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PROBING THEMES OF SILENCE ON LESBIAN PARTNER ABUSE:
EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY'S INFLUENCE

by

Catherine Browning, B.Soc.Sc.

A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Sociology

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

August 11, 1995

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PROBING THEMES OF SILENCE ON LESBIAN PARTNER ABUSE:
EXPLORING THE COMMUNITY'S INFLUENCE

submitted by Catherine Browning, B.Soc.Sc.
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Thesis Supervisor

Chair, Department of Sociology and Anthropology

Carleton University

August 31, 1995

Abstract

A tradition of silence has, and continues to constrain research on abuse in lesbian communities. This academic and community-based silence has limited the definitions, terminology, theories, and themes on lesbian partner abuse. While concern has been raised about individual actions and silence in the academy, this research establishes the role of community in mediating lesbians' individual and social experiences of silence and silencing abused lesbians. This thesis explores community's influence on silence and abused lesbians' identification with community. It concludes that community-inclusive theories and community-generated awareness, systems, and resources are crucial to breaking the tradition of silence on lesbian partner abuse.

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No project of this magnitude is accomplished alone. Of the many people who have encouraged my work on lesbian partner abuse, a few merit special mention. I particularly appreciate the energy and expertise of my thesis supervisors Katharine D. Kelly (Sociology) and Connie M. Kristiansen (Psychology). They tolerated my whining and self-doubt and created a team that was nurturing, productive, respectful, and fun. You are extraordinary students and teachers. As well, I am profoundly grateful to the twelve courageous women who candidly shared with me their experiences of lesbian partner abuse. Without their commitment to breaking the silence, this research would not have been possible. You inspire my voice. Last, but not least, thanks to my daughter, Kara, for motivating me to show her that dreams can come true, and to my partner, Carol, for being true to her promise of love and support, every step and sentence along the way.

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Historical Overview

The short, halting history of lesbian partner abuse in North America speaks as much to an evolving consciousness of the issue as it does to an ongoing tradition of silence. While the 1976 publication of Del Martin's book, Battered Wives, had the combined effect of publicizing women's abuse by their male partners and motivating an explosion of scholarship on that subject, comparable awareness of and material on lesbian partner abuse were not quick to follow. In 1983, a group of American lesbian feminists working with abused heterosexual women attempted to raise their community's awareness of the reality of lesbian partner abuse at a Washington, D.C. conference. At that event, the Lesbian Task Force of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (1983:1) announced that

lesbian battering is a very serious problem. The incidence of such violence is not presently known but we do know that numbers of lesbians have called the battered women's services seeking help. The fact that it exists is sufficient reason for us to mobilize all of the resources of the lesbian nation to end this violence against women.

That same year the subject of "same-sex assault" (Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983:1) was broached by two academics attending meetings of the National Conference of the Association for Women in Psychology in Seattle, Washington. Drawing upon what they had learned in a Michigan Women's Music Festival discussion group and subsequent conversations with abused lesbians, Christine Paisley and Judith Krulewitz (1983:1) of

Iowa State University stated that

it is with hesitation and a sense of mourning that we begin this presentation. As researchers, we come with many issues and few answers: no empirical data, no statistics, only observations, hypotheses, and an urgent need for discussion, movement, and decisions.

By 1984, a few abused lesbians had found the courage to publicly speak for themselves. The earliest evidence of this development, and the trend toward the self-protective use of pseudonyms, is suggested by two formerly abused lesbians. In a letter to the editor of Victimology, 'Susan Marie' (1984:17) explained that it was "difficult to write because the feelings run so deep, and because discussing this subject is so taboo in the lesbian community, although violence between lesbians is nothing new". While Anne Franklin (1984:n.p.) publicly described her abuse by 'Karen' in the Gay Community News, she acknowledged that her use of a pseudonym was "in itself is a measure of how taboo the topic of lesbian battering is in our community". In Canada, the earliest evidence of published victim self-disclosure is supplied by 'Simone' (1986:17) who wrote in the now-defunct Toronto lesbian newspaper Rites that she "shared something with other battered women and children...that we are silent allies in a mission of survival". Writing a self-help book for abused women in 1986, author Ginny NiCarthy (1986:280) acknowledged the problem but chose not to "speak specifically to the needs of [abused] lesbians" because her information "would have been based on

little knowledge and a great deal of guesswork". That same year, drawing on the personal experiences of abused lesbians, and working in collaboration with the U.S. Lesbian Task Force of the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Kerry Lobel's (1986) anthology, Naming the Violence, played a major role in drawing the subject of lesbian partner abuse 'out of the closet' and into the public arena.

Notwithstanding the historical efforts of lesbians, non-lesbians, and gay men, a review of the North American literature on same-sex partner abuse from 1983 to 1994 reveals that awareness, analyses, and action have, and continue to be profoundly inhibited by silence. This 'silence' is defined as individual lesbians' failure to name or identify actions as abusive, their failure to tell about or disclose their abuse and abusers to families or origin, friends, the criminal justice system, medical health professionals, and shelters for abused women, and their failure to speak of, or politicize lesbian partner abuse within and outside lesbian communities.

Literature Review

Very little has been written or available on the subject of lesbian partner abuse since its first documented public discussion in the United States in 1983 (Eaton, 1994; MacAuley, Chesley, & Ristock, 1989; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Renzetti, 1993). Canadian-specific information has been

particularly meagre. For example, of the one hundred and five same-sex documents reviewed for my content analysis, only ten were authored by Canadians. On the non-academic¹ side these sources include four print articles (Hunter, 1994; MacAuley et al, 1989; Simone, 1986; Stewart, 1994), three brochures (Chesley, MacAuley, & Ristock, 1992; LeFeuvre, 1992; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993), and one conference (Dopler, 1993) and one commissioned report (Pepper & Holland, 1994). While just one journal article (Ristock, 1991) has been published by a Canadian, the thirteen articles authored by eight Americans suggest that scholarly attempts to break the tradition of silence on lesbian partner abuse have not fared much better south of the border. According to sociologist Claire Renzetti (1993:10), this lack of information derives from the fact that "due to their own homophobia [and heterosexism] many heterosexual researchers and practitioners do not deem lesbian partner abuse a problem worthy of study and discussion". While the silencing potential of homophobia and heterosexism cannot be discounted, I believe that there are alternatives to Renzetti's explanation. For one, she infers that researchers do not want to study lesbian partner abuse. Instead, I propose that because of the historical silence surrounding the subject, it is unlikely that many academics are aware of lesbian partner abuse. Those who are

¹ The categories of non-academic and scholarly literatures reflect the mediums in which they were published, rather than the authors' often interchangeable activist/academic identities.

informed may resist lesbian-specific research because they adhere to the belief that "researching from the margins is best accomplished by those who live on the margins" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:105). As well as assuming that heterosexual researchers are unwilling to study lesbian partner abuse, and despite some evidence to the contrary, Renzetti presumes that lesbians want to be studied by people outside their communities. To the contrary, Catherine Kirkwood (1993:129) found in her research on heterosexual partner abuse that

although on the whole the two African American women interviewed said little about negative responses from their support networks, one expressed surprise that I had been able to contact any African American women willing to be interviewed, and explained why she thought that black women would be unlikely to discuss their experiences of abuse with a white researcher.

Although community attitudes toward Renzetti's (1992:2-3) heterosexual orientation may have been positively enhanced by her collaboration with lesbians in the Philadelphia Working Group on Lesbian Battering, and although she maintains that her "[hetero] sexual orientation was not a problem" for the abused lesbians she interviewed, like Kirkwood, Renzetti found that "some members of the lesbian community expressed several concerns regarding the project....[and] there were those who were understandably suspicious of the motivations underlying a heterosexual sociologist's interest in lesbian battering".

Corresponding evidence of a tradition of silence in non-

scholarly writings on lesbian partner abuse is provided by the distinctive character of that literature. According to Morrow and Hawxhurst (1989:58)

because the issue of lesbian battering is a relatively new area of inquiry, most resources in this area consist of information from the domestic violence movement focusing primarily on battering in heterosexual relationships, undocumented personal testimonies by battered lesbians, studies currently in progress, and anecdotal and clinical experience.

Even if most existing information is non-systematic or "anecdotal in nature" (Schilit & Lie, 1990:52), the personal testimonies of abused lesbians and gay/lesbian organization reports and outreach material do provide valuable 'grassroots' and 'privileged' insights into the problem of lesbian partner abuse. For one, the work of lesbian individuals and communities of lesbians and gay men is informed by 'insider' knowledge, and this information is often more current than formal scholarship. For another, lesbians may be more forthright in disclosing their abuse to other lesbians. Finally, the recognition and inclusion of lesbian realities "provides the experiential, analytic, and historical information feminist researchers and activists need to understand women's lives and themselves" (Reinharz, 1992:173). Scholarly research is, however, also needed. Because non-scholarly writing on lesbian partner abuse has assumed that what is known to be true of heterosexual partner abuse is equally true of lesbian partner abuse, scholarly research plays a valuable role in confronting the non-scholarly

literature's generalizations, speculations, and shortcomings. For example, theories of heterosexual partner abuse have been generalized to lesbian partner abuse despite the fact that men's inherent power and women's subordinate status in patriarchal society are clearly unable, or restricted in their ability to account for that particular phenomenon. The limitations of the non-scholarly literature extend beyond theory. For example, many of the individual, community, and social features purported to be unique to lesbian partner abuse have been speculation circulating as fact, based as they are on anecdotal accounts.

Despite the 'need to know' about all facets of lesbian partner abuse, most academic research to date has been primarily quantitative, using correlational data with a focus on developing causal theories/explanations. For example, the relationship between substance use and lesbian partner abuse has been explored by psychologists and other academics (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Renzetti, 1992, 1988; Schilit & Lie, 1990) and some community activists (Bramucci, 1988; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Edgington, 1989; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Istar, 1987; Kelly & Warsnafsky, 1986; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Cooperative, n.d.; Task Force on Lesbian Battering of the Massachusetts Coalition of Women Service Groups, 1988).

Paralleling findings of heterosexual populations, researchers have found that human agency, rather than drugs or alcohol, is responsible for lesbian partner abuse. For example, substance use has been found not to cause lesbian partner abuse, but only to increase its frequency and severity (Renzetti, 1992).

The relationship between childhood histories of aggression and lesbian partner abuse has also been investigated by academics (Lie et al, 1991; Schilit et al, 1991) and community activists (Blenham, 1991; Chesley et al, 1992; Dopler, 1993; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Hart, 1986; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992). Lie et al (1991:133) concluded that a "history of aggression, whether the person is a target or observer of aggression is a risk factor for subsequent experiences with aggression. Still, this does not necessarily mean that aggressive pasts always lead to aggressive futures".

The potential existence of unequal power relations in lesbian relationships and lesbian partner abuse is a third area that has been explored by academics (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990; Peplau et al, 1983; Reilly & Lynch, 1990; Renzetti, 1988) and community activists (Irvine, 1984; Kelly & Warsnafsky, 1986). In this respect, some researchers have found that "power-sharing arrangements could not be explained by age, income, education and asset differences between partners" (Reilly &

Lynch, 1990:1), while others highlight the need to ascertain how greater power in decision making accrues to one partner [the batterer] over another, and how specific combinations of status difference between partners may promote or reinforce a sense of powerlessness in one relative to the other (Renzetti, 1988:397-98).

Lastly, the potential link between 'masculine' and 'feminine' sex-role identities of lesbian partners and lesbian partner abuse has been researched by academics (Cardell, 1981; Kelly & Warsnafsky, 1986; Lynch & Reilly, 1986; Oldham, Farnill & Ball, 1982). Debunking the myth that partner abuse is characteristic of butch/femme lesbians, Cardell, Finn, and Marecek's (1981:491) study of ten heterosexuals, ten lesbians, and five gay males found instead that "members of heterosexual couples reported more sex-role differentiated behavior than members of lesbian couples".

