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Lesbian Battering: An Exploratory Study

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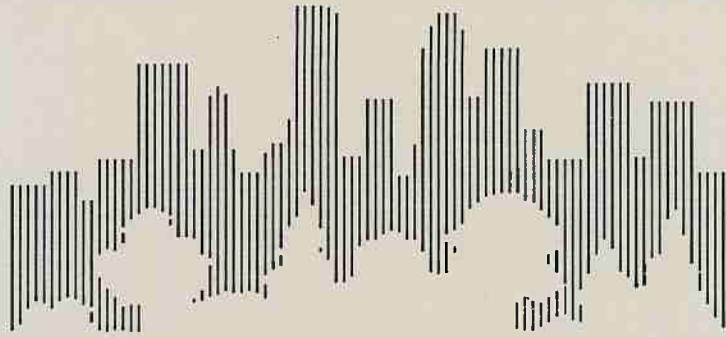
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MASTERS IN SOCIAL WORK THESIS

Raquel Volaco Simoes

**Lesbian Battering:
An Exploratory Study**

1995

**MSW
Thesis**

Thesis
Simoes

**LESBIAN BATTERING:
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

Submitted to the Faculty of Augsburg College
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Master of Social Work

Written by Raquel Volaco Simões
May 15, 1995
Glenda Dewberry Rooney, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK
AUGSBURG COLLEGE
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

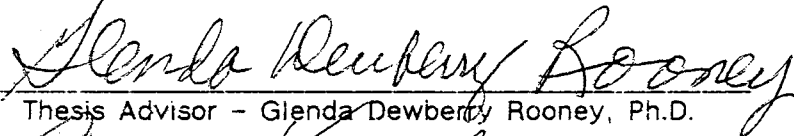
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LESBIAN BATTERING: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to examine the incidence of same-sex female battering. An overview of the existing material on lesbian abusive relationships confirmed the need to further validate and clarify this problem. The Conflict Tactics Scales, Couple Form R, was used to gather data. Fifty percent of the sample reported having perpetrated or experienced physical abuse in current or past relationships. Due to the sample size, the results from this study may not be generalized to the larger lesbian/bisexual community.

CHAPTER 1

Overview

This chapter presents the issue of domestic violence and discusses the problem of same-sex female battering. This section also identifies some of the factors that have prevented the discussion of same-sex battering, as well as the provision of services, from becoming more visible within the lesbian and human services communities. It concludes with the purpose of this exploratory study and the research question.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of same-sex battering is one which has yet to fully come out of the closet. While the magnitude of the problem of domestic violence in heterosexual relationships has been recognized by most human service providers in this country, the same cannot be said for gay and lesbian battering. As indicated by Renzetti (1988), Lie et. al (1991), Bologna et al. (1987), and Kanuha (1990), an extensive amount of literature has been written over the past 20-25 years about violence perpetrated by men against their female partners. What followed was an increase in services for battered women which assumed domestic violence to be a male-female issue.

The existing statistics on domestic violence reflect this trend. For example, according to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, thirty to forty percent of women homicide victims are murdered by their husbands or boyfriends. At the same time, the percentage of women murdered by their female partners is not known.

The reasons for the lack of statistics regarding battered men and women in same-sex intimate relationships, as well as the lack of resources, are the focus of the next section.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of battering in same-sex female relationships is two-fold. First, there is the actual abuse and, secondly, there is a lack/inefficacy of resources and support systems for battered lesbians. In order for these problems to be addressed, more needs to be known about same-sex domestic violence.

One major reason for the lack of information and scarcity of services for lesbians in abusive intimate relationships is that same-sex partnerships are not validated and valued like heterosexual ones. This makes it very easy for service providers to focus on heterosexual families only. The assumption that everyone is straight has also perpetuated the invisibility of services for the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender community (Lobel, 1986).

As Kelly and Warshafsky (1987) suggested in their study

Partner Abuse in Gay Male and Lesbian Couples, another reason is the fear that homosexuality will be correlated with violence and be perceived as the problem, while the issue of domestic abuse will be ignored. "In addition," they stated, "there is a belief among some members of the gay and lesbian community that partner abuse could not occur between gay men or lesbians" (p. 1).

The focus for this project was specific to lesbian battering. Considerably more literature has been written about lesbian abusive relationships, especially in the past decade, than on gay male domestic violence. Pam Elliot, who in 1990 was the coordinator of the Lesbian Battering Intervention Project in Minnesota, was quoted in *Ms.* as saying that "we [lesbians] are 15 years behind the straight women's movement, but we are now starting to own up to it" (p. 48).

The following definitions of abuse and lesbian battering illustrate the dimensions of the problem.

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 partner for resisting the perpetrator's control over her. (Hart, 1986)

Abuse is any behavior intended to cause harm or damage to the victim, or behavior that systematically disregards the basic human needs of the victim. This harm can include, but is not

limited to, emotional, sexual, physical, social, or spiritual harm. (Hammond, 1989)

Lesbian battering is the pattern of intimidation, coercion, terrorism or violence, the sum of all past acts of violence and the promises of future violence, that achieves enhanced power and control for the perpetrator over her partner. (Hart, 1986)

To me, being a battered lesbian means going into the hospital at age nineteen for a possible complete hysterectomy as a result of her abuse. It means being disowned by my parents for not leaving a woman who had told me so many times that she would kill my family if I ever left her. How could I explain this to them? It means believing so strongly that she would kill me that it became not a question of IF she would kill me, but of WHEN and HOW?

("M", 1988)

The voices of battered lesbians are finally being heard within the community. Much of the material on this topic is anecdotal yet very powerful. Lesbians who have shared their experiences have shown that this issue cannot be ignored. Still there are numerous factors which have enabled lesbian domestic violence to exist with little challenge. Among these factors are homophobia, sexism, racism, classism, lesbian invisibility, and lack of information of service providers.

The desire for a "lesbian utopia" felt by many women in the

lesbian community, including therapists and counselors, adds more pressure for battered lesbians to remain in abusive relationships. Hammond (1989) posits that "it is hard for lesbians, especially lesbian feminists, to acknowledge that other lesbians are capable of being cruel, violent, and brutal" (p. 98). Hammond, a clinical psychologist, has worked with violent lesbian relationships and is aware of the lack of training that even lesbian therapists have when it comes to dealing with this issue. According to her experience,

even when a lesbian-identified therapist is aware of an abusive relationship, she may place an emphasis on supporting the relationship rather than ensuring the safety of the victim. In her efforts to affirm lesbian couples, who often live in a hostile environment, the lesbian therapist may unwittingly downplay the importance of abuse in a way she never would in situations involving a male batterer. (1989, p. 100)

Research has indicated that friends are a main source of support within the lesbian community, but anecdotal literature also shows that many women live in battering situations without ever telling the people closest to them. The importance of having friends who can be supportive is magnified for women who cannot afford professional help. Many women who did talk to friends about being battered experienced the denial that exists concerning this issue. The following quote, taken from Renzetti's book Violent Betrayal - Partner Abuse in Lesbian Relationships, is by a survivor of domestic violence and exemplifies this problem.

And nobody - when I talk to our mutual friends now, they just can't believe it's true, because when we'd be in a group, sometimes she would put me down

or not treat me as an equal, but friends treated that as a passing thing... all they ever saw was this adorable naive woman. (1992, p. 102)

The National Lesbian Health Care Survey (1994) gathered extensive information from 1,925 lesbians from all 50 states regarding lifestyle and mental health. Of that group, about 75% reported seeking counseling, mostly for reasons of sadness and depression (p. 228). Most of the lesbians in the sample were white, educated women. What is important to note from the results of that survey is that the participants who were out and well connected within the lesbian community were the ones most likely to seek services "for reasons related to being a lesbian, such as difficulties with lovers and friends" (p. 241). Yet many lesbians are not out and cannot afford to be out. According to the authors, some respondents

expressed concern about seeking mental health services in the past because of being discriminated against or stereotyped by counselors. Others were simply afraid to disclose their lesbianism, even to professionals whose help they needed. (p.241)

PURPOSE

The goal of this research was to examine the incidence of same-sex female battering. A secondary purpose of this project was to show that lesbian battering exists in an effort to promote the provision of appropriate services.

Research Question

What is the incidence of domestic violence in same-sex female relationships?

Summary

The problem of abuse in intimate lesbian relationships is compounded by the lack of information and resources regarding this issue. These factors may also inhibit the willingness of victims to seek services. In order for appropriate support systems to be created, more research needs to be done on the frequency of lesbian violence in intimate relationships. The incidence of abuse in the lesbian community has not been sufficiently documented. Service providers must become educated on this issue and modify current programs as well as create new ones so that battered lesbians feel that they have options. We must also strive to create an environment - not just in our offices and agencies - where people feel safe to come out. The profound misconception and minimization of this issue is probably the biggest and most dangerous problem that battered lesbians face today - aside, of course, to the violence perpetrated on them by their partners.

