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Empirical analysis I: L(G)BT communities handling domestic violence in women-to-women relationships

National report: Germany

Kristin Marunke & Martina Frenznick

Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.

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Background of the LARS project

Violence and abuse in lesbian partnerships is almost no subject of discussion in the mainstream discourse about domestic violence. A European stocktaking study on the measures and actions taken in Council of Europe member States combating violence against women (2006, p. 8) states that most studies focusing on domestic violence against women define domestic violence “as the physical, psychological and sexual violence to women by men”. Policies of European countries combating domestic violence focus on heterosexual couples and provide service and support for female victims and male perpetrators. Nevertheless, recent research indicates that about 40 percent of lesbian women did experience “domestic abuse” at some time in a same-sex partnership (Donovan/Hester/Holmes et.al. 2006). Further, the risk being attacked by a male ex-partner is almost three times as high as being attacked by a female ex-partner (McLaughlin/Rozee 2001).

This extent of domestic violence is not reflected in the number of reported incidences to police, counselling services or to intervention organizations. This fact leads to the assumption that only very few lesbian victims are seeking for support and do use neither mainstream intervention chains nor specific counselling services. One of the major reasons for this imbalance between victimisation and the need for support is the tabooization of domestic violence within L(G)BT communities. L(G)BT communities have been established in middle and north Europe in the twenties of the last century and are meant to be a counterpart to the homophobic mainstream society. Naming domestic violence in same-sex couples may destroy the myth of a violent-free L(G)BT community.

The tabooization of domestic violence within the L(G)BT subculture is expressed in the assumption that domestic violence is a private matter and therefore should not be dealt with in public. This attitude has an impact on victimized lesbians and the perpetrators: The victims feel isolated, blame themselves, and even think that they deserve it since they are homosexuals (internalised homophobia). Furthermore, they rarely report to police or try to get support by counselling services since they want to protect their violent partners from being exposed to homophobia. And finally, not naming domestic violence or identifying with the perpetrator reinforce the violent behaviour of lesbian perpetrators.

Therefore, the aim of the **LARS project** is to develop and to implement awareness-raising actions within the L(G)BT communities to overcome the taboo of domestic violence. Community networks should be built and a community value established promoting the right for a violent-free partnership. Further, influential factors promoting the taboo like internalized homophobia will be uncovered and strategies of “community response” strengthened. In a first step research was conducted to describe the correlation between domestic violence and the L(G)BT communities as a hindering factor to end domestic violence in same-sex couples. In a second step promoting factors will be elaborated and exemplary actions implemented.

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In this report results of our first research steps will be described: The “snap shot” aimed at the L(G)BT communities to get an impression of how domestic violence is discussed within the communities. In a second step the local L(G)BT communities have been mapped. Herewith the focus was put on the kind of organizations and not on its numbers. In a third step representatives of local communities have been interviewed about their impression of how the L(G)BT communities deal with domestic violence. Finally, results will be summed up and conclusions drawn.



PART I: Domestic violence in women-to-women partnerships and the L(G)BT communities

1. *Snap shot research*

1.1 Aim of snap shot

The aim of the snap shot was intended to gather some basic information about the views of lesbian (and bisexual and transgender) women about domestic abuse. This would give a first impression of attitudes within German L(G)BT communities, and could be used to highlight differences and to provide an overview of the situation in Berlin and Frankfurt. The snap shot was also intended as a tool to provoke discussion with interviewees at a later stage in the research.

1.2 Method

The snap shot was arranged early in the project and before partners had met together for a planning meeting. It was important to use the same questions in each participating country, in order to ensure consistency and comparability. This inevitably meant some compromise on language in order to make the questions understandable for all potential respondents.

In Germany, we used an internet based survey site (Survey Monkey) to launch the survey. The software also undertakes basic analysis of responses.

The snapshot was advertised on the front page of two national websites aiming at lesbian women. While the user of one of those websites (www.lesben.org) is described as being between 30 and 40 years old, the users of the other website (www.lesarion.de) are much younger, i.e. in their 20ies. Further, a link to the survey was set on the homepage of *Broken Rainbow* and the *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.* The partner organizations of the umbrella organization Broken were requested publicise the snapshot and to link it to their homepages.

Further, visitors of the *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.* have been encouraged to fill out the snap shot.

The snap shot has been online end of January till April 2010. Its peak of visit has been in February 2010.

1.3 Results

There have been two ways to approach the snap shot, via the national lesbian websites and directly. Since only the number of clicks of using the national websites are documented this number is used as the conservative basis of the analysis. Nevertheless it needs to be stated that an unknown number of participants did visit the snap shot directly.

