

For help with partner violence, please call the LGBT Anti-Violence Project, 414-292-3072.

Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them

(Excerpted from "MEN WHO BEAT THE MEN WHO LOVE THEM" by Island & Letellier)

MYTH ONE: Only Straight Women Get Battered.

Just as lesbian battering forces us to admit that some women batter their partners, gay men's domestic violence forces us to acknowledge some men as victims.

MYTH TWO: Gay Men's Domestic Violence Is a Fair Fight Between Equals.

This myth draws on our unwillingness to look at violence between two people of the same sex, particularly men, as an abusive situation where one person is a victim. It also overlooks emotional and psychological abuse and material destruction. You do not have to be hit to be a victim of domestic violence.

MYTH THREE: It's Not Really Violence When Two Men Fight. It's Boys Being Boys.

This myth addresses the societal attitude about male violence – i.e., it is acceptable, normal and okay for men to be violent. Unfortunately, many gay men themselves view and accept violence by their partners as normal.

MYTH FOUR: Gay Men's Domestic Violence Is Just a Lovers' Quarrel.

All lovers and all couples have quarrels. It is a normal and healthy part of human relationships. Violence, however, is not an acceptable way to resolve a quarrel, no matter how intense the disagreement. Being physically abused, harassed on the telephone at work, having your lover threaten suicide if you leave him, and/or being shouted at are some of the psychologically destructive forces at work in domestic violence.

MYTH FIVE: The Batterer Will Always Be Bigger and Stronger.

A man who is 5'7", prone to violence, and angry can do a lot of damage to someone who is 6'2", twenty pounds heavier, and a non-violent person. Size, weight, "butchness", "queeniness", or other physical attributes or roles are not good indicators of whether or not a man will be a victim or a batterer. A batterer does not need to be built like a linebacker to smash your CDs, cut up your clothing, or tell everyone at work that you are a 'queer'.

MYTH SIX: Men Who Are Abusive While Under the Influence of Drugs or Alcohol Are Not Responsible for Their Actions.

Drugs and alcohol are excuses for violence. Violence is a choice, and the responsibility for making that choice is the batterer's. A person who batters and is on drugs or alcohol person has two separate and serious problems.

MYTH SEVEN: The Law Does Not and Will Not Protect Victims of Gay Men's Domestic Violence

This depends, in part, on where you live in the United States, and on the police officer who responds to your call. People who live in rural areas of the country may have more difficulty with the police and the legal system than men who live in other regions. In some cities great strides have been made to sensitize and educate the police about both gay relationships and about domestic violence.

However, no matter where you live or what the domestic violence laws say there is no guarantee that the police officer who arrives at your front door won't be prejudiced against men in same-sex relationships.

Finally, keep in mind that victims do not have to "come out" when they contact the police. When you call the police, it may be best not to tell them that the man attacking you is your boyfriend or lover. Tell them only that you are being attacked and need help. Later, when filling out police reports, you may decide it is safe to identify your attacker as your partner.

MYTH EIGHT: It Is Easier For Gay Male Victims of Domestic Violence To Leave Their Violent Partners Than It Is For Heterosexual Battered Women

This myth is based on assumptions and prejudices about gay men and their relationships, such as the myth that gay male relationships are sexual but not emotional. Gay couples can be as

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intertwined in each other's lives as straight couples. Some battered gay men are raising children and/or are financially dependent on their violent partners. Some are alienated from their families of origin due to homophobia. Thus, they may place even greater value on their love relationship as it their only family and source of support. Men Who Beat the Men Who Love Them cont.

MYTH NINE: Gay Men's Domestic Violence Occurs Primarily Among Men Who Hang Out in Bars, Are Poor, or Are People of Color.

Domestic Violence crosses all racial, ethnic, religious, educational, and class boundaries. The gay male community needs to recognize that wealthy, white, educated, "politically correct" gay men batter their lovers as much as any other group in our society.

UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

1. Domestic violence is unacceptable human behavior. Gay men's domestic violence cannot be tolerated by members of the gay community.
2. Domestic violence is a crime. There are both criminal and civil consequences for assault, battery, rape, and property destruction.
3. Nothing justifies gay men's domestic violence. All attempts at rationalizing and justifying it are to be repudiated. (Self-defense is not domestic violence.)
4. The perpetrator is responsible for every act of violence that he commits. No victim is ever the cause of violence done to him nor does he ever deserve it.
5. Domestic violence occurs in the gay community with the same frequency as in the heterosexual community.
6. Violent behavior can be curbed and unlearned by the perpetrators, and rejected by the victims.

HOW DO YOU STAY OUT?

"Why not just leave?" "You guys don't have kids or anything, so why don't you just walk out the door?" "I'd leave the first time it happened. Why did you put up with it?"

These are some of the most common remarks made to victims of domestic violence. Some reasons that men stay are:

1. The victims love their batterers. They don't want to leave. They want the violence to stop.
2. The violence may be periodic, and the loving periods between violent episodes entice the victims to stay.
3. Victims may believe (and/or are told by others) that they provoke or cause or deserve the violence.
4. They may have left before but were encouraged by friends, family, therapists, the clergy, or the police to "go home" where they belong.
5. Victims are threatened with more violence, or even death, if they try to leave, and, with good reason, they believe these threats.

Victims of domestic violence are up against walls of opposition and unimaginable difficulties as they try to stay away from their abusive partners. As many victims know, leaving is one thing, but staying away is another.

It is also very difficult to do alone. Finding support can be key to leaving an abusive relationship. Support may come from professionals (therapists, domestic violence shelter works, clergy) or from friends. Sometimes getting a restraining order can help enforce a separation. Wherever the support comes from, it can be invaluable.

How you manage to get support and stay out of your relationship with an abusive man will depend, in part, on where you live, how much money you have, what resources you have access to, and what support networks you have. Remember, wherever you are, whatever your situation, it is possible to get out and stay out.