CHAPTER 2

Overview

This chapter summarizes the literature related to lesbian battering. Some of the research included in this section also contains some information on gay male and heterosexual domestic violence as compared to lesbian battering.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the research that has been done on domestic violence in lesbian relationships has focused on the frequency of lesbian battering, types of abuse, causal factors, and willingness to seek services. The research question posed earlier is a limited one and the literature review that will follow focuses primarily on the few empirical studies regarding the frequency of abuse. Literature that examines causal factors as well as responses of battered lesbians to the abuse will be included.

The time period for this literature review is 1986-1994. Several empirical studies have been selected as well as conceptual sources (Renzetti, 1988; Kanuha, 1990). Some of the empirical literature is specific to lesbian violence (Lockhart et al., 1994; Lie & Gentlewarrier, 1991; Montagne et al., 1990; Lie et al., 1991), while others surveyed both lesbians and gay men and compared the incidences of abuse in those relationships

(Bologna et al., 1987; Kelly & Warshafsky, 1987). One of the studies looked at both heterosexual and lesbian women and compared the incidence of physical aggression in their relationships (Brand & Kidd, 1986).

Only one article specifically dealt with the issue of lesbian battering in communities of color (Kanuha, 1990). Though it does not offer any empirical data on the frequency of domestic violence, it is included here because it considers the role of racism in keeping women of color in abusive relationships and it demonstrates how 'white' the discussion about lesbian battering has been. As the literature review will illustrate,

most of the discussion on lesbian batteringhave been limited to perspectives by and of White lesbians. While battered lesbians share many of the same experiences that all women face, it is the *combination* of being women, battered, lesbians, and people of color that create significant barriers for lesbians of color in the writing and telling of their battering experiences. (Kanuha, p. 170)

Incidence of abuse

The most recent research on the frequency of lesbian battering was conducted by Lockhart, White, Causby, and Isaac (1994). This study used the Conflict Tactics Scales to measure verbal aggression, violence, mild abuse, and severe abuse. Of the 400 questionnaires distributed at a large women's music festival in the Southeast in 1989, 284 were returned. The majority of the sample were white (92%) and between the ages of

21 and 60. Ninety percent of the sample reported verbal aggression in their relationships. One or more acts of physical violence were reported by 31% of the sample.

The research conducted in 1985 by Lie and Gentlewarrier (1991) also provides useful information on the frequency of lesbian battering. Lie and Gentlewarrier distributed 1350 self-administered questionnaires during the Michigan Women's Music Festival. Of the 1350 questionnaires, 1142 were completed and returned. The sample consisted of the women who identified themselves as lesbians (n=1099). The majority of the women were white, comprising 87% of the sample. Black women accounted for 4% of the respondents, Hispanic women for 3% and Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, Asians and others for less than 5%. The results of this study revealed that one out of every two women who participated reported having experienced at least one abusive relationship in their lives. Lie and Gentlewarrier (1991) list several reasons why the findings cannot be used as a generalization to the greater lesbian community. First, the sample was non-random. Second, "contextual factors," such as workshops held at the Festival, may have "heightened the sensitivity of participants to socio-political issues" (p. 52). Similar limitations were given by Lockhart et al. (1994) for the results of their study.

Schilit, Lie and Montagne (1990) examined the problem of lesbian battering related to substance abuse. A mailing list of a lesbian organization in Arizona provided the sample for this

study. Of approximately 350 women, 107 completed the questionnaire and returned it in the stamped and self-addressed envelope. Of those, 104 were used. The age of the respondents ranged from 22 to 52. Caucasians made up 93% of the sample, Hispanics 2%, Blacks 1%, Native American 1%, and Other 3% (p. 57). The findings showed that 37% (n=39) of the respondents were currently in abusive lesbian relationships. Sixty-four percent of both victims and perpetrators reported that they used alcohol or drugs before the battering occurred.

In another study, Brand and Kidd (1986) examined the frequency of physical aggression in heterosexual and female homosexual dyads. They distributed questionnaires to 130 women living in San Francisco, 55 self-identified lesbians and 75 self-identified heterosexual women. There were no significant differences between the two groups on demographics. The sample consisted primarily of white, well educated and middle and upper-middle class women. The study results showed that physical abuse occurred more often in heterosexual relationships than in lesbian relationships. Specifically, of the violent incidences reported in this study, seventy-two percent were committed by men and twenty-eight were committed by women.

Bologna, Waterman and Dawson (1987) surveyed 70 gay and lesbian people, 36 men and 34 women, to explore same-sex domestic violence. Using the Conflict Tactics Scales, participants were asked to take part in a study on conflict resolution tactics. All of the participants were college students in New York and

Boston. The results were almost as alarming as Lie and Gentlewarrier's. Of the lesbians who completed and returned the questionnaires, 40% reported being victims of violence in an intimate relationship (most recent or current) and 54% reported having perpetrated violence. The researchers found that "being a perpetrator of violence in a current relationship was positively correlated with being a victim of violence in that relationship for both females" (p. 51).

Bologna et al. found that the incidence for gay male domestic violence was much lower - 18% of the male respondents reported being victims of abuse in current or most recent relationship and 25% reported perpetrating violence in current relationship.

Lie, Schilit, Bush, Montagne, and Reyes (1991) conducted a study of how frequently lesbians report aggressive past relationships. They surveyed 174 self-identified lesbians (29% of 600 survey recipients) in Arizona. About 90% were white. Of the 174 lesbians surveyed, about 75% had experienced aggression by a past female partner and 25% reported being victimized in a current relationship. About two-thirds (66%) of the sample had experienced aggression by a previous male partner. The researchers found that "the majority of victims that had also used aggression with a previous male partner characterized this use as self-defense, as compared to only 30% of those who had used it with a female partner" (p. 121). The victims of lesbian battering more frequently described it as mutual aggression.

Kelly and Warshafsky (1987) surveyed both lesbians and gay men across the country, the majority being from California, and found that 33.3% of the 48 lesbian participants had experienced domestic violence. Out of the 50 men, 62% had been in an abusive relationship. They also found that 53% of the sample had sought services for the abuse and 31% reported that they would have liked more sources of help.

Causal Factors and Sources of Conflict

Renzetti (1988) conducted a study of 100 battered lesbians throughout the United States and Canada. Most of those who responded were from the northeastern states (34%), followed by the Midwest (22%), the West (16%), the South (14%) and Canada (5%). Most of the participants were white lesbians. Though this study does not directly help answer the research question, it does highlight the seriousness of the problem. Renzetti hypothesized that the abusive partners of the participants felt an imbalance of power and used violence to assert their control. She found that status differentials between partners, such as social class, seem to foster power imbalance. She also looked at dependency versus autonomy in abusive relationships; the greater the batterer's dependency, the greater the frequency of infliction of different types of abuse. Renzetti's study also included the different responses to lesbian battering and how some of those responses, such as friends' denial, have helped

perpetuate the domestic violence.

The study conducted by Lockhart et al. (1994) also explored the sources of conflict in lesbian relationships. The results, much like Renzetti's, suggested that power and status differences can trigger verbal and physical abuse. According to Lockhart et al., verbally abused respondents reported arguing over partner's job, partner's emotional dependency, housekeeping/cooking duties, sexual activities, and respondent's alcohol/drug use. The physically abused respondents indicated significantly more conflict regarding respondent's unemployment, respondent's emotional dependency, partner's jealousy, respondent's jealousy, partner's relatives, respondent's relatives, and partner's alcohol/drug use.

The results of Lockhart et al. differ from the findings of the study conducted by Kelly and Warshafsky (1987), where associations between status differential variables and aggression scores were not found. They did find, however, that alcohol and drug use was a source of conflict for their participants as well.

Kelly and Warshafsky used the Personal Attributes Questionnaire to measure sex role identity and divided the respondents into four categories: 1) Undifferentiated, 2) Androgynous, 3) Male, and 4) Female. Results suggested that an "unclear or undifferentiated sex role appears to be associated with higher levels of aggression" (p. 7). Kelly and Warshafsky proposed that people with unclear sex roles have lower self-esteem, which may lead to partner abuse.

A couple of studies (Lockhart et al., 1994; Lie et al., 1991) reported that respondents who were victimized in their family of origin were more likely to be victims or perpetrators of abuse in current intimate relationships.

Summary

Though it is clear that domestic violence in lesbian relationships exists, the research question still remains unanswered simply because of the inconsistency of the results. Also, because all of the research has been non-random, it is almost impossible to generalize the findings and attribute them to the entire lesbian community. Most of the participants in the studies mentioned in the literature review were white, middle or upper middle-class, educated women. The findings cannot be generalized to a lesbian community that includes many non-white lesbians and bisexual women, as well as working class women.

Though it seems unlikely that a study will be done from which a true generalization can be formed on the incidence of lesbian battering, research can further validate and confirm the problem of lesbian partner abuse. Amy Edgington, a survivor of lesbian domestic violence, touched on the issue of incidence in an article she wrote called Anyone But Me.

