Serving LGBTQ Victims/Survivors: An Overview of Accessibility Issues and Recommended Practices
Terms Associated with LGBTQ Identities and LGBTQ Communities
Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity

- **Sexual orientation** refers to a person's emotional, romantic and sexual attraction to individuals of a particular gender.

- **Gender identity** describes the gender with which a person identifies (i.e., whether one perceives oneself to be a man, a woman, or describes oneself in other ways).
What does LGBTQ mean?

- **The L: Lesbian** – A woman who is predominately or exclusively attracted to women emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.

- **The G: Gay** – A term identifying a man who is predominantly or exclusively attracted to men emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.

- **The B: Bisexual** – A term identifying a person who is attracted to men and women emotionally, physically, spiritually and/or sexually.

✓ **Note:** The L, G and B relate to a person’s sexual orientation.
What does LGBTQ mean?

- **The T: Transgender** – An umbrella term used to describe a continuum of individuals whose gender identity and how it is expressed, to varying degrees, does not correspond to their biological sex.

  ✓ Note: The T relates to a person’s **gender identity**.
What fall under the umbrella of “Transgender”?

- **Transsexual** – A person who has gone through any part of the process of Sex Reassignment Surgery (SRS) and identifies as the gender they feel they are.

- **Female to Male (FTM)** – a person born female who transitions to live and identify full time as a male/man.

- **Male to Female (MTF)** – a person born male who transitions to live and identify full time as a female/woman.
What falls under the umbrella of “Transgender”?, continued...

- **Cross-dresser** – person who wears clothing opposite their assigned gender, usually not all the time. Does not identify as the opposite gender identity.

- **Drag Queen** – person, sometimes gay men, impersonating famous females, usually for performance.

- **Drag King** – person, sometimes lesbians, impersonating famous males, usually for performance.
What does LGBTQ mean?, continued…

- **The Q: Questioning** - Refers to people who are exploring or questioning their sexual feelings, orientation, and/or sexual identity, and who may be experiencing lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender feelings or urges.
Discussion Question

What kind of terms do LGBTQ people in your community use to describe their identities?
What’s most important?

- LGBTQ individuals are incredibly diverse and come from all racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.
What’s most important?

- Respect how people self-identify however that may be:
  …queer, a man who sleeps with men (MSM), a woman who sleeps with women (WSW), genderqueer, two-spirit, dyke, etc...
The Impact of Oppression on LGBTQ Domestic Violence Victims/Survivors
What is homophobia?

- **Homophobia** is the fear of feelings of love for and/or sexual attraction between members of the same sex.
What is biphobia?

- **Biphobia** is the fear of feelings of love for and/or sexual attraction to both sexes.

✓ Note: Homophobia and biphobia refer to the many ways that people are oppressed on the basis of sexual orientation.
What is transphobia?

- **Transphobia** is the fear of people who transgress social expectations of gender conformity.

✓ Note: Transphobia refers to the many ways that people are oppressed on the basis of gender identity and expression.
What is heterosexism?

- **Heterosexism** is a belief that male/female sexuality is the only natural or moral mode of sexual behavior.
The Three “I”s of Oppression

- **Internalized**: Within the oppressed individual. *Ex:* A gay man sees two men holding hands in public and feels ashamed.

- **Interpersonal**: Prejudice and discrimination across individuals. *Ex:* A transgender woman is rejected by her friends and family after transitioning from male to female.

- **Institutional**: Oppression that is encoded into and characteristic of the major social, cultural, and economic institutions of society. *Ex:* Businesses refuse to hire transgender individuals.
The issues surrounding personal, family, and social acceptance of sexual orientation can place a significant burden on mental health and personal safety. 

Research on the negative results of homophobia on gays, lesbians and bisexuals (GLB) showed that GLBs had a shorter life expectancy and faced health risks and social problems at a greater rate than the heterosexual population.


