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Non-Physical Forms of Intimate Partner Violence in
Lesbian Relationships

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Sociology

by

Jessica Lynn Giordano

B.A. The University of Texas at Austin, 2008

May, 2010

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Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Abstract	vi
Introduction	1
Literature Review.....	6
Domestic Violence.....	7
Power and Control	12
Studying Lesbian Relationships.....	15
Sources of Support.....	22
Overview.....	25
The Research Process.....	28
Interpretive Interactionism Strategy	30
Qualitative Methods	31
Data, Coding, and Analysis	33
Validity and Reliability	35
Limitations	36
Ethics	37
Participants.....	38
Discussion of Findings.....	43
Identifying Abuse That is Not Physical	43
Framing Abusive Behaviors	47
Coping	55
Help Seeking.....	58
Support Structure	61
The Relationship Ended.....	67
How Survivors Viewed Themselves.....	69
Homophobia.....	72
Suggestions For Intervention	74
Future Research	80
References	82
Appendix A: Recruitment Script	86
Appendix B: IRB Approval	87
Vita	88

List of Figures

The Power and Control Wheel.....	13
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Abstract

An extensive review of the existing literature makes apparent that academics who study intimate partner violence focus primarily on physical violence in heterosexual relationships. Non-physical forms of abuse receive secondary attention, despite reported claims from survivors that non-physical forms of abuse are more common, more painful, and have longer lasting effects than physical forms of abuse. The dominant focus on intimate partner violence as a social problem enacted by males on their female partners results in a lack of sufficient literature or conversation pertaining to abuse that exists outside these parameters. Members of sexual minority groups are deliberately excluded from the mainstream movement to protect and support survivors of intimate partner violence. Influenced by these realizations, this research explores the dynamics of non-physical forms of intimate partner violence in lesbian relationships; particularly the ways survivors frame the abuse and their experiences with seeking help.

Keywords: Intimate partner violence, Lesbian, Non-physical forms of abuse, Queer

Intimate partner violence (IPV) is a term that refers to something much more than physical violence. Broadly defined, it is “that pattern of violent and coercive behaviors whereby [an intimate partner] seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs or conduct of her intimate partner or to punish the intimate for resisting the perpetrator’s control over her” (Hart 1986:173). The literature reviewed most frequently discussed negative impacts of IPV on the lives of survivors, those individuals whose partners, abusers, use abusive behaviors to maintain power and control over them (Beeble, Bybee, Sullivan, and Adams 2009; Dutton 1992; Edleson and Brygger 1986; Girshick 2002a; Girshick 2002b; Irwin 2008; Jenkins 1996; Lobel ed 1986; Renzetti 1992; Robinson 2002; Russo 2001; Stark 2007; Strauchler, McCloskey, Malloy, Sitaker, Grigsby, and Gillig 2004; Waldrop and Resick 2004; Walker 2009). Through IPV, the “capacity for independent decision making” is taken from survivors “in the areas by which we distinguish adults from children and free citizens from indentured servants” (Stark 2007: 15). IPV was shown to influence survivors to change their habits and behaviors through things such as: the acquisition of coping skills, the development of mental anguish, and drastic change in social groups (Beeble et al. 2009; Waldrop and Resick 2004). Despite the principal focus on the impact IPV has on survivors, IPV in its many forms inflicts pain and suffering upon all members of the society in which it exists (Russo 2001). Some examples of this include: a survivor’s performance at work suffers, neighbors are awakened by screams and crashes in the home of an abusive partnership, and children are used as a tool of manipulation. These are only some of the factors that influence major players in the domestic violence movement to claim IPV is not a private matter; rather, it is a social problem (Silverman 2009).

The domestic violence movement, a feminist inspired large-scale social response to IPV, began with listening and grassroots organizing more than thirty years ago (Stark 2007; Stark

2010). In the beginning, individuals joined together and opened their homes to protect survivors from their abusive partners. Over time, the movement grew into a network of social agencies that include: grassroots organizations, non-profit advocacy programs, legal and medical systems, and academia. Though these entities do not always function in cohesion, they influenced an increase in public awareness about the existence of IPV within this society and created social resources for survivors such as hotlines and shelters (Stark 2007). This movement also influenced a progression over time by which communities increasingly relied on efforts backed by the non-profit sector and the criminal justice system to handle concerns surrounding IPV (Merry 2003). Unfortunately, this approach has not successfully decreased the prevalence of abuse in intimate partnerships (Griffin 2009; Stark 2007; Stark 2010). Furthermore, a hierarchy resulted by which heterosexual female survivors were deemed more worthy of resources than all other survivors of IPV as well as all others affected by IPV. Those survivors who are not heterosexual females lack equal access to protection and support from the domestic violence movement (Russo 2001).

Existing studies predominantly concentrated on physical forms of relationship abuse despite the recognition that the non-physical forms were just as, if not more, prevalent (Balsam 2001; Hart 1986; Irwin 2008; Lobel 1986; Outlaw 2009; Renzetti 1992; Strauchler et al. 2004; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). This influenced the social belief that a woman is abused only if we can see scars and bruises left on her body by a man, but this is not the case. Furthermore, the body of theoretical work concerning IPV, in either heterosexual or lesbian relationships, exhibited little uniformity. The one area most academics agreed was that power and control were the core motives behind all abusive behaviors (Balsam 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Hart 1986; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; NCAVP 2008; Pharr 1997; Renzetti

1992; Russo 2001; Strauchler et al. 2004). Researchers also attributed intimate partner violence to structural injustices, the most common of which cites patriarchy as the structural cause of IPV (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Irwin 2008; Merry 2003).

Many academics who studied IPV in lesbian relationships sought individual-level explanations for abusers' actions such as: minority stress or the manifestation of internalized homophobia (Balsam 2001; Balsam & Szymanski 2005; Tigert 2001). The focus on individual causes was of little use to the exploration of IPV as a social problem or the creation of a lesbian-specific movement to end IPV. Furthermore, the body of work on the lesbian population often relied on models based on the experiences of women in heterosexual relationships to form their analyses, which failed to recognize things such as structural homophobia which influence the experiences of lesbian survivors (Giorgio 2002; Hart 1986; Irwin 2008). Academics attributed this to an effort to validate IPV in lesbian relationships by "drawing parallels and highlighting similarities to a recognized form of violence" (Miller, Greene, Causby, White, and Lockhart 2001: 108; Stark 2007). Nevertheless, when academics and helping professionals presented their research on IPV in heterosexual relationships they mentioned abuse experienced by lesbian women as an experience less severe and distinguishable from the heterosexual model (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Silverman 2009; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). The heterosexual model comes out of a heteronormative society or the "normative regime that ascribes social value to heterosexuality relative to alternative sexual identities and disproportionately allocates opportunities, rights, and benefits accordingly, particularly those associated with marriage or family life" (Stark 2007: 394). Heterosexual literature discussed IPV in lesbian, and other queer relationships, most often as a side-note, not the focus. This presented unavoidable conflict within the movement to end IPV, as it created a hierarchy of who was most deserving of support

and resources. Simply put, the failure to focus on the needs of those who do not fit the mainstream model is a failure to provide support to *all* who experience IPV. Though, as actors in the domestic violence movement frequently state, approximately one in four women experience some form of violence at the hands of a loved one in their lifetime, a comprehensive understanding of what happens within intimate partnerships does not exist (Stark 2007; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). Accurate statistics on the prevalence of IPV in lesbian relationships do not exist at this time¹; however, IPV is a relevant issue in lesbian relationships as well as other queer relationships (Balsam 2001). As a queer feminist researcher, I spoke with women who self-identify as both lesbians and survivors to create a research project that remains accountable to these women as well as provides a useful tool for those with whom they interact: academia, services providers, caretakers, and so on.

It is undeniably helpful to create literature directed to the academic community and helping professionals; however, it is crucial that the information produced within this body of work is also presented to the general public, those whose lives are affected by IPV on a daily basis. I created this work as a resource for and about survivors, as well as abusers, who presently are without helpful information that shares the experiences of survivors and provides a catalyst for conversation surrounding the problem of IPV in relationships that are not heterosexual. Once lesbian survivors of IPV understand that what they are experiencing is abuse and a social problem, they, in addition to academics and helping professionals, will be more able to frame what it is they need to be safe and feel supported.

¹ A total count of the current lesbian population within the United States does not exist. The best resource for population counts, the US Census, only recently began including statistics on same-sex unmarried partner households. These statistics do not include counts of “single gay or lesbian people, nor [do they] count those people in relationships but not living together in the same residence” (Smith & Gates 2001: 2). The numbers provided by the 2000 US Census report 297,061 total lesbian families living in the United States. However, this number comes from a calculated 62 percent undercount of the total number of gay and lesbian people living in committed relationships (Smith & Gates 2001: 2). Researchers estimate a total gay and lesbian population of 10,456,405 individuals currently living in the United States (Smith & Gates 2001).

Despite my desire to share this work with the women of the lesbian community, the immediate intended audience of this work is the academic community. I conducted this research project with the objective of contributing to the growing academic literature on abuse within intimate partnerships. However, this is not where the scope of my reach ends. I also wrote with the goal that those within the helping professions (hotlines, community centers, and shelters) would find my research both understandable and useful. These programs need to find a way to better incorporate awareness training on both lesbian relationships (as well as other queer relationships) and on non-physical forms of intimate partner violence.

In support of these claims, I open with a review of the existing literature and theory on topics relevant to IPV. I begin with foundational works of domestic violence literature and dominant theories supported by the heterosexual literature. I touch on the issues surrounding the identification of abusive behaviors and highlight the importance of a focus on non-physical forms of IPV. Finally, I relay the issues surrounding the study of IPV in lesbian relationships that include: heteronormativity/homophobia, silence within the queer community, and problems within the domestic violence movement. This literature review provides readers with a basic understanding of the problem under investigation. Furthermore, this review of the literature led to the following research questions:

1. How does a self-identified lesbian survivor of IPV frame the abuse she incurred?
2. In what ways, if any, did the survivor reach out for help concerning the abusive relationship?
3. Was the abuser held accountable² for her actions?

² For purposes of this research, accountability is defined as any efforts on the part of those outside the abusive relationship to illustrate that they considered abusive behaviors unacceptable.

A detailed explanation of the qualitative methods I employed throughout this study follows the literature review and leads into an explanation of my findings. The concluding pages highlight suggestions for future research and advocacy work. In its entirety, this work contributes to the growing body of work on IPV in lesbian relationships as well as the less focused upon subject of non-physical forms of IPV.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the course of more than thirty years various actors in the domestic violence movement produced literature on the topics surrounding intimate partner violence. Academics and advocates alike created literature on everything from the broad topic of institutional structures conducive to violence to the specific topic of date rape among lesbians (Girshick 2002a; Girshick 2002b). Intimate partner violence affects the lives of all members of this society, regardless of whether or not they identify as either a survivor or an abuser. An individual abused by her partner is no longer able to invest herself fully in the various social roles she holds outside her abusive intimate relationship: caretaker, friend, and co-worker (Dutton 1992). Therefore, IPV is not an individual problem but a social issue.

Though I refer to the “domestic violence movement,” I did not find a consistent depiction of IPV within the literature reviewed. Dobash and Dobash (1979) established early on that patriarchy was the root of violence against women; though, subsequent researchers provided multiple theories in an attempt to explain the problem of IPV on both the individual and the structural level. Also, academics acknowledged non-physical forms of abuse as severe but failed to focus on them as primary means used by abusers to maintain power and control. Furthermore, the domestic violence movement which overwhelmingly focused on abuse enacted by males on their female partners as *the* social issue hindered the advance of queer-specific theories of IPV

and led to an incoherent picture of IPV in queer relationship. What the literature reviewed successfully revealed is that the social structure of present society is conducive to intimate partner violence, and multiple facets of social life must be taken into account when analyzing such abuse (Balsam 2001; Balsam and Szymanski 2005; Brown, Chesney-Lind, and Stein 2007; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Girshick 2002a; Girshick 2002b; Griffin 2009; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2006; Irwin 2008; Jenkins 1996; Jenkins and Davidson 2001; Lobel 1986; Loue 2001; McClennen 2005; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Merry 2003; Outlaw 2009; Pharr 1997; Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002; Russo 2001; Strauchler et al. 2004; Tigert 2001; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000; Turrell 2000; Walker 2009).

Domestic Violence

Dobash and Dobash (1979) were one of the first to write about domestic violence in an accessible and comprehensive way. Therefore, I used their book *Violence Against Women* as the historical starting point for literature about and collaborative action to combat IPV (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Dobash and Dobash (1979) provide a reference point for measuring progress, or a lack thereof, in the movement to end IPV. These pioneers of the domestic violence movement stated that for women “the family is the most violent group to which they are likely to belong” (Dobash and Dobash 1979:7). They defined domestic violence as “the systematic, frequent, and brutal use of physical force” (1979:11). This initial definition provided the language to identify and discuss abuse within intimate relationships as researchers theorized about the structural injustices that contribute to the existence of IPV in this society.

A variety of theoretical assumptions grounded in feminist scholarship contributed to the exploration of IPV. Feminist scholars focused on the importance of gender relations within this society and the influence the imbalance of power between men and women had on every facet of

social life (Dobash and Dobash 1979). These scholars noted that IPV was constructed and supported within this society's system of unequal distribution of power, and this system of power traditionally favored men through patriarchy. Patriarchy is the "enforced belief in male dominance and control" (Pharr 1997: 8). For example, men are socialized to *know* that they are the more powerful sex or gender and, thus, are justified in using violence against their female partners to maintain this power within society. Conversely, women are socialized to *know* that they are the less powerful sex or gender and must submit to their male partners. Following this logic, it becomes understandable why women often bear the pain of their abuse as if it is a necessary element of maintaining intimate partnerships with men. According to those theorists who cited patriarchy as the cause of IPV, "the seeds of wife beating lie in the subordination of females and in their subjection to male authority and control" (Dobash and Dobash 1979: 33). The theory of the influence of patriarchy as it relates to the etiology of violence was one of the first presented (Dobash and Dobash 1979). It also remains the dominant theory supported by others that followed.

Suzanne Pharr (1997) looked at the structural constraint of sexism within a patriarchal society as one tool of intimate partner violence. She presented violence against women as a means of men maintaining power and control over women through sexism. The social belief of sexism presents itself in the way men act on a sense of entitlement to women's bodies; men believe women are theirs to own, use, and abuse as they see fit. Consequently, society accepts violence enacted on women because women lack ownership over their own bodies. Patriarchy and sexism also construct the woman as weak, tolerant, and deserving of abuse (Hart 1986). According to Pharr (1997), this constructed a society in which males abuse the women to whom they are intimately connected, and women learned to accept the abuse as something they deserve,

or at the very least a normal part of life. These theories do not encompass the entire body of academic work related to IPV; however, they point to an overarching theme of “dominance over” as a structural cause for all behaviors that manifest as IPV.

Forms of abuse

Previous literature used a number of terms to describe what is now referred to as intimate partner violence. It was originally called domestic violence (Dobash and Dobash 1979) and has since been referred to as battering and abuse (Girshick 2002a; Girshick 2002b; Miller, Greene, Causby, White, and Lockhart 2001). The shift to the use of the term “intimate partner violence” intentionally separated this type of intimate violence from other types of family violence, such as elderly violence, sibling abuse, and child abuse. It also allowed for the inclusion of all types of intimate partnerships “regardless of the couples’ marital status, age, or gender” (McClennen 2005: 150). Still, this term is not perfect since the use of the term “violence” implies physical harm done and omits non-physical forms of abuse from its implication. Violence specific language resulted from what Stark (2007) referred to as an “emergent consensus” that came about in the late 1980s and assumed abuse within intimate partnerships meant domestic *violence*. I chose to use IPV within this paper despite its imperfections to highlight the importance of including discussions such as this one of the severity of non-physical forms of abuse within the dominant discourse.