I doubt we'll ever have accurate statistics about lesbians - but I think the numbers are irrelevant anyway. Our choice of lovers is limited. If there's even one batterer in a small community, we stand a greater chance of getting involved with her, and for every batterer, there's likely to be a string

of victims. (1989, p. 122)

Bologna et al. (1987) touched on the issue of "mutual aggression", a concept that is very misleading when dealing with domestic violence. Many service providers tend to view same-sex battering as mutual battering because victims in lesbian relationships are more likely to hit back in self-defense. This probably happens more often in lesbian battering than in heterosexual battering because two women are more likely to have similar body sizes than a man and a woman, thus making self-defense more viable (Hart, 1986).

More research needs to be done on the reasons why many women are unwilling or unable to access services, as well as on the dynamics of abusive relationships. Renzetti's work (1988, 1992) provides helpful information on the dynamics of lesbian partner abuse, but future studies need to include women from diverse races and backgrounds.

The following chapter lays out the conceptual framework which has shaped this research. Some of the ideas presented are similar to the concepts which have also guided past research on woman-to-woman domestic violence.

CHAPTER 3

Overview

There are four main concepts that guided this research on the frequency of woman to woman battering. They are: 1) Misuse of power and control, 2) Different forms of abuse, 3) Homophobia, and 4) Heterosexism. The concepts are based on some of the theories presented in the literature of domestic violence as well as on ideas advanced by battered lesbians and service providers. In addition, this researcher was able to gather information that helped guide this study from Karla Robertson, the co-founder of Casa de Esperanza's same-sex battered women's program. The experiential knowledge she shared supports the concepts specified in this chapter.

There are several similarities between lesbian battering and heterosexual domestic violence. For example, as is common with heterosexual perpetrators of abuse, the lesbian batterer may be abusing alcohol/drugs and may have experienced violence in her childhood (Leeder, 1988). The first two concepts presented in this chapter are not specific to same-sex battering.

Two concepts that differentiate woman to woman abuse from its heterosexual counterpart are homophobia and heterosexism. These are also presented in the following pages.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Misuse of Power and Control

The first concept is the assumption that domestic violence occurs due to misuse of power and control within a relationship. This misuse of power and control does not happen only once, but is systematic in nature. According to Hammond (1989), Lockhart et al. (1994) and Weeks (1994), much of the literature on heterosexual domestic violence has conceptualized this problem as a result of gender-based inequality. This inequality is the foundation of a patriarchal culture that gives men permission and incentive to exercise power over women. Because this research focuses on lesbian domestic violence, the premise mentioned above cannot serve as a guide. Though misuse of power and control is, of course, also a characteristic of heterosexual domestic violence, the problem needs to be framed differently when dealing with same-sex battering. The connection between gender inequality and domestic violence is not a viable one in this case.

Anecdotal literature on lesbian battering clearly shows the presence of systematic misuse of power and control (Lobel, 1986). What seems to be an isolated event evolves into a continual pattern of violent and abusive behavior.

Forms of Abuse

The second concept relates to a belief that has helped shape the domestic violence movement. Specifically, abuse happens in many forms, which includes, but is not limited to, physical violence. Many women don't identify abuse until something physically abusive occurs. Donna Cecere (as cited in Hart, 1986), a survivor of battering, addressed this point: "Though a lesbian feminist activist for years, I still thought of battering as, first, a male-against-female act, and second, as being a physically violent act" (p. 23).

The other forms of violence that can occur in intimate relationships are emotional, psychological, sexual, and spiritual abuse. Many studies on domestic violence focus primarily on the frequency and type of physical and sexual abuse. Similar to a study which examined gay male domestic violence (Weeks, 1994), the definition of violent and abusive behavior used here includes the different forms of abuse. Operational definitions of these forms are discussed in the following chapter.

Homophobia

The third concept is one which is specific to same-sex relationships and has enabled the issue of lesbian battering to remain largely invisible. Homophobia refers to the irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of

the same sex (Pharr, 1988). Both institutionalized and internalized homophobia can make it extremely difficult for a battered lesbian/bisexual woman to recognize what is happening and, if the abusive relationship is acknowledged, to look at services as an option for her situation.

Amy Edgington was in a battering relationship from 1977 to 1981. In her article (1989) she makes a list of the "vulnerabilities and strengths" that kept her in the relationship for so long: fear of the consequences of leaving, lack of resources, denial, lack of perspective, shame, love, willingness to work hard on the relationship, feminism, and lesbian identity. Some of those elements can be seen in heterosexual relationships, while others, particularly the last two, are specific to lesbian relationships. In regards to feminism, Amy has the following explanation:

My politics told me that the last thing I should do was abandon a woman in trouble. I failed to see that battering was working for my lover, and that I was a woman in serious danger. (p. 122)

For 'lesbian identity', she writes:

A lesbian's relationship with her lover is supposed to be the piece of cake that makes all the oppression worthwhile. It was devastatingly hard to admit that my lover was my worst enemy. (p. 122)

Some battered lesbians can also be coerced into staying in an abusive relationship simply by the threat of being 'outed' to family, employer, etc. This internalized homophobia is compounded by institutionalized homophobia. If same-sex intimate

relationships are devalued in this society, why should people care if lesbians are being battered by their partners? This type of thinking in addition to lack of resources, even within the lesbian community, has perpetuated the invisibility of lesbian battering.

Heterosexism

This final concept refers to the assumption that everyone is heterosexual. This assumption has enabled the maintenance of systems (ie. the legal system) that can only work effectively for those who are straight. From forms that need to be filled out at hospitals to crisis lines for battered women, the language most commonly used is heterosexist. If a woman who is being battered by her female partner calls a shelter and the advocate refers to her partner as "he", will the caller feel comfortable coming out if she ends up going there? And, if she comes out, how will workers handle homophobic remarks made by clients as well as other staff?

Heterosexism has kept many lesbians from seeking services, especially within the domestic violence movement. It has also kept many well-intentioned service providers from giving appropriate care.

Summary

Many of the discussions about domestic violence have included an analysis of gender inequality and patriarchal control of women by men. This analysis cannot be used in this research about same-sex female battering. Yet there are concepts that have guided the domestic violence movement which can, and have, also been applied to lesbian abusive relationships. The belief that abuse occurs due to systematic misuse of power and control is one such concept. Another is the conviction that abuse is not limited to physical violence. The other two concepts that have guided this project are specific to same-sex relationships: homophobia and heterosexism.

The following chapter provides the methodology for this study.

Chapter 4

Overview

In this chapter, the methodology used to conduct the research is discussed. The literature review indicated that few studies have been done to assess the incidence of abuse in intimate lesbian relationships. Of those, the sample populations included mainly white participants and results could not be generalized to the broader lesbian community. This study was developed due to a need for further information about the frequency of this problem. This chapter contains the research question, definitions of key terms, and information on data collection, design and sampling procedure.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

What is the incidence of domestic violence in same-sex female relationships?

Key Terms and Operational Definitions

Lesbian Battering

The definition used for this research for lesbian battering is the one used by the Lesbian Battering Intervention Project. It is defined as "all behaviors that harm and gain or maintain power and control over another person." Though not explicitly stated, the researcher believes that this definition does incorporate the concept of systematic abuse. As mentioned in the chapter on conceptual framework, this research operates under the assumption that battering results from systematic misuse of power and control. Also, the above definition recognizes that abuse can take many forms.

Abuse

The following definitions of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse are also taken from the Philosophy Statement of the Lesbian Battering Intervention Project. The researcher is including these definitions because they are used throughout this paper. The variables which were actually measured by the scale used in this study, though similar to the following terms, are worded a little differently by Murray Straus (1979), the author of the scale. His terms and definitions are operationally defined.

Physical Abuse - any physically aggressive behavior, the withholding of physical needs, indirect harm (ie. harm to pets), and the threat of physical abuse.

Emotional Abuse - any behavior, usually verbal, that exploits another's vulnerability, insecurity or character.

Psychological Abuse - any emotional abuse when there is also a history of, threat of, or existence of physical abuse.

Sexual Abuse - any non-consenting or sexually exploitative behaviors.

The researcher wants to make clear that the definition used in this study for lesbian battering also includes bisexual women who are/were in abusive relationships with women. For this study, the definition for same-sex female relationship is an intimate/sexual/romantic relationship between two women who identify themselves as lesbian or bisexual. The very first question respondents were asked in the survey was whether or not they identify themselves as lesbian or bisexual. If the response was "no", they were asked to not complete the questionnaire.

The questionnaire used for this research is the Conflict Tactics Scale, Couple Form R (Gelles and Straus, 1988). This scale measures three variables: reasoning, verbal aggression and physical violence. The *operational definition* for 25

lesbian battering is the responses on the CTS for items D through S. The definitions given by Straus for the three modes of dealing with conflict measured by the scale are:

Reasoning - the use of rational discussion, argument, and reasoning; an intellectual approach to the dispute.