While scholarly work on the subject of lesbian partner abuse suggests that lesbian abusers cannot be exonerated on the strength of external factors such as drugs, alcohol, or childhood experiences, and that explanations of heterosexual partner abuse based on power differentials or gender roles do little or nothing to advance our understanding of lesbian partner abuse, it also reveals that much more has not been learned about lesbian partner than learned. Confronted with this lack of interest in and information on lesbian partner abuse, how are we to understand that silence? Faced with

ignorance and silence, how likely is it that lesbian communities have been able to address this problem? By exploring the roots of silence on lesbian partner abuse, this study searches for new insights into its individual, community, and social dimensions.

Silence and Definitions of Lesbian Partner Abuse

Exactly what constitutes lesbian partner abuse is a key concern at any level, particularly given recent speculation that breaking the silence on lesbian partner abuse will provoke definitional debates in lesbian communities (Ristock, 1994:8). The challenge of reaching a collectively satisfying definition of lesbian partner abuse is, however, formidable. Like definitions of heterosexual partner abuse, definitions of lesbian partner abuse must struggle to include diverse forms of abuse and explain those dynamics. Unlike definitions of heterosexual partner abuse, definitions of lesbian partner abuse have been constrained by a lack of information, research, and theory. To fill the void created by this silence, definitions of heterosexual partner abuse have been uncritically and erroneously generalized to lesbian populations.

For example, my content analysis of one hundred and five same-sex documents conducted for the purpose of this study revealed that in 37 (35%) instances, definitions incorporated the

concept of a 'pattern' of lesbian partner abuse. Rather than reflecting specific knowledge of lesbian realities, I suggest that this trend speaks to the profound impact of early writings on heterosexual partner abuse. In particular, Barbara Hart's (1986:173) widely accepted definition of lesbian partner abuse incorporates the idea of an abusive pattern of behaviour originally coined in Lenore Walker's (1979) ground-breaking delineation of the processes underlying heterosexual partner abuse. The possibility that Hart modelled her lesbian-specific definition on Walker's definition of heterosexual partner abuse prompts the suspicion that lesbians writing or reading about lesbian partner abuse may have assimilated either heterosexual definitions of partner abuse or heterosexist definitions of lesbian partner abuse. Accordingly, it is conceivable that lesbians may fail to identify their abuse if cycles and/or patterns do not exist and are not observable. As well, because definitions grounded in these concepts focus on individual abusers' attitudes and behaviours, they ignore the potential role of unique or exacerbated and interactive effects of social and community factors on lesbians. The historical silence on lesbian partner abuse has played a key role in precipitating the generalization of insights on heterosexual partner abuse to lesbian populations, in the process obscuring its particular 'truths'.

A second trend toward defining the nature of lesbian partner abuse, evidenced in eighty-one (76%) of the documents reviewed is similarly problematic. The fact that physical abuse was identified in eighty-three cases (78%) reflects significant public awareness of its physical manifestations. Despite the strong association of 'abuse' with physical injuries, the finding that emotional abuse was noted in forty-seven instances (44%), and threats, sexual, and psychological abuse were each noted in thirty-four documents (32%) speaks to a growing awareness of its non-physical dimensions. If the possibility of overlap among the four categories is taken into account, significant recognition of non-physical abuse is indicated. I also found that verbal and property abuse were each named in twenty-two cases (21%) and economic abuse was mentioned in fifteen documents (14%). Also included, although rarely noted, were homophobic control, isolation, intimidation, and spiritual and social abuse. These nominal results may reflect some reticence to expand the definition of abuse beyond its physical, sexual, and psychological forms, or may be due to their inclusion in other, more general categories of abuse. Some indication of overlap is provided by the fact that the single category of emotional/psychological abuse was found in eighteen (17%) documents.

Attempts to define abuse through typologies succeed in validating the experiences of lesbians who have not been

physically abused, as well as the perceptions of lesbians who consistently report non-physical forms of abuse as equally, if not more damaging than their experience of physical abuse (Behind Closed Doors, 1987). They also succeed in capturing 'homophobic control' as one difference between lesbians' and heterosexual women's realities of partner abuse. At the same time, faced with the fact that defining lesbian partner is currently considered a community "area of tension" (Ristock, 1994:8) because "some lesbians feel that the term is being misused or overused and applied to a range of practices including conflicts, disagreements, and rudeness", typologies fail to distinguish the transition point at which insensitive actions or reactions become abuse.

Silence and Terminology of Lesbian Partner Abuse

The same-sex literature on lesbian partner abuse indicates that although the concepts of cycles, patterns, power and control, and typologies of abuse typical of heterosexual partner abuse have yet to be observed in lesbian partner abuse, they form its definitional cornerstones. Similarly, the flawed vocabulary (Kirkwood, 1993; MacLeod, 1987) of the heterosexual 'battered women's' or 'violence against women' movement has been uncritically generalized to lesbian partner abuse in three consequential ways. First, my content analysis revealed that the word 'battering' (83%) was most commonly used to refer to lesbian partner abuse. Despite its

popularity, the word 'battering' may, as Catherine Kirkwood (1993) found to be true of abused heterosexual women, prevent lesbians who have not ever or recently been physically harmed (Chesley et al, 1992) from identifying their abuse. As well, the term 'battering' may mask the equal or greater impact of self-defined psychological-emotional abuse reported by heterosexual women (Kirkwood, 1993; MacLeod, 1987) and lesbians (Bramucci, 1988; Cecere, 1986; Chicago Area Lesbian and Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Cormier, 1986; Dupps, 1991; Follingstad et al, 1990; Franklin, 1984; Hamard, 1993; Hammond, 1989; Istar, 1986; Renzetti, 1988; Sarah, 1986; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Collective, n.d.; Susan Marie, 1984; Waterwoman, 1992).

Compounding the shortcomings of words like 'battering', heterosexually-referential expressions may also misrepresent realities of partner abuse. In much the same way as expressions like 'family violence' have fueled myths of 'mutual' abuse between heterosexual partners (Kirkwood, 1993), I found that forty-five, or almost one-half (43%) of the documents reviewed similarly conveyed the notion of 'mutual' abuse between lesbians via expressions like abusive, battering, or violent 'relationships'. As well as "inappropriately implying mutuality and shared responsibility" (Island & Letellier, 1991:29), such expressions ignore the context, meaning and motives for the abuse and make no

distinction between physical aggression and self-defence.

Augmenting words and expressions, contextual misrepresentations of lesbian partner abuse are also conveyed through heterosexually-referential terminology. For example, the phrase 'domestic violence' found in twenty-six documents (25%), may be misleading as abused lesbians may be as, if not more inclined than abused heterosexual women not to co-habit with their abusers (Dietrich, 1986; Renzetti, 1988; Snow, 1992). Further, just as the expression 'family violence' has facilitated the privatization of heterosexual partner abuse (Kirkwood, 1993), the expression 'domestic violence' has contextualized lesbian partner abuse as a personal problem. Writing of the legal ramifications of this trend, author Ruthann Robson (1992:164) observes that the term 'domestic' "not only domesticates critiques of men's violence against women, but it also domesticates critiques of any systemic violence...[and] stresses individualized solutions, either within or without the rule of law". As well as replicating its shortcomings, the tendency to generalize the terminology of heterosexual partner abuse to lesbian partner abuse may also cloud distinctions between those realities. According to writer and gay activist Warren Blumenfeld (1992:43)

in language lies the assumptions of a culture, its rules of conduct, what it will acknowledge as possible and permissable. No mirror of nature, language rather constitutes a prism through which human knowers organize, interpret, and give meaning to their experiences.

Culturally, although the male-dominated English language mirrors and maintains all women's "mutedness and invisibility" (Spender, 1980:229), a heterosexually-referential language of lesbian partner abuse may particularly reinforce the historical "invisibility in language....that affects the lived realities of lesbian existence" (Blumenfeld, 1992:43) and compound lesbians' "enforced silenced" in "heterosexist culture". Further, the tendency to frame the discourse on lesbian partner abuse in heterosexual terms may have particular silencing effects emerging not so much from words and phrases, as from the imprecise transfer of their heterosexually-referential meanings. As Blumenfeld (1992:44) explains

even among people particularly sensitive to the potential abuses of and in language, certain terms of expression and analysis may obfuscate the very problems they are meant to clarify by presenting paradigms that have unintended secondary meanings or that exclude in advance alternative explanations.

One illustration of this result is provided by scholar Catherine Kirkwood (1993:133). In her opinion, generalizing to lesbians heterosexual women's commitment to ending 'violence against women' masks the particular role of lesbian 'community' and obscures the fact that "although there is some overlap between the people in each of these types of groups, lesbian support networks differ in that they are united in their struggle against heterosexism rather than violence against women in particular".

Given that most popular terms of lesbian partner abuse are actually misnomers, my work in this thesis refers exclusively to lesbian 'partner abuse', 'abuse', and 'abused' and/or 'abusive' lesbians. On the positive side, this language sidesteps some of the above-noted semantic problems and can be applied to lesbian, gay, or gay/lesbian populations. On the negative side, its lack of specificity makes it difficult to know at what point hurtful behaviour becomes 'abuse'. This language may also exclude lesbians who are uncomfortable with the word 'partner', or inhibit community efforts to establish a semantic link between the specific problem of lesbian partner abuse and the general issue of 'violence' against lesbians and gay men. Despite the popularity of the word 'violence' (72%) in the same-sex literature, I suggest that its power to silence by exclusion outweighs its discursive merits. Notwithstanding Marisa Rondina's note in the Canadian Vocabulary of Family Violence (1994:120) that "new definitions of violence have moved away from a sole emphasis on physical force", researchers in the area of heterosexual partner abuse suggest otherwise. There, heterosexual women's voices on the silencing impact of terms like 'battering' or 'violence' have led some academics to highlight "the need for a language which would allow women to express their experiences, particularly with regard to emotional abuse" (Kirkwood, 1993:153). Others, like psychologist Lewis Okun (1986:xix) have concluded that "abuse as a term has an

advantage over the terms violence and battering in that its connotation captures the fact that violence is but one technique in a repertoire of abusive tactics". Based on its capacity to accommodate the diverse experiences of abused lesbians and acknowledge the varied techniques of lesbian abusers (Renzetti, 1992:23), I believe that 'abuse' defined as a partner's repeated "attempt to control behaviour through coercion, intimidation, physical force, finances, manipulation or guilt" (Rondina, 1994:1) succeeds in breaking the silence that the word 'violence' encourages.

Silence and Prevalence of Lesbian Partner Abuse

Researchers estimate that partner abuse is prevalent or "widely existent" (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989:575) and physically realized in one out of ten heterosexual relationships (LeFeuvre, 1982:1). In Canada, researcher Linda MacLeod (1987:7) estimates that conservatively, one million heterosexual women are abused by their male partners each year. In contrast, my analysis of same-sex documents that addressed lesbians' repeated experience of abuse in an intimate adult partnership spoke more to what is unknown than to what is known. Sixty-four (60%) documents failed to address the prevalence of lesbian partner abuse; thirty (28%) documents stated that its prevalence is unknown; and only eight (8%) authors speculated that it may parallel the rate of heterosexual partner abuse in

North America. Four documents (4%) offered comments and/or speculations beyond the parameters of this analysis. In those cases where the prevalence of lesbian partner abuse was said to be unknown, a few women specifically acknowledged that their personal reluctance to acknowledge partner abuse had biased their perceptions of the problem. For instance, members of a lesbian group formed in 1980 to address the issue of lesbian partner abuse admitted that "our own ignorance and disbelief had indeed led us to downplay the frequency and severity of violence within our [lesbian] community" (Knollenberg et al, 1986:99). Other writers generally attributed the lack of information on prevalence to the fact that "the topic remains shrouded in silence" (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989:58; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Renzetti, 1992, 1988; Schilit et al, 1991). Still others alluded to the existence of institutional barriers such as the under-reporting of lesbian partner abuse (Chicago Area Lesbian and Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Island & Letellier, 1991; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989; Robson, 1992; Schilit et al, 1990), and lack of publicity in "mainstream journals" (Schilit et al, 1990:52). The "hidden and stigmatized" (Renzetti, 1992:13) location of lesbians also precludes generalizing small study results to lesbian populations-at-large. For example, Renzetti's (1992:14-15) research on abused lesbians notes the under-representation of non-white and working class older and very young lesbians, despite recruitment efforts to

the contrary. Finally, as is the case in studies of abused heterosexual women, where empirical studies of abused lesbians have been conducted

estimates of the prevalence of lesbian partner abuse or frequency of abuse in battering relationships are influenced by how one operationally defines abuse....[because some] researchers have relied on Straus's (1979) Conflict Tactics Scales...[while] others have utilized more qualitative or subjective measures (Renzetti, 1993:11).