It was difficult to find two research projects that labeled forms of IPV in the same way. Some researchers grouped forms of abuse broadly such as Turrell (2000) who looked at physical, sexual, and emotional forms of abuse or McClennen (2005) who looked at sexual, physical, financial, and emotional forms of abuse. Other researchers distinguished certain aspects of non-physical forms of abuse such as McLaughlin and Rozee (2001) who looked at the practices of

using isolation and threats of exposure as different forms of abuse. Miller et al. (2001) broke abuse into the categories of: violence, aggression, verbal, emotional, psychological, physical, and sexual abuse. Stark (2007) suggested the use of the term coercive control in place of IPV. Finally, Outlaw (2009) broke down abuse into the categories of physical and non-physical and then further deconstructed non-physical forms of abuse into emotional, psychological, social, and economic forms. Innumerable possible social experiences lead to a multitude of ways IPV can be experienced and studied. The overwhelming trend in the literature reviewed was a focus on physical abuse as the more noteworthy experience supported by mentions of non-physical forms of abuse as secondary (Balsam 2001; Outlaw 2009; Strauchler et al. 2000). An unintended consequence is that crucial strategies used by abusers to maintain power and control over their partners are ignored (Russo 2001; Stark 2007; Stark 2010).

Non-physical forms of IPV are systematic means by which abusers repeatedly carry out behaviors that cause harm to their partners without the use of physical or sexual violence despite the knowledge that their partners find these behaviors to be damaging. These include, but are by no means limited to, the abusive behaviors mentioned in the spokes of The Power and Control Wheel (discussed later): intimidation, isolation, economic abuse, and so on (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs 2008). Dutton (1992) distinguished different types of abuse that are not physical. She provided examples of emotional abuse that include: insulting, calling names, and attempting to make one feel crazy (Dutton 1992). In comparison, she outlined psychological abuse to include: making threats and attempting to get one to engage in illegal activities (Dutton 1992). As mentioned, academics frequently reported on the severity and prevalence of these and other non-physical forms of IPV within both the heterosexual and homosexual communities (Hart 1986; Irwin 2008; Lobel 1986; Strauchler et al. 2004). In her participatory study that

utilized questionnaires to analyze responses from a sample of one hundred self-identified “victims of lesbian battering” Renzetti found that non-physical forms of abuse occur more frequently than physical (1992: 13). Beeble et al. (2009) used data on 160 survivors to do longitudinal multilevel modeling in which they compared physical and psychological abuse as they influence quality of life and depression. Though they found that both physical and non-physical forms of abuse related to a survivor’s experience with depression, only “psychological abuse” was related to a participant’s quality of life (Beeble et al. 2009). They concluded, “one’s appraisal of and satisfaction with life largely relates to the extent to which one experiences psychological abuse, over and above physical abuse” (Beeble et al. 2009: 726). Outlaw (2009), in a secondary data analysis, found that non-physical forms of relationship abuse are four times more common than physical forms of abuse. However, researchers only gave these forms of abuse attention as they exist “in conjunction with” (Turrell 2000: 283) or “coupled with” (Hart 1986: 173) physical and sometimes sexual forms of abuse (Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). They failed to focus on non-physical forms of abuse as primary tools used by abusers to achieve power and control over their partners, despite the recognition that non-physical forms of abuse did exist in intimate relationships in which there was no physical abuse (Dutton 1992; Outlaw 2009). Researchers established that abuse that is not physical exists; it is more difficult to define it and discuss its impacts (Stark 2007).

Pharr asserted that many women claimed non-physical forms of abuse were more harmful than physical violence because they damaged “self-esteem so deeply” (1997:15). Pharr (1997) recognized the social acknowledgement of non-physical forms of abuse as damaging to be an acknowledgement that all women are battered women in a sexist world. This does not necessarily mean all women are survivors of IPV; rather, all women in this society are subjected

to structural injustices that cause them harm but do not involve the use of physical or sexual violence. For example, all women are bombarded with images that portray the perfect bodies that they are expected to attain. Women are manipulated into a life of diet, exercise, tanning, plucking, slicing, and many other things to mold their bodies into the image of what society tells them they are supposed to be. Widespread knowledge of this as a form of abuse would serve to create a sense of community among females as well as a threat to the existing patriarchal structure. However, non-physical forms of abuse remain invisible to the eye trained by society. Evan Stark (2007) supported this claim with an argument for the recognition of coercive control, which includes physical violence as an element of a larger process of abuse, as a crime against human rights. Stark (2007) stated:

Coercive control lacks the fungibility of violence. We can't see or touch its consequences the way we can injury. And literal deprivations and objective constraints pose even more formidable obstacles to disclosure than violence or fear (P. 372).

Though advocates face difficulties identifying non-physical forms of abuse, the severity of these behaviors remains threatening to survivors. Some of the recorded psychological affects of non-physical forms of abuse include: changes in cognition, psychological distress, and relational disturbances in relationships other than the abusive one (Dutton 1992). Activist survivors also highlighted the scope of non-physical forms of abuse when they included a variety of them in The Power and Control Wheel (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs 2008).

Power and Control

An instrument frequently used by those working closely with relationship abuse is The Power and Control Wheel created by survivors living in Duluth, Minnesota (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs 2008; Jenkins and Davidson 2001). This diagram is a visual representation of the dominant model of IPV. The Wheel was originally created as a tool to

identify and influence discussion around the topic of domestic violence (Ristock 2002). A ring of physical and sexual violence surrounds the spokes of this wheel, implying these forms of violence constantly lurk behind all abusive behaviors. Behaviors that abusers use to establish power and control emanate from the center; these include: using intimidation; using emotional abuse; using isolation; minimizing, denying and blaming; using children; using male privilege; using economic abuse; and using coercion and threats (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs 2008). These behaviors are all distinguishable forms of abuse that are not physical. Finally, at the center of the wheel, power and control represent the assumed core motives behind all abusive behaviors.

Figure 1: The Power and Control Wheel



The Power and Control Wheel is limited and has endured much criticism from the academic community. For example, the inference that the threat of physical and sexual violence is behind all forms of abuse is challenged. Survivors reveal that the non-physical forms of abuse often exist apart from any physical or sexual forms of violence. However, this criticism has yet to be fully explored. The Wheel was originally designed “to have women look at their situations, as well as other women’s” (Ristock 2002: 137), and recognize the various abusive behaviors within many of their intimate relationships. This tool has more recently been misused as a diagram of what domestic violence is rather than what domestic violence can look like. This results in a failure “to pay attention to the social and cultural locations of [survivors] or abusers” (Ristock 2002: 142). Because there are various social factors that contribute to individual relationships in which IPV exists, to create a representative diagram of abuse is impossible. Nevertheless, when taken as a starting point for discussion and analysis, The Power and Control Wheel remains useful.

The dominant literature reviewed on IPV confirmed The Wheel’s implication that intimate partner violence is about the abuser finding ways to exhibit power and control over the survivor (Balsam 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Hart 1986; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; NCAVP 2008; Pharr 1997; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001; Strauchler et al. 2004). Alicia Cast (2003) discussed power as the ability of an individual to control meanings in particular situations. She claimed “those with power are able to assert themselves and impose their own definition of the situation on others, thus potentially reproducing and maintaining the structural arrangements that privilege them” (2003: 198). Once recognized, the external forces that influence any relationship make it apparent that power and control are complex issues that cannot be addressed casually. Though the abuser may hold more power at the times she enacts

abusive behaviors, this does not mean the survivor is powerless within the relationship. Power imbalances fluctuate in relation to social power, gender power, financial power, and so on. Power dynamics are even more obscure in lesbian relationships in which the structural inequalities between men and women created by patriarchy do not manifest as clearly.

Studying Lesbian Relationships

Abuse within lesbian relationships has not been fully understood nor explored. Despite the fact that Dobash and Dobash (1979) opened up the pathway for conversation about and research on domestic violence, it was not until a decade later when Keri Lobel's edited work *Naming the Violence: Speaking Out About Lesbian Battering* (1986) came out that the study of abuse within lesbian relationships received widespread recognition (Giorgio 2002). The literature that followed this work provided countless views on IPV in lesbian relationships and the consequences of its existence. However, an accurate picture of IPV in lesbian relationships does not exist. This is in part because there are no accurate statistics and it is assumed that intimate partner violence in lesbian relationships is underreported (Irwin 2008; (Miller et al. 2001; NCAVP 2008). The aforementioned tendency of queer literature on IPV to rely on the framework of the heterosexual movement also thwarts efforts to understand IPV in queer relationships.

Some academics who subscribe to the heterosexual model of abuse have made it clear their work is not applicable to queer relationships. Prominent actors in the domestic violence movement often claim, as Silverman (2009) did, that studying gender violence perpetrated by women and men (referring to IPV in queer relationships) is not a public health issue and is not a wise use of resources. To include statistics on IPV within queer relationships could weaken the argument of major players in the IPV community who still claim that IPV is a social issue

because men abuse women. Their point is understood and should not be entirely discounted, as previous theorists showed women have historically been mistreated and abused at the hands of men in this society and continue to be so today in this patriarchal society (Dobash and Dobash 1979). However, abuse exists within lesbian relationships as well, despite the absence of a male partner.

Hart (1986) explained that lesbians, just as non-lesbian women, are socialized in a society that legitimates the power of one partner, traditionally the man, over another, the woman. Hart (1986) explained:

Family members constitute a discrete unit, separated somewhat from persons outside of the family. Individuals are treated like the property of the unit. Family members feel a strong connection of ownership to each other and expect a greater degree of loyalty and trust from each other than from outsiders. Intimate partners in family units believe they are entitled to certain services from each other. They also feel that they have the right to exercise some degree of control over other family members. (P. 175)

Hart (1986) supported the theory of patriarchy as the cause of IPV. She attributed the adoption of the heterosexual model of a relationship (which contains a hierarchy of power, ownership, and entitlement) by lesbians as the reason IPV exists within lesbian relationships (Hart 1986).

Girshick also related the existence of abuse to the “the organizing principle of power-over...the idea that hierarchical structures should be the basis of human interaction” (2002a: 18). It is this culture’s structural design of the intimate partnership as a hierarchy of power that permits the space for abuse to occur.

As a feminist researcher, I recognize and support the claim that patriarchy creates a society that is structurally conducive to IPV. Though, the result of such a rigid investment in the theory of patriarchy by actors in the domestic violence movement created a hierarchy of which relationships deserve more resources and attention. Stark (2007), like other prominent figures in

the domestic violence movement, distinguished the experiences of lesbians from heterosexual women. However, he did not attempt to minimize the severity of IPV in lesbian relationships. Rather, Stark spoke to the importance of realizing that a lesbian survivor experiences “animus as a multilayered phenomena rather than as bias directed against a single trait” (2007: 392). Not only do lesbian survivors experience abuse in the context of sexual inequality but also heterosexism and homophobia (Stark 2007). Knowledge that lesbians experience IPV at the intersection of multiple oppressions further strengthens the argument that their experiences deserve acknowledgement.

Homophobia and heterosexism

Within this heteronormative society, homophobia manifests as a social stigma enacted on heterosexual women as a form of abuse. “The force of sexual normalcy cuts across multiple systems of privilege and oppression, [and] is used to regulate all people” (Ward and Schneider 2009: 433). Some illustrations of this include: the way many men call their partners “dykes” or “lesbians” as a means to force them into submission and feminists are referred to as lesbians to quiet their cries for equality (Enke 2003; Pharr 1997). Consequently, these practices also reinforce the stigmas attached to queer individuals. Though omitted from a large portion of the heterosexual literature, the weapon of homophobia, with the power to “damage and destroy lives” (Pharr 1997: 2), influences the lives of lesbian survivors who navigate within this heteronormative society (Balsam 2001; Balsam and Szymanski 2005; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; NCAVP 2008; Raphael and Meyer 2000; Robinson 2002; Russo 2001; Tigert 2001). A society in which the private realm of lesbian women’s lives “are pathologized by the dominant culture” potentially leaves lesbian survivors isolated from help and emotionally distraught (Balsam 2001:28; Pharr 1997).

Unjust beliefs resulting in practices, such as homophobia, racism, ableism, and so forth, provide those in power with the weapons they need to both justify and maintain their power and impede minority members from accessing resources and support within this society (Russo 2001). Pharr (1997) summarized the source of social stigmas attached to lesbianism when she stated:

To be a lesbian is to be *perceived* as someone who has stepped out of line, who has moved out of sexual/economic dependence on a male, and who is woman-identified. A lesbian is seen as someone who can live without a man, and who is therefore against men. A lesbian is assumed to be outside the acceptable, routine order of things. She is defined as someone who has no societal institutions to protect her and who is not privileged to the protection of individual males. Many heterosexual women see her as someone who stands in contradiction to the sacrifices they have made to conform to compulsory heterosexuality. A lesbian is perceived as a threat to the nuclear family, to male dominance and control, to the very heart of sexism. (P. 18)

As a response to the ingrained homophobia within society, lesbian theorists created a wealth of knowledge that acknowledges the normalcy of lesbian existence. Adrienne Rich (1980) carved out a niche for feminist lesbians who are traditionally viewed as the *alternative* to heterosexual women. She called for lesbian existence to be acknowledged as “a reality” and “a source of knowledge and power available to women” (Rich 1980: 633). She challenged the assumption that women would prefer men if their status was actually equal to that of men. Rich (1980) created the image of a world in which women are raised as equals to men and do not come of age having been taught that they cannot exist without a male partner. She also claimed that heterosexuality is a political institution that serves specific purposes in our present society, such as helping men maintain their power. Rich’s (1980) arguments still resonate true today in a time when lesbians continue to be viewed as sexually perverse, and anti-gay legislation attempts to deny equal rights to queer couples within society. Furthermore, structural homophobia affects the three types of social support discussed within this paper and obstructs lesbian survivors’

access to help from friends and family, helping organizations, and the legal arena. The recognition of homophobia, as it persists within the domestic violence movement as well as other facets of society, led some researchers to look specifically at IPV in lesbian relationships.

Intimate partner violence among lesbians

Most academics who studied IPV within lesbian relationships agreed with Hart's statement that "lesbians batter their lovers because violence is often an effective method to gain power and control over intimates" (1986:174). They also referenced Hart's definition of abuse in which she stated: "lesbian battering is that pattern of violent and coercive behaviors whereby a lesbian seeks to control the thoughts, beliefs, or conduct of her intimate partner or to punish the intimate for resisting the perpetrator's control over her" (1986: 173). These quotes illustrated the prevailing focus, which mirrored the heterosexual literature, on physical violence as the primary abusive behavior (Balsam 2001; Balsam and Szymanski 2005; Giorgio 2002; Irwin 2008; McLennen 2005; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Miller et al. 2001; Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002; Robinson 2002; Russo 2001; Tigert 2001). For purposes of this research, I altered the language of the second part of this definition to remove the violence specific language *and* provide a definition inclusive of abuse in all types of intimate partnerships. The result outlines the parameters for determining if a person is abused and reads: "if the [survivor] becomes fearful of the violator, if she modifies her behavior in response to the [abuse] or to avoid future abuse, or if the [survivor] intentionally maintains a particular consciousness or behavioral repertoire to avoid [abuse], despite her preference not to do so, she is [abused]" (Hart 1986:173). In addition, I refer to Stark's statement that constraints placed by abusers on their partners are "patterned, ongoing, nonvoluntary, and personalized" (2007: 38). These parameters used to recognize IPV are widely accepted within the domestic violence movement.

