Mainstream Practice

Highlights from the
[LGBTQ DV Capacity Building Learning Center Literature Review](#)

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Over the past thirty years, a large body of work has emerged in the field of domestic violence research, intervention and prevention practice. Much of this work is focused on advocacy for female survivors who are abused by men in heterosexual relationships.   Located in online collections like MINCAVA and VAWNET, the material is vast, and includes manuscripts from DV Coalitions, best/model policies and practices for varied disciplines, program descriptions, and resources from the various institutes that make up the DV Resource Network[1].

What can we learn from this literature that is of particular interest to understanding, intervening and ending DV in LGBTQ communities?

The body of literature from the mainstream domestic violence movement offers several critical insights, models, and cautionary tales. The theory and practice regarding intimate partner violence challenged the dominant cultural frame of patriarchy by insisting on women's rights to their own bodies and to self-determination[2]. In this sense, the movement mounted an important critique of and challenge to dominant cultural frameworks.

The focus of much of the literature is on heterosexual relationships in which the man is abusing the woman, reflecting the majority of domestic violence cases in many communities. The literature includes acknowledgement that survivors in heterosexual relationships use violence for various reasons, and that women can be batterers and men can be victims in heterosexual as well as LGBT relationships.

In spite of substantial evidence that in heterosexual relationships, women are far more likely to experience abuse (understood as a pattern of coercive behavior) than men, a group of activists and academics have repeatedly elevated flawed research asserting women are just as violent as men in heterosexual relationships. Debates about methods and interpretation have raged for decades in academic and advocacy circles. Some groups and individuals hostile to the goal of increasing equality in the intimate sphere have used this research to argue that socially constructed gender and sexism are irrelevant in understanding intimate partner violence. They reason that if women are just as violent as men, sexism is nullified as a factor. This lack of clarity around heterosexual IPV has at times influenced and confused conversations about the role of gender/sexism in an analysis of LGBTQ DV.   Taken together, the two articles in the literature review provide a good overview of the debate around the Conflict Tactics Scale as a measure and the question of "gender symmetry" in regard to violence in heterosexual relationships. Walter Dekeseredy's summary of the arguments for VAWNET's applied research forum and Michael Kimmel's literature review[3] provide critical grounding for understanding this debate.

The ability to sustain a lively intersectional analysis in this field has been uneven, resulting in breakthrough works such as Suzanne Pharr's book on homophobia[4] and Beth Richie's *Compelled to Crime*[5], as well as work that purports to be universal but is grounded in

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[1] The National Resource Center on DV, National Indigenous Women's Resource Center, The Battered Women's Justice Project, The Resource Center on Child Protection and Custody, The Center on DV, Trauma and Mental Health, The Latin@ Institute for Healthy Families and Communities, API Institute on DV, and the Institute on DV in the African American Community

[2] Schecter, S. (1982) *Women and Male Violence*, Southend Press

[3] Kimmel, M. (2002) "*Gender Symmetry" in Domestic Violence A Substantive and Methodological Research Review*, Violence Against Women (8), No. 11, 1332-1363

[4] Pharr, S. (1997). *Homophobia, A Weapon of Sexism*. Chardon Press

[5] Richie, B. (1995). *Compelled to Crime: The Gender Entrapment of Battered, Black Women*. New York: Routledge

assumptions of whiteness, middle class status and heteronormativity. In particular, the mainstream domestic violence movement has at times failed to adequately consider the challenges women of color face in a racist and sexist society, and how these are connected to experiences of violence in intimate lives. Beth Richie's work illuminates these issues[6].

The mainstream literature and movement include many examples of the field's efforts to recognize and respond to its own limitations, expand accessibility, and examine the role that systemic oppressions play in both domestic violence advocacy organizations and the institutions that advocacy organizations hope to transform. Overall, some critical insights in this literature transcend the limitations.

Critical Insights

The key insight is that the fundamental harm of domestic violence is not the physical violence, but rather the batterer's theft of the survivor's autonomy and self-determination through a complex system of coercive control. Evan Stark describes this coercive control[7], as does Connie Burk[8]. With this understanding, it becomes clear that the work of supporting survivors individually, and ending intimate partner violence generally must be informed by prioritizing survivors' autonomy and self-determination at every step along the way. This insight has been woven through many best practices and model policies for domestic violence advocacy programs and other institutions. The domestic violence movement has repeatedly advocated for the centering of survivor self-determination and autonomy with law enforcement, prosecutors, healthcare and child welfare workers, as well as with advocates. The concept of empowerment, which emerged early on in the movement, correctly identified this task, which has formed a backbone of the work. Recent attention to trauma and how to respond to survivors who are experiencing its impacts affirms and validates that respect and self-determination are critical for survivors of domestic violence[9].