Based on these factors, some writers have concluded that more research is required (Chesley et al, 1992; Kanuha, 1990), or that "reliable incidence statistics....may never be [available]" (Edgington, 1989; Hammond, 1989:89). While statistical evidence of lesbian partner abuse could be used to support requests for publicly funded actions, less can be learned from numbers than from women themselves. Numbers cannot illustrate the individual, social and community contexts of lesbian partner abuse. They cannot define the points at which acceptable behaviour becomes abuse. They cannot provide insight into abusers' motives, or teach us how abused and/or abusive lesbians have differently interpreted and experienced the effects of abuse. Given all we can learn from women, I suggest that numbers are only a small, missing detail in a much larger story of silence on lesbian partner abuse.

Silence and Theories of Lesbian Partner Abuse

Nowhere is the silence on lesbian partner abuse more pronounced and the importance of community more apparent than

in the realm of theory. Despite the fact that theories of heterosexual partner abuse fail to adequately explain lesbian partner abuse, few lesbian-specific theoretical alternatives have been forthcoming. Owing to the tradition of silence that continues to inhibit our knowledge of lesbian partner abuse, all are limited, most notably in discounting community as a unit of analysis. The following discussion will show that, to the extent that community impacts on lesbians' individual and social experiences and directly contributes to their silence, a holistic understanding of silence on lesbian partner abuse can only be achieved by factoring community into current individual-social frameworks of explanation.

While psychologists have been inclined to generalize theories of "intermittent reinforcement" (Dupps, 1991:885) and "learned helplessness" (Dupps, 1991:886) from abused heterosexual to lesbian populations, most other academics have failed to acknowledge, let alone explain, the phenomenon of lesbian partner abuse. According to Richard Gelles (1993:41), the value of current feminist theories of heterosexual partner abuse derives first, from their concern with both explanation and action and second, from the empirically proven accuracy of their gendered analyses. By most feminist accounts, the "social problem" (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:32) of partner abuse is a consequence of structured, sex-based inequality (MacLeod, 1987:38) inherent in 'patriarchal' (Edwards, 1987:23)

"structures of authority, domination, and control...diffused throughout social, economic, political, and ideological activities and in our relations to the natural environment" (Kaufman, 1987:7). Throughout the formative years, males are socialized to power and domination, while females are socialized to submission (Smart & Smart, 1978:3) and powerlessness (Stanko, 1985:71). According to author Michael Kaufman (1987:15) "activity as aggression is part of the masculine gender definition". Most feminist theories hold that the "socially-legitimated cultural phenomenon" (Edwards, 1987:26) of partner abuse is an extension and manifestation of sex-based inequality and unequal gender relations that pervade "the wider fabric of the social structure" (Edwards, 1987:161) and typify the institution of the heterosexual family (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:2, Green et al, 1986).

As far as agency is concerned, most feminist theories of heterosexual partner abuse propose that its solution lies in "the elimination of male dominance within the family and society" (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:246). Feminist efforts toward the eradication of sex-based inequality have taken many forms. While some feminist advocates have concentrated on the empowerment (hooks, 1984:93) of abused women from all ethnicities and social classes (Stanko, 1985:52) through group (Alcoff & Gray, 1993:284) or feminist therapy (Stanko, 1985:80), the shelter movement has focused on changing "gender

inequalities in the domestic, economic and political arenas" (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:28). Still other feminists have worked toward improving perceptions and economic opportunity structures for women in the educational system and the workplace (Stanko, 1985:80), or challenging the 'gatekeepers' of reform in medical institutions (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:4), police services (Edwards, 1987:154), and the criminal justice system (Herman, 1992:72; Radford 1987:147).

Although feminist theories of heterosexual partner abuse are credited with explanation, action, and accuracy (Gelles, 1993:42), they are also criticized for their "use [of] a single variable, patriarchy, to explain the existence of wife abuse" (Gelles, 1993:43, Ristock, 1994), and their failure to "account for a wide range of objective phenomena that fall under the general label of 'family violence'...[like] violence by women" (Gelles, 1993:43). The tendency to apply gendered feminist theories of patriarchal violence to lesbian partner abuse (KALX, n.d.; Le Rougetel, 1993; MacAuley et al, 1989) has only recently attracted attention (Eaton, 1994; Ristock, 1994; Robson, 1990). One social scientist, Mary Eaton, criticizes sex-role theorists' "gender power" (Eaton, 1994:201) explanation of lesbian partner abuse which relies on the assumption that

lesbians challenge the established order between the sexes by virtue of the simple fact that they are lesbians...[and] when a lesbian abuses her lover, she is

behaving in socially masculine ways; when a lesbian is victimized...she is behaving in socially feminine ways; and therefore the battering is a gendered activity (Eaton, 1994:201).

In her opinion, "heteronormative frameworks" (Eaton, 1994:207) of partner abuse grounded in the patriarchy or gender-role inequality fail to explain lesbian partner abuse. For one, their presumption of sameness overlooks crucial differences between heterosexual and lesbian partner abuse (Eaton, 1994:204). For another, because gendered theories are based on the assumption that "lesbian really means white lesbian" (Eaton, 1994:205), they run the risk of obscuring emerging evidence of ethnic (Blenham, 1991; Eaton, 1994; Kanuha, 1990; Ristock, 1994) and class (Chesley et al, 1992; Eaton, 1994; Enos & Rollins, 1988:8; Ristock, 1994) differences in the area of lesbian partner abuse. As well, because individual, biological or sex-role based theories of lesbian partner abuse

relate almost entirely to the characteristics of intralesbian violence at an interpersonal, rather than institutional or societal level, the relation between lesbian battering and the larger context within which it occurs remains largely unexamined (Eaton, 1994:208).

Existing feminist theories of partner abuse have been criticized as too "heterosexually self-referential" (Eaton, 1994:212) to advance the discourse on lesbian partner abuse at a social level. According to Mary Eaton (1994:212),

though the ideological devices of property and privacy powerfully support and entrench the practice of male supremacy, they do not, metaphorically or otherwise, capture why some lesbians are sometimes violent with their

intimates, or why the institutions of dominant society react to the deployment of such violence as they do.

Interestingly, where social levels of explanation for lesbian partner abuse have been speculated in the same-sex literature, they often rely not on critical analysis of specific structures and institutions, but on grand theory or a 'culture of violence' rationale in which "violence and exploitation are not only tolerated, but are condoned, honored, and rewarded" (Chesley et al, 1992; Enos & Rollins, 1988:8; Hart, 1986).

One "lesbian-specific model" (Eaton, 1994:200) highlights the need for theories of lesbian partner abuse that go beyond individual to social levels of explanation that frame lesbian partner abuse "as part and parcel of a larger pattern of antilesbian policies and practices" (Eaton, 1994:216). Coining a theory of lesbian partner abuse based on lesbians' "invisibility" (Eaton, 1994:219-220), Eaton explains that

to the extent, then, that battering is connected with this notion of erasure, neither gender nor gay theories of intimate abuse, which do not factor enforced invisibility into their analyses, can speak fully to the experience of lesbians with domestic violence. And plainly, there is a relationship between invisibility and battering. If erasure is understood to exist on a continuum, from closetry at one pole to physical annihilation at the other, the phenomenon of intralesbian violence can be seen to span its entire spectrum. The shame of individuals involved in such relationships, and the wilence or ignorance with which their appeals are met, all foster closetry....The further question remains as to how to coneive of the response of the social problem apparatus, a response most often characterized by a seeming indifference.

On the one hand, I support Eaton's suggestion that feminist theories of lesbian partner abuse must include both individual and social levels of explanation because "there is an obvious connection between systemic homophobia/heterosexism and the vast silence which surrounds intralesbian abuse" (Eaton, 1992:21). On the other hand, while Eaton suggests that lesbian invisibility and abuse exist on a "continuum", the dichotomous individual-social paradigm she proposes obscures community levels of explanation, their role in mediating lesbians' individual and social experiences, and the unique features of silence on partner abuse in lesbian communities. Alternatively, I maintain that if the whole story of lesbian "invisibility" is to be told, individual, social, and community levels of silence must be acknowledged, explained, and integrated.

The search for feminist theories of partner abuse that go beyond 'blaming the patriarchy' (Ristock, 1994:7) has led Eaton and others to speculate that it may be a response to lesbians' experience of "homophobia" (MacAuley et al, 1989:14; Chesley et al, 1992; DePoy & Noble, 1992; Elliott, 1991; Hammond, 1986; Hart, 1986), or "institutionalized and internalized homophobia and heterosexism" (Ristock, 1994:7; Benowitz, 1986). Where homophobia is "the irrational fear, hatred, and intolerance of homosexual men and women" (Margolies et al, 1987:229) expressed as "a belief system that

justifies discrimination based on sexual orientation" (Margolies et al, 1987:230), internalized homophobia is "the adoption and acceptance within a lesbian or gay man of these negative attitudes" (Margolies et al, 1987:230). For lesbians, "the potential for [heterosexual] negativity creates an almost 'in-built' awareness of her 'deviant identity', 'different choice' or alternative life-style" (Ettore, 1980:38). Lacking "studies of the limiting and deleterious effects of internalized homophobia" (Margolies et al, 1987:235), some writers propose that internalized homophobia "impairs the self-esteem of some lesbians and can isolate lesbian couples and adds stress to their relationships" (Ristock, 1991:116-117; Brooks, 1981). In my opinion, theories that rely on homophobia and internalized homophobia fail to adequately explain lesbian partner abuse. For one, "self hate" (Kirkwood, 1993:129) rationales fail to account for same-sex partner abuse between 'out and proud' lesbians. For another, as Kitzinger and Perkins (1993:102) note,

in applying the label 'internalized homophobia' to our (possibly very real and very painful) experiences, we pathologize ourselves....[and] the consequences of translating [antilesbianism] into 'internalized homophobia' are politically very serious: not only does this change the definition of what is wrong...but it also changes the possible solution.

Although homophobia and internalized homophobia may play some role in reinforcing some lesbians' feelings of difference, inequality, or powerlessness in heterosexual society, more research is needed on abused and abusive lesbians' positive

and negative self-esteem before such theoretical conclusions are merited.

Still other people have alluded to the 'fit' of theories based on "woman-hating" (Ristock, 1994:7), misogyny (Chesley et al, 1992; DePoy and Noble, 1992; MacAuley et al, 1989; Ristock, 1994), or "internalized misogyny" (Benowitz, 1986, Hart, 1986, Irvine, 1984, KALX, n.d.; Ristock, 1994:7). As activist Naomi Porat (n.d., 11) explains

lesbian battering demonstrates how deeply ingrained and systematic the socialization processes are which teach acceptance of violence as a form of power and control. Even lesbians learn violence and hatred against women and thus the violence against themselves. These acts of abuse by women against women are a form of internalized misogyny.