Verbal aggression - the use of verbal and nonverbal acts which symbolically hurt the other, or the use of threats to hurt the other.

Physical violence - the use of physical force against another person as a means of resolving the conflict.

Design

This study used an exploratory design to answer the research question. The sample included women who self-identified as lesbian or bisexual. The researcher considered sending the questionnaires to social service agencies that are lesbian-specific, but decided otherwise because lesbians and bisexual women who seek services may not be representative of the larger lesbian/bisexual population. Another consideration was to randomly pick 100 names out of a mailing list comprised of mainly lesbians and bisexual women. This option was dropped due to the potential risk to respondents who received this in their homes

and could be living with an abusive partner.

Data for this study were collected using the Couple Form R of the Conflict Tactics Scale (Straus, 1979). The Couple Form R of the CTS is a 7-point, 19-item Likert type questionnaire. It is the most recent version of the CTS and was originally used in interviews rather than as a self-administered survey. As described in the Handbook of Family Measurement Techniques (Touliatos et al., 1990), the CTS

is designed to assess individual responses to situations within the family involving conflict. The introduction asks the subjects to think of the times "when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason." Respondents are then asked to indicate how often they did each of the CTS items in the past 12 months. (p. 490)

The survey begins with questions that conceptualize reasoning. It gradually works up to the items that measure verbal aggression and violence, which are the focus of this research. Items D, E, F, H, and I operationalize verbal aggression; items J through S operationalize physical violence (see appendix C). The responses for the items which operationalize reasoning do not directly help answer the research question, which asks about the incidence of domestic violence in same-sex relationships.

Item G is omitted because it does not help measure any of the three variables. The action of crying was integrated into the scale simply because "pre-test interviewing showed it to be a frequent response and because respondents became uneasy if there was no place to record this" (Straus, 1979, p. 80).

The scales have "moderate to high reliabilities" (Straus, 1979) and "there is evidence of concurrent and construct validity" (p. 85). The Couple Form R (or modified versions of it) has been widely used by service providers and researchers to assess domestic conflict and violence. Though three of the studies that were included in the literature review used the CTS, only one contained information on its usage with lesbian couples. Lockhart et al. (1994) reported that the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the CTS for the respondents in her study were very similar to Straus' parallel coefficient for husband-to-wife. This supports the use of the CTS with lesbian couples.

Sampling Procedure

This researcher identified several contact people from different lesbian/bisexual women's groups in the Twin Cities. Four contact people agreed to take the surveys and distribute them in their meetings. It was left to the contact person and the group to decide whether or not the questionnaires would be completed during a meeting or simply handed out then. The groups were selected with the issue of diversity in mind. Three of the groups were ethnicity specific (ie. one was of Latina lesbians), while the fourth was an open student-run group. The names of these four groups will not be identified in order to maintain the confidentiality of respondents.

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to the four contact people. The researcher gave them out in the middle of April, with a deadline of one week for return. Six surveys were returned postmarked by the deadline date; two more came the following week. All eight surveys were used for this study.

Protection of Human Subjects

Each potential respondent was given a cover letter (see appendix A) together with the questionnaire. The letter contained information regarding the nature of the study and stated that participation was voluntary and confidential. In addition, it included resources for women who felt upset upon completing the survey and wished to talk to someone.

Summary

One hundred questionnaires (Couple Form R of the Conflict Tactics Scales) were distributed to lesbian and bisexual women in the Twin Cities. Eight questionnaires were returned. They measured reasoning, verbal aggression, and physical violence. The responses to the items that operationalize verbal aggression and physical violence were used to answer the research question.

The following chapter presents the results of those eight surveys, graphs of the responses and a section on the findings of this study.

CHAPTER 5

Overview

This chapter presents the results of the study. It contains the characteristics of the sample, graphic representation of the responses and findings of the study. Each graph represents the responses of the eight participants to the particular item described.

RESULTS

Sample Characteristics

Age:

Of the eight respondents, five (63%) were between the ages of 31-39, three were between the ages of 25-30 and one was between the ages of 18-24.

Ethnocultural Background:

This was the response category that reflected the most diverse results. Two women identified their ethnocultural background as bi-racial (Caucasian/African-American and Asian/Caucasian), two as African-American, one as Italian-American, one as Caucasian, one as Asian, and one as Latina.

Income:

Sixty-three percent (n=5) of the eight participants reported an income of \$20,000-\$29,999 in the 1994 year. Two respondents indicated an income of \$10,000 - \$19,999, while the remaining one made less than \$10,000 in 1994.

Relationship Status:

All but one of the participants were partnered at the time they completed the questionnaires. Of the seven who were involved in a relationship, four were living with their partners (50% of the sample). Of these four, all reported being monogamous.

Of the three women who had partners but did not live with them, two described their relationship as monogamous and one as non-monogamous.

No correlation was found between sample characteristics (ie. ethnocultural background) and presence of aggression in lesbian relationships.

Responses

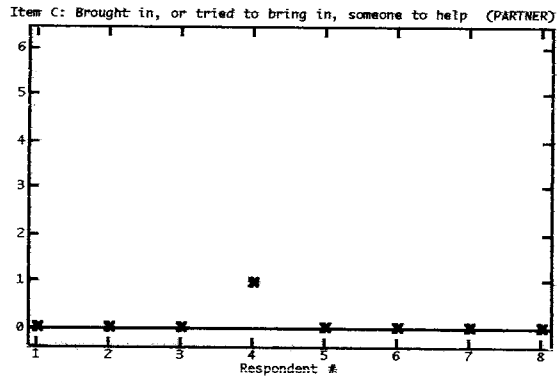
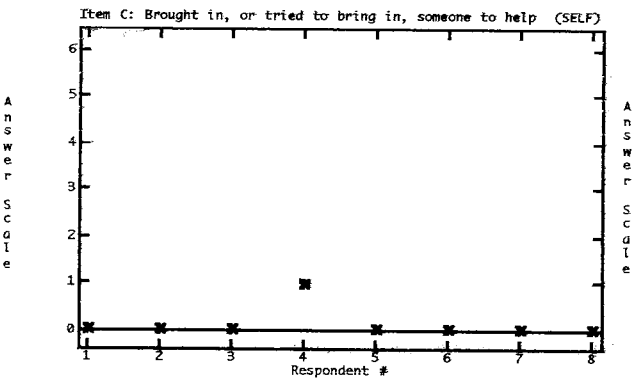
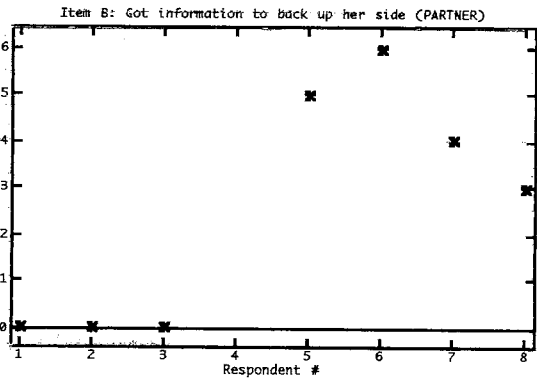
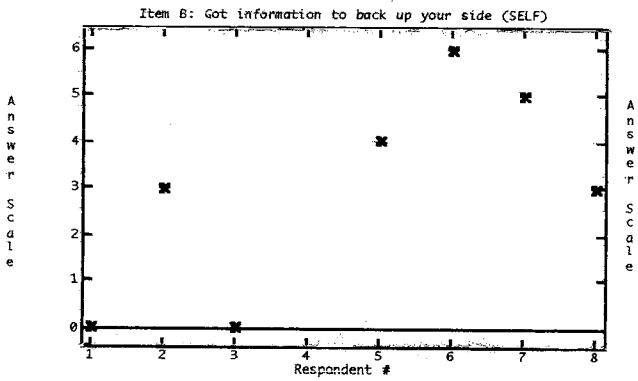
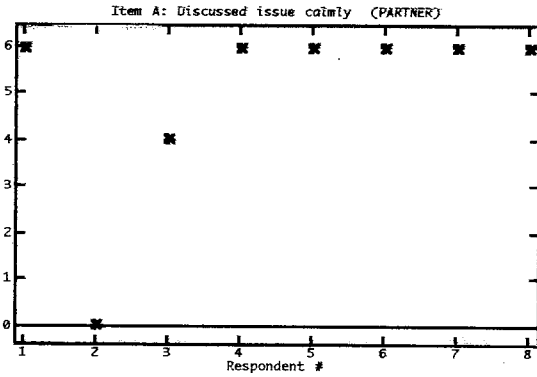
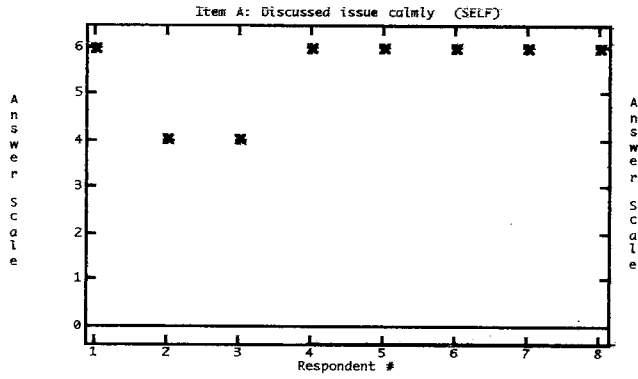
The following graphs represent every respondents' answer to each of the items in the CTS, Couple Form R. The graphs on the left show the responses to the question "How many times in the past year have you...?". The ones on the right show the responses to "How many times in the past year has your partner...?"