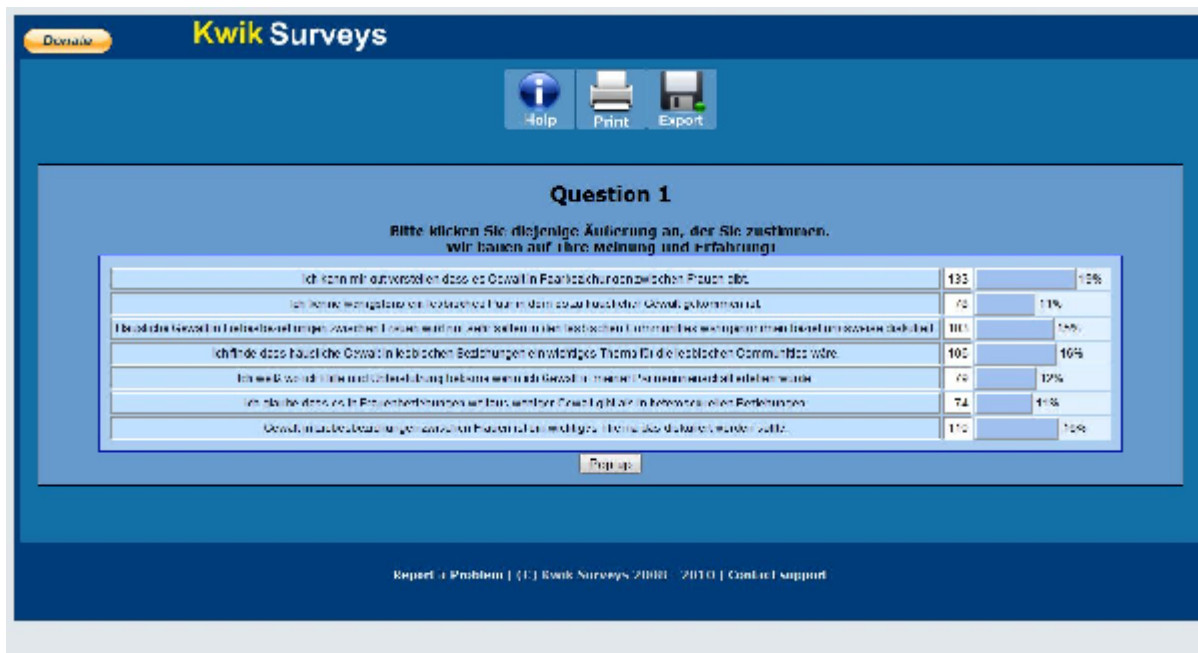
Using the documented clicks (209) and number of votings (683) indicate that each person did agree to at least 3 statements.

Statements	N=209/683 number of votings (%)
I easily can imagine that there are violent couples in the women's community.	63.6/19.0
I am aware of at least one example of violence within a lesbian/women-to-woman relationship	37.3/11
Violence in women-to-women relationships is barely mentioned or discussed in the lesbian community.	52.6/15
I think that violence in women-to-women relationships should be an important issue within the lesbian community.	49.3/16
I would know where to get help or advice if I experienced violence within my women-to-woman relationship.	37.8/12
I think violence in woman-to-woman relationships is less frequent than violence within heterosexual relationships.	35.4/11
Violence in women-to-women relationships should not be an important subject of discussion.	Not rated

More than half of the participants can imagine that there are violent couples in the women's community (63.6%). But only a little bit more than a third of them know a violent lesbian couple (37.3%), meaning they experienced abuse and violence either as witnesses or being involved personally. Almost the same amount of women does know where to get help or advice (37.8%). In this case the number of those women who do not know where to get support is of importance: more than 60% do not know where to find support and help.

About half of the users agree to the statement that domestic violence in women-to-women partnerships is an important issue; at the same time almost half of them agree to the perception that this issue is only rarely discussed within the communities. Even though there is an overlap of numbers it needs to be assumed that not all women who agree that this phenomenon is only barely mentioned within the lesbian communities agree to that is an important issue.

1/3 of the voters agree to the assumption that violence in women-to-women relationships is less frequent than in opposite sex partnerships.



Dated 5th of May 2010

1.4 Conclusions

The snap shot indicated that almost 64% of the respondents can imagine that there is domestic abuse in women-to-women partnerships. At the same time half of the respondents agree that it is only rarely mentioned within the communities. But furthermore, only half of the respondents agree to that it is an important issue for the community. This may lead to the conclusion that it is regarded as not being significant for the lesbian community. Thus, domestic violence is viewed as being a private problem and that the L(G)BT communities are not responsible for solving this problem.

Further, there seems to be a correlation between the experience of domestic abuse (either as witness or personally) and the knowledge about possible support. This may support the assumption that this third did indeed experience domestic violence personally – and that they got support. Nevertheless this correlation indicates that people only get interested in support organizations when needed: There is no need being informed about domestic violence intervention networks when not affected by it. But it also needs to be taken into consideration that there is a kind of “general knowledge” about domestic violence – at least in the mainstream – and thus the threshold to get support and help in cases needed is quite low. This does not necessarily applies to the L(G)BT communities.

Finally, about a third of the visitors assume that domestic violence in women-to-women relationships is less frequent than in opposite sex ones. This rating does not necessarily mean that all others assume that the extent is the same. It also could mean that they do not know.

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To sum up, respondents do not view the LGBT communities as being responsible for contributing to fight domestic violence. Further, basic information about the extent of domestic abuse and possibilities to get support is not widespread. Women do know about support systems in case they are affected by abuse. What is missing, is a kind of “general



knowledge” about domestic violence within the L(G)BT communities. Only in spreading information and knowledge an atmosphere can be created which may encourage the communities to cope with this phenomenon.