Concerning IPV in lesbian relationships, some researchers ventured to explain the existence of abuse based on individual characteristics of the abusers. Renzetti (1992) combined questionnaires and interviews in her study of one hundred self-identified survivors of IPV. She was one of the first to focus on correlates of abuse such as substance use and intergenerational violence (Renzetti 1992). Other possible explanations of abuse explored include: batterers were abused as children, batterers only abuse when under the influence of drugs, lesbian batterers manifest their own homophobia, lesbian batterers have personality disorders, fusion in lesbian relationships causes conflict, and many more (Balsam 2001; McClennen 2005; Miller et al. 2001; Tigert 2001). Investigation into each of these individual causes failed to draw commonalities among lesbian relationships and distracted from the focus of IPV in individual lesbian relationships as part of a larger social problem.

Other researchers addressed and criticized the various negative effects of the heterosexual, and often homophobic, domestic violence movement on lesbian survivors. McLaughlin and Rozee (2001) interviewed 297 lesbian/bisexual women and found that those interviewed were more familiar with IPV in heterosexual than homosexual relationships. From analysis of her in-depth interviews with eleven survivors Giorgio (2002) found that the gender specific language surrounding IPV silenced her participants who were unable to relate their experience to caretakers. Similarly, Irwin interviewed twenty-one survivors and found that the heterosexual framework coupled with the “invalidation” of lesbianism as a sexual identity “influenced both how [survivors] saw themselves and their material experiences of the violence” in a negative way (2008: 206). This body of work illustrates that the existence of homophobia clearly distinguishes lesbian survivors’ experiences with IPV from those of heterosexual female survivors. This body of work contributed to literature on the topic of IPV in lesbian relationships

that emerged in the face of politically motivated efforts of different groups to conceal its existence.

In the historical period when Dobash and Dobash (1979) opened the door for conversation about IPV in this society and others, lesbians fought homophobic heterosexual feminists to gain recognition within the second wave of the women's movement as activists grappled "to determine in what ways feminism and lesbian rights activism overlapped and in what ways they were distinct" (Gilmore and Kaminski 2007: 100; Stein 1992). Talk of women's liberation from male oppression brought about an environment in which women repressed the voices of other women, lesbians as well as other minority women. Though lesbians composed a large portion of the second wave feminists, their contributions were rarely acknowledged and were often criticized (Enke 2003). In 1969 Betty Friedan referred to lesbians as the "lavender menace" which posed a threat to the then prominent National Organization of Women (Gilmore and Kaminski 2007). Further division within the movement developed as embittered feminists attributed the failure of the Equal Rights Amendment in 1982 to the association of feminism with lesbianism (Gilmore and Kaminski 2007). Consequently, those radical lesbians who chose to break away from heteronormative feminist groups claimed lesbianism as a political identity (Enke 2003; Gilmore and Kaminski 2007). This, in part, led to the deliberate creation of a utopian idea that all lesbians have relationships based on equality and respect for other women (Lorber 1999).

Influenced by the image of the nurturing lesbian existence, research published by lesbians before 1986 focused primarily on the positive dynamics of lesbian relationships (Peplau, Cochran, Rook, and Padesky 1978; Rich 1980). Unfortunately, this image is a "feminist utopianism" that denies the existence of IPV within lesbian relationships, "perpetuates the

institutional abuse of survivors, and forestalls structural changes” (Koyama 2006: 213). Because political activists engaged in efforts to preserve the image of lesbians as loving and non-violent toward other women, lesbian communities have been hesitant to admit violence exists within our own relationships (Balsam 2001; Hart 1986; Miller et al. 2001; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001). Regardless, lesbian survivors have appealed “to get the issue of violence among lesbians out of the closet” (Crall 1986: 36). Many lesbian survivors want other women like themselves to know they are not alone and the abuse is not their fault (Northwood 1986). There are a number of negative consequences to this stigma created around IPV in lesbian relationships: isolation of survivors, lack of accountability, stigmas surrounding abuse, and so on. These outcomes contribute to the perpetual victimization of lesbian survivors of all types of abuse as well as a lack of support within the greater communities in which they experience abuse (Irwin 2008).

Sources of Support

Previous scholars identified three informal and formal major support systems for survivors of abuse; these include: family and friends, helping professionals, and the legal system (Balsam 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Giorgio 2002; Irwin 2008; Jenkins and Davidson 2001; McClennen 2005; Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002; Russo 2001). Unfortunately, lesbian survivors have very little access to any of these sources of support and are less likely to turn to resources that are not geared specifically toward lesbians (Girshick 2002a; Girshick 2002b; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001). Existing literature provided an understanding of the structural significances and shortcomings of these types of support in the lives of all survivors of IPV.

Family, friends, and other social contacts all comprise a valuable support system for survivors of abuse and increase their resources. The availability of this type of support structure is especially beneficial to lesbian survivors who may not see help from potentially homophobic

advocates as an option (Dutton 1992). Then again, this type of support may not be an actual choice for lesbian survivors who are often shunned by their familial social groups again on account of homophobia (Raphael and Meyer 2000). Some lesbians leave their hometowns and established social connections behind for more liberal cities (Pharr 1997). Some lesbians feel pressured to stay in their abusive relationships because revealing the abuse would mean confirming what their homophobic loved ones claim, that the relationship is no good (Kim 1986). Moreover, many survivors reveal they feel shunned by their lesbian communities as well if they admit the abuse. Cormier (1986) identified a feeling of betrayal in her past concerning the lesbian community which she said lacked understanding and resources for survivors. Northwood (1986), another survivor, said her friends often tried to trivialize her experience. Neither the heterosexual nor queer communities were viable sources of support for these survivors.

As a result of the domestic violence movement services such as shelters and hotlines were created and now exist to support and protect survivors of IPV. Researchers found, though, that most lesbian women do not receive adequate support from these helping agencies; agencies that many lesbian women helped to create (Balsam 2001; Cecere 1986; McClennen 2005; Renzetti 1992). Most shelters are designed to protect women from male abusers who use violence and are not equipped to effectively take in and care for lesbians or survivors of non-physical forms of IPV (Enke 2003; Geraci 1986; NCAVP 2008). Prejudice exists within helping agencies that creates additional hardship for lesbian survivors, as well as survivors of other minority groups (Kim 1986; Koyama 2006).

What began as a grassroots movement of women protecting other women grew into a collection of non-profit organizations that became reliant on state and federal sources for their

funding (Smith, Richie, Sudbury, White, and INCITE! Anthology Co-editors 2006; Stark 2007; Stark 2010). This transformation in structure influenced a system modeled after the way the government treated individuals; Stark (2007) summarized some of the problems with this alliance:

...public engagement with state institutions has changed the advocacy movement almost as much as it did the service response. Shelters were conceived as a political service that could protect and support women while mobilizing their resourcefulness to challenge institutional discrimination. But partnership with traditional services and the legal establishment eroded the incentive to activism that brought droves of volunteers to the autonomous shelter movement, dulled its political edge, eliminated even the embryonic struggle to end discrimination against women in economic and political life, and reduced advocacy in hundreds of communities to missionary casework. Many shelters are now players in the social service game they originally hoped to change. (P. 364)

Furthermore, a homophobic government does not provide protection to lesbian women. For example, training programs for advocates working with survivors of domestic violence have short intervals dedicated to working with the queer community rather than incorporating members of the queer community into the overall structure. Lesbian women are treated differently than heterosexual women within the shelters and agencies to which they turn for help, and this difference in treatment implies that “lesbian victims’ crises are less pressing” (Giorgio 2002: 1241). Lesbians can sometimes find solace in therapy or support groups, but these programs are usually only available in larger cities with dense lesbian populations and do not benefit lesbians in other areas (Cecere 1986). Research showed helping professionals have not provided a sufficient support structure for lesbian survivors to turn to in their time of need (McLaughlin and Rozee 2001).

Within the domestic violence movement, agencies and individuals alike learned to rely on the criminal justice system and turn to police or other officials for assistance. This strategy has not decreased the prevalence of IPV in this society (Stark 2007; Stark 2010). Furthermore,

the experience itself can be traumatic for survivors. All female survivors of relationship abuse, both homosexual and heterosexual, face discrimination from a patriarchal legal system that tends to pathologize women who experience abuse (Dutton 1992). Women who exhibit courage and take their cases to the courtroom face multiple discriminations once they are there (Jenkins 1996). For example, Giorgio (2002) found, through in-depth interviews, that visible proof of assault was often not enough for the legal system to offer aid to abused lesbians. Furthermore, the criminal justice system takes an incident specific approach to IPV and fails to recognize the cumulative affects of ongoing abuse (Stark 2007; Stark 2010). The result of this is a failure to acknowledge the abuse as survivors experience it, as an ongoing process. All survivors must attempt to validate their abuse to a critical system; lesbian survivors must also validate their relationships (Renzetti 1992). Overall, this practice of relying on the law is an ineffective one in the movement to end IPV and removes accountability from the communities in which abusive relationships exist (Griffin 2009). “If we are truly committed to ending violence against women, we must start in the hardest places in our own communities” rather than attempt to find a niche within the existing ineffective bureaucratic movement (Smith et al. 2006: 10).

Overview

Previous researchers, influenced by their unique social backgrounds, sought different understandings of and explanations for the phenomenon that is intimate partner violence. Existing literature examined very different segments of the issue such as how to empower and heal survivors and ways men and women report battering differently (Dutton 1992; Edleson and Brygger 1986). Furthermore, no two researchers categorized forms of abuse in the same way. Some researchers used broad categories, while others distinguished particular aspects of abuse (McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Miller et al. 2001; Outlaw 2009; Turrell 2000; McClenne 2005).

Within these works, the major theme pertaining to the motives behind IPV, however it was compartmentalized, was power and control (Balsam 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Hart 1986; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; NCAVP 2008; Pharr 1997; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001; Strauchler et al. 2004; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000). This body of work focused primarily on physical forms of abuse and considered non-physical forms of abuse to be secondary (Balsam 2001; Outlaw 2009). Researchers need to recognize and investigate the existence of these non-physical forms of abuse in their own right and not simply as indicators of physical and/or sexual abuse (Strauchler et al. 2004). For this research, I removed the violence specific language from Hart's (1986) frequently referenced definition. It is considered abuse "if the [survivor] becomes fearful of the violator, if she modifies her behavior in response to the [abuse] or to avoid future abuse, or if the [survivor] intentionally maintains a particular consciousness or behavioral repertoire to avoid [abuse], despite her preference not to do so, she is [abused]" (Hart 1986:173).

The dominant claim found within the literature attributes patriarchy as the cause of IPV. Though founded in strong evidence, the investment in this theory contributes to a hierarchy that determines which types of abusive relationships deserve more academic and advocacy attention (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Academics and service providers within the movement speak chiefly about heterosexual women as survivors of abuse and refuse to acknowledge the severity of IPV within queer relationships. As a consequence, survivors who do not identify as heterosexual women are denied validation of and support for their experiences with abuse (Anderson 1997; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Loue 2001; Merry 2003; Silverman 2009; Walker 2009). Furthermore, conflict within the Second Wave of the Women's Movement influenced the strategic creation of a positive image of the empowered female dyad and turned the topic of abuse in lesbian relationships into taboo (Balsam 2001; Enke 2003; Gilmore and

Kaminski 2007; Hart 1986; Irwin 2008; Miller et al. 2001; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001). Though academic literature on abuse within lesbian relationships exists, the combined effects of these impacts are apparent.

Queer researchers such as Girshick (2002a; 2002b) and Hart (1986) provided an illustration of ways the patriarchal model of hierarchies within relationships created a space for IPV in all types of intimate partnerships. Existing literature on IPV in lesbian relationships frequently derived from theories of IPV in heterosexual relationships in its analysis and sometimes ignored mediating factors such as the homophobic society in which lesbian survivors navigate their abusive relationships (Balsam 2001; Balsam and Szymanski 2005; NCAVP 2008; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Raphael and Meyer 2000; Pharr 1997; Renzetti 1992; Robinson 2002; Russo 2001; Stark 2007; Tigert 2001; Ward and Schneider 2009). This paper was written from the standpoint of queer studies not necessarily because the analysis is strictly of those individuals who identify as “queer,” but because the analysis considers the possibility of IPV in relationships that do not fit the heterosexual model and recognizes the severity of such.

Though strong feminist women began the domestic violence movement with a well-intended and fervent effort, after more than thirty years of combating IPV society is no closer to achieving its end (Stark 2007; Stark 2010). Part of the reason for this failure to end abuse is the reliance on the non-profit sector as *the* structure to care for survivors of abuse. This focus took the responsibility away from the communities in which people lived and put it in the hands of increasingly bureaucratic organizations that failed to recognize the needs and desires of all those who experience IPV. Instead of devising strategies to truly end violence, advocates dedicate their efforts to uncover ways to acquire more funding, open new hotlines, and build additional shelters (Griffin 2009). This established practice tends to isolate survivors within their

communities, ostracize abusers, and create a skewed picture of IPV within this society. Work based on the awareness of these points would result in the creation of research and literature that has the potential to educate the public on the severity of abuse that is neither physical nor heterosexual and help all communities in which IPV occurs find ways to cope with and end abuse.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Those insufficiencies realized within the literature review, as well as my personal background, directly influenced the research process. Led by the interpretive interactionism strategy as outlined by Denzin (2001), I utilized qualitative methods in this investigation into non-physical forms of abuse as a principal form of abuse. Through snowball sampling, I acquired women who self-identified as both lesbians and survivors for participation in an inclusive effort to contribute to the queer body of work on IPV. These women participated in in-depth interviews that I then transcribed to create the data for analysis. I also considered their comments and suggestions on the findings before completing a final draft. I considered issues of validity, reliability, and ethics throughout the research process. This resulting research is the product of an exploration into and interpretation of the dynamics of non-physical forms of IPV within lesbian relationships as nine women who self-identified as survivors recounted their own past experiences with abuse.

Researcher's Role

Following Denzin's (2001) recommendation that the researcher begin with an acknowledgement of her personal biases concerning the phenomenon and her role within the project, I disclose that I am invested in this project intellectually and personally. My biases come from three major areas: a past abusive relationship, my politics, and my work experience.

The experience of intimate partner violence in my own life taught me the value of sharing one's story and the benefit it can hold for survivors. The relationship between a researcher and her participants *can* be mutually beneficial, as these women have as much to gain from telling their stories as the academic community has from hearing them. Through both my undergraduate and graduate education, I learned to see the world through a feminist lens. I recognize society as a place in which males have power over females and heterosexuals have greater rights and freedoms than homosexuals. I also worked for some time at a domestic violence hotline where I provided crisis intervention and resources to teenagers, as well as adults, who experienced abuse in their intimate relationships. This background provided me the opportunity to discover ways those within the domestic violence movement can encourage agency in survivors and demand accountability of abusers of IPV. It also provided me the opportunity to gain insider knowledge of the workings of the non-profit industry and its neglect of survivors who do not identify as heterosexual women who experienced physical abuse. This left me disenchanted and desiring a deeper knowledge of other queer survivors' perceptions. I chose to study non-physical forms of IPV within lesbian relationships fueled by this background and an intellectual interest in a topic that has not been sufficiently investigated by other academics. I present this work under the assumption that "the claims that we make, the categories we mobilize, and the systems we enter are all political undertakings with consequences, not only for women experiencing abuse, but for advocates, activists, and people providing services" (Ristock 2002: 151).

Founded in my strong feminist background, the advocacy participatory worldview (Creswell 2009) influences me to see the effort to help other people as the responsibility of the social science researcher. Researchers are in a position to study populations who are at a disadvantage within this society and have the power to help them create the change those people

wish to see in their communities (Creswell 2009). For reasons discussed in the literature review (homophobia, a lack of focus on non-physical forms of abuse, insufficient information on abuse in non-heterosexual relationships, and so forth), lesbian survivors of non-physical forms of IPV are marginalized within this society. Because of this, the issues addressed within this thesis are social justice issues in need of attention as well as action. In support of this worldview, I chose the interpretive interactionism strategy to carry out this thesis.

