Goddard & Hardy, 1999; Johnson, 1999)

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## Strategies: Outreach

- Waldon (1996) argues for the importance of **not solely** advertising services for LGBTQ survivors within LGBTQ publications and community
- Argues that some LGBTQ people of color may be **more closely connected** to their ethnic community than the LGBTQ community
- Wide reaching outreach to **communities of color** (not just LGBTQ specific communities of color) also important
  - Importance of language

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## Strategies: Inclusive language

- Efforts at inclusion for some groups **may inadvertently exclude or alienate** others:
  - Exclusive use of terms such as "same sex" or "gay and lesbian abuse" do not encapsulate those who do not experience abuse in this context (e.g. transgender survivors, gender queer survivors, bisexual survivors, etc.)
  - Particularly in some communities of color, terms such as "women who have relationships with women" (and "men who have relationships with men") may be more meaningful (Waldron, 1996)

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## Strategies: Staff training

- Training on "LGBTQ" issues often primarily focuses on the "LGB", with transgender and gender queer issues given peripheral treatment
- Goldberg & White (2011) argue that there should be specific, **separate training on transgender survivors** as their needs and issues may be distinct from those of "LGB" survivors
- They also recommend **modelling solidarity** by co-facilitation of trainings by transgender people and cisgender allies

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### Strategies: Agency culture

- Helfrich & Simpson (2006) and Waldron (1996) argue for the importance of **creating a positive LGBTQ culture for agencies** that goes beyond training:
  - Modeling inclusion by having a diverse staff at all levels of agency
  - Do not designate sole responsibility for providing LGBTQ services to one staff person only
  - Written policies with consequences for failure to provide culturally sensitive services

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### Strategies: Engagement

- Simply "including" LGBTQ persons in the process for creating LGBTQ positive services is not enough
- LGBTQ persons should be **instrumental and fundamental to driving this process** from the ground up
- At the same time however, it is not the responsibility of LGBTQ people to "educate" your agency
- Important for allies to take responsibility for their own learning **with (not "about") LGBTQ persons**

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### LGBTQ affirmative practice

- Goes beyond simply "accepting" LGBTQ identities (Alessi, 2014):
  - Highlighting **positive aspects** of LGBTQ communities
  - Drawing on the **strengths and resiliencies** within LGBTQ communities
  - Confirming the **validity and importance** of LGBTQ relationships
  - Critical for **countering effects of minority stress** than may contribute to violence

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### Things to consider

- Do you use intake forms? If so, what does the language on these forms look like? How do you use these forms?
- How do clients' sexual and gender identities typically come up?
- What happens once you learn of a client's sexual and/or gender identity? What about other aspects to their identities/selves? How is that information 'taken up' in their care plan?
- Is being a member of a rainbow community something that's valued by your agency?

(St. Pierre, 2015)

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### More things to consider

- Does your agency have an anti-discrimination policy that includes both sexual orientation & gender identity? Is it visible to clients?
- Are there policies & procedures in place to deal with client complaints?
- Are members of diverse LGBT communities aware of the services you offer? Do your information & promotional materials refer to LGBT clients?
- Are you aware of and connected with other resources in your community, relevant to LGBT people generally and to IPV specifically?

(St. Pierre, 2015)

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### Key "take home" message

- IPV service providers need to be cognizant of diversity **within** LGB populations
- Approaches which homogenize rainbow communities may fail to meet the **unique and diverse needs** of individuals within these communities
- Efforts at inclusiveness must be responsive to the diverse range of identities within rainbow communities
- Models of heterosexual IPV are insufficient in and of themselves to address the potential complexities of IPV within LGB populations

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**contact information**

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 Nicole Rietich, B.A., Coordinator, Ontario Coalition of Rape Crisis Centres  
 Julie Lalonde, M.A., Project Manager Draw-the-line.ca Campaign

**RESOURCES:**  
**Inimate Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities: A Discussion Paper Informed by the Learning Network Knowledge Exchange (November 2014)**  
[www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/learningtoendabuse.ca/vawlearningnetwork/files/IPV\\_Knowledge-Exchange\\_Final\\_Report.pdf](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/learningtoendabuse.ca/vawlearningnetwork/files/IPV_Knowledge-Exchange_Final_Report.pdf)

**Inimate Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities Newsletter**  
[www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/issue-12-inimate-partner-violence-rainbow-communities](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/issue-12-inimate-partner-violence-rainbow-communities)

**Partner Violence in Rainbow Communities Network Area (resources)**  
[www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/network-area/partner-violence-rainbow-communities](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/network-area/partner-violence-rainbow-communities)

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