



SASC
Sexual Assault Support Centre

Violence in Queer Communities

From the SASC blog: <http://www.gotconsent.ca/1/post/2013/04/violence-in-queer-communities.html>

The Sexual Assault Support Centre is dedicated to providing services to people of all genders, and creating a welcoming, queer-friendly environment for all who need support. While this may seem like a minor mandate decision, being open to all genders is a large step away from other service providers who support people who have experienced violence. We acknowledge and respond to the fact that trans* folks, particularly trans* women of colour, experience violence to a far greater extent than others; and that violence happens in the queer community. The anti-violence movement and network of service providers is dedicated to undoing and dismantling myths that surround sexualized violence. However, there still exists a dominant understanding of violence that feminism has clung to: violence against (cis) women that is perpetrated by (cis) men.

Violence happens in queer communities. It does. Most people think that violence is strictly between heterosexual men and heterosexual women, that it is only 'strangers' who jump out of bushes at night, and that domestic violence is solely between husbands and wives. But, it's not true. These are some of the many myths that surround sexualized violence, myths that actually work to perpetuate feelings of fear, shame, blame, and simultaneously make it harder to end violence as a whole. Unfortunately, violence and abuse can and does happen in all kinds of relationships and situations. However, because of these myths and assumptions about violence, because heteronormative* assumptions are so pervasive, many folks who experience violence in queer relationships or communities have an extremely difficult time getting support or finding services that will help them through it.

Imagine a trans* woman who just experienced sexual violence, whether it was from their partner or from someone they know or a stranger. They would immediately be faced with a lack of support services for survivors of sexual assault. A number of factors would withhold them from accessing the services to being with: **what if the place or the counselor is transphobic? What if they make me use my 'legal' name and use the wrong pronoun? What if they don't believe me when I tell them it was a woman who assaulted me? What if they will out me as trans* or queer to others? What if they just don't understand anything about trans* issues? What if they don't even believe it was sexual assault?!** And these questions are just the surface.

Furthermore, there are a number of abuse tactics that queer partners use to maintain power and control over the other. These include things that are also present in heterosexual/cis partners, like intimidation, threats, physical and emotional violence, and so on. However, there are also tactics and experiences that are entirely distinct for abuse in queer relationships:

- one partner could threaten to 'out' the other

- they could use the small queer community against the other, telling them that if they leave, they will have no friends or community
- they could tell the other that they are 'not queer enough,' or that they are the only one that will ever love them
- if they have children without an 'official' second-parent adoption, they could threaten to take the children if the abused-partner leaves

Accordingly, if a survivor of abuse chooses to get support, or even report the violence they've experienced, they will likely face homophobia and transphobia from police and court officials, who won't believe them or who think that 'same-sex' partners can never harm each other. Cops or judges may assume that the more 'butch-looking' partner is the perpetrator of violence, and won't believe them if they report it. As mentioned, the survivor might face transphobic support centers and doctors who use transphobic 'diagnoses from the DSM.

Heterosexism is deeply embedded within the fabrics of our society – in our political structures, our economic structures and educational structures. The anti-violence movement or 'battered-women's movement' began as a response to structural violence against women as perpetrated by men. Unfortunately, this binary thinking still exists in many anti-violence organizing, leaving queer survivors of abuse and violence with multiple barriers. There *must* be a concerted effort to make services entirely accessible to queer and trans* survivors of violence, and have programming and counselors who understand the distinctness of their experience.

Finally, we must challenge dominant thoughts and myths in society. We must be critical of media depictions of violence, as well as everyday conversations or jokes about abuse or violence. We must acknowledge that even 'social-justice' organizations are not immune from perpetuating heterosexism, and that we, as members of communities, must take the matter into our own hands and stop the spreading of homophobic, transphobic, and heterosexist language and ideas.

Vancouver-specific resources:

Battered Women's Support Services (BWSS): <http://www.bwss.org/> BWSS accepts all self-identified women, and has specific programming for violence and abuse in queer relationships

WAVAW: <http://www.wavaw.ca/> WAVAW accepts all self-identified women, offers counseling, programming, support groups, and has a 24-hour crisis line.

Catherine White Holman Wellness Centre: <http://www.cwhwc.com/about-us/>
Dedicated to providing low-barrier wellness services to trans* and gender-non-conforming folks

QMUNITY: <http://www.qmunity.ca/> Offers basic counseling to queer and trans* spectrum folks, though not specific to violence

Safe Choices through Ending Violence Association (EVA):
http://www.endingviolence.org/safe_choices Advocacy for self-identified women who are currently in or have been in abusive same sex/gender relationships