2. Description of local L(G)BT communities

2.1 Kind and focus of organizations

Trying to make an overview of the existing L(G)BT-Community organizations in Berlin is a hard job. It seems, as if there is a place to go for every kind of interest or problem. There are counselling services offering support, therapy, courses, groups, advanced trainings, legal advices, and geriatric care. The most popular ones are *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.*, *LesMigras*, *Schwulenberatung*, *GLADT e.V.* (Gays and Lesbians aus der Türkei) as well as the *TGNB* (Transgender Netzwerk Berlin). Furthermore, people can join in parties, cafes, carpentry, archives for LBGT-literature and publications as well as in venues with a variety of cultural offers. LGBT-people in Berlin can join in sport-groups for nearly every kind of sport; there are clubs as well as lectures and courses (offered for example by *Pink Ballroom*, *Seitenwechsel* and *Vorspiel*). Not to forget the organizations working against various forms of discrimination (named in a German law called *Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*) and violence against LGBT. Most organizations are NGOs, financed by donations and public funds. The focal points of organizations are as various as the described offers for LGBTs. Meanwhile some of them address the whole community (e.g. sport-groups), others are more specific and working for a special community (like elderly, people with migrational background, lesbians, gays, trans*).

Though, the offers are various and often one organization is working on many different topics. Especially the counselling services offer a wide range of support. Nevertheless and with respect to the branched organizations of support and political engagement, the *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.* is the only institution working against violence occurring in the LBT-Communities¹. Consequently, there is also no other organization, putting domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships on top of its agenda. Thus, the impact of homophobic assaults and sexual identity related discrimination is named regularly and there is a growing number of support services for victims of these offences. But the examination of violence against LGBT perpetrated by LGBT just started.

2.2 Domestic violence in L(G)BT media

To analyse how often magazines make domestic violence in same-sex/trans-relationships a subject of discussion, there has been a literature research. The most common print-media for L(G)BTs has been reviewed for a period of the last 12 month. The magazines analysed have

¹ For gays and bisexual men who experience discrimination and/or violence there is support provided by MANEO which is a gay anti-violence project in Berlin.



been *L-MAG* (a German wide lesbian magazine), *Siegessäule* (a Berlin City Magazine for LGBTs), *gab* (a gay magazine in Frankfurt/Main that is concerned about lesbian topics as well) and *Siegessäule Kompass* (the LGBT yellow pages for Berlin). In the last 12 months, there has been only one publication in the L(G)BT media dealing with domestic violence in women-to-women relationships. The article was published in *L-MAG* (from March/April 2010), which is the most-read magazine for lesbians in Germany. The six-page article (which was announced on the front page as well) was split in two parts: (a) a self-report of two women who had been victims of domestic violence and (b) an article about the most important facts on domestic violence. The documentation showed that relationships between women might be violent as well. The authors also made clear, that violence is more than to hurt somebody physically and that every lesbian/bisexual woman could be affected by it. So, domestic violence is a problem that does not spare middle and upper class women, nor emancipated, self-confident and successful ones. The myth of the peaceable and non-aggressive woman as well as the one of a safe community was broken by this article. Another important aspect the article dealt with was the particularity of domestic violence in same-sex partnerships compared to heterosexual ones. The importance of homophobia and heteronormativity to how domestic violence is experienced and to the consequences were emphasized as well. Finally, the authors named counseling services dealing with domestic violence in women-to-women relationships in whole Germany.

Summing up, the authors of *L-MAG* succeeded to give a short but empathic and comprehensive overview of domestic violence in women-to-women relationships. But much more articles are needed to make the communities and individuals sensitive for that concealed topic.

2.3 Local intervention networks fighting domestic violence and L(G)BT participation

In Berlin, there are many projects and networks fighting domestic violence. Most of them put the focus on violence perpetrated by men against women in heterosexual relationships. Nevertheless, there is a growing awareness for the topic and peculiarities of domestic violence in women-to-women partnerships. There are too many networks and organizations in Berlin that offer support for women affected by violence to name them here. So, the ones presented in this text are only a small variety. The biggest project of intervention concerning domestic violence against women is *BIG* (Berliner Interventionszentrale bei häuslicher Gewalt) that offers in cooperation with different counselling services and shelter houses (called *BIG-Hotline*) support for women and their children who are affected by domestic violence. Furthermore, at the political level the *Netzwerk Frauengesundheit Berlin* and its consortium *Fachgruppe gesundheitliche Folgen von Gewalt* is active. Even if the majority of all networks are operating against domestic violence in opposite sex relationships, there is a number of lesbian and bisexual women working in these projects. It's because lesbian and bisexual women have always been engaged in anti-violence-organization due to the fact that this domain is traditionally a women's project one. So, the participation of women who are part of the L(G)BT-communities in networks fighting domestic violence is not a new phenomenon. New is, that the awareness of violence in relationships between women

increases since the last 15 years – in the L(G)BT-communities as well as in anti-violence-networks. Beside the listed and all the other organizations fighting domestic violence, there is only one aiming at violence in women-to-women relationships. The main object of this network called *Unterstützungsangebote für lesbische Frauen, die von häuslicher Gewalt betroffen sind* (founded by the *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.*) is to improve the psycho-social support offered to lesbians and bisexual/trans* women. Part of the network are different women shelter houses (*Frauenort Augusta, Frauenhaus Bora, Frauenzimmer* and *EWA*), as well as the *BIG-Interventionszentrale* and the *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.*.

The *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.* cooperates with all above named networks to bring up the topic of domestic violence in women-to-women as well as in trans*- relationships persistently.