The opinion that abusers have more power or "control or authority" (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989:569) was reflected in my content analysis of one hundred and five documents where power (42%) and control (50%) were perceived to be present in lesbian partner abuse. The strength of lesbians' assimilation to heterosexist relationship contexts, and power and control in particular, is substantiated by Susan Edwards (1987:27) who notes with a hint of irony that "the alternative strategies of lesbian separatism and the negotiation of 'new' types of relationships between men and women both assume that, if conscious of it, one may escape or modify one's cultural and sexual conditioning". If partner

abuse is any indication, political awareness of differential power relations clearly has not succeeded in offsetting those specific 'ripple effects' in lesbian relationships. If lesbians are avoiding confronting ideas about power this may reflect a strong desire to keep intact the notion of a lesbian 'utopia' in which egalitarian relations of power are purported to be not only a norm, but a superior feature of lesbian relationships. The significant potential of misogyny and internalized misogyny-based theories in advancing our understanding of lesbian partner abuse will be lost if scholars and political activists alike continue to stifle the truth that not only are there non-egalitarian power dynamics in lesbian relationships, but there are some power dynamics that are controlling, abusive, and far from ideal.

In this section I proposed that our knowledge of lesbian partner abuse has been constrained by a tradition of silence on that subject. I suggested that because of that silence, facts of heterosexual partner abuse have been generalized to lesbian partner abuse, inhibiting the formulation of lesbian-appropriate definitions, terminology, and community-inclusive theories. In the next section I will explore other potentially obscured features of abused lesbians' silence at individual, social, and community levels.

Contrasting Silence on Heterosexual and Lesbian Partner Abuse

In the previous section I proposed that knowledge of lesbian partner abuse has been constrained by a tradition of silence. Owing to that silence, facts of heterosexual partner abuse have been generalized to lesbian partner abuse, constraining the formulation of lesbian-specific definitions, terminology, and community-inclusive theories. Referencing the literatures on heterosexual and lesbian partner abuse, network analysis, and gay/lesbian identity formation, this section will explore other potentially obscured features of abused lesbians' silence at individual, social, and community levels of analysis.

Defining the Framework of Analysis

As far as the framework of analysis for exploring suggested distinctions between abused heterosexual women's and abused lesbians' silence is concerned, parallels to my conception of the 'individual' level are found in the social support work of Nan Lin (1986). According to Lin (1986:20) the most intimate of the three levels of social support is "closest to the individual" and

consists of relations among confiding partners....[where] the relationship tends to be binding in the sense that reciprocal and mutual exchanges are expected, and responsibility for one another's well-being is understood and shared by the partners.

While "intimate and confiding relationships" (Lin, 1986:20)

are common to abused heterosexual women and abused lesbians, the social stigma attached to relationships outside the heterosexual 'norm' suggests that the roles of partners, friends, and family in lesbian partner abuse cannot be automatically assumed to be the same. Focusing research on silencing factors at an intimate or individual level exposes these potential discrepancies in the experiences of heterosexual women and lesbians.

What I have termed the 'social' level of analysis captures those

relationships with the larger community...[which] reflect integration into, or a sense of belongingness in, the larger social structure.... Even though such involvement tends to be impersonal, the sense of belonging to and being part of the social environment is significant (Lin, 1986:19).

Sociological research that acknowledges the differential social location of women is generally important because the concept of a 'social structure' relies on the "premise that behaviors or actions are interpretable only in relation to the positions of actors in social structure" (Marsden & Lin, 1982:9). Feminists' recognition of diversity has, for instance, furthered our understanding that some women are more marginalized than others, based on their ethnicity or class. Likewise, research that acknowledges the unique social location of lesbians is especially important in illuminating previously generalized and obscured distinctions between

abused heterosexual women's and abused lesbians' silence. While heterosexual women and lesbians' sense of 'belonging' in the North American social structure is commonly impaired by its woman-hating or misogynist ideology, lesbians' ability to 'belong' is further and particularly constrained by homophobia and heterosexism.

The task of establishing what constitutes lesbian 'community' is rather formidable when one considers that the "concept of community has been the concern of sociologists for more than two hundred years but even a satisfactory definition of it in sociological terms appears as remote as ever" (Bell & Newby, 1974:xliii). Indeed, while the term 'community' is liberally used in documents pertaining to lesbian partner abuse, I was unable to locate a single definition of that term in a content analysis of one hundred and five same-sex documents. Consulting the literature on gay/lesbian identity formation, however, allowed me to evaluate the usefulness of social network analysis models in defining lesbian 'community'. The identity formation position that lesbian communities are "profoundly important" (Pearlman, 1987:314) to those individuals is also reflected in the literature on network support systems. Sociologist Nan Lin, for example, emphasizes community or "social network" (Lin, 1986:19) relations over individual and social levels of social support (Lin, 1986:20) or "belongingness" (Lin, 1986:19). As a rationale for her

emphasis on community, Lin (1986:19) explains that communities provide a sense of bonding...[that] is more substantial than relationships based on a sense of belonging....[and] bonding relations represent actual linkages of the individual with others, even though some of the linkages may be indirect.

The relational importance of community alongside individual and social contexts is also conveyed in Claude Fischer's (1982:3) statement that "it is through personal connections that society is structured and the individual integrated into society".

In regard to network analysis paradigms of 'community', Karen March (1982:64) maintains that sociologists employ the term in three ways. First, network analysts use the word 'community' to "refer to social units as social groups, neighbourhoods and total institutions" (March, 1982:64), as 'ideal types' or "first-order abstractions from reality...[which] contain as much as possible of the information about the whole of the social life of the community to which it corresponds" (Barnes, 1969:56). This sense of 'community' is "exemplified in the study of religious communities, work associations or neighbourhood organizations whose members all express some common identification that binds them into a social group" (March, 1982:64). When applied to lesbian communities, however, the value of this model is offset by the fact that neither are lesbians in most North American cities so residentially concentrated as to qualify as "neighbourhoods"

(Barnes, 1969:56), nor are many lesbian social groups as institutionalized, enduring, or identifiable as, for example, religious or work (March, 1982:64) 'communities'. This difference is conveyed in the statement that

in small towns or universities, there may be many [lesbian] communities. The center of community can be one or more bars or coffee houses, a women's center, a social organization, self-help or discussion groups, or an occasional dance or musical event...thus, community is not a fixed entity (Pearlman, 1992:314).

A second network analysis definition of 'community' derives from Tonnies' conceptualization of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* (Bell & Newby, 1971:42). In this perspective, 'community' encompasses the "spatial relationships" (Bernard, 1973:37) within "ecological units" (Fischer, 1982:271), "territory" (Poplin, 1979:9), or "those units of social and territorial organization that, depending on their size, may also be called hamlets, villages, towns, cities, or metropolitan areas" (Poplin, 1979:3). This emphasis on locale is also found in the gay/lesbian identity formation literature's note that "lesbian communities are typically defined by geography" (Pearlman, 1992:314). Both literatures also acknowledge the importance of "spatial relations" (Bernard, 1973:37) or "connections...through activity" (Pearlman, 1992:314). Beyond these commonalities, lesbian 'communities' defy description as "hamlets, villages, towns, cities, or metropolitan areas" (Poplin, 1979:3) because they

vary across class and racial lines, from city to city, over time, and according to type - bar communities, for example, differing from political communities, home-based social communities from work-based communities, and each of these from institutional communities such as emerge in boarding schools and prisons (Krieger, 1982:105).

Not all network analysts regard locale as an adequate determinant of 'community'. In her study of social networks and families, for example, Elizabeth Bott (1957:99) noted that

the immediate social environment of urban families is best considered not as the local area in which they live, but rather as the network of actual social relationships they maintain, regardless whether these are confined to the local area or run beyond its boundaries.

This emphasis on social relationships is captured in the third network analysis conceptualization of 'community' as a "psychocultural unit" (Poplin, 1979:19) characterized by "sentiment" or "we-ness" that "involves...a sharing of common values, beliefs, and goals....[which] may arise from many sources, especially from the historical milieu out of which the community grew". In this sense, feelings of 'community' or "meaningful fellowship" (Poplin, 1979:23) can only be inspired if one is involved in and identifies with the community (Poplin, 1979:19). Echoing the network concept of "we-ness" (Poplin, 1979:19), the identity formation literature attributes to lesbian 'community' "a sense of connection or groupness'" (Pearlman, 1992:314), as exemplified in Susan Krieger's (1982:92) admittedly broad, support-based definition

of lesbian community as "a sense of camaraderie with other lesbians, a sense of support, shared understanding, shared vision, [and] shared sense of self 'as a lesbian', vis-a-vis the outside world". Because of "losses of acceptability, security, and connection combined with isolation from... family" (Pearlman, 1992:314) lesbian

community-as-connection provides definition, acceptance, and inclusion; it offers sources for social life, political activity, friendships, lovers, places to go, and other types of assistance...[and] it is these needs that make community profoundly powerful.

Theorists who advocate the "psychocultural" (Poplin, 1979:19) model also succeed in capturing the historical roots of lesbian 'community' as "both a personal awareness and a way of life" (Ettore, 1980:34). From the twentieth century shift away from women's "special friendships" (Kennedy & Davis, 1993:8), toward "lesbian friendship networks and communities [that] were primarily social and bar-oriented" (Kennedy & Davis, 1993:10), the rise of feminism during the late 1960s and early 1970s prompted a move away from perceptions of lesbian community as "actual communities, defined as groups whose members acted as support for each other" (Schuyf, 1992:54), toward ideological communities defined by a "politicized view of lesbian identity, consisting of a radical rejection of patriarchal heterosexist society" (Schuyf, 1992:54). Although the notion of lesbian 'community' continued to be synonymous with "utopian...visions of lesbian futures" (Schuyf, 1992:55) throughout the 1980s, since then

feminists' growing acknowledgement of the diversity of experience (Schuyf, 1992) appears to have impacted on definitions of lesbian 'community' in that they now typically encompass both supportive and ideological bases (Krieger, 1983). Beyond connection and history, the premise of "common values, beliefs, and goals" (Poplin, 1979:19) contained in network's "psychocultural" (Poplin, 1979:19) definition is also compatible with identity formation theorists' acknowledgement of the resocializing role of lesbian communities "using sets of standards specifically tailored to the lesbian situation in life with the aim of making lesbianism an accepted part of women's identity" (Schuyf, 1992:53). In summary, compared to social groups, neighbourhoods and institutions, or 'community' as locale, the psychocultural model of network analysis best reflects the identity formation theorists' perception of historical, normative, lesbian 'communities-as-connection' (Pearlman, 1987:314).

Despite these commonalities, the idealized perspectives of network analysts and gay/lesbian identity theorists fail to fully capture the implications of the wider social context for lesbian partner abuse. For one, homophobia at a social level may inspire lesbians' greater dependence on and often unrealistic expectations of community for "support and sustenance" (Pearlman, 1992:315). For another, insular

lesbian communities may "bear the weight of traumas, hurts, and jealousies as break-ups and exchanges of lovers create ex-lovers, single lesbians, and new partnerships" (Pearlman, 1992:315). As well, the "self-hating of internalized homophobia" may result in inner "frustration, rage, and bitterness" turned outward toward other lesbians (Pearlman, 1992:315). Early evidence of black lesbians' social separation from white lesbians (Kennedy & Davis, 1993:113) and emerging class-based distinctions (Kennedy & Davis, 1993:139) in the 1950s hints at still-prevalent "underlying tension between the unity of one large community in the face of common oppression as lesbians and the integrity of separate sub-communities each with its own strategies of resistance" (Kennedy & Davis, 1993:113). The impact of these particular class and ethnic tensions was recently recognized by activist and academic, Janice Ristock (1994:7), who stated in a Toronto panel discussion on lesbian partner abuse that

the conceptual framework has to expand to explore the impact of things like internalized misogyny as well as look at how racism, classism, ageism, anti-semitism - all structures of domination - intersect with one another and provide a context where violence becomes an opportunity that people take in certain circumstances.

Finally, lesbians' drive for

sameness, for a common and collective identity that is typical of many communities...can clash with the drive toward individual identity....[and] make differences uncomfortable and suspect, as if dissimilarity could erode cohesiveness (Pearlman, 1992:315).

Taking these stresses and strains into account, lesbian communities might be more accurately construed as diverse spatial, social, and/or emotional affinities with other lesbians, ideologically grounded in expectations of shared support, security, understanding, political vision, and/or sub-cultural identities 'as a lesbian' in a homophobic social world.

