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

National report: Sweden

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1

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Table of contents

Background of the LARS project	3
PART I: Domestic violence in women-to-women partnerships and the L(G)BT communities.	5
1. Snap shot research.....	5
1.1 Aim of snap shot.....	5
1.2 Method	5
1.3 Results	5
1.4 Conclusions.....	6
2. Description of local L(G)BT communities	6
2.1 Kind and focus of organizations:.....	6
2.2 Domestic violence in L(G)BT media	8
2.3 Local intervention networks fighting domestic violence and L(G)BT	9
2.4 Conclusions.....	10
PART II: Empirical research: Qualitative Interviews with key agents of the L(G)BT communities	12
3. Methodology	12
3.1 Aim of the interviews	12
3.2 Interview guide	12
3.3 Description of key agents	14
4.1 Coping strategies	15
4.2 Tabooization of domestic violence within the L(G)BT communities.....	15
4.3 Discussed strategies to overcome the taboo	19
4.4 Conclusions.....	20
PART III: Summary and conclusion	21



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 organisations. 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

3



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.

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. Here-with the focus was put on the kind of organisations 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 snap-shot was intended as a simple method to gather some basic information about the views of lesbian and bisexual women about domestic abuse. This would give each project partner an overview of attitudes within their own cities, and could be used to highlight differences and to provide an overview of the situation in each city. 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. In Sweden the questionnaire has been published on Facebook, at RFSL's own homepage and at the biggest community on internet via the gay magazine QX.

Finally, 274 women took part at the snap shot.

1.3 Results

Most respondents (94 %) said that they could easily imagine that there is domestic violence in women-to-women relationships. 64 % were aware of at least one example of domestic violence in women-to-women relationships.

5

At the same time 72 % said that domestic violence only rarely is discussed within the lgbt community although as many as 86 % think that it should be an important topic.



Further, only 51 % of the respondents know where to seek advice or help if they are confronted with domestic violence.

More or less half of the respondents 51 % believe that domestic violence is more common in heterosexual relationships than in women's same sex relations. Only very few respondents (10 women) argued that violence in women to women relation shouldn't be a question of priority within the lgbt-community.

1.4 Conclusions

The most interesting result of the snap shot is the fact that the majority of the respondents know about domestic violence. They even know at least one couple who experienced a form of abuse or violence within their partnership. At the same time they recognize that the problem is addressed only very rarely within the lgbt community. Contrary to this, they are of the opinion that domestic violence in women to women relationships should be discussed.

Analysis reveals an inconsistency in the answers. Although the respondents assume that this topic should be discussed, at the same time it's seems that they themselves don't take this issue up. Indirectly they argue for that somebody else should do this. One expression of just how spread the silence is in this matter is that many respondents not even know where to seek help for themselves or tell a friend where to go.

The positive conclusion of this inconsistency is that there is a chance to break the taboo and an that respondents are interested in doing so. The challenge for us in the LARS project is to find out how we can do this. Even though the respondents confirm the need to discuss domestic violence, they to not want to pick it up themselves. A possible explanation could be that almost half of them thinks it's more common with domestic violence in heterosexual relationships. Here, the LARS-project could support to spread information about the extent of domestic abuse, its impact on the couple and on the lgbt community

2. Description of local L(G)BT communities

2.1 Kind and focus of organizations:

6

The lgbt communities in Sweden are small loose networks rather than a movement with many branches and subgroups. The people who join those groups are more or less the same. They engage in one group for a while and another group for some other period of time.



To live as an open lesbian/bisexual/transgender women still is a political act in itself but it doesn't mean that the organizations joined by lgbt people are political organizations. The impression of Stockholm is not coloured by its local political community. Of course there are a lot of small NGOs raising questions on the political agenda. But as the capital of Sweden - with all the national administration, national political debates, national NGO offices, national news papers, a majority of white collar middle class population and so one, the local perspective is in the background and is more or less drowning in the national context. This situation concerns all societal groups and their representatives. This circumstance puts the local lgbt community into a very special context.