2.4 Conclusions

Reflecting the picture drawn above, it needs to be stated that there is a lack of willingness to deal with the topic of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. Even if the number and offers of LGBT-organizations in Berlin is as large as nowhere else in Germany, there is a huge lack of institutions working against domestic violence in women-to-women/trans*-relationships. As described above, there is only one organisations and one network dealing with. This unawareness is reflected by the LGBT-media which just started to recognize violence between people of LGBT-communities. So, in the last 12 month, there was only one article dealing with the sensitive topic of violence in lesbian relationships. That is not much and even more than ever since. This single article may indicate a change in how domestic violence is dealt by community-agents. But still, there is much more work and publicity necessary until women/trans* affected by domestic violence could leave their isolation.

Analysing the local intervention networks fighting domestic violence, our assumption that there is a taboo about violence in women-to-women relationships has been confirmed. There is evidence of the participation of lesbian and bisexual women in anti-violence organisations and networks. Nevertheless, discussions about the extent of violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships and its impact on affected women and the community are rare. Though, there is the question, how LBT affected by violence could access support, if the existence of this kind of violence is ignored or even denied.



PART II: Empirical research: Qualitative Interviews with key agents of the L(G)BT communities

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim of the interviews

The *Lesbenberatung Berlin e.V.* undertook six in-depth interviews with ‘community leaders’ from the LBT women’s community in Berlin, in order to find out more about whether a taboo exists concerning women-to-women domestic abuse, and if so how it operates and how it could be effectively challenged. An additional interview was conducted in Frankfurt, thus altogether 7 interviews have been done.

The interviews were based around a standard set of questions which were developed cooperatively with other LARS partners, and which were general enough to apply to all countries.

In Berlin only those community leaders have been interviewed who had specialist knowledge of issues relating to women-to-women abuse (mostly counselors). Nevertheless they were selected according to reflect the diversity of the L(G)BT communities. The person interviewed in Frankfurt is a community leader in editing the major (mainly gay) local magazine for LGBTs.

3.2 Interview guide

The interviews have been focused and guided. The guide was developed at the first partner meeting in Vienna in February 2010. The interviews have been conducted in March and April 2010. They have been taped and transcribed. The analysis is based on methods of content analysis (Mayring 2002, Flick 2000). In the qualitative content analysis only those information which are relevant for the leading research question are extracted (cf. Gläser&Laudel 2006). The aim is a structured and comprehensible analysis which allows interpretation and conclusions. Thus, the material will be sorted according to fixed categories which have been functions as classification criterion. Subsequently, the structured material will be reduced to main contents (cf. Mayring 2007). Computer based data analysis programs have been used to ease the analysis.

The interview guide

My name is [name] from [organization]. Our organization is partner of a European project called LARS – lesbian awareness raising strategies to overcome the taboo of domestic violence in women to women partnerships. Other partners are from Sweden, Germany, Netherlands, UK and Austria [please delete your country]. The project is based on the results and experiences of former European projects within the Daphne programme which dealt with domestic violence/abusive same-sex partnerships. Aim of the project is to develop a concept of how the taboo can be overcome and to implement an action in 2011.

In our research we would like to know more about how domestic violence and abusive partnerships are discussed in our community here in [city]. The interview will last around 30 to 40 minutes.

First of all, I would like to ask you if you agree that the interview will be taped.

[Yes/No]

- (1) In the very beginning I would like to ask you explain who you are, what your involvement in the LGBT community is, since when you are part of the community and what your motivation was to become active.*
- (2) What is your impression of how LGBT domestic violence is dealt with in the community?*
 - a. Do you think that there have been changes in the awareness in the last 5 to 10 years?*
 - b. How would you describe this development?*
- (3) Have you ever come across domestic violence in your function/position in the community?*
 - a. Depending on the function/position of the interviewee: Has it been a subject of discussion in your magazine, in an internet forum you are hosting, in your LGBT centre, did you ever witness DV in your bar/restaurant and was there any reaction from other guests etc.*
- (4) At the beginning of this project we did a little online snap shot and asked women who love women if they know violent couples, if they think it is an import subject of discussion or if they know where to get support in case needed. There have been following results:*
 - a. Present data*
 - b. Leave space for the interviewee to respond before you continue with follow up questions.*
 - c. Go through each question that hasn't been referred to in the spontaneous response.*
- (5) To what extent do you think that domestic violence is discussed in our community and privately between lesbians?*
 - a. Can you remember any private or public discussions about it within the last year?*
 - b. Can you remember any event dealing with domestic violence within the last years?*
- (6) Why is there this taboo? [If the interviewee thinks that there is no taboo, please continue with question no. 10]*
 - a. What do you think contributes to the taboo?*
- (7) What do you think would make it easier to discuss the taboo?*
 - a. Have you any idea how the topic of domestic violence should be communicated, so that it can get a subject lesbian would talk about?*
- (8) What do you think would be a good strategy to overcome the taboo?*
- (9) Finally, would you like to add something to the interview?*

Thank you for taking time and participating in this interview.

Continuing question (6) – there is no taboo:

- (10) Can you give examples of the times when people discuss it and how they discussed the phenomenon of abusive partnerships in women to women relationships?*
- (11) What do you think makes it possible for women to talk about domestic violence or potential domestic violence in their partnerships?*
 - a. The idea of the question is that there obviously have been no obstacles to discuss domestic violence. So what could have been conducive factors for having the discussion?*

For example: No shame, no concernment, idea of that community is a safe space; idea that women are not aggressive etc.