Proposed Individual Features of Silence

At an individual level, lesbians and heterosexual women share many dimensions of silencing about partner abuse. At least six key areas in which lesbians' reality of partner abuse departs from the heterosexual norm are, however, suggested in the literature. These areas include isolation, shame, denial, love for their abuser, fear of abuser retaliation, and concern for children.

First, like many heterosexual women, lesbians suffer abuser-enforced isolation from friends (Advocates for Abused & Battered Lesbians, n.d.; Burstow, 1992; Chesley et al, 1992; Cormier, 1986; Crall, 1986; Dietrich, 1986; Dupps, 1991; Eaton, 1994; Evans & Bannister, 1990; Hamard, 1993; Hammond, 1989; Istar, 1986; Kim, 1986; Lisa, 1986; McKnight, 1989; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Poorman, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992, 1989, 1988; Ristock, 1994, 1991; Sarah,

1986; Susan Marie, 1984; Why Many Abused Lesbians Don't Seek Help, 1990). However, unlike abused heterosexual women, homophobia and the marginalization of abused lesbians may exacerbate their isolation. Abusers' real or threatened disclosure of their partners' sexual orientation may deter both 'hidden' and 'out of the closet' lesbians from reaching out to family, friends, or social supports. Some lesbians may be more isolated than others, given their particular fears for the effect of abusers' disclosure of their sexual orientation on job security (Burstow, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1994; Hamard, 1993; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Ristock, 1994; Snow, 1992). Lesbians who are not 'out of the closet' may fear that disclosure of their sexual orientation will, in addition, negatively impact on their existing relationships with their families of origin (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dopler, 1993; Dupps, 1991; Hammond, 1986; Le Rougetel, 1993; Renzetti, 1992, 1989). Lesbians who are 'out of the closet' may fear that their families of origin will perceive the abuse as evidence of the 'sickness' of their sexual orientation (Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dopler, 1993; Dupps, 1991; Grover, n.d.; Hammond, 1986; Kanuha, 1990; Renzetti, 1992, 1989). Finally, specific lesbians who do not self-define as lesbian (Chesley et al, 1992; Edgington, 1989; Hamard, 1993; Hammond, 1986; London Battered Women's Advocacy

Centre, 1993), who have just 'come out' (Simone, 1986), and other lesbians (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989) may be particularly vulnerable to isolation because they perceive their abusive partner as their only like-minded contact.

Like heterosexual women (Dupps, 1991) lesbians may be economically/materially dependent (Chesley et al, 1992; Hammond, 1989, 1986; Istar, 1986, Kim, 1986; Leeder, 1988; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Morrow and Hawxhurst, 1989; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Poorman, n.d.) and/or emotionally dependent on their partners (Eaton, 1994; Leeder, 1988; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Susan Marie, 1984). It has been argued, however, that lesbian couples may experience emotional dependence and intimacy more profoundly than heterosexual couples (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Breeze, 1986; Cormier, 1986; Dupps, 1991; Evans & Bannister, 1990; Hurley, 1986; Irvine, 1984; Istar, 1986; Kim, 1986; Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Le Rougetel, 1993; Lindenbaum, 1985; Lisa, 1986; McKenzie, 1992; Pearlman, 1989; Peplau et al, 1983; Renzetti, 1992, 1988; Vargo, 1987). This may increase their isolation (Eaton, 1994; Renzetti, 1992). According to David Dupps (1991:598)

the importance of power equality may be explained by the fact that lesbian couples are fully dependent on each other for all of their needs, because they are without the

social structure and approval of heterosexual couples.

Of the particular character of lesbian couples' isolation, Lee Evans and Shelley Bannister (1990:55) comment that

our isolation within relationships from the rest of the community is often accommodated by the community. This isolation, however, is damaging....The concept of romantic love assumes that we are each just a half of a person, looking for the perfect lesbian to join with to become...complete.

A second way in which abused lesbians and heterosexual woman are commonly silenced is through shame (Blenham, 1991; Bramucci, 1988; B.R., 1988; Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian and Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dupps, 1991; Dziggel, 1986; Eaton, 1994; Edgington, 1989; Hammond, 1986; Hurley, 1986; Kresge, 1986; Le Rougetel, 1993; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; M, 1988; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; S.K., 1988; Sarah, 1986; Simone, 1986; Waterwoman, 1992; Why Many Abused Lesbians Don't Seek Help, 1990). Researchers have found that abused lesbians, like abused heterosexual women, report feelings of helplessness (Chesley et al, 1992; Evans & Bannister, 1990; Leeder, 1988; Poorman, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992; S.K., 1988), guilt (Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Crall, 1986; Dietrich, 1986; Franklin, 1984; Leeder, 1988; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Poorman, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992), responsibility (Burstow, 1992; Cecere, 1986; Cormier, 1986; Franklin, 1984; Hammond, 1986; Hurley, 1986;

Istar, 1986; Kresge, 1986; Le Rougetel, 1993; Lee, 1988; Leeder, 1988; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Renzetti, 1992; S.K., 1988; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Cooperative, n.d.), and poor self-esteem (Eaton, 1994; Edgington, 1989; Evans & Bannister, 1990; Renzetti, 1989; Renzetti, 1988; Waterwoman, 1992). While feelings of guilt are behaviour-related, emerging from a sense of "responsibility for wrongdoing" (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989:332), feelings of shame are self-directed and suffered as a "painful sense of having done something wrong, improper or immodest" (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989:664). Lesbians may be more ashamed of partner abuse than heterosexual women to the extent that their feminist politics (Cecere, 1986; Edgington, 1989; Hammond, 1986; Lenae, 1989; Simone, 1986; Why Many Abused Lesbians Don't Seek Help, 1990) or larger physical size (Franklin, 1984) did not prevent their abuse.

A third way in which abused heterosexual women and abused lesbians are individually silenced is through the denial and/or minimization of abuse (Blenham, 1991; Bramucci, 1988; Burstow, 1992; Cecere, 1986; Crall, 1986; Dwyer, 1988; Edgington, 1989; Franklin, 1984; Irvine, 1984; Istar, 1986; Leeder, 1988; Lenae, 1988; MacAuley, 1989; McKnight, 1989; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Poorman, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992; S.K., 1988; Sarah, 1986; Task Force on Lesbian Battering of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups,

1988; Why Many Lesbians Don't Seek Help, 1990). Like heterosexual women, lesbians may deny or minimize the bad 'side' of the abuser by concentrating on their good 'side' (Bramucci, 1988; Kresge, 1986; Lisa, 1986; Sarah, 1986), by claiming that things 'aren't so bad' (Waterwoman, 1992; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989), or that things will improve (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Burstow, 1992; Dziggel, 1986; Hammond, 1986; Kim, 1986; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Renzetti, 1988; Susan Marie, 1984). They may also deny or minimize abuse by rationalizing that it won't happen again (Breeze, 1986; Dziggel, 1986), or that the abuse can be controlled (B.R., 1988; Chesley et al, 1992; Istar, 1986; Renzetti, 1988; Waterwoman, 1992). Belief in the myth of 'mutual' abuse may further encourage denial by heterosexual women and lesbians (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Burstow, 1992; Chesley et al, 1992; Davis, 1988; Dopler, 1993; Eaton, 1994; Elliott, 1991; Hart, 1986; KALX, n.d.; King, n.d.; Lee, 1988; MacAuley, 1989; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1983; Pharr, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Women Service Groups, 1988; Walker, 1986; Waterwoman, 1992). The same-sex literature notes, however, that lesbians who have retaliated in self-defence (Le Rougetel, 1993; Burstow, 1992; Renzetti, 1992; Lee, 1988; Hammond, 1986; Hart, 1986; Irvine, 1984; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Cooperative, n.d.) or lesbians who believe in feminist analyses of partner abuse that present men as its perpetrators may experience greater

confusion and be more inclined to see their situation as a 'lover's quarrel' than partner abuse (Battered Lovers, 1986; Blenham, 1991; Brownworth, 1993; Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Cormier, 1986; Eaton, 1994; Edgington, 1989; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Geraci, 1986; Grover, n.d.; Irvine, 1984; KALX, n.d.; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Porat, 1986; Renzetti, 1993, 1992; Ristock, 1991; S.K., 1988; Sarah, 1986; Simone, 1986; Strach et al, 1986; Snow, 1992).

The literature also suggests that lesbians' internalized homophobia may, via stereotypes of abused and abusive lesbians, encourage abused lesbians' denial or minimization of partner abuse (Advocates for Abused & Battered Lesbians, n.d.; Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Breeze, 1986; Brownworth, 1993; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Cormier, 1986; Dietrich, 1986; Dopler, 1993; Dowd, 1988; Eaton, 1994; Edgington, 1989; Elliott, 1991; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Evans & Bannister, 1990; Grover, n.d.; Hammond, 1989; Hart, 1986; Irvine, 1984; KALX, n.d.; Kelly & Warsnafsky, 1986; King, n.d.; Le Rougetel, 1993; Lenae, 1989; London Women's Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Northwood, 1986; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Renzetti, 1992, 1988; Ristock, 1991; S.K., 1988; Strach et al, 1986; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Women Service Groups,

1988; Vargo, 1990; Walker, 1986; Waterwoman, 1992). In an interview with Amanda Le Rougetel (1993:28), counsellor Sally Papsco explains that

institutionalized and internalized homophobia and heterosexism...keeps us socially isolated. Out of isolation comes self-contempt and contempt for others like us. If lesbians internalize the myths about us that society perpetuates, we come to believe that we are [sic] all those horrible things. Because we don't like dirty, useless people, we come to hate ourselves and other women like us. Self-contempt can thus lead to violent, ugly behaviour against others like us.

Beyond potentially inspiring the "venting of internalized homophobia or misogyny on women partners" (Vargo, 1990:164), and the outcome of silenced abused lesbians, internalized homophobia may also inspire lesbians' conscious or unconscious denial of partner abuse. Consciously, lesbians may choose to deny partner abuse rather than "contribute to the already negative views that society holds about lesbians as sick and perverted" (Elliott, 1991; Ristock, 1994:2). Unconsciously, lesbians' struggle against external and internal homophobia may blind them to the reality of partner abuse. Author Mindy Benowitz (1986:6) explains that "lesbians struggle against being too much 'like a man' or too much like a 'stereotypical woman', while fighting shame for being different as a lesbian in a heterosexist world....[and] our unrealistic standards make it difficult to admit that lesbian battering exists". Abused lesbians' denial and minimization of partner abuse may be enabled through myths that "conspire to diminish concern

within the community regarding the seriousness of the problem and dampen the community's caring response" (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1992:17). On the one hand, denial-enabling myths may concern the general issue of lesbian partner abuse. For example, while abused heterosexual women and lesbians may misperceive that lesbian partner abuse is not serious (Dietrich, 1986; Eaton, 1994; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Northwood, 1986), the absence or infrequency of physical abuse (Renzetti 1988, 1989, 1992) and the often similar size of lesbian partners (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Edgington, 1989; Elliott, 1991; Edgington, 1989; Hammond, 1989; Irvine, 1984; MacAuley, 1989; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Renzetti, 1992) may particularly fuel this misperception. Just as some abused heterosexual women may deny their abuse because of stereotypes that attribute partner abuse to certain classes (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1994), individual lesbians' isolation and denial may be encouraged by various lesbian-specific stereotypes (New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.) that suggest that some groups of lesbians are more capable of partner abuse than others. Target groups mentioned in the same-sex literature include 'butch/femme' lesbians (Battered Lovers, 1986; Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Benowitz, 1986; Bramucci, 1988; Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dopler, 1993; Dowd, 1988; Eaton, 1994; Hart, 1986;

Irvine, 1984; KALX, n.d.; King, n.d.; MacAuley, 1989; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989; Renzetti, 1992; Strach et al, 1986; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Women Service Groups, 1988), non-feminist 'bar dykes' (Bramucci, 1988; Chesley et al, 1992; Hart, 1986; Leeder, 1989; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; MacAuley, 1989; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Cooperative, n.d.; Strach et al, 1986; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Women Service Groups, 1988) and sado-masochistic lesbians (Califia, 1990; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993). Despite the fact that "the key words in S and M are safe, sane and consensual...[and] the idea is to gain pleasure from being pushed to your physical limits, not to cause permanent physical or psychological damage to someone else" (Dyer in Bramucci, 1988:18), lesbians distinguished by their sado-masochistic sexual practice are frequently stereotyped as abusive (Battered Lovers, 1986; Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Bramucci, 1988; Burstow, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Irvine, 1984; Ristock, 1994; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Cooperative, n.d.; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups, 1988). In the process of encouraging non sado-masochistic lesbians' denial of their abuse, these stereotypes also enhance the isolation and denial of abused sado-masochistic lesbians. As author Pat Califia

(1990:n.p.) explains

there are many good reasons why the violence that some leather dykes commit against each other has remained a dirty secret. We all expend a lot of energy trying to educate the world about S/M. We repeatedly have to confront the stereotype that lesbian S/M is the same thing as violence against women. We want to make a distinction between what we do and assault and battery. This can lead to denial that our community, like any besieged minority, has its own problems with violence... [but] if we are honest, we will admit that we are also afraid of the women who are violent...and we don't know where to turn.