Interpretive Interactionism Strategy

Feminist theories, such as standpoint theory, influenced the shift from writing about survivors to writing for them. Dorothy Smith (1992) pointed to the importance of writing sociology from the perspective of women, so that society may gain an understanding of the world, as it exists for women. Within the domestic violence movement, prominent academics, such as Stark, also pointed out the importance of “bringing those who have survived [IPV] together with those constituencies determined to end it” (2007: 367). Because it follows this line of reasoning, I utilized the interpretive interactionism strategy for this study (Denzin 2001). This strategy found its roots in the work of theorists who deliberately ventured away from the positivist mode of scientific reasoning and found a way to fully explore the lives of the populations under study (Denzin 2001).

Denzin (2001) stated the interpretive interactionist approach was for those open to the qualitative, interpretive approach. The use of qualitative methods allowed me to obtain detailed accounts of the survivors’ experiences with abuse that I then interpreted in my analysis. I was able to get the biographical information surrounding their abusive relationships, and open-ended questioning allowed the survivors to share any experiences they had with IPV that were not recognized by the dominant literature. As Denzin (2001) pointed out, programs and institutions

are best judged from the perspective of those who utilize their services. Consequently, this approach allowed for the inclusion of survivors' suggestions for members of the overall community who have contact with and influence the lives of all individuals in abusive relationships. Throughout this process, my analysis focused on the following research questions:

1. How does a self-identified lesbian survivor of IPV frame the abuse she incurred?
2. In what ways, if any, did the survivor reach out for help concerning the abusive relationship?
3. Was the abuser held accountable for her actions?

Qualitative Methods

Because it was not possible to acquire a representative sample of the lesbian population within Austin or New Orleans, I utilized snowball sampling through personal contacts and queer-friendly organizations to find the nine participants for this project. Based on my own social network, I contacted organizations that work with the queer populations in both New Orleans and Austin.³ Emails and copies of the recruitment script⁴ were sent to these organizations, and their help was requested to find perspective interview participants. I also used my own network of contacts within the queer community and sent out personal emails to a list of friends on the social networking site Facebook. The recruitment process was challenging. Many contacts insisted they knew of individuals who would speak about their experiences with abuse in lesbian relationships. However, the majority of these contacts were unable to convince their acquaintances to make contact. The reluctance of survivors to contact me could indicate a

³ These two cities were not chosen to allow for comparison either between these two cities or to other cities; however, it should be noted Smith and Gates (2001) identified them as two of the top twenty-five metropolitan areas ranked by percentage of coupled households assumed to be same-sex. Though this does not provide a complete picture of the lesbian populations in these areas, it does imply that lesbians in these cities have more contact with other queer individuals than those in other cities. This may differentiate the experiences of these survivors from those who experience IPV in cities in which they are more isolated from other queer people.

⁴ A copy of the recruitment script is included after the references.

number of things including: an unwillingness to share their stories with a stranger and an aversion to participating in academic studies. A few women expressed an interest to talk about their experiences but did not respond further once I attempted to schedule an interview. The majority of actual participants were found via 300 social contacts on Facebook⁵.

Overall, I conducted ten in-depth interviews with nine white lesbians⁶ who identified a previous female partner as abusive. The recruitment of self-identified survivors of abuse for this qualitative project followed the precedent set by previous researchers (Balsam 2001; Giorgio 2002; Irwin 2008). This does not necessarily mean these women used the label “survivor” to refer to themselves; rather, this label was used because it is empowering and appears often in the literature (Beeble et al. 2009; Irwin 2008; Koyama 2006; NCAVP 2008; Robinson 2002). They did all use the term “abuse”, though, to refer to their experiences. I chose this label over terms such as “battered woman” and “victim,” because those terms imply the individual who experiences abuse is entirely defeated by her partner, and this simply is not the case. The identification of these women as survivors, and not abusers, does not mean these women were weaker than their abusers or always held the less powerful positions within their relationships (Ristock 2002). In any relationship the power dynamics are dependent on a number of factors such as investment in the outcome of a particular situation or interpersonal dependency (Cast 2003; Glick and Fiske 1999). These abusive relationships were no different.

⁵ Facebook was both an easy and effective means to get information about my research to a large number of people in a short amount of time. Through this popular online server, I made frequent (once a week for about a month) posts that could be viewed by people in my network who then shared that information with people in their networks. This resulted in a large number of individuals getting information about my research without me having to contact them personally.

⁶ One woman was interviewed twice, and the two interviews were conducted a year apart. The first interview was done to fulfill a requirement for a Qualitative Methods course and the second was strictly for this thesis. Though the participant discussed the same relationship in both interviews, she shared different aspects of her experience making both interviews valuable to this research.

Even though they responded to my request for “participants who identify as survivors of non-physical forms of relationship abuse,” upon initial contact I asked these women to describe in what ways they thought their relationships were abusive. This process did not serve to question their identities as survivors; rather, it ensured all of the women interviewed considered their relationships abusive in predominantly non-physical ways. At the time of the interview, each participant was provided with a release form as well as a list of referrals⁷ in the event she or anyone she knew desired help with an abusive relationship. All participants were repeatedly reminded that the interview was completely voluntary and they could choose to end the interview at any time. The interviews lasted between twenty and eighty minutes; the average time for an interview was forty-five minutes. Five interviews were conducted in New Orleans and five in Austin. Interviews were conducted in places of the participants’ choosing to help ensure their comfort during the interview process. For the most part, participants chose to hold interviews in their homes; though, one participant asked that we meet at her place of work. Open-ended questions were used to guide the conversation through my specific topics of interest while allowing the survivors to address areas that were of importance to them. Rapport was built with most participants after the first prompt: “Why don’t you start by telling me about the relationship.” Observations of body language and other physical cues from participants during their interviews helped with the interpretation of the dynamics of these women’s experiences. Combined, these qualitative methods resulted in significant data for analysis.

Data, Coding, and Analysis

The data set for analysis included: detailed field notes taken immediately after the interviews along with transcriptions of how self-identified lesbian survivors of non-physical

⁷ The referral sheets included a number to a shelter in New Orleans and a shelter in Austin. The GLBT National Help Center phone number and website was listed as was that of The National Domestic Violence Hotline. The sheet also listed my phone number and email address as well as that of the chair of my thesis committee.

forms of IPV frame their experiences with abusive relationships. Transcription occurred within two or three days of the interviews to ensure attitude and tone were interpreted accurately.

Because this research addressed how the survivors framed their experiences, the transcriptions were not edited to correct dialect or language use in order to remain true to the original context (Oliver, Serovich, and Mason 2005). Within a week of the interview the transcription was emailed to the respective survivor. Each email contained a personal “thank you” as well as the invitation for survivors to make any comments they thought valuable to the research. Some of these emails also included additional questions, so survivors could elaborate on their experiences. Four of the survivors sent response emails that clarified areas of the interviews I questioned. This also prevented assumptions that could have been made about the details of their experiences, which were influenced by their social and cultural environments. None of the survivors criticized either the analysis or interpretations I produced based on their experiences.

To find patterns and themes within the data set created by interviews with these women, I reviewed and coded the transcriptions in three rounds. Two rounds of open-coding created, for analysis, a focus on those topics mentioned most often by the participants. Through the first round of coding, ten major codes arose: abusive behaviors, advice, coping, help seeking, homophobia, how survivors viewed themselves, identifying abuse, the relationship ended, survivors’ views of their abusers, and support structure. I created a master list of these codes and met with my committee chair to ensure continued validity of the work. A list of these codes remained visible for the second round to ensure all transcriptions were coded accurately before analysis began.

I analyzed the contents of each code file created and compared the survivors’ responses. After extensive analysis, it was apparent that axial coding (Creswell 2007) was a beneficial way

to address the issue of conflicts. With axial coding, I took this central phenomenon of interest, returned to the available data, and used this to explain causes of the phenomenon, strategies the survivors used to cope with it, external factors that influenced these strategies, and the consequences of the survivors' actions. The findings presented here are ultimately based on my knowledge of the issues surrounding IPV and my analysis of the ten interviews I conducted.

Validity and Reliability

A number of strategies, as outlined by Creswell (2009), were utilized to validate the findings. First, data was collected through multiple sources: literature reviews, in-depth interviews, and field notes taken after interviews. Creswell (2009) referred to this process as triangulation. Peer examination was employed throughout the research process. Both peers and a professor reviewed a pre-tested interview, which helped ensure the clarity of the questions. Moreover, committee members as well as fellow graduate students reviewed this work at different stages. Finally, member checking occurred before I submitted my final draft. All participants reviewed copies of their transcripts as well as a rough draft of the findings and were asked to review these to ensure validity. This allowed the survivors to critique the work and offer suggestions, which resulted in an inclusive piece. Though, I am solely accountable for the final product.

Efforts to ensure reliability were carried out as well. I collaborated with my committee chair, an expert in the field of IPV, to create interview questions informed by an understanding of the literature on and personal experience with survivors of IPV. This process helped ensure that another researcher, with my background and experience, could interview these women and get the same answers to the open-ended questions used. Finally, I based my interpretations on the words of the survivors to ensure that the discussion focused on what these women identified

as salient in their experiences with IPV. Though the existing knowledge I held of this topic contributed at all stages of the process, I did not discuss my personal experiences or opinions with these women until after the interview ended to avoid influencing their responses.

“Knowledge is power,” and these women provided the data needed to create a piece that will provide informed knowledge to others (Denzin 2001: 4).

Limitations

Limitations exist with any research venture, and this thesis is no exception. The most obvious restraint on the scope of my analysis came from the decision to specifically investigate lesbian relationships. I chose this population because of the need for a greater focus on non-heterosexual relationships. Future research is needed that includes bisexuals, transsexuals, gay men, heterosexual men, as well as other who identify as survivors. These groups also lack the resources they deserve.

Other minority groups are also underrepresented within my research. My use of snowball sampling excluded any analysis of racial minorities or women who are differently abled within this work. This is unfortunate, as there has been a persistent failure of the academic community to study relationship abuse among lesbians with these identities (Robinson 2002). I recognize that their experiences with IPV, both physical and non-physical, are different than the experiences of white able-bodied lesbian women because of the multiple oppressions (racism, ableism, and so forth) that influence their experiences with IPV. I hope my work is helpful to women who fall into these categories, even though it remains an incomplete resource for them.

I deliberately did not discuss relationships that occurred when the survivors were teenagers. Dynamics of adult relationships (financial co-dependence, cohabitating, and child-rearing) that do not exist in many teenage relationships would have presented additional

variables. Though I did not study them, I do see the investigation into abuse among teenage relationships to be crucial in the movement to end all forms of IPV. This piece also did not include the experiences of lesbians who experienced IPV hidden as lesbians and/or out of contact with other queer members of their communities. I assume these women face even more hardships within their abusive relationships than did those lesbians interviewed who had social contacts that were aware of their sexual identities. These were some of the major choices made through the research process in an effort to create the most concise piece. Despite its limitations, this work presents a representative interpretation of the stories of nine women who self identified as lesbian and survivors of IPV. Their reflections provided a view of IPV distinct from the literature reviewed. I hope their words offer support to other survivors, information to academics and caretakers, and understanding to everyone who reads this.

Ethics

I would like to respond to a valid concern state by Linda and Avreayl (1986) through which they expressed their disapproval for those academics who use the stories of battered women for their own self-serving purposes and without considering the concerns of the survivors themselves. It is true that reliving these events through their telling could have been traumatic and harmful to the participants; nevertheless, I agree with Denzin's statement that "the stories we tell help us wrestle with the chaos in the world around us, help us to make sense of our lives when things go wrong" (2001: 60). Throughout this process, I worked on a Masters thesis as well as literature I hope will be helpful to those outside the academic realm.

There were a number of steps I took to help protect my participants. Any personal information was removed from the transcripts to avoid the possibility that participants were identifiable. Pseudonyms, chosen from an online database of names and randomly assigned to

the participants, were used on transcripts and in the discussion. All participants were provided with a release form that informed them of the anonymity of their responses, the voluntary nature of their participation, and the reassurance that no information that arose within the interview would be addressed at any later time. The participants told these stories in their own words and were informed that they may benefit by helping the larger community to understand the dynamics of abuse in lesbian relationships. In the event that negative emotions arose as a result of the interview process, all participants were provided a referral sheet of contact numbers and websites for organizations such as: The National Domestic Violence Hotline, The Gay and Lesbian Community Center, and Crescent House Battered Women's Shelter. This sheet also included my contact information. Because none of these women perceived helping agencies to be helpful forms of support, I encouraged them to talk to their friends and assured them they could contact me as well.

I also upheld an obligation to protect the integrity of the academic institution with which I worked to create this thesis. I only interviewed individuals who fit the parameters (lesbians who were adults at the time of the relationship in which they self-identified as survivors). Despite any personal biases I had coming into this research project, my main objective was to produce an honest and valuable representation of these women's experiences and to do no harm to them.

Participants

The findings presented came from the lives of nine survivors, whose names have been changed to protect their identities. All participants self-identified as lesbians at the time of their interviews and when in the abusive relationships they discussed. This label is meant less to describe how society sees these women than it is to describe what image these women wished to

project into the world. Like gender, sexuality is performed (Connell 1999) and the role of a lesbian has many different characters. I agree with Stein's claim that "any unified conception of lesbian identity is reductive and ahistorical" (1992: 562). I do not intend this work as an attempt to define a lesbian, and this topic was not discussed during the interviews. What all of these women had in common was they experienced an intimate relationship with another woman that was abusive in predominantly non-physical ways in a homophobic society. Elements of physical abuse were present in some of the relationships, but it was not seen as the primary form of abuse in any of the relationships. Though there were no requests for individuals of a specific racial background, all participants were white. They ranged in age from their mid twenties to late thirties. I assigned the socioeconomic status (SES) of each woman based on a combination of educational attainment, career, and income. The range of SES for these participants was upper-lower to upper-middle. Finally, these survivors were in long-term committed relationships that lasted an average of five years. Though these women all experienced a common social injustice, IPV, they led very different lives at the time of their abusive relationships.

Allison

Allison was in her mid twenties at the time of the interview. Of lower-middle SES, Allison had a Bachelor's degree from an Ivy League college and was applying for acceptance into a Graduate program. She worked as both a personal tutor and an assistant at a construction company. Allison's abusive relationship lasted several years off and on and ended a little over a year ago. The first time Allison was with her abusive partner they both identified as bisexual; therefore, any discussion of this segment of the relationship was omitted from the analysis and findings. Though she was close with her family, Allison did not see them often because they lived in another state. Allison lived alone in the New Orleans metro area and maintained a social

circle that did not consist of many lesbians. The portion of the relationship discussed in this paper lasted a couple months during which time Allison moved across the country to live with her partner who was abusive that entire time.

Cassie

Cassie was in her late thirties with a son of eighteen. Cassie was of middle SES. At the time of her interview, she worked as an administrator for an orthopedic company and worked for the same company more than ten years. She worked hard after her abusive relationship to become an independent woman and lived alone in a small city outside of Austin. Cassie saw her son often and visited her parents, who lived in another part of the state, for holidays. When we spoke, she was in a loving and supportive relationship with another woman and had a number of lesbian friends. The abusive relationship she discussed lasted about ten years, and Cassie identified that her partner was always abusive. The relationship ended a little over a year ago.