RFSL Stockholm, not RFSL the national offices who offers the crime help-line, of course organize a lot of different groups. Golden Ladies is a group for older lesbians who meet and dance and eat. Transgender groups are also an example of a self help group at RFSL Stockholm as well as Egalia, the only place for young lgbt kids and their friends to meet. The two latter named groups are not exclusively for girls and women. It's the same for RFSL Youth, which is an own national organization with their own board and their own political agenda.

The counselling service at RFSL Stockholm has two counsellors. But they don't work with crime and crime victim and dealing with violent experiences is no subject of their counselling offers. Their focus is on the coming out process and more general problems with being a lgbt-person in a heteronormative world.

Other groups are the women's choir who at least for Christmas give concerts for the public. Then there are some sport clubs as Stockholm Snipers, Stockholm Dolphins (swimming) and of course a lot of women's football teams.

When it comes to the political parties the lgbt groups are active at the national level and not on the local one. The local political groups are an anarchistic lesbian group and a branch of the women party Feminist Initiative. At Stockholm University there is a strong Gay student group. They do political work as well as culture happenings.

7

The one and only self-help group besides RFSL Stockholm is an AA group for lgbt people. But to be honest, self-help groups is not very popular in Sweden. People seem to prefer one to one discussion with a professional person rather than in groups. It's also like that, that a lot



of lbt-women are integrated in “heterosexual” women’s help groups and organizations, for example groups for single mothers.

Some lesbians or women to women oriented women, have started clubs or restaurants; Wish, Decadence, Copacabana, Moma, Roxy, Högkvarteret, Hallongrottan, Häktet, is names on places were you can drink, eat and who also organize cultural evenings, readings, meetings with an author, book release party’s and so on. Hallongrottan is actually a bookstore. The publisher Normal print a lot of lgbt literature and let the readers meet the author.

On the Internet the most popular site is called Qruisier. Host for this site is a commercial gay magazine QX. On Qruisier you can find women exclusive pages and chat rooms where you can make contact with others for a date or just some small talk. There are dating sites for women in Stockholm so it’s possible to meet women in the local surrounding. Maybe some of them works like a self help group.

None of these groups have evenings or events where they discuss or debate violence in women-to-women relations. If they talk about this topic it is more in an informal context. Then they mostly speak about some friends or an incidence, but not about the consequences lgbt community or what should be done and certainly not about the political implication of women’s violence against other women.

The following organizations are not really a part of the lgbt community but since violence is the topic I think they should be mentioned. The first is a gynaecological clinic for lesbians and the second clinic is Mama Mia, which is a clinic for lesbian mothers and rainbow families. The third clinic is for women who got raped and is open for lesbian women. The two first ones mentioned do a screening for partner violence. When it comes to lbt-women they don’t do the screening, although they should do just as they should do with heterosexual women.

2.2 Domestic violence in L(G)BT media

When it comes to lgbt media there are only two magazines; QX the commercial glossy magazine and RFSL magazine for their members; Kom Ut (Come Out). QX write mostly about more light topics. Kom Ut is a political magazine addressing all kind of lgbt questions global as well as national sometimes local, in long articles. None of this magazine has published some articles about domestic violence the last year. But QX wrote about a campagne RFSL help line did last summer.



The only article in this year that focused on domestic violence was actually on RFSL home page where we publish news. Also some of lgbt-people who write blogs sometimes write about domestic violence.

But there is a growing subculture that makes Fanzines, which is a kind of comics and cartoons with a political messages. Probably some of them wrote about domestic violence. Fanzines comes from all parts of Sweden.

But there have been other events. An art exhibition with the theme: Noise from the neighbour. The artist made paintings of walls and there were all kinds of angry voices and quarrel coming from behind. The question asked was, what was the noise and what should you do as a listener and neighbour.

The RFSL help-line had its own tent at the PRIDE festival together with other organization. In the tent was possible to get all kind of information about same-sex violence from RFSL and also from the other help-lines and women shelters we work with. But as mentioned before, we work with the other national organizations and not with the local ones.

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

As already mentioned Stockholm is more of a national city than a local town. Stockholm is divided in small barrels that have their own administration such as social services and health care etc. At the same time RFSL help line is a national help line so the Stockholm based organisations really don't refer to us as co-workers at a local level.