As well, non-white lesbians may be erroneously associated with partner abuse, with the effect that

it is somewhat surprising that lesbians of color would ever feel safe in the world. The triple jeopardy they face as women living in a sexist society, as lesbians living in a homophobic society, and as people of color living in a racist society forms a complex web of silence and vulnerability with very little protection. In this oftentimes isolated existence, lesbians of color in violent relationships are further hidden (Kanuha, 1990:176).

A fourth area in which individual abused lesbians may differ from abused heterosexual women is in their love and concern for their abuser. As with heterosexual women, lesbians feel love or concern for their abusers (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Blenham, 1991; Burstow, 1992; B.R., 1988; Bramucci, 1988; Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chrystos, 1986; Cormier, 1986; Davis, 1988; Edgington, 1989; Franklin, 1984; Gentlewind, 1986; Hammond, 1989; Hurley, 1986, Istar, 1986; Kresge, 1986; Poorman, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992, 1988; Santa Cruz Women's Self Defence Teaching Cooperative, n.d.; Sarah, 1986;

Susan Maric, 1984; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups, 1988). However lesbians, especially lesbian feminists, may be particularly reluctant to label their 'sisters' abusive (Hammond, 1986; Lee, 1988). Unlike abused heterosexual women, abused lesbians may also be especially prone to empathize with their abusers' actions based on their particular or shared childhood histories of abuse (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Cecere, 1986; Cormier, 1986; Gentlewind, 1986; Hurley, 1986; Leeder, 1989). Further, to the extent that there may be more intimacy (Peplau et al, 1983) or "fusion" (Krestan & Bepko, 1980:277; Irvine, 1984) and "merger" (Lindenbaum, 1985:88; McKenzie, 1992; Pearlman, 1989) in lesbian relationships, abused lesbians may be more inclined than many abused heterosexual women to believe that their abusers' affection is key to their survival, or that their love and concern are crucial to their abusers' survival (Marecek, 1993; Blenham, 1991; Edgington, 1989; B.R., 1988; Lee, 1988; Cecere, 1986; Cormier, 1986; Hammond, 1986; Kim, 1986; Simone, 1986; Susan Marie, 1984; Poorman, n.d.).

A fifth factor that silences heterosexual women and lesbians alike involves abuser retaliation (Chesley et al, 1992; Edgington, 1989; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Poorman, n.d.; Renzetti, 1992; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups, 1988). Like heterosexual women (Dupps, 1991), lesbians wanting to leave the relationship may

fear retaliation against themselves (Cecere, 1986; Cormier, 1986, Dietrich, 1986; M, 1988; Maracek, 1993; Poorman, n.d.; Susan Marie, 1984) or others (M, 1988; Poorman, n.d.; Waterwoman, 1992). Lesbians may be particularly deterred, however, by fears that their sexual orientation will be disclosed by their abuser out of vengeance (Advocates for Abused & Battered Lesbians, n.d.; Burstow, 1992; Chesley et al, 1993; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1994; Eaton, 1994; Evans & Bannister, 1990; Hamard, 1993; Kresge, 1986; Le Rougetel, 1993; Lesbian Battering, 1988; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Maracek, 1993; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1990; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989; NiCarthy, 1986; Ristock, 1994; Snow, 1992; Task Force on Lesbian Battering of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women Service Groups, 1988).

Finally, researchers speculate that unique child-related concerns may particularly silence abused lesbians. Lacking the legal protections afforded heterosexual couples (Linda & Avreayl, 1986; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989), many non-custodial abused lesbians may be silenced on the one hand by the custodial abusers' threats to deny abused partners access to the children (Edgington, 1989). On the other hand, abused custodial lesbians may be silenced by abusers' threats to disclose their sexual orientation to the children's father (Grover, n.d.) or others (Renzetti, 1992) or by their

perception that mainstream support will not be forthcoming if their children are kidnapped by their abuser after they leave the relationship (Grover, n.d.).

While abused heterosexual women and abused lesbians share many dimensions of silence on partner abuse, the literatures suggest that abused lesbians' silence may be distinctive or enhanced by their particular experiences of isolation, shame, denial, love for their abuser, fear of abuser retaliation, and concern for children.

Proposed Social Features of Silence

Claire Renzetti's (1988:395) research finding that "the police, attorneys, physicians, and psychiatrists, proved to be the least helpful of all" to abused lesbian respondents highlights the fact that in addition to unique or exacerbated features of silence at an individual level, lesbians may be distinctively silenced at a social level by their real and perceived fears of police, the criminal justice system, medical and mental health professionals, and shelters for abused women.

According to the London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre (1994:2) homophobia is defined as "fear and prejudice about homosexuality". Although homophobia is often expressed as overt and covert personal "prejudice" (Jennings, 1994:24)

toward gay men and lesbians, some people suggest that it "is more damaging as a disease of institutions than as an individual's failing" (Cruikshank, 1992:10). Heterosexism, on the other hand, is an "assumption that heterosexuality is the "norm", that it is (or should be)[sic] the [sic] universal sexual/intimate experience" (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1994:2). Like homophobia, heterosexism motivates overt and covert "attitudinal, institutional, religious, legislative, and policy discrimination against lesbians and gay men" (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1994:2).

Generally, perceptions of homophobia and heterosexism may deter lesbians from disclosing their sexual orientation to police officers (Benowitz, 1986; Califia, 1990; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Grover, n.d.; Hamard, 1993; Hammond, 1989; Lesbian Battering, 1987; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Renzetti, 1992, 1989; Stewart, 1994), criminal justice officials (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Benowitz, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dopler, 1993; Dupps, 1991; Hamard, 1993; Hammond, 1989; Grover, n.d.; Le Rougetel, 1993; McKnight, 1989; Renzetti, 1992; Zadkine, 1987), and medical (Lesbian Battering, 1987) and mental health professionals (Benowitz, 1986; Grover, n.d.). Equally, perceived homophobic and heterosexist reactions from residents (Renzetti, 1992), "funding sources,

the community and the shelter board and staff" (Irvine, 1984:n.p.) may deter abused lesbians from resourcing shelters for abused women (Benowitz, 1986; Brownworth, 1993; Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dopler, 1993; Dowd, 1988; Dupps, 1991; Eaton, 1994; Geraci, 1986; Grover, n.d.; Hammond, 1989; Hammond, 1986; Irvine, 1984; Kim, 1986; Knollenberg et al, 1986; Le Rougetel, 1993; Leeder, 1988; Lesbian Battering, 1987; MacAuley, 1989; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989; NiCarthy, 1986; Pharr, 1987; Renzetti, 1992; Robson, 1992; Renzetti, 1989; Strach et al, 1986; Zadkine, 1987). Paralleling the evidence that abused black heterosexual women fail to use shelters for abused women due to perceptions of racism (White, 1985), lesbians of colour may be additionally deterred by real or perceived homophobia (Kanuha, 1991). A second, general fear concerns the possibility that lesbians' sexual orientation, rather than their abuse, will be seen as the problem by police services (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; KALX. n.d.), the criminal justice system (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Robson, 1992), and medical (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993) and mental health professionals (Breeze, 1986; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Eaton, 1994; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993). Third, lesbians may believe that a lack of awareness of lesbian partner abuse will result in police

services (Chicago Area Lesbian and Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Dopler, 1993) or mental health clinicians' (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Renzetti, 1994; 1992) misperception of abuse as mutual combat. A fourth general inhibitor derives from lesbians' fear that the abuse will not be taken seriously; that police will classify it as not serious (Cecere, 1986), or as a female 'cat fight' (King, n.d.; Snow, 1992) or that mental health professionals will minimize the abuse because it occurred between women (Renzetti, 1993, 1992, 1989, 1988; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups, 1988; Waterwoman, 1992). Finally, although child custody concerns are generally shared with abused heterosexual women and specifically shared with marginalized aboriginal heterosexual women (MacLeod, 1987), abused lesbians may also fear that combined knowledge of their sexual orientation and their abuse will be used by police (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993), criminal justice officials (Linda & Avreayl, 1986), and mental health professionals (Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian and Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Marecek, 1993; Ristock, 1994) to justify the removal of their children from 'unsuitable' lesbian homes.

A variety of other misgivings that are specific to police and criminal services, medical and mental health professionals or

shelters may also deter lesbians from breaking the silence on partner abuse at a social level. First, with respect to the criminal justice system, both heterosexual women and lesbians are dissatisfied with the leniency of abuser punishment. Lesbians, however, express a variety of specific concerns. For one, lesbians may be reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation to juries (Irvine, 1984; King, n.d.) or officials of the criminal justice system (Linda & Avreayl, 1986; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993) for fear that their job or personal safety will be jeopardized (Linda & Avreayl, 1986). Lesbians' exclusion from law due to ignorance of lesbian partner abuse is a second potential deterrent to accessing the criminal justice system. The Chicago Area Lesbian and Gay Domestic Violence Project (1993:12) notes of this problem that

although the Illinois Domestic Violence Act applies equally to citizens regardless of sexual orientation, the application of these laws to the needs of lesbian and gay survivors is extremely inconsistent and problematic. Many judges do not fully understand the applicability of current laws regarding domestic violence to situations involving lesbians and gay men.

The unavailability or selective availability of protection and restraining orders to abused lesbians is a third way by which the criminal justice system actively deters abused lesbians from speaking out on lesbian partner abuse. For example, American lesbians have often been denied these orders and protections (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence

Project, 1993; Dietrich, 1986; Eaton, 1994; Hammond, 1989; King, n.d.; Le Rougetel, 1993; Linda & Avreayl, 1986; Marecek, 1993; Robson, 1992), or have been required to co-habit in order to be issued protective orders (Dietrich, 1986). In addition, mutual restraining orders (Cormier, 1986; Eaton, 1994; Marecek, 1993; Renzetti, 1992; Robson, 1992) are often issued on the basis that the identities of abused and abusive lesbians cannot be distinguished, thereby maintaining and reinforcing the myth of 'mutual' abuse (Hammond, 1989; Robson, 1992). Double standards are a fourth way in which the criminal justice system may fail to assist, and thereby encourage the silence of abused lesbians. On the one hand, there is evidence from the U.S. that lesbian abusers are less likely to be prosecuted (King, n.d.; M, 1988; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989; Snow, 1992), and that lesbian abusers have received lighter court sentences than their heterosexual male counterparts (Snow, 1992). On the other hand, abused lesbians may not have been treated as kindly or fairly by the criminal justice system as abused heterosexual women. For example, Ruthann Robson (1992:159) writes that the first, failed invocation of the battered woman defence in a case of lesbian partner abuse in Florida in 1989 is "evidence that jury members had no inclination to extend the battered woman defence to a lesbian".