Haley

Haley was of upper-middle SES and was in her late thirties at the time of the interview. Haley had a military background and graduated at the top of her class from college. She worked as an engineer for a major corporation where she had established herself as a respectable employee with ten years of experience. The mother of two boys, Haley's abuser cut off Haley's contact with the son who was not biologically hers. When we met, Haley lived with her biological son in a city outside of New Orleans. She saw her mother often, was in a loving and nurturing relationship, and had just begun to be more involved in the queer community. Haley's abusive relationship lasted nineteen years and officially ended about a year and a half ago. Haley believed her partner "snapped after a few non-abusive years in the relationship, and the abuse still occurred at the time of the interview.

Isabella

Isabella was in her late thirties when interviewed and was of middle SES. She recently left her first profession and returned to culinary school. She worked as the executive chef for a corporation at the time of her interview and lived in Austin with her partner to whom she was engaged. Isabella saw her family for holidays, but they were not accepting of her sexual identity. Isabella had a close group of lesbian friends with whom she spent time often. Though she recognized that her partner exhibited some abusive behaviors in the beginning, Isabella did not identify the first part of her relationship as abusive. The abusive relationship Isabella discussed lasted about four years and ended approximately ten years ago.

Melody

Melody was, at the time of the interview, in her mid thirties. She worked as a nanny for some friends of hers, and rented a place in Austin where she lived with her current girlfriend. Her family did not live in Austin, but she saw them around the holidays. Melody had some lesbian friends and had worked hard to become a stronger and more independent woman than she was in her abusive relationship. Melody saw that the relationship she discussed progressed from one that was not abusive, though it was unhealthy, into an abusive relationship. It lasted two years and ended more than ten years ago

Peggy

Peggy was in her late twenties and lived in the New Orleans metropolitan area at the time of her interview. She was of upper-low SES. Peggy recently graduated from pastry school and spent her days as a full-time unpaid caretaker for her mother. She had regular contact with the rest of her immediate family as well. Peggy did not consider herself to be an “active” member of a queer community; however, she regularly attended queer bars in the New Orleans area and had

many queer friends. Peggy's abusive relationship lasted about a year and ended almost ten years prior. Looking back, she saw that her partner was always abusive and continued to be so at the time of the interview, though Peggy only saw her every once in a while.

Roxy

Roxy was in her early thirties when we spoke. Roxy was of lower-middle SES. She lived with a friend from whom she rented a room in the New Orleans metropolitan area. Roxy recently quit her job doing manual labor and returned to school to study nursing. Roxy was close with her family, who lived within driving distance of her home. She had many queer friends and went out to gay bars in the city. Roxy was with her abuser for almost four years, and the relationship ended about five years before the interview. Roxy's relationship was abusive from the start and even after it was officially over.

Ursula

Ursula was in her late twenties and of lower-middle SES at the time of her interview. She rented a house in Austin with a roommate and worked as a chef at a grocery market. Ursula was close with her family but did not see them often, because they lived in another state. Also, her social circle consists mostly of heterosexual people. The relationship Ursula discussed lasted between four and a half and five years and ended approximately six years ago. She recognized the relationship was abusive the entire time she was with her partner.

Yvette

Yvette was in her mid thirties when we spoke. Of middle SES, Yvette was college educated. She worked as a mechanical engineer but was recently laid off due to the economic downturn. Yvette lived in Austin with her long-term partner. She saw her family for the holidays. And, Yvette had a group of lesbian friends with whom she was close. Yvette was

committed to her abuser for five years. She saw only the last year of the relationship as abusive and left her abuser a little over ten years before the interview.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

After open and axial coding, eight major areas of focus with a number of subthemes arose from the data. Each section of the findings is based on my interpretations of what these nine survivors communicated about their past abusive relationships, and they are presented in a sequence similar to how the survivors experienced IPV. I begin with the identification of abusive behaviors followed by the way participants framed IPV. The next section addresses how these women coped with abuse and leads into their experiences with help seeking. I then provide my interpretation of the dynamics of their support structures. The previous sections all contribute to the discussion of the events surrounding the end of their relationships as well as how the participants perceived themselves in relation to the abusive relationships. Before moving on to policy suggestions, I include a discussion of the influence of homophobia on these women's experiences. All subheadings within these findings are extracted from direct quotes provided by the survivors and are used to highlight that though this final work is my thesis, it is based on their experiences.

Identifying Abuse That is Not Physical

Abuse that does not result in physical harm often goes unrecognized by society, and previous research found that non-physical abuse was most difficult for survivors to identify (Dutton 1992; Irwin 2008). As mentioned, all the participants in this study identified their previous relationships as abusive in predominantly non-physical ways before their interviews began. Some of them also experienced physical abuse; though, the non-physical abuse occurred more frequently and had what they stated was a more significant affect on their lives. Despite

this, these women focused on physical forms of abuse as they recounted their experiences. This happened both as they told of their struggles to identify their own relationships as abusive, and as they discussed IPV as a social problem. Interestingly, the most common points at which these women recognized the presence of abuse in their relationships were times when the relationship became physically violent, even if the relationship itself was not physically abusive⁸.

‘Actions speak louder than words for sure’

All the participants reported they had difficulties identifying abusive behaviors that were not physical. A couple of them were able to identify patterns of non-physically abusive behaviors. Cassie shared what indicated to her the presence of abuse in her relationship:

I started seein a pattern that whenever we would get around our friends that that was her opportunity to, to degrade me and make me feel uncomfortable. So, for many years I would pretty much come up with some kind of excuse if we got invited to go somewhere... Because, I didn’t want to go and be put in that situation.

Even though she recognized the pattern, Cassie said she still did not “know how to describe” the IPV in her relationship that “wasn’t any physical abuse.” Melody also recognized a pattern in her relationship when “negative comments” would always come up and she and her partner could “never get past the point of just having a conversation to work out [their] troubles.” Every time Melody addressed her feelings in the relationship, her partner “ would go on the defense” and used insults and belittling comments to make Melody feel as though her feelings were trivial. For most women in this study, however, the non-physical abuse was not what indicated to them that they were abused.

For many participants, the first instance of physical violence was the first time they realized they were being abused. They, like many actors in the domestic violence movement,

⁸ I distinguish physical violence from physical abuse based on the assumption that physical violence does not occur as a habitual event. Physical violence becomes abuse when it is habitual and changes the behaviors of the survivor in such ways as outlined in the previously mentioned definition, modified from Hart’s (1986) definition.

used violence as the “litmus test” for abuse in their relationships (Stark 2007; Stark 2010).

When asked how she first identified her relationship as abusive, Isabella referred to the one time her partner “hit [her] and hit [her] on the head.” From then on it was all “emotional abuse,” but the hit on the head served as Isabella’s indicator of abuse. For Roxy, “at first, before the hittin’ started, [she] didn’t really know that [she] was bein’ abused.” But, the first time her partner hit her, she “pretty much knew” it was abuse. Allison said the first time she thought her relationship was abusive was when:

We [she and her abuser] were in the car; for some reason we were in my car. And, I was driving. Probably cause she was drunk. And, we were going to a party at one of her friend’s houses. We, I don’t, we were arguing about something stupid. It wasn’t really about what we were arguing about... And, she ended up slapping me so hard that I split my lip. And, there was blood all over my face.

This event influenced Allison to evaluate her relationship and realize her partner also used things such as abandoning and insults against her. For Ursula, it took her partner “throwin’ things and yellin’” for her to see that she was in an abusive relationship. These participants did not recognize non-physical forms of abuse until physical violence indicated the presence of abuse in their relationships.

Other respondents, however, judged their relationships by the absence of physical violence. Haley said she thought her relationships “wasn’t so bad, cause there was no physical violence,” and she would “just suck it up” when she felt she was mistreated by her partner. Peggy’s partner was not physically violent toward her either. Consequently, Peggy talked about her issues identifying the non-physical forms of abuse in her relationship:

Looking back I probably would have rathered her hit me once and me get out a lot sooner than I would have. Because, I didn’t really see what she was doing until afterwards. I feel like I withstood a lot more than I should of, because I wasn’t exactly aware of what was goin on. And, I think if she would have abused me

physically I would have seen it, I would have felt it, and I would have moved on a lot quicker.

Peggy did not identify her relationship as abusive until after she and her partner broke up. It was then she was able to look back and identify the ways her partner “manipulated [their] whole relationship.” For all the participants, a dilemma arose as they acknowledged non-physical abuse was a serious problem but could not move past conversation about the severity of physical violence.

Just as the dominant literature acknowledged non-physical forms of abuse (Hart 1986; Irwin 2008; Lobel 1986; Outlaw 2009; Renzetti 1992) but focused on physical forms (Balsam 2001; Strauchler, McCloskey, Mallow, Sitaker, Grigsby, and Gillig 2004; Tjaden and Thoennes 2000), so did these women. Melody said life could be difficult “if you’re in an abusive relationship, especially one that’s *physical*.” Peggy stated, “no one person should feel that much hate for someone else that they have to put their hands on ‘em.” Allison talked down the abuse she suffered, because she “wasn’t in any sort of life-threatening situation.” Roxy stated outright that abuse that is not physical is “hard to detect.” And, this realization explains the difficulty all the survivors had as they identified and described non-physical forms of abuse.

All nine survivors discussed physical violence as if it were at the top of a hierarchy of abusive behaviors. This mirrored the focus found within the literature; however, it contradicted the personal experiences these women shared. Those who experienced physical abuse in their relationships said it was just as, or more often less, painful than the non-physical abuse. Roxy acknowledged that “most people look at abuse as just hitting,” and this prevents survivors from identifying non-physical behaviors as abusive. Society’s lack of understanding of these types of abuse prevented many of these women from identifying the abuse until physical violence

occurred. Once this happened and they reflected on their experiences, the participants were able to identify the number of different non-physical abusive behaviors of their partners.

Framing Abusive Behaviors

Just as the literature reviewed categorized different behaviors as abusive (McClennen 2005; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Miller et al. 2001; Outlaw 2009; Turrell 2000), these women identified a variety of different behaviors they considered abusive which included: abandoning, cheating, controlling, denying, abuse of domestic duties, financial abuse, insults, isolating, manipulation, physical abuse, property abuse, sexual abuse, and using children. This list of behaviors, much like that within The Power and Control Wheel, is a list of examples rather than a definitive inventory (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs 2008; Ristock 2002).

No matter what the behaviors, all nine women experience abuse as a pattern, an every day or almost every day occurrence. The presence of a pattern of behaviors indicated that the participants' partners used these behaviors repeatedly and intentionally (Jenkins and Davidson 2001). Also, for all of the participants, Hart's (1986) definition of abuse applied:

If the [survivor] becomes fearful of the violator, if she modifies her behavior in response to the [abuse] or to avoid future abuse, or if the [survivor] intentionally maintains a particular consciousness or behavioral repertoire to avoid [abuse], despite her preference not to do so, she is [abused]" (1986:173).

The length of time these women were in the relationships varied. The shortest relationship, Allison's, lasted four months and the longest, Haley's, lasted nineteen years. The average length of the relationships discussed was five and a half years. The duration of abuse within these relationships averaged five years as well. For some of these women, such as Peggy, the relationship was abusive from the beginning. For others, such as Haley, the abuse did not arise until after a few years. As with all survivors of intimate partner violence, the severity of abuse

varied from one person to another (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Jenkins and Davidson 2001; Renzetti 1992).

In this study, Roxy's account provided an illustration of very serious abuse. Some of the things Roxy's partner forced her to do include: quit her job, do drugs with her, and move to a city in which she knew no one. Roxy said that at one point after they moved:

They [her partner's family] would lock me up in their house. The house had a...kind of lock on the front door. How it's gotta outside/inside lock [the door, once locked from the outside, could not be unlocked without a key]. They would lock me inside. And, the windows were the pane windows that flipped out. So, I couldn't climb outta the window either. So, every day for about a week I was locked in the house. By myself. Because, [Abuser] would leave to go...wherever. Cause, she knew, she knows [major city] like it's her back yard. And, I'd be locked inside the house.

Even when they moved back to the New Orleans area, Roxy's partner took the car and house keys with her whenever she went out. This prevented Roxy from being able to leave the house without her partner. When Roxy did go out in public, her partner ordered her to act as though everything was alright and made threats to her in Spanish. For Roxy, "basically just every aspect of [her] life [her partner] had to either be there or be in control of it."

In the middle of the continuum of respondents was Allison. Allison's partner did things such as: forced Allison to do all the housework, accused Allison of being unfaithful, and took Allison to bars and abandoned her. Allison said:

If we went out to a party, she would get really drunk really quickly. And then, she'd go find some nasty old man, and dance inappropriately with him, and leave me with her friends. And, ignore me.

This behavior in public was coupled with ways Allison's partner abused her at home. Allison said:

I did most of the housework. And, sometimes if I worked a really long week, fifty to sixty hours, the house would get messy. The dishes would be left undone.

And, I was cooking dinner every night. I was making our breakfast. And, I was packing both of our lunches. *And*, I was working a longer day than her.

On days when Allison was off work and tried to rest, her partner insisted she get out of bed and made loud noises to prevent Allison from taking time for herself. Allison's relationship left her both mentally and physically exhausted.

Finally, Yvette experienced what was the least serious abuse. Yvette's partner "started progressively going downhill" and became abusive in the last year of their five year relationship. Her partner ignored Yvette's requests to spend time together, brought strangers into their home, and even started a new relationship with a man while with Yvette. Yvette said about the cheating:

She didn't wanna end anything with me. She wanted me to stick around. It was like, "you're great, you're wonderful. I just wanna supplement you with this guy."

Her partner continued to insist things would work out between them, even as she was cheating on Yvette. All of the participants experienced abuse in different and unique ways. While these behaviors defined their relationships and selves (discussed later), their accounts did not focus on the specifics of the behaviors, but rather their cognitions and feelings about these behaviors. The three emergent topics include the way the participants understood the causes, motivations behind, and effects of these behaviors. The respondents' reflections on relationships that ended between one and ten years prior to their interviews provided an understanding of how these women framed the abuse they incurred.

'A lot of her actions towards me was because of...'

Just as much of the literature on IPV in lesbian relationships attempted to discover individual causes of abuse, most of these women referenced specific reasons their partners acted in an abusive manner towards them that were beyond the control of either partner (Balsam 2001;

McClennen 2005; Miller et al. 2001; Tigert 2001). What these survivors reported most often as the cause of their partners' abusive behaviors was they were imitating behaviors learned as children. Cassie said her abuser "came from a very very broken home," which Cassie believed led her to become abusive as an adult. And, Isabella mentioned her partner "had been abused by her father," so her abusive behaviors were "like a natural reaction." Ursula also said her abuser's behaviors were "just in her nature" and blamed troubles with her family of origin for this. Yvette blamed the "underlying problems" with her partner's family for the mental issues that Yvette identified as the cause of the abuse.

Other respondents reflected on both psychological and social psychological reasons.

Haley, Melody, and Allison referred to other stressors that directed their partners to abuse them.

Haley perceived a natural disaster as the turning point in her relationship:

She snapped pretty much with Hurricane Katrina. She just lost it...Cause, we had lost everything...And, she just was not the same person. So that, it's almost that, before she was a little bit angry. And, you'd see it every now and then. And, that's who she became, just that angry, miserable, don't wanna be around, suck the life outta you person.

Allison cited her partner's job, which she claimed caused her to be "really stressed out" and take it out on Allison. Finally, Melody recognized that the age difference between herself and her partner created issues in the relationship that led to abuse. Each respondent attempted to rationalize the abuse either through her knowledge about abuse or other socio-psychological reasoning.

The participants all identified what they interpreted as the underlying intentions of their abusive partners as well. These women framed their relationships as abusive when their partners' habitually showed disregard and disrespect toward them as either individuals or partners in their relationships. Their partners acted out abusive behaviors despite the efforts of

these women to let them know those behaviors were hurtful. This manifested in different ways for the respondents through a variety of abusive behaviors but was consistently present in all the relationships discussed. Peggy repeatedly mentioned things such as this:

She just totally was selfish disregarding my feelings most of the time... Yeah, she may have loved me. But, as far as like respect-wise and caring-wise. I look back and now it's like, you know, I don't see it. I don't see *any* of it... You don't play with somebody's emotions like she played with mine. And, to me that's, you know, that's emotional abuse. Like, she's abusing the fact that I cared about her more than anything, and she probably could've given two shits about me.