- (12) Finally, would you like to add something to the interview?*

Thank you for taking time and participating in this interview.

3.3 Description of key agents

We aimed to interview a range of people who represented, as far as possible, a cross-section of the lesbian/bi/trans*-Communities in Berlin and Frankfurt. We interviewed seven key agents, who worked in a wide range of specialised counseling services as well as in the media. Interviewees ranged in age from early 30s to mid-50s.

4. Reflecting how L(G)BT communities handle the phenomenon of domestic violence in same-sex partnerships/women-to-women partnerships

4.1 Coping strategies

The key agents named different ways how domestic violence is dealt by the institutions they are working for. Most of them reported of networking with other counselling services and round tables about domestic violence. Furthermore, they are looking for discussion-rounds and advanced trainings about domestic violence in women-to-women relationships. To reach LBT-victims (and likewise - even if less often - perpetrators), they communicate their offers of support via public relations. At the same time, most of the key agents said, that they are not sure about, if these process of opening is recognized by help-seeking people. One interview-partner named as coping-strategy the development of standards for the work with lesbians affected by domestic violence. Another person said in the very beginning of the interview, that there definitely is a taboo about domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* and that this is why there are rudimental coping strategies only.

Concerning their work as counsellors, two of the key agents expressed their intention to name every kind of violence. So, if there is a couple or single person seeking for help because of a topic that is not related to domestic violence, but counsellors are recognizing the existence of violent behaviour in their relationship, they would name this. According to these statements, the majority of key agents says, that it would be best to name violence every time it occurs to break the taboo of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships.

The key agent of the Frankfurt community describes the phenomenon of domestic violence as being a taboo within the LGBT communities:

G: Es ist ein Tabu. Niemand spricht darüber und ich selbst höre nur davon, wenn ich mit Dir darüber spreche. (It is a taboo. Nobody speaks about it and I myself only hear about it when talking to you.)

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In the interview it has been discussed that he recognizes lesbian women as being more “aggressive” than gay men. The organizers of parties usually engage security in case of homophobic attacks, but security is also used to deescalate aggressive situations between the women/guests.



4.2 Tabooization of domestic violence within the L(G)BT communities

The majority of key agents interviewed identified domestic violence in relationships between women/trans* as a taboo issue. Nevertheless, there are differences in how this taboo is experienced and interpreted. In the following the different mechanisms named will be presented and discussed. It will become apparent that the underlying strategies of tabooization are similar in different L(G)BT-sub-communities, even if they are specific in their value and consequences.

4.2.1 Low media response

Scrutinizing the LGBT media, it becomes obvious that the phenomenon of domestic violence is only rarely dealt with. There has been one article about it in 2010 in a national lesbian magazine and none in a gay one. Even last year, there have been no publications covering domestic violence in same-sex partnerships.

I: Ist das Thema bei dir in der Redaktion schon einmal aufgegriffen worden? (Was this topic already mentioned in your editorial office?)

G: Nein, es hat noch niemand so als Thema, oder so als Vorschlag gebracht (No, no one did propose it yet.)

I: Also, es gab auch weniger Debatten darüber. Manchmal greift man ja, oder ein Magazin greift ja die Debatten ... (Okay, there have been only few debates about it. But sometimes a magazine takes up a theme which is discussed in the community)

G: Hmhm

I ... auf, die in der Szene sind.

G: Nein, nein, auch von der Seite. Es gab auch noch nie eine Lesermeldung, oder ... ja, nein, habe ich bisher noch nicht gehabt. (No, nothing from this side. There even has not been a letter to the editor or something like that...)

I: Also, von deiner Meinung nach ist es also kein Thema, mit dem sich die Community beschäftigt? (So, you think it is no topic the community is discussing?)

G: Nein, zumindest nicht, dass ich es mitbekommen würde. Also im jetzt im Gegensatz zu Gewalt gegen Lesben und Schwule, also Übergriffe in Parks oder so, das war vor ein paar Jahren mal ein großes Thema, das haben wir auch mitbekommen. Da melden sich die Leute, oder wenn es irgendwo Razzien auf einer Klappe oder am Baggersee oder so gibt, dann melden sich Leser schon. (No, not that I do know. But contrary to violence against gays and lesbians, attacks in a park or so. This has been a major topic some years ago and we got notice of this. People get in contact with the editor when there has been a bust at a public toilette or at the lake or so, then readers get in contact with us).

This section of an interviews shows that domestic violence is only rarely – if at all – discussed in the community. According to the interviewee this is not the case if incidences of hate crime happen, then people inform media and want to make it public. Later on in the interview the interviewee explains, that LGBT people have developed an attitude that they experience a form of “injustice” when being confronted with hate crime. This is, why the go public with it more easily.

4.2.2 Denial and declaration of domestic violence as a private affair

G: Ich glaube, es ist ein sehr heikles Thema, weil es, also Gewalt in der Beziehung, was sehr private ist, was, glaube ich, es ist sehr schwer, darüber zu sprechen. Also Opfer und ich denke auch als Täter, weil es eben halt innerhalb einer Beziehung ist, und das schon etwas Besonderes ist. Ein besonderes Verhältnis zwischen zwei Menschen. Und in einer Beziehung ist es unglaublich schwer, so etwas überhaupt erst einmal zu erkennen und darüber öffentlich zu sprechen. Das ist glaube ich noch einmal schwieriger, als wenn man einfach als Person auf der Straße angegriffen wird. Wenn das quasi im eigenen Haus oder in den eigenen vier Wänden mit dem eigenen Partner passiert.