In general, the **chronic stress** of coping with social stigmatization and societal hatred is the primary reason for the negative effects of homophobia. More specifically, the reasons for the harmful effects of homophobia are:

- Lack of support and helping resources
- Distress from internalized homophobia
- Stress from self-concealment of sexual orientation
- Stress from altering behavior
- Coming out stress
- Harmful coping behaviors [7]

Oppression is the Problem, Not Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

"Being GLB is not genetically or biologically hazardous to one’s physical or psychological health (O’Hanlan, 1995; Remafedi, French, Story, Resnick & Blum, 1998; Ross, Paulsen & Stalstrom, 1988; Wayment & Peplau, 1995) [8]."

- A client’s sexual orientation or gender identity is never to blame for violence from a partner.
- Homophobia, biphobia, transphobia and heterosexism in society and in the abusive relationship are the problems, not the sexual orientation or gender identity of the survivor.

Issues and Challenges LGBTQ Domestic Violence Victims/Survivors Might Face
Myth and Reality

- **Myth**: Battering in LGBTQ relationships are not as prevalent, harmful or dangerous as battering in relationships of non-transgender heterosexual people.

- **Reality**: Current research confirms that battering is just as prevalent (occurring in 25-33% of relationships) and just as harmful and dangerous among LGBT people as among non-transgender heterosexual people (NCAVP, 2002 National Domestic Violence Report).
Myths and Reality

- **Myth:** Women are less capable of being violent than men. Gay men are not real men and therefore also not as capable of being violent as heterosexual men. In other words, “You fight like a girl.”

- **Reality:** Incidences reported by female, male and transgender survivors to staff at Domestic Violence Legal Advocacy Project (DVLAP) at the LA Gay & Lesbian Center include emotional and psychological abuse as well as... Feet hammered while asleep; Hit in the head by a brick; Eardrum ruptured by blows to the head with a shovel; Gunshot wound to shoulder - not allowed to seek medical assistance for hours; Ribs broken and then gun held to head for 2 hours.
-- Video ---
““My Girlfriend Did It””
“My Girlfriend Did It” Discussion

1. What was described in the beginning of the segment as the main difference between women-to-women domestic violence and heterosexual domestic violence?

2. What were some of the fears that the survivors talked about?

3. What were some of the common problematic responses to woman-to-woman domestic violence among service providers, police and courts?
LGBTQ Cycle of Violence

- See handout “LGBT Cycle of Violence”
- The LGBTQ cycle of violence is exacerbated by internalized and externalized oppression. These present additional challenges to safety and help seeking.
See handout “LGBT Power and Control Wheel”

The LGBTQ power and control wheel is also exacerbated by internalized and externalized oppression that also present additional challenges to safety and help seeking.
Summary of Issues and Challenges

- Fear that the abuse will not be taken seriously because it is occurring within an LGBTQ relationship.
- Lack of acknowledgement and support from other LGBTQ individuals who may not be aware of the fact that DV in LGBTQ relationships occurs and is dangerous.
- Fear of re-victimization by law enforcement, criminal justice, and social service workers based on one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity.
- Fear of being outed to friends, family, employers and/or employees.
- Fear that the abuser will convince people that they are the victim.
Discussion Questions

- Among the issues and challenges mentioned, which do you think are most relevant to LGBTQ DV victims/survivors in your community?
- How do these dynamics play out in your community?
- Are there additional issues or challenges LGBTQ DV victims/survivors in your community might face?
Recommended Practices
Many LGBTQ people will prefer to “pass” or “be closeted” with others, unless or until a relationship of trust has been established.

- **Passing**: Behavior used to avoid being identified as LGBTQ

- **“Being closeted”**: When an LGBTQ person does not reveal their sexual orientation and/or gender identity to others [11]
Am I Welcome Here?

“To welcome”:
- To accept gladly
- To greet upon arrival
- To receive with pleasure

Discussion: When you go into a new environment, what makes you feel that you are welcome?
What if you are LGBTQ?

Historically, LGBTQ people were viewed as deviant or pathological by much of the health and mental health communities.

Many providers still do hold on to negative beliefs about LGBTQ people.