Allison stated she too felt “disrespected” by her partner’s abusive actions and didn’t think she was a “priority” in her partner’s life. Melody said her partner, who used abandoning, often made the statement that she did not want to be around her and other “people [were] more important.” Haley thought her abuser’s actions showed a “total disregard” for her and her contributions to the relationship. And, Isabella thought her partner perceived her as “worthless.” The language of their understanding about the causes of abuse did not reflect the professional social service or academic research.

Nearly all practitioner and academic models of abuse contain the conceptual framework of power and control (Balsam 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Hart 1986; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; NCAVP 2008; Pharr 1997; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001; Strauchler et al. 2004). These women, however, when asked directly about power dynamics, thought they were equal. Ursula said both she and her partner made decisions about things such as: where to spend holidays, where to live, and what to do for fun. Haley and Yvette actually thought they had more power than their partners. Haley saw her career as a source of power, and Yvette stated that her partner was “dependent” on her. However, these views that the abusive partners did not hold greater power in the relationships than the survivors contradicted much of what these women said in their interviews.

Isabella thought decision-making was balanced in her relationship; however, her partner “started getting very controlling” and convinced her to “move to a small town” away from friends and family. Ursula also said she and her partner had equal power in their relationship. Nevertheless, her partner would determine how many alcoholic beverages Ursula could have each night. When Ursula tried to argue, her partner would “huff and walk out” or “yell” at Ursula to get her to comply. Cassie said the power in her relationship was balanced but then said:

If things didn't go her way then she would talk down to me or convince me. I literally think that she had me brainwashed. I really do. Into her way of thinking and her ways. It was pretty much “it's my way or the highway” is pretty much how it was with her.

Though Cassie realized her partner always got her way, she did not frame it as an issue of power. Though the participants did not identify “power and control” as the intent behind their partners' behaviors, their language revealed that it was. Furthermore, according to these women, a significant amount of abuse occurred after their relationships ended.

‘She just continued to play with my little strings like I was a little puppet’

The literature reviewed discussed specific ways survivors engage in efforts to maintain their safety even after they leave their abusive partners, such as moving to a new city (Dutton 1992; Jenkins and Davidson 2001). However, “physical proximity is largely irrelevant to ongoing [survivor] risk” in IPV (Stark 2007: 377). Eight of these women discussed ways their partners abused them after their relationships were over. For most, this occurred as they attempted to establish friendships with their previous partners. Perhaps because of the idea of the lesbian utopia, these survivors thought they could remain friends with the women who had abused them (Hart 1986; Koyama 2006; Lorber 1999). Melody explained:

With women and being in a lesbian relationship, it's kind of a two pronged bonus. It's a win-win. Because, not only do you get to have this wonderful person in your life that you love, but you can also relate to them, and have fun with them, and do all these other things.

Despite this hopeful vision, though, existing patterns of abuse continued into their friendships.

And, the abuse after the relationship ended influenced many of these women to cut off all ties with their abusers. Peggy's abuser continued to "lie" to her and say she did not cheat on Peggy up to the time of her interview, ten years after the relationship ended. When Peggy saw her in public, the woman insisted she never did anything to hurt Peggy. The significance of this is not that her previous partner consistently lied to Peggy; rather, she made Peggy doubt what she knew to be true. Within the domestic violence literature this is called "crazy making." Peggy eventually cut off all contact with her abusive partner and gave up her attempts to maintain a friendship. Melody described the situation surrounding her decision to finally cut ties with her abuser. It was after the relationship was over and she attempted to help out her abuser, because "that's what friends do." She kept some furniture for her abuser in an apartment that got cleared out by the landlord due to her inability to pay the rent. This is what happened when her abuser found out about the "one or two things" of hers that were thrown away:

And, uh, she calls me and asks me about these items. And then, accuses me of stealing them. And, at that point I was just so pissed off at her, you know, her, you know, "here's what I did for you, and here's what you're accusing me of." And, I basically ended it. And, never talked to her since.

Melody "ended" it by saying something that she knew "was something that [she] couldn't take back. And, that was [her] way of slicing that final end all to it. So, [she] didn't have to mess with it anymore." Cassie's described a similar experience:

I have not seen her [previous partner] in nine, nine or ten months I guess. And, she is back in town trying to find work. And, called me yesterday matter of fact to see if I would keep her cat while she found work. That she would pay me and all this kind of stuff. And, I told her, "No." Cause, I didn't wanna get caught at

my apartment complex, and get fined, and I just didn't think it'd really be a good idea for me to do it. And, [Abuser] has this way of, um...she was really nice in askin me and, you know, "I'll do whatever. I'll pay you. It'll help with your rent or money, you know, towards anything." Then when I told her, "no" it was like she just switched and was like, you know, "I don't know what your problem is. I guess you're just one of those people that are just gonna continually hold a grudge. I just wish that we could be friends. And, I don't know why you have to hold a grudge."

When this happened, Cassie recognized it as an attempt to manipulate her and felt empowered by her decision to stand up to and cut contact with her abuser. Roxy recently attempted to rekindle a friendship with her abuser but recognized her continued attempts to abuse her. She told about a recent phone conversation:

She called me today. And, I can't answer the phone cause I'm at work. And then, when she called me again I answered the phone. And, she started with the controlling, "When I call you, you answer the phone." And, I'm like, "No. When I'm at work, I can't answer the phone." And, she really had nothin to say after that. I guess because she was expectin me to say, "O.K. O.K. O.K. "

Roxy, too, decided to cut contact with her abuser because of the persistence of abuse. All of these women asserted their agency as they chose not to pursue friendships with the women who abused them.

The underlying motives behind abusive behaviors were salient in the lives of these women. They focused less on lists of abusive behaviors and more on abusive behaviors as a means for their partners to demonstrate disregard or disrespect for them. None of the participants, however, framed abuse as an effective means for their partners to gain power and control over them. This contradicted many of their accounts concerning times when their partners did achieve power and control as a result of their abusive behaviors. This was true of all participants regardless of SES. Regardless of how they thought their partners came to be abusive, though, these women all experienced a series of events that pointed to the same outcome: they assigned the label "abusive" to the relationships they discussed. As recognized in

the literature (Stark 2007), the abuse persisted even when the relationship shifted from intimate to friendly. This led most of the participants to cut all ties with their former partners. In their accounts, these women attempted to explain the individual causes of their partners' abusive behaviors. As is common, they did not address the ability of their partners to direct abusive behaviors toward them as intimate partners rather than other members of their social structures (Dobash and Dobash 1979). Though it does not explain society's structural influence on IPV, the process of finding causes for abusive behaviors is a recognized coping strategy within the literature (Carlson 1997). These participants also distinguished a number of other means by which they coped with IPV.

Coping

Existing research showed that survivors fight to protect themselves and escape the abuse they incur (Dobash and Dobash; Jenkins 1996; Stark 2007). All survivors work to make sense of the abuse as it exists in the most intimate of settings (Dutton 1992). As a consequence, they develop coping strategies that serve to protect their psychological function as well as physical health (Waldrop and Resick 2004). These participants were no different. Through their interviews, these survivors revealed different strategies for coping with abuse both in the moment and after the fact. Strategies used to cope in the moment were ways the survivors attempted to prevent the abuse altogether or minimize its damage. The respondents also talked about ways they personally coped with the abuse to make themselves feel better about the abuse after it happened. Though there were successful means by which these women asserted their agency, they were not effective means to eliminate the abuse altogether.

'Once that train kinda got set on those tracks, it was going to that station'

At the time of their interviews, these women all recognized they were not the cause of their partners' abusive behaviors. They also talked about ways they fought to protect themselves in their relationships and did not submit to the abuse without a fight. Based on previous experience with their abusers' behaviors, many of the survivors knew they could engage in behaviors to prevent intensification of the non-physical abuse even if they could not prevent the abuse altogether. The literature referred to this as a form of *active coping*, which includes attempts to change the behavior or distance oneself from the situation (Waldrop and Resick 2004). Some participants found ways to avoid their partners to temporarily prevent abuse; Peggy often "walked out the room" and Allison got "out of the house" and did "her own thing." Haley would "walk away" until her partner calmed down. The abuse would persist once they returned, but their actions provided temporary relief.

In order to prevent their partners' escalation, some women learned to temporarily comply with their demands or resist the urge to argue. Roxy knew she could prevent her partner's insults if she did "exactly what [her abuser wanted] all the time." At one point, Roxy risked both her job and her health to prevent her partner from escalating. She said:

I ended up losin' another job, because if I didn't do the drugs with her and stay up with her, we got in a fight. Because, I was sleepin' and she wasn't. And, it would aggravate her because I could fall asleep, and she couldn't. So, I was, I started doin' drugs again with her. Just to stay up with her.

Roxy lost her job and got back on drugs, two things she did not want to do, because it was the only way she knew to assert some control over the situation. Though she could not choose which reasons her partner would find to abuse her (sleeping, being sober, and so on), she could try to eliminate the excuses her partner used in the past. All of these practices were deliberate efforts made by survivors to engage in the process of lessening the severity of the abuse they suffered.

Some of the survivors realized they could not prevent or minimize their partners' abusive behaviors. Cassie and Yvette both insisted there was nothing they could do to prevent the abuse.

And, Melody had this to say:

If it was gonna happen, it was just gonna happen. There wasn't any bribery, or attempting to apologize, or any of that stuff. Once that train kinda got set on those tracks, it was going to that station.

When this was the case, the survivors disengaged in an attempt to prevent any further escalation.

The literature referred to this as *avoidant coping* (Waldrop and Resick 2004). Ursula "just wouldn't fuel" her partner's anger; she "wouldn't say anything." Haley, too, "wouldn't say anything" when her partner insulted her. By remaining silent and doing nothing, survivors were able to minimize the abusive behaviors. All of these efforts to avoid or minimize abusive behaviors were supplemented by coping strategies used after the fact when survivors found ways to assert agency where they could

Of the many coping strategies these women identified, substance abuse received the most attention. Six of the nine participants talked about excessive substance use as a means to cope with their abuse. Substances included: food, alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, and more substantial drug use. Isabella said she "was the six pack queen...daily" while coping with the abuse in her relationship. Peggy started smoking weed to cope, because "it would stop [her] from ponderin' about it" and she "wouldn't sit around beatin' [herself] up over it (the abuse)" when she was high. These women are not unique, as substance use is a common coping skill used by survivors of IPV (Carlson 1997). Stark (2010) discussed coping with substance use as a form of agency that is not commonly understood as such. He referred to coping strategies that may seem self-destructive as a means for survivors to "take the resistance underground" in order to assert

control in the context of no control (Stark 2007; Stark 2010). Other ways these survivors coped after the fact included: hanging out with friends, driving, and reading a book.

These survivors identified specific active as well as avoidant tactics they employed to cope with abuse. For them, coping was a constant effort throughout their relationships and often after they ended. Many of these women still, at the time they were interviewed, engaged in what they saw as both healthy and unhealthy coping skills. For example, Cassie used food as a means to cope with her abuse and still had a “weight problem” at the time of her interview. Just like the abusive behaviors they experienced, the coping skills these women established were specific to their relationships. Each survivor’s coping skills served as important tools to help her exert agency in the situations created by the abuse she experienced. Coping was also often an interactive process for my respondents, as these women sought help from those in their social network.

Help Seeking

As mentioned, there are three main sources of help identified by the literature: friends & family, helping agencies, and the legal system (Balsam 2001; Dobash and Dobash 1979; Giorgio 2002; Irwin 2008; Jenkins and Davidson 2001; McClennen 2005; Renzetti 1992; Ristock 2002; Russo 2001). Similar to the findings of McClennen (2005) and Renzetti (1992), friends were the only consistent support the women in this study sought. Despite their reliance on friends as support, these women admitted they did not disclose all the details of the abuse in their conversations. Rather, as Peggy said they “vented” to friends and sought support and understanding. Isabella talked to her friends, but “not in detail.” Haley, Yvette, Peggy, and Cassie all stated that they talked to friends, though they did not listen to their friends’ advice

when told to leave their abusers. Many of these survivors said they used help seeking as a means to cope with the abuse rather than actually get help to stay safe or leave their abusive partners.

Some of these survivors recognized the actual abuse as a personal problem they had to solve themselves. Isabella said she was not really the “kind of person” who talks about her relationship problems. Allison “didn’t really want advice on the obvious” when she knew what she had to do to leave her abuser. And, Ursula insisted it was her “personal situation,” and she did not talk to anyone about the abuse in her relationship. Yvette and Melody both expressed feelings that they could handle the situation on their own and did not need anyone’s help. Many of these statements segued into the aforementioned conversations about the severity of physical versus non-physical abuse. When asked why she did not seek help, Cassie said “cause it wasn’t that severe;” there was no physical violence. Melody said she used help seeking as a coping strategy, because she was having a hard time identifying the abuse that was not physical. She said she often thought:

Maybe I am being stupid. Maybe this isn’t the way most people in life see things.
And, I’ve just gotten this skewed view for one reason or another

Talking to other people helped Melody “get a handle on” identifying the abuse. The lack of physical abuse also prevented most of these women from seeking help from the legal system.

Haley was the only survivor who turned to the legal community for help when she filed for a restraining order against her abuser. However, this was not an effective means of protection from her abuser, as is often the case (Dutton 1992; Griffin 2008; Jenkins 1996; Renzetti 1992). The legal system granted Haley an order of protection, but Haley’s partner still harassed her over the phone. Also, the judge appointed to Haley’s case refused to give her custody of her son, despite her previous partner’s criminal record and violent behaviors. Haley blames the lack of support she received on the homophobia within the legal system (discussed

later). Finally, the women interviewed did not seek any services of the organizations designed specifically to provide support to survivors: hotlines, shelters, and support groups.

‘What’s someone on the other end of the phone gonna be able to do to help me’

Russo (2001) reported that lesbians have very little access to helping agencies and suggested this is problematic for these women; furthermore, the survivors interviewed claimed they had no desire to access help from these sources. When asked why they did not turn to official agencies for help with their abusive relationships, the survivors all gave similar responses. Peggy thought about it but did not think advocates would “really know” what she was going through like her friends did. Isabella expressed a similar concern:

I’m not that kind of a person. And, I know that’s...like, what’s someone on the other end of the phone gonna be able to do to help me. I’m in it. I’m the one who stays in it. I’m the one that has to make the move to get out of it. I’m very strong minded.

Their hesitancy to turn to hotlines for help could have been because these services do not direct their advertisement to either lesbians or non-physical abuse. Peggy said:

I think that if lesbians knew that lesbians who were abused were puttin’ together something, they’d be more likely to maybe go. Instead of just a straight person. Cause, we could more relate to it.

If services were more queer friendly, Peggy said she would “probably go talk to somebody.”

Though this confirmed what previous researchers found: lesbian survivors are less likely to turn to resources that do not advertise as queer friendly, Peggy was the only participant to directly address this (Girshick 2002a; Girshick 2002b; Renzetti 1992). Other women did not think organizations were designed for them, because they did not experience physical abuse. Both Melody and Cassie mentioned their problems were not “severe” enough to warrant professional help. It was not that they did not perceive their situations as dangerous; rather, the survivors realized organizations are not designed to offer adequate support to survivors who are lesbians or

who experience abuse that is not physical. Still, personal support structures did serve as sources of help, even when the survivors did not actively seek it.