G: I think this is a very delicate topic since violence in a relationship is something very private and thus it is, according to my opinion, very difficult to talk about. As a victim and also as a perpetrator, I think. Because it is within a relationship and this is something very special. A very special relation between two people. And in a relationship it is very difficult to realize and to talk publicly about it. This is even more difficult than when being attacked on the street as a simple person. But when happening in the own house or the own rooms with the own partner.

Part of this strategy is to judge the own behaviour as well as the behaviour of others not as being violent. Interview partners E and G suppose that this strategy of denial is supported by an uncertainty about when violence starts. This weighs particularly for violent behaviour that is not physical but verbal or psychological. Another aspect of this tabooization strategy is the declaration of domestic violence as a private affair. Person B pointed out that this mechanism is used both from the women/trans* concerned by violence and from outsiders/the social network. Furthermore, some interview partners reported, that even if L(G)BT-victims (and perpetrators) of domestic violence use the sources of counselling services, they seldom address their problems. Mostly, the counsellors have to point out these experiences. It was assumed by person F that maybe it is easier to mask the fact that one live in a violent relationship because of the uncertainty and problems caused by the examination with the own sexual orientation.

F: Also es gibt ne Auseinandersetzung eben mit sowas wie, wie Gewalt im öffentlichen Raum, ähm, also was ja ein großes Thema ist, ähm in Trans-Szenen halt grade. Ähm, so und ich glaub, vielleicht, also ich weiß nicht, ob das was miteinander zu tun hat, also, dass da so der Fokus drauf gerichtet wird, dass das so ein großes Thema ist. Ähm, oder ob, das hat sicher auch noch andere Gründe, aber so also, wenn Gewalt thematisiert wird, dann in der Art und Weise. Aber, ja, ich weiß nicht, ob das was ist von "OK, es kommt so viel von Außen", dass man eben nicht auch noch sich damit auseinander setzen will, was da sozusagen auch noch im eigenen häuslichen Bereich irgendwie passiert. Oder, keine Ahnung, also das hat sicher auch noch mal andere Gründe, da möchte ich jetzt nicht drüber spekulieren. Aber wenn, dann ist das eher die Schiene, über die Gewalt thematisiert wird.*

F: So there is a debate about violence in public space, hum, so which is an important topic in the trans-scenes right now. Hum, and so I think, maybe, so I'm not sure if there is a link, so, that the focus is on violence in the open space, that there is made an issue out of this. Hum, or if, surely there are other reasons, too, but, when violence is picked out as a central issue, than in this way. But, yes, I'm not sure if there is an idea like „Ok, there is so much coming from outside“ that people don't want to deal with violence occurring in the own domestic area. Or, I have no idea, so there might be other reasons as well, I don't want to conjecture about this. But when, it is more this way how violence is picked out as a central issue.*

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This idea refers to the influence of a homophobic society on how domestic violence is dealt by L(G)BT-communities. As will be shown in the following chapter this influence deposits in different ways.



4.2.3 Silencing as a strategy to tackle with (homo)phobia

To live as L(G)BT still means to live in a homophobic society. Interview partner A draws the consequences as follows: A L(G)BT victim of domestic violence speaking about his/her experiences openly runs the risk of handle his/her partner to a homo/trans*phobic system. Even if one is suffering from violence, the awareness of this possibility could block the search for support.

Another aspect of homophobia is the attribution of deviance to people living a homo- or bisexual identity. This weighs even more for trans* people, whose identity is still pathologized (as registration in the international classification of diseases shows). In consequence, it might be possible to assume a correlation between own sexuality and the experience of domestic violence. As interview partner F explained, there are still (unassigned) theories about the experience of violence in childhood and the development of a trans*identity. To deny the experience of any kind of violence (in childhood or in the relationship) seems to be a possibility to be taken serious in ones identity. So, both interview partner D and F pointed out that experiencing discrimination and phobia might lead to the need of silencing domestic violence.

Further, the experience of homophobia and other phobias in society might lead to the need of defending the own identity. As interview partner B explained, it might be still important to uphold the image of lesbian relationships to be the better ones, the ones that are superior to heterosexual relationships in terms of equality. The occurrence of violence in women-to-women relationships dodges this image. Furthermore, the experience of violence perpetrated by another woman might touch not only the identity as a lesbian, but her self-image as well-fortified and emancipated person as well. Especially elderly lesbians often have a feminist background that includes an attitude against violence. To become victim of women-perpetrated domestic violence could stand in contrast to this image, an image that wants to be hold up against one self as well as against the environment. The need to hold up an image may work together with feelings of shame that victims of violence often have to struggle with. In reflection of the here described mechanisms, interview partners D and A assumed a connection between holding up an image and the difficulty to speak about domestic violence in women-to-women relationships openly.