Nevertheless, RFSL is collaborating with some local organizations, for example a network with a handful of social services persons from different social service offices, fighting hate crimes/honour related crimes. When it comes to hate crimes we work with the local hate crime police. But none of them deals with women to women domestic violence. So, to summarize, even though the national organisation RFSL offers counselling in case of hate crime or domestic violence, the local organisation (RFSL Stockholm) does not. Further, RFLS collaborates on the local level only with few experts in the area of hate crime/honour related crime. Thus, the national branch of RFSL is not rooted in the local community.

9

The ways that we do work together with other parts in fighting domestic violence is when some local help line will have a debate on domestic violence and invites RFSL help line to



make same sex violence an issue in the discussion. Some local social services also ask for information or lectures. This is the same for local women shelters and the shelter for migrant women organisations. Actually the most work we do with other organizations in Stockholm has to do with individual cases and not with the more structural work to fight domestic violence.

I think that one reason for this is that RFSL gets money from the State because it works on a national level. RFSL cannot apply for money from local institutions and thus does not provide local services.¹

Nevertheless, I assume that RFSL could improve service for victims as well as for perpetrators of women to women domestic violence if it would be rooted stronger on the local level. There are no strong reasons not to work on both, the national and the local level. But right now the most of our work to fight domestic violence in same sex relations is based on informal contacts and individual case counselling.

2.4 Conclusions

RFSL help line is trapped between national and local structures and this creates some unnecessary problems. As a consequence of this trap and because there are no local organisations addressing domestic violence in same-sex partnerships there is a silence about women to women domestic violence on the local level.

RFSL Stockholm doesn't argue for this question with the local government and the local help lines don't address RFSL even though we get invited in individual cases. But RFSL also did not put a lot of effort to get connected with the local networks, and with the police, hospital, social services, shelters etc. At the same time it has always been extremely difficult to create network to fight even heterosexual domestic violence. Different rules for example around secretes, and the fact that the social services personnel working with domestic violence moves to other work or stop working with just this question.

10

¹ I should also mention that we have difficulties to apply for local money since they define domestic violence in a heteronormative way as men's violence against women. In practice this means that sometimes it's possible to count lesbian and bisexual women and apply for money. But since RFSL is an lgbt organization and it's hard to argue for that we only should work with women and not with gay and bisexual men and transgender people.



It is important to realize that the lb community is rather big and has a broad spectrum of topics and events. But women to women domestic violence is rather unspoken even though the most women in the community realizes that it is a problem.



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

3. Methodology

3.1 Aim of the interviews

The aim of the interviews is to find out if the key agents have some thoughts around, as one of the interviewees said: “How to get people to discuss something in public they really don’t want to talk about, not even in the private.”

3.2 Interview guide

A guideline with questions in English were sent out to all of us in project and in Sweden we translated them into Swedish. It was of great importance that the questions kept their original meaning so that we all had the same focus to be able to compare and analyze the answers as a whole. But also to do conclusions that will say something about this questions and possible strategies in our respectively country as well as to find common ways to handle this question.

The interview guide

My name is [name] from [organisation]. Our organisation 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?*

Do you think that there have been changes in the awareness in the last 5 to 10 years?

How would you describe this development?

3. *Have you ever come across domestic violence in your function/position in the community?*

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:*

Present data

Leave space for the interviewee to respond before you continue with follow up questions.

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?*

Can you remember any private or public discussions about it within the last year?

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]*

What do you think contributes to the taboo?

What do you think would make it easier to discuss the taboo?

7. *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.

10. *Continuing question (6) – there is no taboo:*



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?

What do you think makes it possible for women to talk about domestic violence or potential domestic violence in their partnerships?

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?

3.3 Description of key agents

1) First key agent works with publishing. She's around 40 years old. Her engagement has to do with her desire to make a difference for our community. She gets angry when she thinks about the inequality and injustice that strike LGBT-people as a group in our society.

2) A 29 year old queer feminist activist. She's been active in the community for about 10 years making cartoons, write a blog on the Internet and manage a lesbian/women club for a number of years.

3) Has been active on the BDSM scene for many years and she is in her mid 30's. She's doing a lot of teaching in the BDSM question both within community as well externally in the majority society.