Support Structure

Previous research showed social support can increase a survivor's choice of coping strategies and can be especially beneficial to lesbian survivors, like those interviewed, who do not see help from agencies as an option (Dutton 1992; Waldrop and Resick 2004). For my respondents, a support structure consisted of those family and friends with whom they had contact while they were in their abusive relationships as well as after they ended. Just as Dutton pointed out that social support is "essential...as a means of countering the battered woman's isolation" (1992:120), these women named their social support as an important resource for them as they coped with abuse. Through their interviews it became apparent that: support structures diminished during these abusive relationships, intervention strategies were ineffective, and abusive women were not held accountable. Relationships with members of their social networks were influenced and influenced these women's experiences with IPV.

'I just wanted friends, and support, and a network of people'

In the context of IPV, isolation results in a batterer's increased ability to carry out abusive behaviors along with the survivor's decreased options for coping strategies, and it is a common outcome of intimate partner violence (Domestic Abuse Intervention Programs 2008; Dutton 1992; McLaughlin and Rozee 2001; Renzetti 1992; Waldrop and Resick 2004). Isolation also makes the survivor dependent on her abuser's sense of reality (Stark 2007; Stark 2010). For all of the participants, except Ursula, contact with friends and family became less frequent while they were in their abusive relationships. Both Yvette and Melody framed this as something caused by their own decisions and not as a result of the abuse they incurred. Melody said,

“When you’re in a relationship...that person that you’re dating is supposed to be your best friend.” Even though her partner maintained friendships outside their relationship, Melody said she chose not to do so. Yvette revealed she lost track of all her friends and did not realize this until her relationship was over. Both these women invested in their relationships in which their partners were supposed to be their “best friends,” and this left them without friends when they needed support concerning the abuse. Other survivors cited both indirect and direct ways their abusers caused their support structures to become smaller.

At times, abusers indirectly influenced the survivors to cut off contact with friends and family. Peggy’s partner was “rude” and refused to socialize when they were around Peggy’s family. Peggy gave examples such as the time she “brought her [partner] to one of [her] grandfather’s birthday parties, and [her partner] slept in the backseat of the car.” As a result of this and other similar instances, Peggy spent less time with her family while she was with her former partner. Isabella’s abuser was also rude and made negative comments about Isabella’s friends, because they were “simple.” Due to this, Isabella’s friends “slowly but surely stopped hanging around.” Cassie’s partner only abused her when they were in public. Cassie said:

When we would get out in front of other people or our friends, she would take that opportunity to take pot shots at me and degrade me. Make me look like I was an idiot.

Cassie’s partner also “usually had something to say negative in regards to anybody” Cassie had any type of relationship with. These things influenced Cassie to stop going out in public or spend time with her friends; consequently, her support structure diminished. Because her abuser refused to go anywhere with her, Haley was unable to meet new people and make friends. Her social network consisted primarily of other parents she met through her boys’ school. And, Haley did not get close to these people, because of her perception of the town in which she lived

as homophobic. Even though they did not refer to their abusers' behaviors as a direct attempt to isolate them from their loved ones, these participants did recognize that the behaviors had that effect. The social resources of these women were depleted as a direct result of their abusive relationships.

Other survivors lost contact with friends and family because of what they identified as their abusers' deliberate efforts to isolate them. Allison moved to an entirely new city to be with her abuser. Once there, Allison became friends with her partners' friends; however, whenever Allison tried to make friends at work her partner would act "insecure" and imply that Allison could not be trusted around them. Allison said:

Mostly I hung out either by myself or with people I had met through her. And then, she was insecure that I was going to do something with them. And, a lot of these guys were guys that she had done things with in the past. And, I felt disrespected by the whole implication of that. That she thought I would behave that way. But, I guess if she thinks she's capable, she thought I was capable too. But, I thought it was all nonsense. And, really I just wanted friends, and support, and a network of people.

Allison pointed out later in the interview that she would have left her abuser much sooner had she had friends who could have helped support her. Roxy's abuser not only entirely removed her from her existing support structure but also refused to allow Roxy to become close with her own friends and family. Roxy stated that she "didn't have *any* friends" while she was in that relationship. The shift in their social networks strongly influenced the lives of all these women both while they were in these abusive relationships and after they ended. Nevertheless, the accounts by respondents reflected a sense that there was support.

For most of these women, support came from new friendships or acquaintances they developed while in their abusive relationships. When Roxy's dad refused to help her, she called

a friend of her partner's who showed up and "loaded up his car" with all her stuff to help her leave. Allison's support came from a coworker who:

...bought a condo and let me stay in her spare room there. And, I started paying rent for her once I could. But, she didn't make me before I was ready. And, if it hadn't been for that I wouldn't have been able to not live in my car.

Haley received support from the mother of a child at her son's school. This woman helped care for Haley's son, so she would not lose her job. Haley said the woman "was just a godsend" and without her help she "wouldn't have been able" to keep her job. These unexpected acts of support had a significant positive impact on the survivors' lives. Nevertheless, participants discussed many more ways the support they received was less than helpful.

Members of the survivors' social networks offered support as they pointed out negative qualities about their abusers or told them to end their relationships. Peggy said "everybody" asked her "why do you waste your time" with her? Ursula's parents often commented that her partner was "controlling" and they "did not like her." Also, when Haley talked to some coworkers about her relationship, they advised her to "just leave." Though the survivors acknowledged they knew leaving was the socially acceptable solution to an abusive relationship, they did not think these suggestions to leave were helpful. Peggy talked about how her friends would tell her "their opinions and [she] would take them for what they were," but she would "go right back to talking to her" abuser. And, Ursula's parents "stopped kinda telling [her] what to do after a while," when Ursula remained with her abuser despite their advice. The participants' accounts confirmed what previous literature established; it is more effective to offer support to survivors by doing things such as: listening, planning ways to keep survivors safe, and sharing information about IPV (Dutton 1992; Jenkins and Davidson 2001; NDVH 2010). Based on these

women's experiences, members of social networks could also better support survivors by demanding accountability of those who engage in abusive behaviors.

'It was pretty much the same kind of behavior'

Previous research pointed out that society often blames survivors and fails to force batterers to own up to their abusive behaviors (Giorgio 2002; Hart 1986). This transpired in the accounts shared by the survivors in this study as well. As mentioned, for purposes of my research I considered any efforts on the part of those outside the abusive relationship to illustrate that they considered abusive behaviors unacceptable as accountability. This includes a variety of behaviors such as confronting the abuser about the use of abusive behaviors and allowing the survivor to decide if and when social gatherings will include her abuser. Cassie said her friends did not confront her partner about the abuse. Cassie stated:

They saw how she treated me. And, plus they had seen her in a previous relationship before we got together. And, it was pretty much the same kind of behavior.

Even though they knew this, Cassie's friends did not warn her or confront her partner. Members of her social network failed to hold her batterer accountable, and this allowed the incidence of IPV to increase (Griffin 2009). Allison had a similar experience, as her friends did not hold her partner accountable either. And, Allison "knows" this woman used the same behaviors in relationships after she and Allison broke up. At the time of her interview, Peggy still frequented a local gay club where her previous partner also socialized. Peggy said even though people at the club "know what she's really about," they still insisted she was a "cool person" and did not hold her accountable. This woman had also moved from one partner to another using the same behaviors with each one.

Peggy wanted people to hold this woman accountable and had this to say about some of her friends:

They would all wanna hang out with her and then ask me to come. They just didn't *fucking* get it. They knew...they knew how crappy she treated me, but they still wanted me to be around her sometimes.

Peggy developed ulcers from the stress situations like this created, and she stopped spending time with friends who refused to hold this woman responsible for her actions. Previous literature confirmed that a lack of accountability further isolates survivors in their social networks (Irwin 2008). As a consequence of their partners' behaviors, Isabella, Melody, and Roxy cut off all contact with social acquaintances they made while with their former partners. These women as well as Haley, Peggy, and Yvette preferred to spend time with people who acknowledged the pain they went through in their abusive relationships. This was another way their partners' abusive behaviors caused changes in these survivors' support structures.

As a result of their abusive relationships, the survivors did not interact as often with their family and the friends they had before the relationship began. This isolation from family and established social networks prevented members of their support structure from being able to help them or often be aware of the abuse in these relationships. It also created an environment in which these women had very little social contact with anyone but their partners. Even when friends and acquaintances knew of the abuse, they failed to hold batterers accountable. Lack of accountability led to secondary trauma for these women as well as the loss of friends. As with other survivors, a diminished social structure led to increased isolation and less support for these participants (Beeble et al. 2009: 723).

Even though the survivors focused on ways their support structures were damaged by their abusive relationships, support was received in a variety of forms. Many of these women

formed new friendships to replace the ones they lost as a result of their partners' behaviors. These new relationships proved to be crucial resources for many of these women. This was seen in the support Allison received from a new friend who let her live with her, and the way an acquaintance Roxy made through her partner helped her pack up and leave. However, there was an obvious disconnect between what members of their established social networks offered as support (advice) and what survivors identified as helpful support (listening and comfort). It was evident that these women did not find the "advice" or situational interventions they received to be helpful means for caretakers to support them, as this advice came at a time when the respondents were not in a place to hear it. Nevertheless, the relationships these women discussed did all come to an end.

The Relationship Ended

There were no apparent commonalities in the events surrounding the end of the participants' relationships. One topic discussed often was the positive aspects of the relationships that influenced the survivors to stay with their abusers longer than they thought they should, which is common among survivors (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Walker 2009). These survivors expressed hope that their relationships would improve and become the ideal relationships they desired. Cassie said about the rough times in her relationship that she:

...thought that it was just another down. And, that things would get better. And, they would. We'd rock along for a while. Things would get better.

Melody identified the love she had for her abuser as a reason to stick it through what she hoped would be a rough patch. She stated:

I think when you love somebody so much and you just, you *just* want them to love you back, you're willing to suffer through some pretty stupid shit. If, you think there's gonna be a pay out in the end.

Not all of the women stayed for hopeful reasons, though. Haley felt pressured to stay with her abuser because of her children, and Allison did not leave because she simply could not afford to move out. These women, like many survivors stayed, because they did not have the resources to leave safely (Dobash and Dobash 1979; Dutton 1992; Jenkins and Davidson 2001). Despite what it takes for the relationships to end, there comes a point for all survivors when they realize the behaviors will not change and they do not deserve the abuse (Lobel ed. 1986).

'Thread broke'

For these women, the official end of their intimate relationships did not necessarily mean the end of the encounters with their former partners that were abusive. As discussed, most of these women reported abuse after their relationships ended. However, there did come a time when they realized their own agency and stood up to their abusers in ways they would not have before. These were significant moments in these women's lives; Denzin (2001) referred to them as "epiphanies". As they shared the specifics about these times, the survivors sat up straighter, spoke more clearly, and smiled with pride. For Cassie, this moment came about a year after her relationship ended when she told her partner she did not have to "abide by" her rules anymore. This was much like Roxy's experience when she recently, five years after the relationship ended, told her abuser that she did not "run [her] life anymore." When Melody had her epiphany, she said something cruel and explained why:

I said that because I knew it was something that I couldn't take back. And, that was my way of kind of slicing that, you know, final end all to it. So, I didn't have to, didn't have to mess with it anymore.

To protect herself, Melody was intentionally hurtful toward her previous partner. The act that coincided with the epiphany was unique to each woman. What linked these experiences was how empowered the survivors felt afterward. This process allowed the survivors to finally

remove the abuse from their lives and see themselves as strong capable women. In their own ways, they all made the decision to assert their agency and refuse to allow their previous partners to inflict additional harm on their lives.

How Survivors Viewed Themselves

Over time, the respondents came to understand that who they were was altered by their experience of abusive behaviors. Their accounts showed that they, like other survivors, viewed themselves as naïve and manipulated while with their abusive partners, as turning into someone they did not want to be (Lobel ed. 1986). These women realized their partners led them to believe in a false ideal of the relationships they wished they had. And, they realized their partners led them to believe they deserved the abuse they suffered and the misery they experienced was unwarranted. According to their accounts, this experience resulted in both negative and positive changes to the survivors' lives.

'She put a scar on me. It's healing, but it's gonna take time'

The negative consequences of the abuse they suffered influenced two main segments of these women's lives: health and social interactions. Health consequences included stomach troubles, weight gain, and mental anguish. Peggy said:

Toward the end it was...I would get so upset that, I, my legs would start shakin' and I had ulcers in my stomach. And, worry. Mean, you stressin' out; it upsets your stomach. Well, it upset mine.

Though most of these women healed from the ailments related to the abuse, the negative effects of the abuse on these women's health did not immediately stop when the relationships ended. Melody sought counseling for the "emotional injury" she suffered as a result of her relationship years after she discontinued contact with her abuser, and Cassie still battled with weight gain at

the time of her interview. Even when their abusers did not abuse them with physical violence, the survivors' bodies felt the impact of their abuse.

The way these women functioned within their social networks was also altered by IPV. Haley said it was "really difficult at work," because she had to take extra time off to settle things in her relationship. Allison said she was "suffering at work" because her partner kept her up all night and she was tired during the day. Peggy faced the potential of conflict with strangers whenever she went to a gay bar frequented by many of her friends. She stated:

All these people I don't know got involved. And now, they're thinking of me because of the way [abuser] told them about me or whatever she told them about me. And, now I got like half the people in the club pissed off at me for reasons that I don't know because of [abuser]. Because, they're her friend.

Respondents also talked about problems they had in future intimate relationships that were caused by their inability to trust after they were so badly hurt. Isabella said she was more "impatient" in her next relationship. And, Allison said she was "tired" and was "more likely to emotionally shut down sooner and stop investing" in intimate relationships. As Dutton (1992) pointed out, the ability for survivors to function in social settings was negatively influenced by their experiences with abuse; however, these consequences were not all the abusive relationships changed in the lives of these women.

'She was a big lesson for me'

The survivors communicated ample examples of the ways the insight they gained from their experiences with IPV changed their lives for the better. Peggy decided for herself:

I'm not gonna sit around and *rot* on the bad shit that happened to me. I'm gonna learn from it and know never to walk down that path again.

Roxy said she was “a lot stronger now” after her abusive relationship. A story Haley told her son to explain why she made tough decisions about their family made it apparent she saw herself as a stronger mother because of things she experienced as a consequence of IPV. She said:

So, I said, “O.K. Let’s say you’re playin in the street, and this car’s comin barrelin down at ya. And, you don’t see it.” I said, “And, I don’t have time just to yell for you to get out the way.” I said, “I have to run in the street, tackle you, throw you to the side of the yard. All you know’s that your knee’s all banged up, your mom just sacked you for no apparent reason, you’re just mad at me.” I said, “But, then later you start yellin at me. And then, your friend says, ‘Wow. Your mom just saved your life.’” I said, “So, right now that’s where you are.” I said, your knees all scratched up; you don’t know why I just did what I did.” I said, “But, one day you’re gonna realize that I saved your life.”

Haley identified herself as a strong woman and a good protector for her son. The ability to reflect on the events of their abusive relationships also allowed these women to build stronger ideas of what they wanted to be happy in subsequent relationships. They pointed out positive differences in everything from the way they interacted with potential partners to how they communicated with their current partners. Melody explained that her experience “definitely changed [her] for the better. She learned the importance of honesty in a relationship and the inevitability that all lies will destroy trust. Additionally, many of the respondents understood their abilities to be better partners as a direct result of their abilities to be stronger individuals.

Influenced by the way they “lost” themselves while with their abusive partners, these women learned to be more independent and confident in themselves afterward. Many of them disclosed ways they recently stood up to their abusers who tried to treat them as they did before the relationship ended. When Cassie’s partner tried to manipulate her into doing what she wanted by angrily insisting she was “holding a grudge,” Cassie had this to say to her:

I’m not holdin a grudge, but you can’t manipulate me anymore. I don’t have to abide by your rules anymore. I don’t have to listen to what you say. I’m standing on my own two feet. I have my own head on my shoulders now. You’re not

gonna manipulate me...I don't do anything I don't wanna do anymore because of you.