Empowerment centered or survivor centered advocacy plays a central role in both direct service best practices and system change advocacy. For example, the Praxis International Advocacy Learning Center's model for advocacy involves a continuous reference to what the survivor seeks to accomplish, expanding survivors' access to information and options, and providing nonjudgmental, compassionate space to support survivors in making informed choices[10]. The most effective advocacy works to remove barriers, and "to change policies, practices and conditions that are negatively impacting people. It involves addressing injustices and increasing resources for disadvantaged individuals and groups. While a great deal of advocacy involves working with institutions and professionals, advocates may also intercede with survivors' informal support networks, such as with family and friends, as needed as well."[11]

In the face of dangerous batterers, an inadequate response by the legal system, and a lack of community support for survivors and their children, the mainstream domestic violence

[6] Richie, B. E. (2012). *Arrested Justice: Black Women, Violence, and America's Prison Nation*. New York: NYU Press
[7] Stark, E. (2009). *Coercive Control: How Men Entrap Women in Personal Life*. Oxford University Press.
[8] Burk, C. (2008). ABA Summit Keynote: DV Is Not A Question of Violence At All, It Is A Question Of Agency. Presented at the American Bar Association LBGT DV Legal Issues Summit, Washington, DC.
[9] Prescott, L., Soares, P., Konnath, K., and Bassuk, E. (2008). A Long Journey Home: A Guide for Creating Trauma-Informed Services for Mothers and Children Experiencing Homelessness. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration; and the Daniels Fund; National Child Traumatic Stress Network; and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Available at www.homeless.samhsa.gov
[10] Praxis International. (ongoing). *Advocacy Learning Center*. Retrieved from http://www.praxisinternational.org/alc_advocacy.aspx
[11] Sullivan, C. M. (2012). Advocacy Services for Women with Abusive Partners A Review of the Empirical Evidence. Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Retrieved from http://www.dvevidenceproject.org

movement developed a model of confidentially-located domestic violence shelters, where survivors could flee their batterers, stay for a short period of time, find advocacy and support, assistance with childcare, legal services, housing, employment, and other needs. Many survivors find shelter to be very helpful. For example, in a study[12] of 3,410 residents of 215 domestic violence shelters in eight states, respondents "reported that if the shelter did not exist the consequences would be dire, homelessness, serious losses including children, continued abuse or death, or actions taken in desperation." However, the confidential shelter model has been extensively critiqued. Few shelter programs are welcoming or accessible to LGBTQ survivors, survivors with disAbilities, and survivors from other marginalized communities. Because of the policies designed to maintain the confidentiality of their location, domestic violence shelters may unintentionally isolate survivors from their own families, communities, religious organizations and other sources of support by not allowing residents to have visitors, or to disclose where they are staying. Additional concerns are discussed below, under "Emergency Shelter."

For these, and other reasons, programs serving culturally specific communities have developed alternatives to shelter models, turning instead to community based or mobile advocacy as in, for example, WSCADV's Crossing Borders Program[13] but the core insight remains: center the survivor's agenda, expand options, and support decision making. Not only is such an approach consistent with the domestic violence movement's values, Sullivan's research confirms that it is the most effective way to intervene with survivors of intimate partner violence. Broad-based advocacy has shown to result in decreased risk of re-abuse as well as increased access to community resources, higher social support, and higher mental health and well-being.[14]

The second key insight is that domestic violence is a problem of unequal power, injustice, and is not in any way caused by mental health issues of the survivor. Many survivors find healing through counseling provided by peers rather than degreed professionals. However, numerous survivors experience debilitating traumatic impacts from the abusers violence and coercive control, which can result in clinical depression and PTSD. Carole Warshaw[15] and her colleagues explored the efficacy of trauma interventions for survivors that integrate the context of ongoing domestic violence. In a comprehensive review of the literature, they found that promising interventions offer information of the dynamics and effects of domestic violence focus on safety, cognitive reframing and skill enhancement, and social connection. They note the promise of these interventions for healing and thriving, and the need for additional research in this area.

The third key insight is that an understanding of institutionalized sexism can help to frame our understanding of intimate partner violence, the ways it is perpetrated, and the inadequacies of social service, public safety, and court systems response to it. Sexism matters, as do other forms of oppression such as homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and racism. Sexism is the primary system that undergirds the trivialization of intimate partner violence, contributes to victim blaming, and also allows our communities to underfund efforts to assure safety and justice for those abused in their relationships, even when the victims of intimate partner violence are battered by LGB partners or are transgender. Attending to sexism makes it clear that structural oppression increases peoples' vulnerability to abuse. Attending to an intersectional analysis that integrates a thorough understanding of

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[12] Lyon, E., Lane, S., & Menard, A. (2008). Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences. National Institute of Justice.