Both heterosexual women and lesbians have indicated that they

fear "insensitive or inadequate" (Hammond, 1989) care by medical health professionals if they disclose their abuse. Lesbians may be reluctant to disclose their sexual orientation because that information will be "part of her permanent medical record" (Hammond, 1989:97; Dopler, 1993). The literature also suggests that, due to a lack of consciousness of lesbian partner abuse, lesbian clients are rarely suspected to be abused or abusive (Hammond, 1989; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993), and abusive partners are sometimes invited to be present with medical personnel treating the abused party (Hammond, 1989:97).

With respect to the mental health profession, heterosexual women and lesbians may fail to seek assistance for a variety of reasons (Cecere, 1986). Like abused heterosexual women, lesbians may fear they will be accused of provoking the abuse (Hammond, 1989; Renzetti, 1992; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups, 1988). Unlike heterosexual women abused by men, the problem of discerning the identity of lesbian abusers with any certainty may make abused lesbians more susceptible to misperceptions that they provoked or perpetrated the abuse. Additionally, untrained therapists and clinicians (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Hammond, 1989; Knollenberg et al, 1986; Lee, 1988; Walker, 1986; Waterwoman, 1992) may fail to suspect or screen for abuse if their client is a lesbian (Advocates

for Abused & Battered Lesbians, n.d.; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989). As well, Nancy Hammond (1989:98) suggests that because

most mental health professionals receive little or no training in either lesbian issues or domestic violence....the caregiver's own prejudices, stereotypes, or incorrect assumptions are likely to have gone unchallenged and uncorrected, once again putting the lesbian at risk for further victimization.

Common therapeutic models may also be considered more "inherently dangerous" (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989:59) or inappropriate (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Pharr, 1987) to abused lesbians. One objection derives from the fact that these models

are based on clinical work with heterosexual couples....therefore, although potentially informative, they should be used with caution until more empirical evidence supports their use with lesbian couples (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989:59).

The family system model and its couples' therapy is one model that approaches abuse as the mutual responsibility of both partners, stemming from their "ineffective communication patterns and relationship dynamics" (Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989:60). While some advocate this model (Leeder, 1988), most writers note that it fails to assist abused heterosexual women and abused lesbians (Burstow, 1992; Chesley et al, 1992; Hammond, 1989; M, 1988; Pharr, 1986; Renzetti, 1992; S.K., 1988). Author Nancy Hammond raises the point that "sessions may be spent taking care of the batterer's perceived emotional

needs, rather than taking steps to ensure the victim's physical and emotional safety" (Hammond, 1989:100). A further danger of this approach is highlighted by sociologist Claire Renzetti (1993:23) who explains that

one of the major difficulties I have with couples' counselling is that it is grounded in a family systems or codependency model which depicts both partners as sharing responsibility for abuse. Such a model is inherently victim-blaming.

Its particular ability to encourage the erroneous assumption that lesbian partner abuse is a mutual 'relationship' problem (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Renzetti, 1994, 1992) is outlined by Nancy Hammond (1989:98) who writes that

homophobic mainstream counselors may assume that all lesbian relationships contain an element of perversity or destructiveness, and may encourage the victim to accept an abusive relationship that may, after all, have some positive or loving aspects.

Given the above, it is conceivable that the family systems approach may be even more unhelpful to abused lesbians than it is to abused heterosexual women needing to leave their abusers because it easily facilitates covertly homophobic grounds for keeping the partnership intact (Hammond, 1989; Renzetti, 1992).

As far as shelters for abused women are concerned, lesbians' particular reluctance to access this resource may derive from the fact that because shelter locations are common knowledge

in lesbian communities, they fear more for their safety in shelters than heterosexual women (Renzetti, 1992). Lesbians may also have particular concerns for confidentiality in shelters because lesbian workers may be acquainted with their abuser (Grover, n.d.). Abused lesbians' fears for their safety may be compounded if their abusive partner is a shelter worker (Renzetti, 1992). A third inhibitor derives from shelter workers' heterosexist presumptions and their feminist politic of accepting women's word that they have been abused (Hammond, 1989; Pharr, 1987). In theory, abusers presenting as victims (Behind Closed Doors, 1987; Eaton, 1994; Renzetti, 1992) could gain easy entry to the same shelter as their partner (Eaton, 1994; Hammond, 1989; MacAuley, 1989). Of lesbians, Nancy Hammond (1989:96) explains that

when a lesbian requests services, there is no simple way to know that she is, indeed, the victim. In fact, because of the detrimental effects of emotional abuse, the battered lesbian often perceives herself as the one in the wrong, the one who has provoked or caused the abuse by her misbehavior...[and] lesbian batterers have been known to contact shelters seeking a place to stay, and identify themselves as victims.

In sum, and just as unique or exacerbated factors may distinguish abused lesbians' silence at an individual level, the literatures on heterosexual and lesbian partner abuse also suggest that abused lesbians may be particularly silenced at a social level by their real and perceived fears of the criminal justice system, the medical health profession, and

shelters for abused women.

Proposed Community Features of Silence

While scholarly and activist contributions provide some support and explanation for silence at individual and social levels, a comparable degree of insight into lesbian communities' silence is lacking. As a result, the role of lesbian communities in maintaining silence and inhibiting awareness, analyses, and action on lesbian partner abuse has potentially been underestimated. Further, while individual and social rationales for silence are respectively grounded in experiential and empirical fact, the reasons for silence in lesbian communities are largely conjecture. These speculations include that lesbians have specific concerns for their communities' internal solidarity and external image, resist challenges to their ideological notion of a lesbian 'utopia' and their gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse, and lack awareness due to lesbian communities' inaction.

Despite the fact that the "response of others, especially in the lesbian community, plays a major part in assisting or inhibiting lesbian victims' efforts to free themselves from abusive relationships and in preventing further violence" (Renzetti, 1988:398), the same-sex literature indicates that disclosure or discussion of partner abuse at the community

level is not only unusual (Pharr, 1987), but selective and event-specific. For instance, lesbians wanting to leave their abuser may disclose to and seek assistance from a few close friends. According to Bonnie Burstow (1992:169), lesbians rarely file criminal charges against their abuser because "the community may construe this as betrayal or a lack of caring" for the image of the lesbian community and/or the welfare of the lesbian abuser (Dietrich, 1986; Hart, 1986). Those who do file charges, however, may confide in and seek friends' support during the legal process (Cormier, 1986; Dietrich, 1986). Local community forums (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993) are rare, and "domestic violence affecting lesbian and gay adults and youth receives scant responsible publicity or attention, especially in the gay and lesbian media" (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993:17). The literature also hints at the possibility that lesbians may be differentially silenced by the community due to classism (Chesley et al, 1992; Eaton, 1994; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Ristock, 1994) and racism (Blenham, 1991, Eaton, 1994; Kanuha, 1990; Ristock, 1994). Regarding the latter, author Valli Kanuha (1990:173) explains that "heterosexism relegates lesbians of color to a much lower status than that of White [sic] lesbians and works effectively to silence them not only in the larger society but in lesbian and feminist communities as well".

As the literatures on heterosexual and lesbian partner abuse propose lesbian-specific or exacerbated features of individual and social silence, they also lend support to the speculation that unique or compounded variables underlie abused lesbians' silence at the community level (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Kelly & Warsnafsky, 1986).

While all abused women report feeling individually and socially alienated, certain marginalized abused heterosexual women and lesbians are also isolated from identity or geographically-based communities. For example, abused women in black (White, 1985), ethnic (Kirkwood, 1993; MacLeod, 1987), native (Kirkwood, 1993; MacLeod, 1987) and lesbian communities (Blenham, 1991; Bramucci, 1988; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Irvine, 1984; MacAuley, 1989; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups, 1988; Zadkine, 1987) may be commonly discouraged from speaking out about the abuse by the lack of non-discriminatory and community-appropriate heterosexual (Kirkwood, 1993; MacLeod, 1987; White, 1985) or lesbian resources (Brownworth, 1993; Chesley et al, 1992; Dopler, 1993; Eaton, 1994; Elliott, 1991; KALX, n.d.; Kirkwood, 1993; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Renzetti, 1988; Snow, 1992; Waterwoman, 1992). Rural lesbians (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993) may be as geographically isolated from

resources and information as their heterosexual counterparts (Hammond, 1986; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993). Like abused black or heterosexual women of colour (Kirkwood, 1993) and native heterosexual women (MacLeod, 1987), lesbians may fear that speaking out about their abuse will result in a lack community support (Burstow, 1992; Chesley et al, 1992; Elliott, 1991; Franklin, 1984; Hammond, 1989; NiCarthy, 1986; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989). As well, like abused black or heterosexual women of colour (Kirkwood, 1993) and native and rural heterosexual women (MacLeod, 1987), lesbians may find it hard to ensure confidentiality (Chesley et al, 1992; Dopler, 1993; Grover, n.d.; NiCarthy, 1986; NiCarthy & Davidson, 1989) or avoid contact with their abusers within the parameters of their respective communities (Burstow, 1992; Chesley et al, 1992). Like black heterosexual women (White, 1985), lesbians whose "close cliques of friends usually include the lovers of their members, who are accepted as full members of the circle in most cases" (Cotton, 1975:145) may be deterred from speaking out for fear that mutual friends will take sides (B, 1988; Chesley et al, 1992; Dopler, 1992; Edgington, 1989; Hammond, 1989; Le Rengetel, 1993; Renzetti, 1989) or that disclosure of the abuse will negatively affect their abusers' friendships in close-knit lesbian communities (Dupps, 1991; Franklin, 1984; Hammond, 1986). As well, like abused black heterosexual (Kirkwood, 1993) and native women (MacLeod, 1987), lesbians may be

silenced by fear that disclosure will internally strain community relations (Dietrich, 1986; Hammond, 1986; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups, 1988). Of native women's concerns for their communities, Linda MacLeod (1987:24) explains that

they want the violence to stop, but they see the society and its influences as more responsible for the battering than the batterer himself. This shared anger, felt by some aboriginal women and men against the white community, reinforces strong community pressures to rely on one's own kind, to keep the family cohesive, and so to stay in relationships despite the violence.

While lesbians are similarly marginalized by social influences such as homophobia and heterosexism, and while lesbians may, like native women, experience anger at their oppression, the existence of "strong community pressures to rely on one's own kind, to keep the family cohesive, and...to stay in relationships despite the violence" (MacLeod, 1987:24) is an unlikely source of lesbian communities' silence on partner abuse. Instead, lesbian communities' acceptance of serial monogamy and lesbians' awareness of or activism on 'violence against women' should discourage, rather than encourage, the maintenance of abusive relational units. Despite these commonalities with particularly marginalized abused heterosexual women, the literature suggests that concern for the internal solidarity of their communities is a factor differently experienced by abused lesbians (Chicago Area

Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Le Rougetel, 1993; Zadkine, 1987). According to Catherine Kirkwood (1993:129), "women abused by their lesbian partners find that often their communities struggle with accepting that abuse occurs, and the silence of abuse is even greater than in heterosexual culture". Accordingly, lesbians in communities of color may be particularly silenced because "those communities will have to confront the sexism and homophobia in their own neighborhoods that continue to hurt lesbians who are their mothers, daughters, and sisters" (Kanuha, 1990:178).

In the aftermath of failed relationships or interpersonal conflicts, for example, lesbians may also fear that because identities are obscured in lesbian partner abuse, the label 'abuser' will be used indiscriminately against themselves or other women (Linda & Avreayl, 1986:109). As well, abused lesbians may be too intimidated or concerned for the internal image of the community to risk exposing abusers who are its respected feminist (Cecere, 1986; Lenae, 1988; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989) or spiritual (Franklin, 1984) leaders. In the opinion of the Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Woman Service Groups (1988:n.p.) these fears are not unfounded because "battered lesbians who are courageous enough to have raised the issue have often received a response which focuses on how, if this info [sic] gets out, the lesbian community will be split at a time when we need each other the

most".