These women stated they were presently in control of their lives and refused to let anyone else tell them how to live. They clearly appreciated their own self-worth.

None of these women looked back on her abusive relationship and perceived herself as the woman she truly wanted to be. Neither did they think, at the time of their interviews, that they were the reason for their partners' abusive behaviors. They did, however, identify ways IPV changed them and how these changes influenced the way they interacted with friends, family, and other members of their communities. Nevertheless, these survivors took the negative experiences they had with abuse and used them, according to their accounts, to transform themselves into "stronger" women who were better able to care for themselves as well as others. However, many of them recognized that their own agency was not enough to guarantee their empowerment in an oppressive society.

Homophobia

Most of what these women discussed seemed as though it could be relevant to any survivor of IPV; however, "lesbians necessarily operate in a society marked by inequalities of class and race as well as of gender and sexuality" (Stein 1992: 561). As a result of this, certain issues arose for these women specifically because they were in lesbian relationships. Though I did not directly ask participants about issues they faced in their abusive relationships specifically because they were lesbians, some of these women pointed to a few noteworthy obstacles they faced because of homophobia within this society. That they addressed these issues without any prompting from me illustrates the salience of homophobia in these survivors' experiences. The majority of the conversation surrounding issues specific to lesbian couples arose in the interview with Haley and related to structural homophobic practices. Haley's situation was unique to this

sample of women in two ways: she was the only woman to have children with her abusive partner and she was the only woman to co-own a home with her partner. Haley pointed out she knew as soon as her son came home from the hospital it was a mistake to have her partner give birth to their first son, because she knew her abuser would one day take her son away. Haley explained a specific time when she could not live in the home she paid for, because she did not want to put her partner's biological son, whom Haley raised from birth, out on the street:

[The house is] in both our names. But, you know, because I had left. When I left and I'd got the restraining order [abuser's biological son] was still here. So, I could have with the restraining order asked for permission to live in the dwelling. But, because [abuser's biological son] was here; I didn't wanna kick him out. I didn't ask. And, it's something that you just can't change once you submit the restraining order. So, we had to go to court again for permission to live here.

Haley did not have any contact with her son at the time of the interview and did not expect to until his eighteenth birthday, which was ten years away. Obviously distraught about this, she said that because "we [lesbians] have no laws" she could not gain the rights to see her son. Even though she could not see her son and wanted nothing to do with her abuser, Haley reported:

Right now I'm payin her car insurance. Cause, I have to. Cause, it's under my name, too. And, if she doesn't have car insurance, if she's in an accident, they could take the house.

Because of the homophobic practices of this country that fail to provide legal rights and protections to lesbian couples, Haley was forced to suffer from the abusive behaviors of her previous partner despite her decision to end the relationship.

Yvette, Cassie, and Isabella all brought up different issues that arose in their social relationships due to the existence of homophobia. Yvette and her girlfriend were pressured to leave their hometown and move to a bigger city early in their relationship, because "word was gonna spread fairly quickly" about their sexual identities as lesbians. This pulled Yvette away from the people in her support structure and made her more dependent on the relationship with

her abuser. In time, it diminished her options for support when the relationship turned abusive. Cassie, on the other hand, identified the homophobia of society as a tool her abuser used to further isolate her in their relationship. In her account, she stated:

I was also hidden in the relationship. She didn't want her fellow co-workers to know she was gay, cause she worked in a man's world. And, she thought that she would be picked on, or looked down on, or thought that it would be bad for her. And, the man's world to know that she had a female partner. So, anytime we were around any of them, which was not very often. I didn't go around them very often. But if I did, I was just a friend...to her. And, so, when she would travel she wouldn't call me as much as probably someone should that is in a relationship. She wouldn't talk to me when she was around those other people.

Finally, the consequences of homophobia for Isabella were more general to all of her intimate relationships. In the abusive relationship she discussed, she was unable to turn to her family as a source of support, because they refused to accept any intimate relationship she had with another woman. The denial of human rights to individuals of queer identity led to increased isolation of these lesbian survivor and leaves all queer individuals isolated within this society (Russo 2001).

Suggestions for Intervention

With this research, I sought to explore non-physical forms of intimate partner violence as nine lesbian survivors experienced them. I intentionally focused on the domestic violence framing of IPV throughout the literature review, the interview process, and my analysis. From the beginning, the focus of my work was on the application side of IPV. I did not intend to provide an adequate analysis of the causes of IPV in lesbian relationships, nor could I from the data. To do this would have required not only a much larger and more representative sample but also a different interview design. I agree with Hart's (1986) argument that the adoption of the patriarchal model of a hierarchy within the family created a space for IPV in lesbian relationships. Also, the discussion of power within my participants' previous relationships had the potential to lead to an analysis of the influence patriarchy had on the abuse they experienced.

However, participants were not eager to discuss power in their relationships in great detail. Therefore, I was not able to effectively probe into this topic to provide sufficient evidence to support or reject patriarchy as the etiology of IPV within my work.

I also chose not to analyze the relationship between the manifestation of gender roles and the existence of IPV within these relationships. This does not mean issues of gender did not exist in these relationships. Rather, gender did play an integral part in the dynamics of these abusive relationships. For example, Allison's partner often used her traditionally masculine public sphere power (a career making more money) to force Allison to carry out the duties of the traditionally feminine domestic sphere (cooking, cleaning, and so forth). Nevertheless, proper analysis of patterns with things such as masculine identification or structural privilege was beyond the scope of my research. Other researchers provided valuable research on gender dynamics as a component of IPV in lesbian relationships (Lobel ed. 1986; McClennen 2005; Miller et al. 2001; Renzetti 1992; Russo 2001).

For purposes of this research, nine survivors reflected on past lesbian relationships they identified as abusive in predominantly non-physical ways. Analysis of transcriptions of their interviews illustrated many similarities to the manner in which the dominant literature described the experience of IPV. These women coped, sought help, and framed their abuse much like the heterosexual female survivors of physical abuse depicted within the literature. Where these women differed from those survivors was not so much the way they experienced abuse but rather the social context in which they experienced it. What was distinctive for these women was that information and support networks within this society have not been developed for survivors who are not heterosexual women experiencing abuse that is predominantly physical.

Before a new political movement can begin, we need to create spaces in which conversations occur that acknowledge the existence of IPV outside the parameters of predominantly physical abuse. We need to realize that not only is physical violence an issue that affects all members of society, but non-physical IPV is also a societal issue about which all members of our communities should be educated (Russo 2001). Outlining the parameters of non-physical forms of abuse for those who are not involved in the movement will not be a simple task (Stark 2010). These participants illustrated that physical abuse is easier to identify and discuss. It is not always easy to distinguish between a white lie and manipulation. Was it not, however, only thirty years ago that we were without a language to discuss and a system to respond to physical abuse? When the domestic violence movement first began, it was still socially acceptable for a man to beat his wife to “keep her in line.” Now we have various social systems in place to respond to this behavior. Furthermore, is physical abuse really objective? Is it considered abuse when a man slaps his wife on the hand or when he punches her in the face? Where do we draw the line? Perhaps, it is not as important that society recognizes punching or hitting as abuse but rather that as a result of the efforts of actors in the domestic violence movement society recognizes punching and hitting *as* signs of something unacceptable: domestic violence. Without a recognized “name for the continuum of strategies that imprison [survivors] in personal life, there can be no community of support or outrage” (Stark 2007: 371).

Educating the overall community on the dynamics of all types of abuse will also result in better education of survivors and abusers. Participants in this study came from different cities, had different educational backgrounds, and their social resources varied. However, those with college degrees had no more information about non-physical IPV in queer relationships than did those with only high school degrees or less. These women said they did not reach out for

traditional forms of help because they thought their problems to be their own and no one else's. They did not realize their experiences were part of a larger social problem, as is the case with many survivors (Irwin 2008). Neither did they recognize themselves as members of a larger group composed of all survivors deserving of rights and support. Without a socially recognized category with which they may identify (such as survivors of non-physical forms of intimate partner abuse) survivors, such as those interviewed for this research, remain invisible even to themselves (Stark 2007). Public awareness campaigns such as billboards and ads on social networking sites could help increase awareness and provide survivors, such as these, the language they need to relate their experiences to others.

One facet of the domestic violence movement that confirms the severity and heinous nature of IPV is the perceived support of the criminal justice system. Though the criminal justice response has not effectively protected women from abuse, it has provided validation for the claim that domestic violence is unacceptable. The legal response to IPV in the United States currently focuses only on physical abuse; specific laws do not exist to protect survivors of IPV from abuse that does not leave physical scars (Stark 2007). However, progressive members of French parliament recognize non-physical abuse has the potential to destroy women "little by little" and are attempting to make it illegal (Martine Billard quoted in Beardsley 2010). Though they would increase awareness of the severity of these types of abuse, laws against abuse may not be the solution to ending IPV.

Some major actors in the domestic violence movement, such as Stark (2007), claim the proper course of action is to remove those who abuse from society. I disagree. If the estimate that one in four women experiences abuse at the hands of a loved one in her lifetime is assumed true, efforts to remove those who abuse would be nearly impossible (Tjaden and Thoennes

2000). Successful intervention must include a more consistent effort of collective peer involvement to hold all abusers accountable for their behaviors. Confronting an abuser, who is also a friend, family member, coworker, or so forth, poses certain risks. Relationships are viewed as private and oftentimes people would rather not interfere for fear of losing that friend, family member, coworker, or so forth even if she is abusive. Furthermore, I can not make a broad suggestion of how to hold all abusers accountable anymore than I can outline the behaviors all abusers use. Intervention strategies should be unique to the social settings in which the abuse occurs. What if people in Allison's social group talked to her abuser about her behaviors at times other than when she was escalated? What if Peggy's friends realized Peggy needed time away from her abuser and stopped going to social gatherings where the abuser would be present? What if caretakers and other members of society found a way to make abusers "realize it for themselves" as Allison suggested? Perhaps then abusers would not simply move on to hurt other women when one partner leaves them. Perhaps then abusers would be able to better identify their behaviors and work toward change. It is unfair to assume all those who use abusive behaviors are unwilling to change. Without resources and support, though, it would be very difficult for them to do so.

As Allison pointed out, "you can't just tell someone how it is, and what their life is like, and what's wrong with their life." It is also important to listen to community members and realize that although they may not be familiar with the literature, they are familiar with the relationships in which they experience abuse. And though it may contradict what advocates assume to be true, they provide valuable insight. For example, though it may seem helpful to assure survivors that abusers are fully responsible for the abusive behaviors, Allison stated she felt more "empowered" when she was able to take some responsibility for the situations

surrounding her abuse. The participants of this study realized that although they did not cause the abuse itself, they were capable actors in the events of their own lives. This knowledge could help advocates work with survivors to build their self-image and help them see the power they possess.

These suggestions support efforts that diverge from those of the dominant heterosexual domestic violence movement. If the domestic violence movement refuses to respond to the existence and severity of abuse in queer relationships, those who study and experience abuse in queer relationships must find ways to create new systems designed to support the communities in which it occurs. These suggestions direct advocates toward the formation of new collectives of people who realize that the systems in place, though once progressive and impactful, no longer work (Stark 2007). Many of these suggestions mirror those of previous researchers and may be critiqued for being reactive. We may effectively prevent future abuse, though, by first reacting to existing abuse. For example, holding batterers accountable may help prevent them from abusing future partners, thus, decreasing the prevalence of IPV. This work supports the existence of many movements working toward a common goal, as it acknowledges there are many different experiences with IPV. In order to bring an end to intimate partner violence, intervention efforts must be directed toward all those involved, effectively all members of society. Stark (2007) points out that an end to IPV has not been achieved, because the domestic violence movement has failed to address the inequalities at the core of intimate relationships. I add that under the system in place survivors who do not fit the dominant model are left without resources or support and abusers are permitted to continue with their behaviors as reasons society is no closer to seeing an end to intimate partner violence.

Future Research

With each investigation, a better understanding of the dynamics of IPV within this society develops. It would be beneficial for future research to continue efforts that focus on populations that have traditionally received less attention. Exploration into the ways in which other queer survivors, including men, frame their experiences with IPV is needed. There is also a need for literature on other minority populations. These groups of people face additional social stigmas that put them at greater need for resources, yet they remain overwhelmingly neglected by the academic community. Researchers should also study those who engage in abusive behaviors. It will not be possible to find ways to end IPV, if we do not talk to and try to understand those who use abusive behaviors. Information produced by this research on these populations could provide advocates with the information they need to create more substantial resources for all.

Research should also critically evaluate the non-profit sector and the ways in which the systems in place function to support survivors as well as other members of communities. Academics should talk to advocates and discover what they need to more effectively carry out their missions. Also, research should be conducted that follows information that is transmitted from both organizations as well as the academic community. Investigators would be well-advised to discover why the information known within the movement (such as the most effective help is listening and offering information) is not getting to the people the movement is intended to help. Academics should also take on the task of finding out how to get information to specific populations. None of the lesbians in this study recognized herself as an active member of a “queer” or “lesbian” community at the time of her abusive relationship. They recognized themselves as members of social circles composed of friends, loved ones, coworkers, and so on.

Based on the idea that lesbian feminism decentered through the period of the eighties, which led to a less structured (also less exclusive) lesbian presence within society (Stein 1992), it would be interesting to know how other lesbians associate themselves with a sense of queer community today and how this interacts with IPV. This knowledge could help advocates create better systems for advertising to and supporting lesbians who experience IPV.

Most importantly, researchers should realize that the academic literature created on intimate partner violence in this society has the potential to do good as well as harm.

Researchers should remember that the work they produce contributes to the image this society holds of intimate partner violence. Use of inclusive terms, such as survivors rather than women who experience abuse, is important as is the use of empowering language to describe survivors, instead of victims. Academics have a responsibility to the populations under study to produce information that will benefit their lives, and in this case that will help communities work to bring an end to intimate partner violence.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Script

Hello,

My name is Jessica Giordano, and I am a graduate student working on my Master's Thesis in Sociology at The University of New Orleans under the direction of Dr. Pamela Jenkins. The purpose of my research is to examine the dynamics of non-physical forms of relationship abuse within lesbian relationships from the perspective of the survivors. I am looking to enlist participants who identify as survivors of non-physical forms of relationship abuse to aid me in this process by recounting their experience with these types of abuse. Participants in this study will be asked to sit down with me for one interview lasting between sixty and seventy-five minutes. All personal information acquired during the interview process is strictly for research purposes and will not be used in any other way. This study is completely voluntary, and participants can opt out of answering any questions or withdraw from the study at any time. Getting involved in this research project is an excellent opportunity for lesbian survivors to tell their personal stories and to help get the word out about the existence and severity of these types of abuse. If you are interested in becoming involved with this study or have any further questions, please contact...

I greatly appreciate you taking the time to consider this research.

Sincerely,

Jessica Giordano

APPENDIX B

University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research **University of New Orleans**

Campus Correspondence

Principal Investigator: Pamela Jenkins
Co-Investigator: Jessica Giordano
Date: October 2, 2009
Protocol Title: "Non-Physical Forms of Relationship Abuse in Lesbian Relationships"
IRB#: 02Oct09

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7)).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

Robert D. Laird, Ph.D., Chair
UNO Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research

VITA

Jessica Giordano was born in New Orleans, Louisiana in 1984. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology from The University of Texas at Austin in May, 2008. She attended the University of New Orleans as a graduate student in Sociology from the Spring of 2009 until May, 2010 when she graduated with her Master of Arts. Her future plans include pursuing a career as an advocate in the movement to end intimate partner violence.