4) A journalist in her forties who writes specifically about LGBT-question. She was editor for a magazine for a couple of years. From the beginning her motive was to learn more about a hidden history and to deepen her knowledge about the topic she find interesting. Something that mainstream media didn't allow. These days it's more about solidarity with the community.

5) She's in her early thirties and has been on the political scene for almost ten years. She's been playing in a band, writing a blog as well as being a columnist in a gay magazine. She also published a book and now days also lecture.

Did they come across DV in their role in the community?

They all heard of domestic violence in their private realm but not in their professional role in the community. Rather the opposite. Even though some of them wrote or published stories about domestic violence they got less response compared to when they wrote about other serious topics.



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

4.1 Coping strategies

In general the key agents did not name any specific activities dealing with domestic violence within the community, even though three of them mentioned RFSL campaign from 2009.

The publisher who actually published a novel about domestic violence arranged evenings with the author and an expert from RFSL help line to talk about the book and domestic violence in women to women relationships.

Also the woman whom for a period of time published an lgbt magazine, mention articles that touched this subject and a portrait of a well-known gay man who speaks openly about the abuse he experienced as young. At the same time she said: “Now when I looking back I realize that violence wasn’t any main topic in the magazine. Rather it has been a couple of articles over the years.”

The women who are active in the BDSM scene said: One way I worked with violence is to have classes for beginners to teach people how to recognize and be aware of the difference between BDSM and violence.”

All agreed that this problem is something which is not discussed in the community. If there are some discussions, they are kept more at a private level and between friends. At the same time all in the community know about the existence of domestic violence but it’s not something which is discussed in public.

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

Even if they didn’t use the word taboo them self they all agreed to the thought that there practically no discussion about domestic violence in the lgbt community and they mentioned different reasons for this. When I used the word taboo they all agreed to this way to formulate the situation.

The journalist argued: “Since we are a minority group and still are exposed to structural discrimination and homophobia we really can’t afford to speak freely about problems within the



group.” And continued: “It’s much easier to speak about hate crime since this highlight the discrimination of lgbt people.”

Another thing mention was quite the contrary. The queer feminist said that: “Many people within the community want to be like the average people in the majority society.” As I interpreted her comment: We are like you even though we are lesbians, homosexuals, bisexuals, transgender”. She concluded: “And in the majority society no one talks about domestic violence so why should they be different.”

At the same time, when comes to more problematic areas like domestic violence, the lgbt-people want to present themselves as better than heterosexuals. As I interpreted it: “We don’t have this problem since our relationships are equal by definition. We don’t have gender based problems”. Either way the subject of domestic violence in same sex relations will remain unaddressed.

A third explanation discussed by the interviewees has been the familiarity of the lgbt community: the community is small and many people know each other or are friends in one way or another. The queer feminist explains: “If a victim talks about her violent experiences she indirectly or directly points out another woman as a perpetrator because everyone knows who used to be her partner.” From her point of view this is unthinkable for most victims. The reaction of the community can be a total disclosure from the community and thereby may have a negative effect on the perpetrator’s life. The queer feminist continue: “To be defined as a perpetrator is very hard and if there is no police report or no sentence there is always a possibility that it’s a rumor or the result of a bad separation. No one wants to take side in this matter since all are in the same circle of friends. At the very end it is the victims who lose because they can’t speak freely about what was really happened.”

There also is an unspoken rule in the lgbt-community in Sweden that when a couple break up whatever reason you continue to invite both women to parties and dinners. That’s because you shouldn’t take side. If this former couple is angry with each other one woman decides to stay at home and the other will accept the invitation and show up. Of course they don’t do this together but mostly the outcome is that only one woman is showing up.

A fourth obstacle mentioned also mentioned by the queer feminist activist is about the perpetrator. In a woman- to-woman context the perpetrator is someone known and maybe even taken care about. This makes it difficult to stigmatize the perpetrator as evil or bad or to rebuff her. So how will you talk about it? There is no model for how to think about a women perpetrator, except to interpret it on an individual level as a personality problem or some psy-



chological illness or as an alcohol problem. At the same time the interviewees question the approach to give up explanations on a structural level for an individualized one.

Some of the key agents underline that to break the taboo around domestic violence in women-to-women relationships it needs to be taken care of the aggressor but keeping responsibility for the violence on the perpetrator.