D: Leute, denen das bewusst ist, also die auch ein Bewusstsein haben [für häusliche Gewalt], für die ist es ja auch nochmal was ganz anderes, also, es ist mehr als das, was da passiert. Es ist ja, und auch bei so sagen wir mal bei so Engagierten, sensibilisierten Leuten, weil da glaub ich auch nochmal das Gefühl auftaucht, wie kann es mir passieren? Also weil viele denken, natürlich ich würde da auch davon ausgehen, „ich kenne mich da aus, ich arbeite in dem Bereich, ich bin politisch aktiv und mir würde sowas nicht passieren“. Also denke ich, aber. Deswegen ist es so ne große Enttäuschung, wenn es doch passiert.

D: People who are aware of the existence [of domestic violence], for these people it is more special, there is happening more than the violence. This is because, let's say for sensitive people doing a lot against domestic violence, there is the question „how could that happen to me?“. So because many people think - and by the way I would think so as well - „I know about domestic violence, I'm working in this field, this won't happen to me“. That's why it is such a large disappointment when it still is happening.

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Another consequence of homo- and trans*phobia might be the need to feel safe in the own community. The existence and recognition of L(G)BT perpetrators holds the potential to



destroy this feeling of the community as a safe and violent-free space. Thus, as interview partner A,C and D said, it seems probable that violence between L(G)BTs is kept in silence to strengthen and preserve this community-related feelings. At the same time there is a lot of energy invested to assaults perpetrated against L(G)BT by members of the majority society. As interview partner D supposed, this might be another strategy to detract from violence in L(G)BT-relationships and to hold up the image of a safe community.

The here described mechanisms could be seen as strategies to tackle with homophobia and other forms of phobia that still exists and need to receive attention when speaking about domestic violence in women-to-women and trans* relationships. Phobias reflect proportions of power that are discussed to be associated with the perpetration of violence. And as will be elaborated in the following chapter, power relations might influence the tabooization of L(G)BT domestic violence as well.

4.2.4 Proportion of power and cultural norms

Beside power relations at a societal level as described above, individual differences in power and resources may affect the tabooization of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships as well. As interview partner has highlighted, financial dependency because of different incomes may confuse the issue of experiencing domestic violence and lift the barrier to speak about the experienced assaults. Additionally, interview partner D emphasized a migrational background and the risk of losing the residence permit status if the relationship is separated. This may have an effect on the willingness to make incidences of domestic violence public. In short, people who are perceived of having more power also may have more rights. These rights could contribute to the denial or silencing of assaults perpetrated by more powerful ones. Additionally, violent behaviour of people with power might not been interpreted as such. That these differences in power do not have to be obvious at first sight reveals the following example supported by the statements of interview partner A. So might violent acts, committed by a person who is part of a minority (and there are minorities in the minority of L(G)BTs as well) be excused by the distress this person is suffering from.

Beside these differences in power, there are also cultural norms that may contribute to the tabooization of violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. As interview partner C discussed, the exposure to heterosexual domestic violence in majority society might have an influence to how the L(G)BT-communities deal with domestic violence. In a society that does not except domestic violence at all, the minority-groups should struggle with this even less. In consequence, this norms might cause the concealment of occurring violence in L(G)BT-relationships.

4.3 Discussed strategies to overcome the taboo

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A main object of the interviews was to work out strategies how to overcome the taboo of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. The key agents had various ideas which will be presented in the following chapter.

A lot of ideas dealt with the topic of public relations. It was supposed to be helpful if the occurrence of domestic violence would be treated more often in L(G)BT-media. Persons A



and E talked about the positive effect of reports about women/trans* that experienced violence in their relationship on victims that feel isolated and without hope on change. Via reports and case studies it could be shown that many different people are affected by violence in their relationship and that it is not a sign of deviance if someone becomes victim of violence. As interview partner C said, it would be helpful to overcome the strong aspects of morality by talking about domestic violence. Although it is a balancing act, there should be a discussion about that “violence is human, even if not humane”. Interview partner A also revealed, that it might be helpful to publish data about how many lesbians and bisexual women as well as trans* are affected by domestic violence in their relationship. Finally person C alluded to the aspect that to overcome the taboo of domestic violence is a process that needs time. So, if the actions done till today did not succeed to break the silence this does not mean, that they have been without any effect. But rather, we need more of this and have to bring out the topic of domestic violence again and again.

Due to the fact that most key agents interviewed work as counsellors, there have been many ideas dealing with the responsibility of L(G)BT counselling services. It was discussed that a lot of changes are necessary to provide a woman/trans* affected by domestic violence good possibilities of support. First, the counselling services should open their offers for the needs of people that experienced violence consequently, with includes an explicit promotion of their willingness to work with victims (and maybe perpetrators) of domestic violence as well. Following the interview-partners, the basis for this is the improvement competences from counsellors to become more confident in how to deal with L(G)BT people affected by domestic violence. Due to her experience in the work with couples that behave violently in their relationship, interview partner A underlined the importance of imbalance of power for the occurrence of domestic violence. So, she promotes to name these imbalances by working with women/trans* that have to deal with domestic violence.

Meanwhile most of the interview partners underlined the responsibility of counselling services to deal with domestic violence, some highlighted the importance to give responsibility to the L(G)BT-communities as well. It seems to be important to take care of an empowerment about how to deal with domestic violence. In view of existing insecurities concerning the broadness of violent behaviour and about how to react if one becomes voucher of L(G)BT-perpetrated violence as well as the need to empower moral courage, all interview partners underlined the need for actions encouraging these competences.