[13] Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Crossing Borders Immigration Project http://wscadv.org/projects/crossing-borders-immigration-project/

[14] Sullivan, C. M. (2012). *Domestic Violence Shelter Services: A Review of the Empirical Evidence,* Harrisburg, PA: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence. Retrieved from http://www.dvevidenceproject.org.

[15] Warshaw, C., Sullivan, C. M., Rivera, E. A., (2013) *A Systematic Review of Trauma Focused Interventions for Domestic Violence Survivors,* National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma and Mental Health

sexism, racism, transphobia, biphobia, homophobia and other forms of oppression illuminates this further.

Fourth, domestic violence impacts parenting, and it impacts children. This is particularly relevant, as more than 111,000 LGBT couples in the US are raising children together[16]. Batterers manipulate and damage parenting relationships, interfering with the survivor's parenting efforts, and using children to further maintain power and control, often long after a couple has separated. Domestic violence survivors are generally very concerned for their children's safety and well-being, and want to support their children's resilience. Part of responding to this type of harm is providing support for children, and support to adults that acknowledges their roles as parents are integral to their larger sense of self, and that reclaiming their parenting is a critical piece of work in repairing the harms of abuse. Concurrent parent and child support groups, with developmentally appropriate information and activities for children can be helpful to both survivors and their children. The Kids Club/Moms Empowerment is an evidence-based model[17] developed through experience with survivors and their children in domestic violence programs.

Cautionary Tales

Overreliance on the Criminal Legal System

The DV movement has poured huge amounts of effort and resources into reforming local criminal justice agencies and in establishing national best practices for police, prosecutors, attorneys and courts, with the hope that this reform would result in a greater measure of justice for survivors who turn to the system for help. This has not been a total loss; recognizing the right of women in particular to be free of abuse in their private lives and demanding that institutions acknowledge this has been empowering to some women, and helped increase community awareness. However, any work with the criminal justice system has complex implications, because practices and impact of this system are inextricably interwoven with racism and the marginalization of communities of color, LGB, and transgender communities, with devastating results for those communities.

Woven throughout the mainstream literature is a consistent thread of ambivalence and caution about survivors seeking help through the criminal legal system. In 1982, Schecter[18] highlighted emerging analysis and tensions around this topic. More recently, INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence and Critical Resistance[19] jointly issued a position paper summarizing some of the problems with continuing to focus on criminal justice system reforms. The paper discusses the negative impact of the criminal justice system response on women of color, who are more likely than white women to be arrested in the context of abuse, and who must also deal with the way that the criminal justice system extracts men from their communities, then releases them back after serving their sentences, with no concern for the impacts on the community itself. This paper provides recommendations, including putting "poor/working class women of color in the center of their analysis, organizing practices, and leadership development. Recognize the role of economic oppression, welfare "reform," and attacks on women workers' rights in increasing women's vulnerability to all forms of violence and locate anti-violence and anti-prison activism alongside efforts to transform the capitalist economic system" and, "Centering stories of state violence committed against women of color in our organizing efforts."[20]

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[16] Gates, G. J. (2013) *LGBT Parenting in the United States,* The Williams Institute
[17] Graham-Berman, S.A., Lynch, S. et al (2007) *Community-based intervention for children exposed to intimate partner violence: an efficacy trial,* Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology,
[18] Schecter, S. (1982) *Women and Male Violence*, Southend Press
[19] INCITE! WOMEN OF COLOR AGAINST VIOLENCE AND CRITICAL RESISTANCE: STATEMENT ON GENDER VIOLENCE AND THE PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX. (2001). INCITE! Retrieved from http://mail.incite-national.org/sites/default/files/incite_files/resource_docs/5848_incite-cr-statement.pdf
[20] Ibid

Emergency Shelter Models

Recently, critiques from both within and without the domestic violence movement have led to reexamination of some basic assumptions about emergency shelter. Perhaps most significantly for our efforts to address LGBTQ domestic violence, programs around the country are reexamining the utility of communal shelters as the centerpiece for services to survivors (Building Dignity). Communal shelters have traditionally been gender-segregated and for women only, barring access for many transgender, gender non-conforming, and male survivors. This critique, grounded in survivors' voices, points out that communal shelters:

- Tend to lead to rule proliferation, in an effort to solve conflicts with other residents and the lack of privacy[21], and can create challenges in parenting,[22]
- Can interfere with survivors' opportunities to reclaim their parenting relationships and rebuild their support systems, and
- Create environments in which residents are unavoidably exposed to each individual's substance use and abuse, mental health issues, trauma responses, and cultural biases. This in turn may be re-traumatizing, stressful, and disruptive.