A fifth thing brought up was that some LGBT-people really don't understand that this can happen in an LGBT relationship and therefore don't even recognize that there is a problem. Maybe this shouldn't be defined as a taboo but as I interpret the meaning of their says is that in the context of tabooization within the community the ignorance about the problem comes to work as a tool of making the question invisible and stopping people from asking questions and looking for information. In the long run this works like a mechanism for tabooization.

The last reason brought up was that especially lesbian and women loving women can't accept bad endings since the popular culture is overloaded with it. There are tons of novels like: "The Well of Loneliness" by Radcliff Hall where the lesbian love story ends with one partner committing suicide or some other bad things happens and the relation is over. In the worst scenario one of the women finds out she is really heterosexual and leaves her partner for a man. The consequence is that no one wants to speak about bad relationships.

4.2.1 Silencing DV

A predominant expression of silencing domestic violence in women-to-women relationships is the circumstance that it is utmost difficult to talk about domestic violence with ordinary LGBT people or even interview them about their violent experiences within their partnerships. Media in our days want a "personal destiny" story but regarding domestic violence it is difficult to find a person who is willing to reveal her/his experiences and furthermore, it is a matter of ethics of not placing a client. But according to the interviewed journalist this makes it difficult, to write an interesting article about the subject.

The interviewed women would not agree to the idea that there is an active silencing when it comes to domestic violence. It's more that there are no other approaches known than the personal one to convey the phenomenon of domestic violence into the community. And as I pointed out before they mean that this is not possible since that at the same time point out a perpetrator with big consequences for her as an unwanted result. What remains is to publish information leaflets and texts and public relation work done by some specific organization such as RFSLs help line. They all agree that this is a good way to work.



From the interviewed queer feminist woman's point of view there is no genuine interest to discuss domestic violence from a more theoretical or political point of view. She explains: "In short it because there is no political gain to discuss domestic violence in lesbian relationships since this can't be explained from a male power analysis."

When it comes to most LGBT media, the journalist says that: "They focus on party and 'light' problems, even though HIV still is a big topic in our media. But actually, there is no market for many articles about that."

But there is also some silencing from the majority society. The publisher pointed out that there is no major interest of the majority society in the topic of domestic violence in women-to-women relationships. She explains: "There was a very low demand for publications shown by bookshops. Booksellers order only what they expect to get sold. A book about domestic violence in lesbian partnerships is not viewed as covering a demand." She smiles when she concludes that the book has sold out already.

4.2.2 Other tabooization mechanisms

An interesting thing that was brought up is the fact that there is no political motive or political gain to address this question in public. That differ from the heterosexual domestic violence were feminist at the same time as they speak about domestic violence also can point out and discuss patriarchy and male societal power and women's subordination.

Another thing mentioned is that women with a feminist background and/or working at a women shelter only hardly reflect the idea that women can be perpetrators as well. But since this woman come out the classification of victim and aggressor is not easy anymore and this is a difficult thing to realize. "Suddenly I realized", said one of the woman: "I could be interpreted as a perpetrator because I didn't understood the other woman signal even though I didn't really wanted to do anyone any harm." That turned all her theories upside down.

The discourses around domestic violence often create images that imply the worst scenario. That means that some of the interviewed key agents assume that the psychological violence and the more light versions of domestic violence is neglected in the debate in favor of more "hard core" physical descriptions of the violence. As the columnist of a gay media said: "What's needed to be able to speak more easily about domestic violence is a less rigid picture of violence."



Of course, in very specific settings like the BDSM scene it's not so easy to address the question of domestic violence at all. The most people within or outside the community can't really differ BDSM from violence. But as the women active at the BDSM scene said: "There is clearly a difference between domestic violence and sexual practices."

4.3 Discussed strategies to overcome the taboo

One strategy mentioned has to do with more information. Organizations like RFSLs help line should provide more and different kinds of information material. Further, they are encouraged to put the women-to-women domestic violence on the political agenda. It's important to let everybody know that there is support for both, the victim and the perpetrator. It is utmost important to line out the differences between domestic violence in women-to-women relationships and within heterosexual couples.