CTS RESPONSES

ANSWER SCALE:

1. Once 2. Twice 3. 3 - 5 Times 4. 6 - 10 Times 5. 11 - 20 Times 6. More Than 20 0. Never

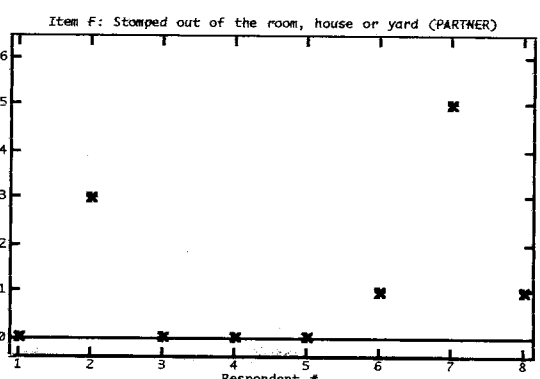
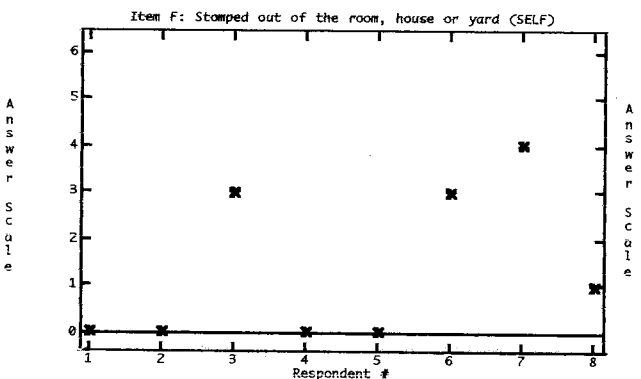
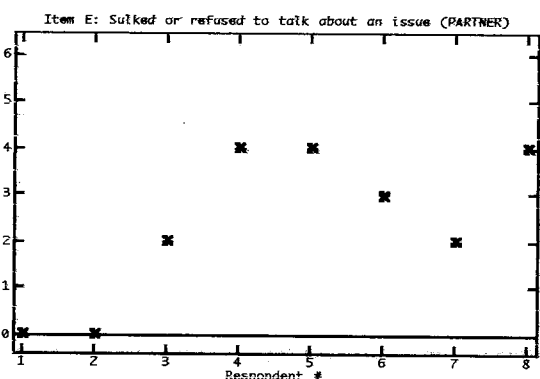
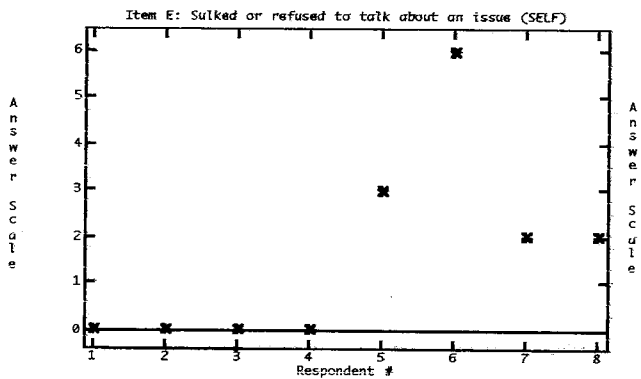
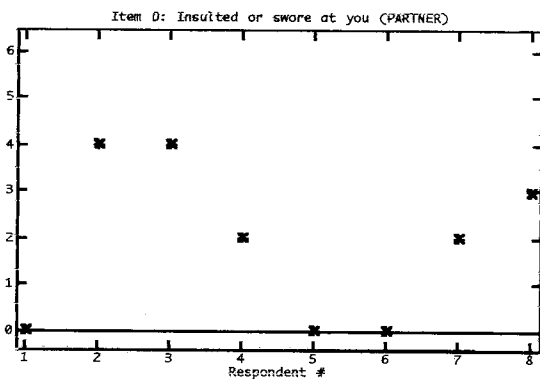
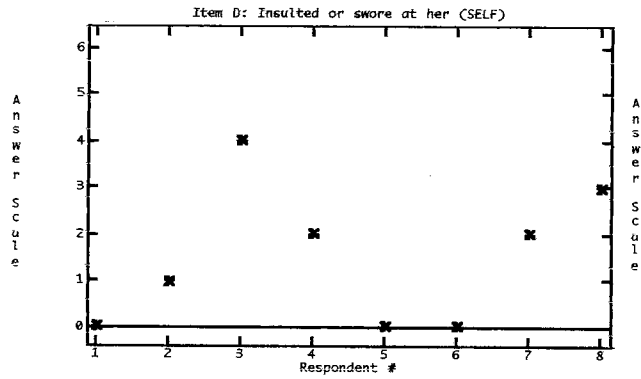
REASONING



ANSWER SCALE:

1. Once 2. Twice 3. 3-5 Times 4. 6-10 Times 5. 11-20 Times 6. More Than 20 0. Never

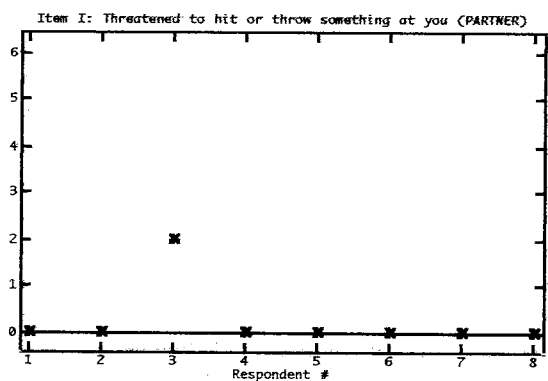
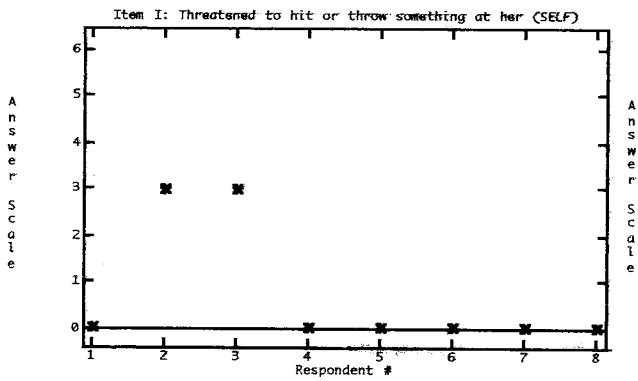
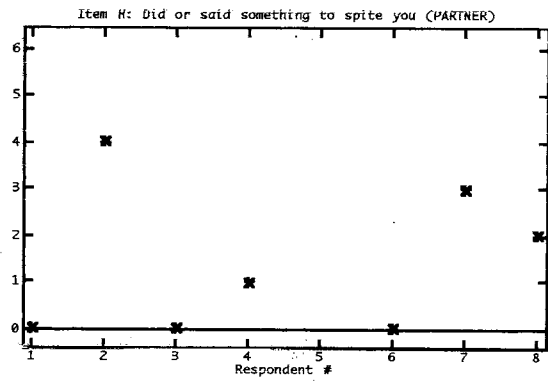
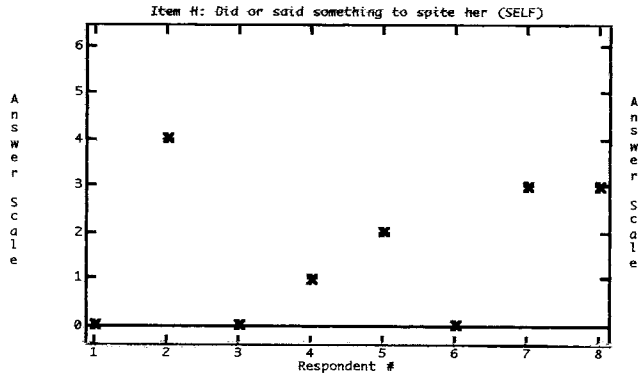
VERBAL AGGRESSION



ANSWER SCALE:

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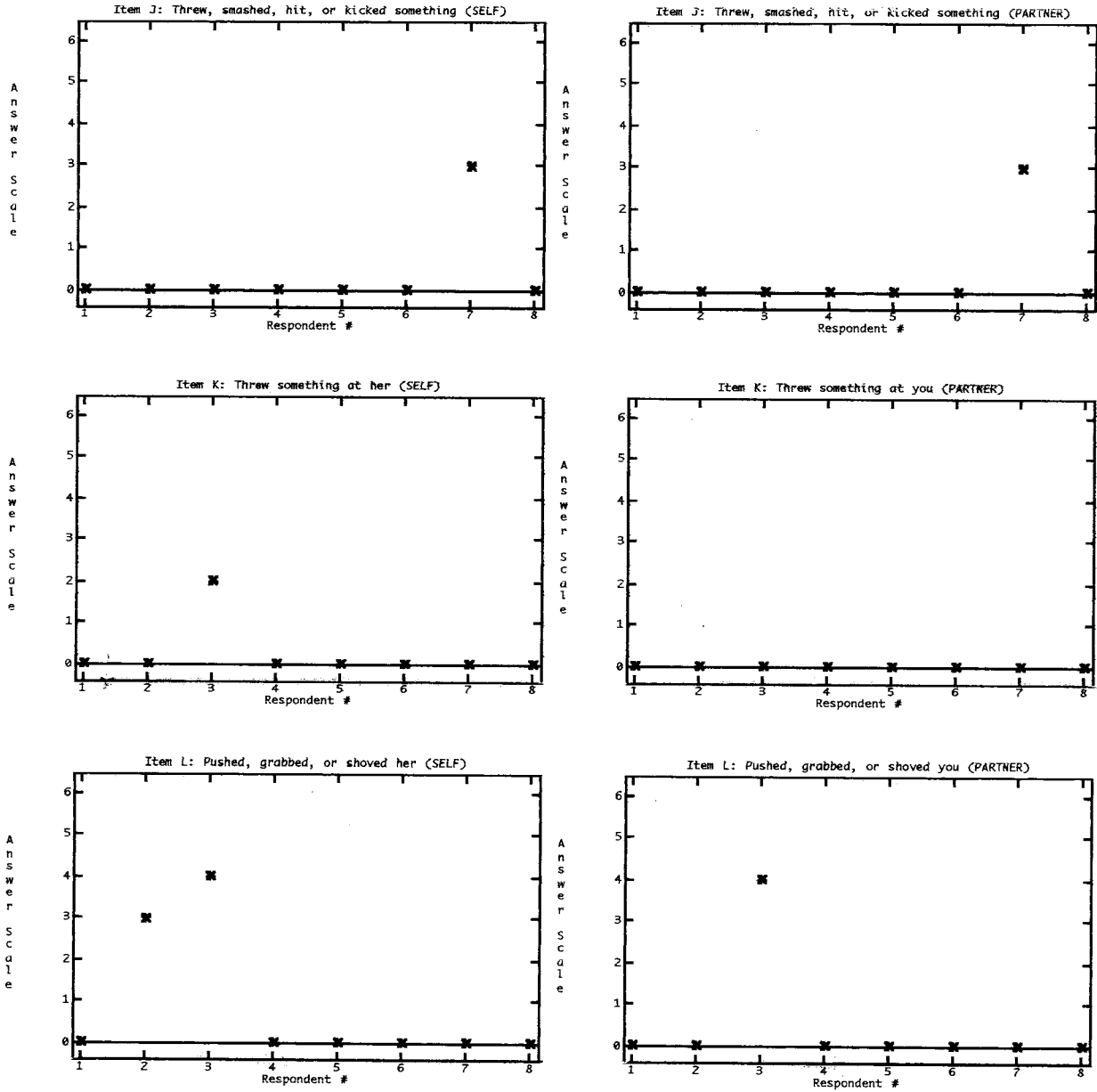
VERBAL AGGRESSION (con't)



ANSWER SCALE:

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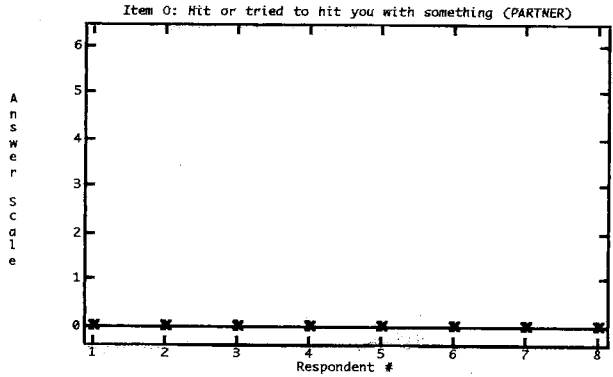
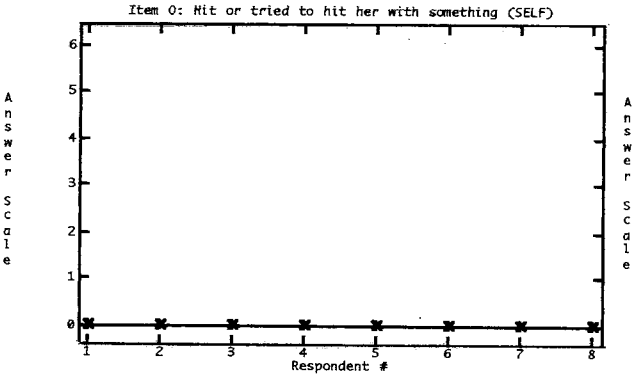
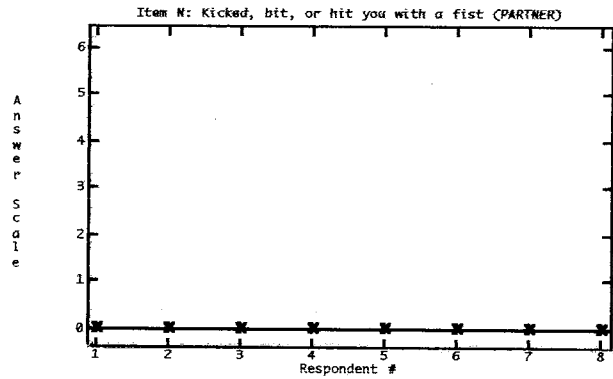
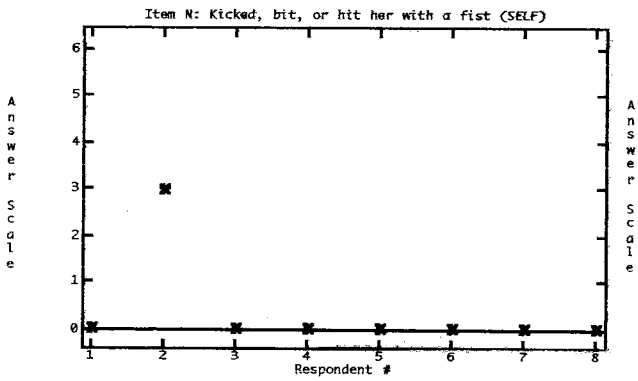
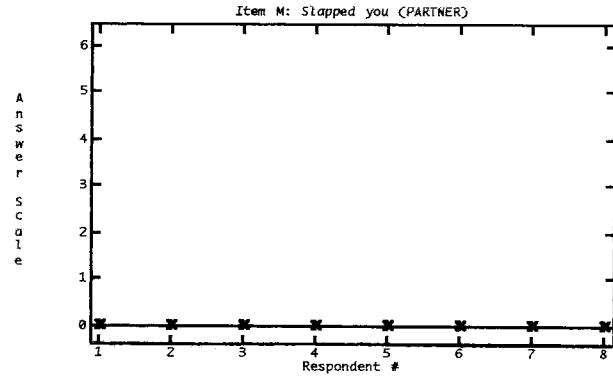
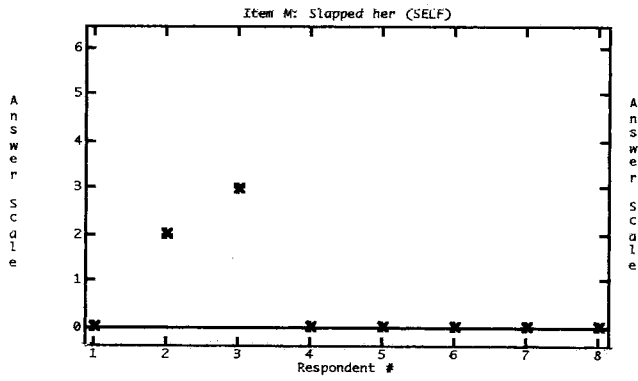
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE



ANSWER SCALE:

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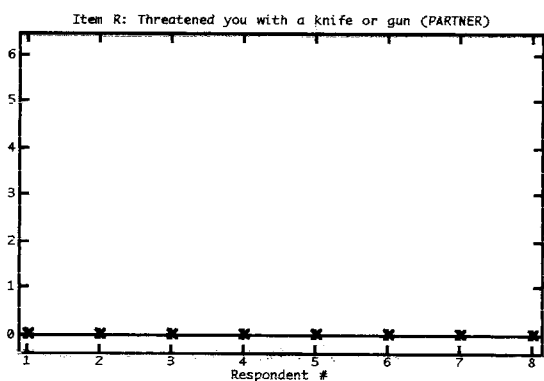
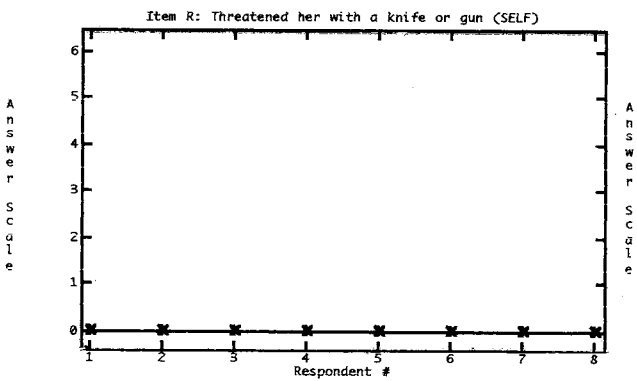
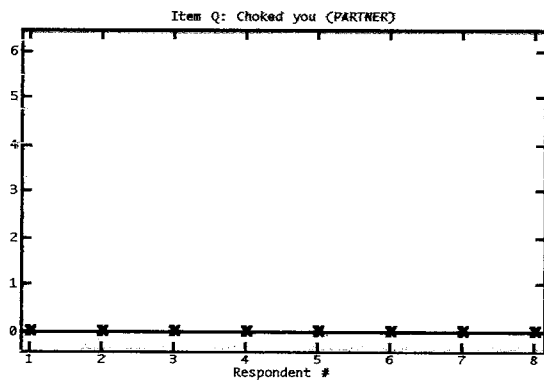
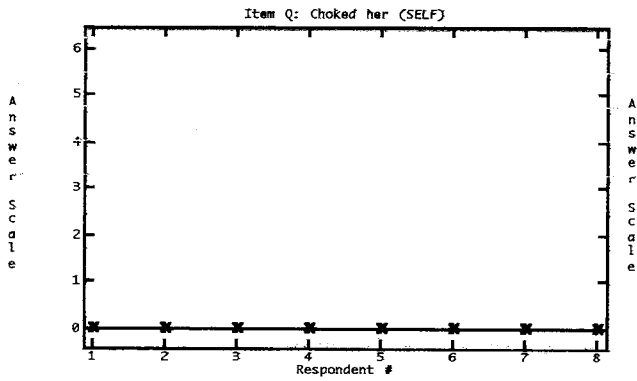
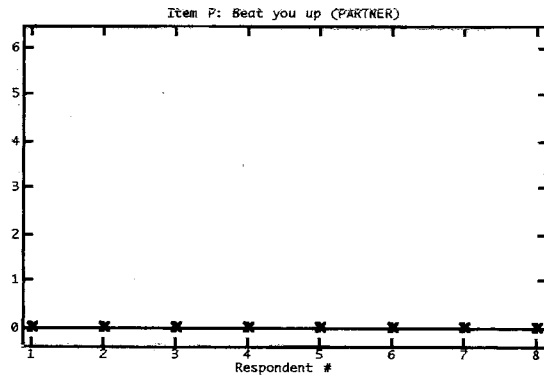
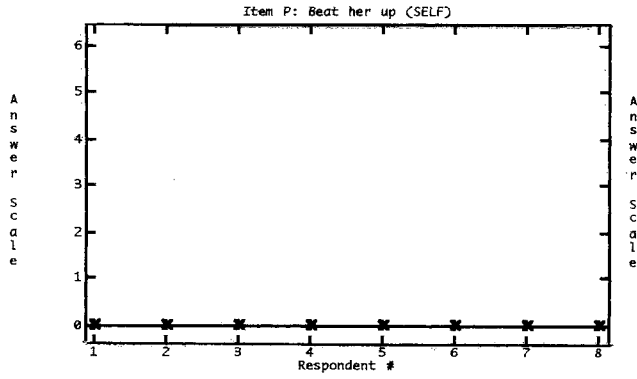
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE (con't)



ANSWER SCALE:

1. Once 2. Twice 3. 3 - 5 Times 4. 6 - 10 Times 5. 11 - 20 Times 6. More Than 20 0. Never

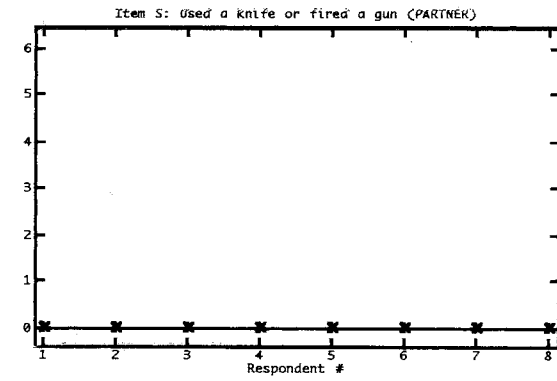
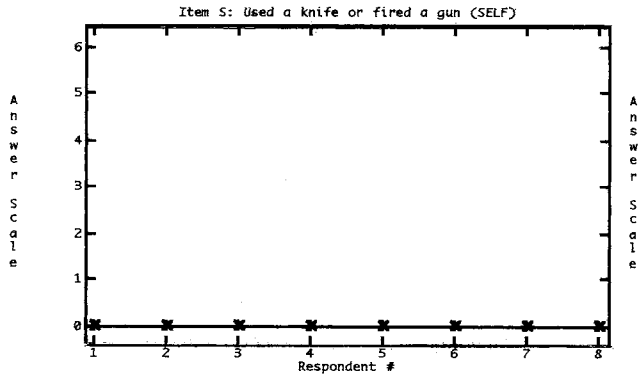
PHYSICAL VIOLENCE (con't)



ANSWER SCALE:

1. Once 2. Twice 3. 3 - 5 Times 4. 6 - 10 Times 5. 11 - 20 Times 6. More Than 20 0. Never

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE (con't)



Findings

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

The results of this research showed that abuse occurs in woman-to-woman relationships. Three participants indicated the presence of physical violence in their current partnerships, while one reported domestic violence in a past relationship. This group comprised half of the sample (50%). Of those four, one woman stated that she had thrown, smashed, hit, or kicked something 3-5 times in the past year. Two respondents (#2 and #3) reported having pushed, grabbed, shoved and/or slapped their partners in the past year; one 3-5 times the other 6-10 times. Their respective scores on the *physical violence* category were 8 and 9 (the average was 2.5). One respondent (#2) answered that she had kicked, bit, or hit her partner with a fist 3-5 times in the past year. This act of physical violence was the most severe for the sample in this study. There were no reports of items 0 through 5 (the more severe acts) in current or most recent relationships.

The person who reported having thrown or smashed or kicked something 3-5 times the past year also indicated that her partner had done the same thing 3-5 times (respondent #7). This is the only case out of the three current relationships where there was no indication of whether the participant was the aggressor. The scores on the *verbal aggression* category for this woman and her partner were almost the same; 11 and 12 respectively.

VERBAL AGGRESSION

The majority (88%) of the women who completed the questionnaire indicated having done or experienced one or more of the actions in this category in their current or most recent relationship. This supports the findings of the study conducted by Lockhart et al. (1994), which reported that 90% of the sample had experienced one or more acts of verbal aggression in the year prior to the study.

In this study, only one respondent conveyed a total absence of verbal aggression in her current relationship (# 1). This is the same woman who answered "yes" to the question "Has it ever happened?" for all of the items representing verbal aggression and physical violence.

The responses to the verbal aggression items show that swearing, sulking/refusing to talk about an issue, and stomping away are frequent actions in lesbian relationships. These are the items D, E, and F on the CTS.

Aside from one of the respondents, no one indicated doing or saying something to spite her partner (item H) more than 3-5 times in the past year. Since this research is guided by the assumption that battering occurs due to a systematic misuse of power and control, the conclusion that most of the women who completed the questionnaire are/were in emotionally abusive relationships cannot be made.

The one respondent who answered that she had done or said something to spite her partner more than 6-10 times in the past

year was also the one who indicated being physically violent (#2). Similarly, the only two who reported threatening to hit or throw something at their partners (item J) were the ones who scored 8 and 9 in the physical violence section (respondent #2 and #3).

The average score for self for verbal aggression is 6.8 and for partner is 7. This shows that, aside from the cases where physical violence was involved, participants used verbal aggression as often as they experienced it. As noted in the beginning of this section, the actions that were most denoted were the ones lower in coerciveness (swearing, sulking, stomping out).

Results showed that the woman who scored 8 in the physical violence section (and reported no violence perpetrated on her by her partner) indicated that her partner was the one more verbally aggressive. Her partner's score was 11, as compared to the respondent's score of 7.

Summary

The majority of the sample comprised of women between the ages of 31 and 39 who were in monogamous relationships. Most indicated the presence of verbal aggression in their current or most recent relationship. The actions most commonly reported in the verbal aggression category were ones lower in coerciveness. Three respondents indicated the presence of physical violence in

their current relationships, while one reported severe violence (all items) in a past partnership. The two respondents who answered that they had threatened to hit or throw something at their partners (the item highest in coerciveness for the verbal aggression category) were two out of the three who reported being physically violent.