From a financial and strategic planning perspective:

- Many domestic violence advocacy programs invest the majority of their assets in a physical shelter building. This limits nimble decision-making, and directs the bulk of resources into a single form of service, reducing flexibility for innovating or providing non-shelter based services. The Nonprofit Finance Fund offers a stark critique of this model, noting that costly shelter buildings can drag their organizations and their missions down.[23]
- When a program experiences reductions in funding, the more flexible advocacy services are more readily cut, and shelter becomes the default service. This limits the capacity of the program to offer a range of services to the many survivors who don't want or need shelter, or whom the shelter does not have capacity to serve. (NNEDV's one day DV Census makes clear most programs must turn away about 9 requests for shelter for every one they can accommodate.)

However, clearly many good things can and do happen in shelter[24] (Evidence Project, Meeting Survivor's Needs) but it is not clear that it is the only or even best way to provide advocacy and emergency housing.

Alternatives

DV Housing First projects are beginning to demonstrate alternatives to emergency shelter, focusing on maintaining a current housing for survivors, increasing the safety of current housing, and/or providing affordable long term housing to survivors without an interim shelter stay. These options may be more cost effective than holding and maintaining a building.[25]

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[21] Lyon, E., Lane, S., & Menard, A. (2008). *Meeting Survivor's Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences*. National Institute of Justice.

[22] WSCADV, Hobart, M., Rosen, C., & Payne, F. (2012). *Building Dignity: Design Solutions for Domestic Violence Shelter.Building Dignity: a project of the Washington State Coalition Against DV*. Retrieved from http://buildingdignity.wscadv.org/

[23] Deshmukh, A. (2011 10–12). *The Shelter Trap: Managing Domestic Violence Facilities. NFF Social Currency*.

[24] Op. Cit.

[25] Mbilinyi, PhD, L., & Kreiter, A. (2013). *The Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First Program Evaluation Summary: Cohort 1 Agencies July 2011 to December 2012* (funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation). Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

These approaches continue to center an advocacy relationship and survivor's agendas, but broaden the options by making flexible funding available to assist survivors with housing-related issues and providing supportive advocacy and/or legal advocacy at the same time.

Other programs are creating emergency shelters made up of single dwellings or apartments, which may be geographically scattered, or all in one building.[26] Allowing each family to have their own dwelling instantly solves many of problems discussed above, and leaves advocates with more time for meaningful and supportive advocacy, since conflict and the need for mediation diminishes.

Advocacy Models

The mainstream movement has worked to define and implement survivor centered advocacy. Advocacy is a complex task, involving multiple skills and knowledge sets. Keeping advocacy survivor-centered takes practice and discipline. Key contributions to articulating best practices around advocacy include the following resources.

- The Praxis International Advocacy Learning Center model: provides an 18 month training to advocates, focusing on both individual and system advocacy. The curriculum provides a framework for advocacy that includes connecting, understanding, analyzing, strategizing, implementing, and adapting, and focuses on practical skills as well as critical thinking.
- Safety Planning with Battered Women:[27] articulates a survivor-centered approach to safety planning, taking into account the local and social context, and the constrained set of choices survivors may face. The focus of this book is women in heterosexual relationships, but the principles of careful attention to identifying the risks faced by individual survivors, safety planning as a dynamic and ongoing process, and understanding both batterer- and life-generated risks are relevant to anyone doing advocacy, including advocates for LGBTQ survivors.
- Advocacy Beyond Leaving[28] focuses on the substantial number of survivors who continue to live with their abuser or be in contact with that person because of children in common, proximity, or overlapping communities and social circles.
- Praxis International's Safety Audit Model is a method used by interdisciplinary groups to analyze how and why particular institutions impact the safety of domestic violence survivors and the accountability of perpetrators. This model is particularly important for understanding text driven institutions such as the criminal justice system, child welfare, and custody courts.

Many strengths of the mainstream domestic violence movement currently inform LGBTQ domestic violence practice. However the emerging lessons discussed above can be incorporated into LGBTQ domestic violence practice as it continues to develop, such as a critique of communal sheltering and an overreliance on the legal system. Understanding the mainstream domestic violence movement and its approach is just one piece of understanding the bigger picture of LGBTQ DV survivors' lives. We must also take into account the unique factors that affect LGBTQ communities and LGBTQ lives. We will begin by looking at the policies that affect the lives of LGBTQ survivors.

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[26] Op. Cit. Building Dignity
[27] Davies, J., Lyon, E. J., & Monti-Catania, D. (1998). *Safety Planning with Battered Women: Complex Lives/Difficult Choices*(1 edition.). Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, Inc.
[28] Davies, J. (2009). Advocacy Beyond Leaving: Helping Battered Women in Contact With Current or Former Partners. Futures Without Violence.