Another aspect highlighted by the interviewees is that it is important to have more research showing that this really is a problem in our community. Statistics and reports need to be done and put out in the public as it was done with HIV and hate crimes.. Another central question is to explain power within violent women-to-women partnerships since it is undoubtedly not based on male dominance. Here is a huge possibility to learn more about the mechanism in domestic violence regardless of the sex of the victim or the perpetrator. Further, organizing campaigns aiming at support, especially from RFSL should be on the agenda.

Most interesting was the suggestion from two of the interviewed persons is that the community needs to talk more about relationships in general and love in particular. What means a love relation, what means equality in the domestic area, how do same-sex couples organize the division of labour in the household, how do they cope with economical aspects? Those basic questions and their discussions could be a door opener for discussing domestic violence.

Furthermore they agreed that there is a need for such discussion and that it is only rarely on the agenda. When it comes to heterosexuals most newspapers write articles about relationships. But in the LGBT community the discussion tends to focus on sex and love relations on a political level. Not even now when there is a baby boom in the lesbian community are love relations discussed.

19

More concrete solutions are to work with the language and how we speak about domestic violence and especially find better words for the psychological violence. But as the feminist queer activist said: "We also need to speak about the fine line between an argument about



every day things and violence and an expression of dominance. We need to help people to define the difference between violence and arguments.”

She also further argued: “There should be lists defining violent behavior as such and explaining it by examples. This could be done as a comic strip or using pictures since a picture says more than a thousand words. People prefer to read information in this way and not in the traditional way said one informant.”

4.4 Conclusions

Even though the respondents did not reflect women-to-women domestic violence, they all made suggestions on how to deal with the problem. In some way knowledge about domestic violence and the possibility to occur was much more of a reality for them than it has been when I interviewed heterosexual women. But at the same time it was a kind of denial when it came to talk about it or having strategies to prevent it in public discussions. This is a kind of paradox.

When it came to strategies for how to communicate domestic violence some argued that the way the LGBT-movement succeed in putting HIV on the agenda could be a good example. As one respondent said, “It was even tuff to fill in the questionnaire on the internet”.

Some respondents said that a major obstacle to talk about domestic violence in women to women relations is the LGBT-people’s urge to be “better” than heterosexuals. LGBT-people don’t do gender based things like violence and if that’s the case there is nothing to talk about. But I also think that a reason for this silence is the difficulty to understand how and why it occurs at all. The theoretical explanation has been for many years that domestic violence is correlated to male dominance and patriarchal structures. Since many people think that same sex domestic violence cannot be explained this way some don’t know what to think at all while others get afraid to contribute to once again put heterosexual domestic violence away from the political agenda. This causes some frustration and the easiest way to handle that is to put women-to-women domestic violence from the public sphere. But it’s the victims who will pay the price.



PART III: Final conclusions

The first conclusion drawn is that the key agents verified the thought about the tabooization of domestic violence in women-to-women relationships. Even though they took part at the debates in gay media and other scenes of the community, the problem appears not to be on the agenda.

A second conclusion drawn is based on the remarks about the perpetrator that some of the interviewee have uttered. Coming from the heterosexual feminist movement in to the queer community in some ways make them reflect on the stigmatization of the offender. Maybe it has to do with the lack of knowledge about domestic violence in women-to-women relationships but I think it points out an obstacle to raise the question about violence. It's really important to overcome this since it's only the victim who can lose in terms of support and help if the focus is on the eventual stigma on the perpetrator.

The need of other ways to talk about the problem is interesting. For many years the discussions has focused on severe and brutal violence. But now it's time to focus more on the psychological, emotional and economical violence to be able to help women to put words on their experiences. It really doesn't need to come to physical violence to be in a violent relationship. Here we need to find ways to communicate the more invisible forms of violence.

Another interesting result was the need for discussions about what relationships in women-to-women context means. Is there any division of labor, economical injustices and how is that correlated to domestic violence? If this topic is discussed it's maybe possible to get close to that fine line when the relationship get violent and put the not so brutal forms of DV into the focus. The challenge here is to talk about relationships in a non-heteronormative way.

To sum up, it's possible to note that even though the respondents have not done so much in this field, they still had some new and interesting reflections to share. Those hopefully can help us to come closer to the aim of overcoming the tabooization of domestic violence in women-to-women relationships.