The last chapter includes a discussion of the results, research limitations, and implications for future research and social work.

Chapter 6

Overview

This chapter presents a discussion of this research. It includes three main sections: 1) Limitations, 2) Implications for Future Research, and 3) Implications for Social Work.

DISCUSSION

According to Caldwell and Peplau (1984), ninety-seven percent of the lesbians they interviewed about satisfaction in lesbian relationships supported the idea of an egalitarian partnership. The present study indicates that this ideal of equal power is, in practice, missing from many lesbian relationships.

The results for this study show that verbal aggression occurs more frequently than physical violence in lesbian relationships. The study also indicates that women who threaten to hit or throw something at their partners are likely to follow through with their threats.

Limitations

The most obvious limitation of this research is the fact that only eight questionnaires were returned. The findings

cannot be generalized to the larger population of lesbian and bisexual women. One of the possible reasons for the low response rate is that not all 100 questionnaires were distributed by the contact people.

A second reason for a low response rate was the short time allowed for the completion of the questionnaire. Allowing more time may have made it possible for the distribution of more questionnaires.

Third, lesbian battering, as mentioned in the introduction of this study, is not a topic that the lesbian community is used to talking about or dealing with. Many women who received the survey may not have wanted to "come out" as a batterer or as a battered lesbian, regardless of the confidentiality factor. Also, it is possible that some did not feel safe to complete the questionnaire. It is conceivable that some of the partners of respondents were members of the same group where the surveys were handed out.

Another limitation of the study may be the form itself. Though the CTS has been widely used in past studies, it is still uncertain how well it works for same-sex relationships. The only study that supported the use of the CTS with lesbian couples was Lockhart's (1994). In addition, the questionnaire did not include any questions on sexual abuse.

Incorporating open-ended questions in the survey could have enhanced understanding regarding some of these issues.

Implications for Future Research

Additional research needs to be done to examine the power dynamics in lesbian relationships. Does the perception of power imbalance lead to partner aggression? Why do some women think it's ok to hurt their partners? Why aren't battered lesbians soliciting more help? Why are we not providing the right services? How can the lesbian community effectively deal with this issue?

This researcher believes that some of the above questions can best be answered through focus groups. Qualitative research can take a more in depth look at this problem. As Amy Edgington commented, perhaps it really is futile to try to gather numbers about the incidence of same-sex female domestic violence. How many need to experience abuse before something is done about it? Yet, as stated earlier, the problem of lesbian battering needs to be documented so that services can be implemented.

Documenting this problem was one of the goals of this exploratory quantitative research. Due to the sample size limitation, the answer to the original research question cannot be answered. For this sample, the incidence of abuse turned out to be 50%. One or more incidents of verbal aggression were reported by 88% of the sample. This study suggests that lesbians use verbal aggression more often than physical violence as a response to conflict in intimate relationships.

Implications for Social Work

Social workers have been known to maintain the status quo, even when the potential for change is there. Often real change implies going against the system, something that many over-worked and burnt out social workers have no energy or desire to take on. Perhaps they have the energy and desire, but the agencies they work for offer little encouragement.

The author believes that the discipline of social work has the potential to create fundamental change. The field of social work presently appears to be more welcoming of practitioners who do not differentiate good social work practice from political activism and advocacy. The fact that this research was supported by an institution that is strongly affiliated with the Lutheran Church shows that MSW programs are becoming more receptive of 'non-traditional' issues and their exploration.

The problem of same-sex domestic violence cannot be ignored by social workers and other service providers. As long as homophobia and heterosexism, wherever they exist, remain unchallenged, lesbians will continue to have very limited access to services specific to partner abuse.

Summary

The main limitation of this research was the small sample size. Though the study validated the problem of same-sex female battering, many questions remain unanswered. Future research needs to be done to further examine this problem. Qualitative research can explore the dynamics of abusive intimate relationships between women and look at issues such as perceived power imbalance and status differentials.

Lesbian battering exists. It has existed and will continue to exist for a long time. Many of the factors that maintain this problem are perpetuated by social workers as well as society at large. Creating services for lesbians and bisexual women in abusive relationships is one component of the fight against bigotry and ignorance. To be effective advocates of women battered by women, it is essential that social workers follow the lead of activists who have survived lesbian battering (Morrow and Hawxhurst, 1989). Hopefully, this study will prove to be an incentive for future research as well as for the development of services for women battered by women.

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APPENDIX A

FOR LESBIAN/BISEXUAL WOMEN ONLY

Dear Potential Participant:

My name is Raquel Simões and I am a Master of Social Work student at Augsburg College. You are invited to be a participant in a research study on domestic conflict, specifically among lesbian and bisexual women. If you are interested in participating in this study, please read this letter before filling out the questionnaire. You will not receive any payment for completing the questionnaire.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Augsburg College. If you agree to participate in this study, I will ask you to do the following things. First, please complete the section titled Demographic Information. This will take about 2-3 minutes. Secondly, complete the questionnaire titled Conflict Tactics Scales. This won't take more than 10 minutes. You may stop at any time. If you choose, you may also skip any question you do not want to answer. After completing all or any part of the questionnaire, please mail it in the self-addressed stamped envelope that is provided. Please mail it back as soon as you complete the questionnaire, no later than April 21st.

The results of this study will be kept private and any published reports will not include information that will make it possible to identify you. You do not have to put your name on the questionnaire. The questionnaires for this study will be kept in a locked file. My thesis advisor is the only other person that may have access to the data. All questionnaire materials will be destroyed in December of 95.

If you feel upset upon completing the questionnaire and wish to talk to someone, you may call the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council Helpline at 822-8661 and/or DAP (Domestic Abuse Project) at 874-7063. You may also call Casa de Esperanza's crisis line if you are a battered/formerly battered woman. The number for Casa de Esperanza is 772-1611.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me at 579-7719. You may also contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Glenda Rooney, at 330-1338.

Thank you for your time and interest.

Sincerely,

Raquel Volaco Simões

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Do you identify yourself as a lesbian or bisexual woman? Please check one.
Yes _____ No _____

If you've answered no, do not complete the rest of the survey but please mail it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. Thank you.

2. Please check the appropriate age range.
18-24 _____ 25-30 _____ 31-39 _____ 40-49 _____
50-59 _____ 60-69 _____ 70 or older _____

If you are under the age of 18, do not complete the survey but please mail it in the self-addressed stamped envelope provided. Thank you.

3. Are you currently employed? Please check one.
Yes _____ No _____
4. What was your annual income in 1994? Please check one.
0-9,999 _____ 10,000-19,999 _____ 20,000-29,999 _____
30,000-39,999 _____ 40,000-49,000 _____ 50,000 or more _____

5. How do you identify your ethnocultural background? Check all that apply.
Caucasian _____
African American _____
Chicana _____
Latina _____
Asian _____
Native American/Eskimo _____
Other (please specify) _____

6. What is your relationship status?
a. Partnered in monogamous relationship _____
 * living with partner _____ * not living with partner _____
b. Partnered in non-monogamous relationship _____
 * living with partner(s) _____ * not living with partner(s) _____
c. Not partnered _____
d. Other _____ Please specify: _____

When answering the questions in the following pages, refer to your current or most recent partner. If you are in a non-monogamous relationship, refer to only one partner throughout the survey.

APPENDIX C

CONFLICT TACTICS SCALES

No matter how well a couple get along, there are times when they disagree, get annoyed with the other person, or just have spats or fights because they're in a bad mood or tired or for some other reason. They also use many different ways of trying to settle their differences. The following items are some things that you and your girlfriend or partner might do when you have an argument. Using the scale provided, please circle the number of times you have done those things in the past year, as well as the number of times your partner has done them.

1. Once 2. Twice 3. 3-5 Times 4. 6-10 Times 5. 11-20 Times 6. More than 20 0. Never

	How many times in the past year have you...							How many times in the past year has your partner...							If you've circled "0" on both, has it <u>ever</u> happened? 1. Yes 0. No	
A. Discussed an issue calmly	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
B. Got information to back up your/her side of things	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
C. Brought in, or tried to bring in, someone to help settle things	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
D. Insulted or swore at her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
E. Sulked or refused to talk about an issue	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
F. Stomped out of the room or house or yard	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
G. Cried	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
H. Did or said something to spite her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
I. Threatened to hit or throw something at her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
J. Threw or smashed or hit or kicked something	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
K. Threw something at her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
L. Pushed, grabbed, or shoved her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0

M. Slapped her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
N. Kicked, bit, or hit her/ you with a fist	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
O. Hit or tried to hit her/ you with something	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
P. Beat her/you up	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
Q. Choked her/you	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
R. Threatened her/you with a knife or gun	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0
S. Used a knife or fired a gun	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	0	1	0