4.4 Conclusions

The findings presented above show that the mechanisms that cause the tabooization of domestic violence seem to be multifaceted. First, there has to be acknowledged a large influence of homophobia and other forms of phobia (like trans*phobia and xenophobia) on the issue. Certain aspects correlated to the circumstance of belonging to a social minority may cause a lack of courage to speak about domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. Being part of a minority as well as the continuing pathologisation of L(G)BT* people may lead to the need to sustain the own identity as a positive one. In consequence, there are many images kept uphold: the image of an emancipated lesbian, of lesbian relationships being violent free and in this term superior to heterosexual ones, the image of a community that is supposed to be a safe place for every one – to name but a few. Furthermore, the exposure to heterosexual domestic violence in majority society might have

an influence to how the L(G)BT-communities deal with domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. In a society that does not except domestic violence at all, the minority-groups should struggle with this even less. In consequence, this might cause the concealment of occurring violence in L(G)BT-relationships. Beside the importance of societal power imbalances, there seems to be an influence by couple-related differences to the tabooization of domestic violence as well. Differences in terms of social standing or the fear to be deported due to migrational background could make it much more difficult to risk the end of the relationship by speaking about domestic violence. The here outlined mechanisms emphasize the importance of power to the willingness to speak about domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships.

Pertaining to the discussed strategies to overcome the taboo of domestic violence has to be concluded, that there is a need to be active on different levels. Though, it does not seem to be helpful to develop a single strategy, but various ones. L(G)BT-media should be involved in public relations that could show, that domestic violence is not a individual fate. The interview partners emphasised the responsibility of counseling services to open their offers to victims (and perpetrators) of domestic violence and to make them public. The relevance of going public with the challenge of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships seems to be the most important conclusion drawn by the interviews. Finally, measures of intervention need to aim at the communities themselves. It became obvious that not only the L(G)BT-media and counseling services need to be addressed, but the people concerned could be addressed on a more direct way as well. Therefore, it might be helpful to empower L(G)BTs in terms of the variety of how domestic violence can occur as well as in terms of moral courage.



PART III: Summary and conclusion

5. Summary

The overall aim of the project is to develop an awareness raising strategy dealing with domestic violence and aiming at the L(G)BT* communities. Therefore in a first step a snapshot was developed containing statements the visitor could agree to. The results of the snapshot showed that there domestic violence in women-to-women partnerships is not really a matter of urgency within the L(G)BT* communities. Even though more than a third of the respondents know a violent lesbian couple they also agree that it is not dealt with in the community.

The second approach, qualitative guided interviews with key agents of the community, revealed specific tabooization mechanisms like silencing domestic violence in not making it a public topic, in defining it as a private problem, in not “washing dirty laundry in public”, in outlining correlations between different forms of social exclusion and their impact on the LGBT* communities like hiding the problem of domestic violence. Since the majority of the interviewees are working in the area of counseling, the interviews themselves had an effect on their organizations.

Some of them reported on discussions initiated by participating in the interview. Furthermore, the interviews contributed to a networking ambition that has been in progress already. The installation of an expert panel could be realized due to the networking with interview partners as well. Additionally, the persons interviewed expressed a great interest in the LARS-project and asked to be kept informed. With regard to the local actions in 2011, the majority of interview partners were interested in cooperation and organising activities together. Beside these positive effects on the networking sector, the interviews retrieved the possibility to open up new perspectives on both sides.

The conducted interviews revealed different mechanisms underlying the tabooization of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. First, there had to be noticed that the L(G)BT-media are silencing the existence of domestic violence. This takes effect with the lack of discussion about L(G)BT-violence in the different communities as well. The analysis of the interviews showed that the mechanisms of tabooization are similar in different communities, even if there are peculiarities to consider. To sum up, it can be stated that violently behaviour is often not named as such or interpreted as a private matter. Both phenomena can be applied to people affected by violence as well as to outsiders. Additionally, it was reported by the interviewees that they recognized a great uncertainty about the meaning of violence and how it could be dealt with. Furthermore, the tabooization could be described as a strategy to tackle with homophobia and other phobias of the majority society. As the interview partners showed, there are identities to defend and images that have to be uphold. These images may concern the community as a violent free place as well as lesbian relationships that are supposed to be superior to heterosexual ones in terms of equal status. The occurrence of violence in L(G)BT-relationships might endanger these images. Thus, the tabooization of domestic violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships could be described as a consequence of proportions of power between a majority society and a minority. Beside proportions of power in the societal level, there are imbalances in private as well. Is one of the partners isolated or dependent (e.g. in finances or because of



imminent risk of being deported) this fact may hinder a separation as well as it might exacerbate the difficulty to speak about experienced domestic violence.

6. Conclusions

There is indeed a taboo about domestic violence within women-to-women communities. Even though women experience abuse and violence in partnerships – either as witnesses or being directly affected – they only rarely feel supported by the community. Even if there are supporting organizations, they are not established in the “public awareness”. Here is a potential given to raise awareness.

Concerning the strategies to overcome the taboo of domestic violence various approaches have been elaborated. As an major aspect, public relations have been in the focus of discussion. Both, the L(G)BT media and counselling services were taken in responsibility to challenge the silence about violence in women-to-women/trans* relationships. Beyond that there has been the demand of empowering the L(G)BT communities themselves. The ideas discussed here dealt with the need to strengthen moral courage as well as the need to support the victims, their relatives and the women exerting abuse and violence.