Not surprisingly, many LGBTQ people are wary of seeking support from any service provider, do not feel welcome to access services and decline to self-identify when they do interact with providers.
LGBTQ People Look for Clues & Cues

- When the majority of the public sphere is not safe or welcoming, people look for clues and cues of safety and welcome.
  - “Cue”: A signal, hint or direction
  - “Clue”: Something that serves to guide and direct

Discussion: What clues and cues might an L, G, B, T and/or Q person look for?
Clues and Cues of Safety

1. Language
   - Spoken
   - Written

2. Visual
There are no universal agreements on terminology and language and culture continually change.

Therefore, there are no rigid rules, only helpful suggestions.

Contrary to ‘sticks and stones...’ words do have the power to hurt AND the power to convey respect and understanding.

**Handout: Avoiding Heterosexual Bias in Language, American Psychological Association**
Clues and Cues of Safety: Verbal Language

Generally:

- Use gender neutral language
  - Partner rather than boyfriend, husband
  - They, rather than he or she
  - Person rather than man, woman
  - Relationship status rather than marital status
  - Parent or Guardian, rather than Mother, Father
Clues and Cues of Safety: Verbal Language

With clients:

- Do not assume someone’s sexual gender identity.
- Call people what they want to be called.
- Reflect back the language that clients use.
- When clients disclose they are LGBTQ, acknowledge the disclosure, thank them for their courage.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Mention commitment to non-discrimination & accessibility
- Demonstrate your knowledge of LGBTQ issues and LGBTQ community resources, as appropriate and helpful
Respect Self-Determination to Be “Out” or Not…

“Passing” and being “closeted” are both protective measures to preserve dignity and prevent harassment and violence.

"’Passing’ or being ‘closeted’ [also] means denying the essence of oneself and denying or disowning partners." [12].

What is “Coming out?”: The process of telling others about your sexuality and/or gender identity; a complex, difficult and life-long series of events.

"One of the most difficult aspects of coming out is that it is a never-ending process, each new situation requires another telling. In the main, as sexual orientation isn’t visually obvious and the assumption is often made that people are all heterosexual, this is a fairly constant and exhausting process [13]."

Respect the Client’s Choices

- Pay attention to the degree to which the survivor discloses her/his identity.
- Respect her/his choice to define her/his identity and who s/he wants to share it with. Maintain confidentiality.
- Ask and confirm if you are not certain.
- Respect anxieties about disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender identity that a client might have. This anxiety is usually based on realistic fears of discrimination and its effects on child custody, family support, job security, etc.
- At the same time, respect a client’s choice if they DO want to be out. Don’t discourage a client from coming out – it’s their choice.
Cost Benefit Analysis of Coming Out

- Help clients assess the costs and benefits of disclosing their sexual orientation, gender identity and/or experience of abuse to other clients and staff and to other service providers. Some questions a client might consider are:
  - Does the environment appear open to my disclosure?
  - How safe is it for me to come out?
  - What might be the benefits of coming out? (e.g., potential support, etc.)
  - What might be the risks or costs of coming out? (e.g., potential bias, victim-blaming, etc.)

Tracking LGBTQ Identity

- It’s NOT about:
  - Screening LGBTQ people out
  - Pressuring people to disclose information
Tracking LGBTQ Identity

- It’s okay to ask! It’s important to ask! It’s not offensive to ask!
- Collect information about sexual orientation and gender identity as a routine practice during hotline calls (as appropriate) and during intake interviews.
- Also, protect the rights of clients to decline to self-identify as LGBTQ.
- Don’t pressure or force disclosure.
“What is your sexual orientation?”
Responses can include:
- Bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, questioning/unsure, or decline to answer.

“What is your gender identity?”
Responses can include:
- Female, male, transgender (female-to-male), transgender (male-to-female), or decline to answer.
Case example

- Please read the case example.
- Discussion will follow.
For more information, please contact:

LGBTQ DV TAT Project
Lisa Fujie Parks, Project Manager
California Partnership To End Domestic Violence

lisa@cpedv.org
510-967-0369 (direct line)