Beyond internal concerns for lesbian communities, the same-sex literature suggests that concern for its external image is a second distinctive feature of the silence on lesbian partner abuse (Irvine, 1984; Le Rougetel, 1993; Ristock, 1994). Communities may deny or minimize partner abuse for fear of generating "politically destructive" (Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993:17) heterosexual criticism (Battered Lovers, 1986; Blenham, 1991; Breeze, 1986; Brownworth, 1993; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Closed Doors, 1987; Eaton, 1994; Edgington, 1989; Hamard, 1993; Hammond, 1986; Hart, 1986; Irvine, 1984; Kelly & Warsnafsky, 1986; King, n.d.; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Renzetti, 1992, 1993; Ristock, 1991; Task Force of the Massachusetts Coalition of Woman Service Groups, 1988; Zadkine, 1987). This criticism may include accusations that lesbians are "sick" (Behind Closed Doors, 1987:5; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993). Lesbians may also opt for silence rather than fuel racist stereotypes of abusive black lesbians and lesbians of colour (Kanuha, 1990; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Ristock, 1994) or deter women from 'coming out' as lesbians (Edgington, 1989). Third, lesbians may resist acknowledging partner abuse because it debunks the dream of a "lesbian utopia" (London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre,

1993:8; Closed Doors, 1987; Dopler, 1993; Eaton, 1994; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Renzetti, 1992; Zadkine, 1987), complete with more egalitarian relations of power than heterosexual relationships (Bramucci, 1988; Brownworth, 1993; Dupps, 1991; Edgington, 1989; Elliott, 1991; Enos & Rollins, 1988; KALX, n.d.; London Battered Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Renzetti, 1993, 1992, 1988; Snow, 1992). Of this ideology, Donna MacAuley, Laurie Chesley, and Janice Ristock (1989:14) explain that

as lesbians we have often been unable to speak about our lives and relationships. We have been silenced by a homophobic society which labels us as sick, rejects us and imposes other forms of sanctions against us. Thus as lesbians we often view our relationships ideally - as loving and protective, based in equality, a place where we can find shelter from a homophobic world. In our ideal view, abuse between women simply cannot happen. However comforting our ideal may be, it remains a myth.

As well as belief in a lesbian 'utopia', activist Janice Irvine (1984:n.p.) notes that "part of the reticence about the problem of battering stems from a reluctance to attempt to reconcile it with current theories of violence against women". Lesbians who hold gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse may be unaware or reluctant to admit that women, like men, can be abusive (Battered Lovers, 1986; Blenham, 1991; Brownworth, 1993; Cecere, 1986; Chesley et al, 1992; Chicago Area Lesbian & Gay Domestic Violence Project, 1993; Cormier, 1986; Geraci, 1986; Eaton, 1994; Edgington, 1989; Enos & Rollins, 1988; Grover, n.d.; Irvine, 1984; KALX, n.d.; London Battered

Women's Advocacy Centre, 1993; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1989; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983; Porat, 1986; Renzetti, 1993, 1992; Ristock, 1994, 1991; S.K., 1988; Simone, 1986; Snow, 1992; Strach et al, 1986). Finally, silence in lesbian communities may derive from their inaction on the problem of lesbian partner abuse. Many women believe, for example, that listening to the experiences of abused lesbians is a first step toward breaking the silence on "one of the dirtiest secrets in the queer community" (Brownworth, 1993:96) and raising lesbians' awareness of partner abuse (Dowd, 1988; Grover, n.d.; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 1983; New York City Gay & Lesbian Anti-Violence Project, n.d.; Paisley & Krulewitz, 1983). As Kitzinger and Perkins (1993:85) explain

often, when another lesbian tells us about her unhappiness we feel overwhelmed by it, terrified that we are not 'good enough' to help her, or that we cannot bear the burden of her pain....This is a common response to lesbian battering...It comes partly out of a shattering of illusions about lesbian community....[and] it comes too out of fear and a sense of incompetence, of not knowing how to help.

The long-term significance of abused lesbians' testimonies is conveyed in Barbara Hart's (1986:9-10) statement that

any intervention will fail or further endanger battered lesbians unless it is one that is shaped by the experience of all battered lesbians and tailored to the specific needs of a lesbian victim....therefore, we must listen to battered lesbians.

Combined with suggested unique or compounded features of

abused lesbians' silence at individual and social levels, speculations at the community level include lesbians' specific concern for communities' internal solidarity and external image, their ideological beliefs in a lesbian 'utopia' and gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse, and their lack of awareness of lesbian partner abuse due to communities' inaction.

While the literatures point to the existence of unique or exacerbated features of abused lesbians' silence at individual, social, and particularly, community levels of analysis, the 'real world' validity of these suggestions remains to be seen. In the following section I will explain the technical process by which those silencing variables were assessed and introduce new themes of silence emerging from the data collection process.

Methods

In the preceeding section, I explored potentially obscured distinctions between abused heterosexual women's and lesbians' silence at the individual, social, and particularly, community levels of analysis. This section will describe the methodological process by which the 'real world' validity of those suggestions was assessed and introduce new themes of silence emerging from the data collection process.

Introduction

The development of a feminist research methodology has had a transformative effect on researchers and the women we study. It has released researchers from their traditional roles of passive observers and liberated the voices of women who have historically been considered passive subjects. At the same time, feminist methodology has demanded of researchers new and sometimes difficult personal disclosures. For example, methodologists Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989:49) maintain that identifying and accounting for the experience of the researcher is crucial to the production of focused and insightful research "from the margins" because "who you are as a person, including the particular experience you have, affects what you can know" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:52). My interest in and approach to the subject of silence on lesbian partner abuse is informed by my "conceptual baggage" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:49), or personal experience of this problem.

My friendships with and knowledge of abused and abusive lesbians during the 1980s initially sensitized me to the existence of a 'problem' between women that I now identify as 'partner abuse'. More than anything, my commitment to naming, telling, and speaking about lesbian partner abuse is driven by the haunting knowledge that through past silences, I failed to support abused lesbians I knew and loved. While I accept that fifteen years ago I could not name a phenomenon that did not officially exist, I have taken little comfort in the fact that against other instincts, I rationalized lesbian partner abuse as a private 'relationship' problem. This denial and its silencing effect derived from my concern for and knowledge of the lesbian community. I wanted to protect our dream of egalitarian and superior relationships and inhibit opportunities for heterosexual criticism. I also anticipated unforgiving and divisive community reactions toward lesbians who named, told, or spoke out about partner abuse and abused and abusive lesbians. While I was unable and unwilling to name partner abuse and tell about abusers, I twice attempted to 'speak' to the gay/lesbian community about the behaviour I witnessed and heard rumoured. Rather than generating discussion and action, my articles in a community newspaper were met with silence. In 1993, my intimate relationship with an abusive lesbian personalized even further my experience of partner abuse. Within the lesbian community there appeared to be no one to tell and no way to know whether I would be

believed. Based on past incidents I knew that although lesbian partner abuse was known of or rumoured, it was rarely, if ever, discussed. As a political activist, I was painfully aware that there were no community-based resources for abused lesbians. While I allowed that some lesbians knew as much about partner abuse as I did at the time, I doubted that anyone knew more. All the while I continued to be concerned about the potentially divisive effects of my disclosure on individual lesbians, lesbian friendship networks, and the community's external image. As well as enabling naming and telling, this thesis provided me with a previously unrealized opportunity to speak out about silence on partner abuse in lesbian communities. My knowledge, experience, and understanding of this problem led me to expect that other lesbians had been similarly abused and silenced. In that event, I imagined that my research could advance my own interest in breaking the tradition of silence on lesbian partner abuse and, at the same time, provide a medium through which the voices of other silenced, abused lesbians could be heard.

The Study

The purpose of this study was to explore silence on lesbian partner abuse. A non-random sample of lesbian partner abuse 'survivors' was interviewed. The exclusion of lesbian abusers from the interview process was not intended to discount their

experiences or dismiss the need for abuser-located research. Rather, my decision to focus on abused lesbians was dictated by the same-sex literature's emphasis on the abused lesbian identity. Networking and advertising within a Canadian city's gay/lesbian and women's communities were the primary methods of recruiting interview participants (Appendix 1). Some participants with whom I am personally acquainted were asked to participate, based on my knowledge of their abuse. Other women with whom I am personally acquainted volunteered to contribute, based on their knowledge of my project. Still other women I did not know responded to notices posted in women's bookstores and/or gay/lesbian bars and organizations, faxes distributed to women's groups, and a paid advertisement in a lesbian community newspaper. By confining advertising to gay/lesbian 'spaces' and women's groups I hoped to protect myself from homophobia-based harassment and protect the study from false reporting by women presenting as lesbians. At the same time, I recognize that abused and non-abused lesbians who are not aware of or in regular contact with gay/lesbian or women's communities may have been excluded. This study was also limited in its ability to represent abused lesbians who are very isolated by or fearful of their abusers, as well as differently located women who, because of disability, ethnicity, or sexual practice, for example, are marginalized within lesbian communities.

Anticipating that some women may co-habit with their abusers, the answering machine message on my home telephone requested that interview participants specify when and where they could safely be contacted. Once telephone communication was established, the project and the interview process were explained. Because of the sensitive nature of the subject and my own concerns for women's safety, participants were asked to select interview sites where they would feel the most comfortable and secure. As a result, two women were interviewed at university offices; two were interviewed in their workplace; six women were interviewed in their own homes, and two women were interviewed together in one's home. While I appreciate that my decision to interview these women together was neither methodologically 'correct', nor conducive to full disclosure, attempts to discourage this arrangement by reassuring the participants and pleading proper research process failed. Faced with the choice of interviewing the women together or not at all, I concluded that far more would be learned than sacrificed. I also judged that this situation, however methodologically flawed, provided an invaluable, concrete example of lesbians' fear of breaking the silence on partner abuse, even when protected by pseudonyms, a consent form guaranteeing confidentiality (Appendix 2), and the safety of their own home. Before beginning to tape record the interviews, the project and interview process were re-explained and the consent form was read and verbally agreed to

by participants. Although respondents were asked to commit at least one hour to the interviews, more often than not the process required from one and a half to two hours. The significantly longer interviews may be explained by the fact that most of the abused respondents had rarely confided their experience(s) of partner abuse to other lesbians, and few participants had previously disclosed their abuse to another abused lesbian. The flexibility of an open-ended time schedule was crucial in minimizing their perceptions of exploitation as sources of 'data', and facilitating their uncensored voices on the privatized subject of lesbian partner abuse.

The Techniques

As my choice of topic was guided by my experience or "conceptual baggage" (Kirby and McKenna, 1989:49), my choice of a research technique was as much a personal and political decision as an academic one (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:64). Regarding researchers' personal motives, Anne Oakley (Oakley in Roberts, 1981:41) writes that

the goal of finding out about people through interviewing is best achieved when the relationship of interviewer and interviewee is non-hierarchical and when the interviewer is prepared to invest his or her personal identity in the relationship.

As a formerly abused lesbian, interviews allowed me to break my silence on partner abuse at a more personal level than I had previously attempted. I hoped that my disclosure would

reciprocate the participants' gifts of courage and trust, and foster dialogue and "a sense of connectedness" (Reinharz, 1992:20) with the women I interviewed. Through personal disclosure, I also aspired to encourage egalitarian, rather than exploitative, interview climates (Kirby & McKenna, 1989:67) and minimize respondents' feelings of subordination as "sources of data" (Oakley in Roberts, 1981:33). These particular goals were enabled by anticipating and responding to participants' apprehension. Women were assured that only I would listen to and transcribe the tape recorded interviews; that with the exception of one tape returned to a respondent at her request, all others would be erased; that women's identities would be protected by pseudonyms; that my thesis would be available for their perusal upon request; and that their need for information on lesbian partner abuse or other subjects would be promptly met.

My preference for interviews was also politically grounded in my own 'outsider' status as a lesbian. The importance of this marginalization is expressed in Kirby and McKenna's (1989:105) statement that

researching from the margins is best accomplished by those who live on the margins. The simple reason is that, in speaking from the margins, convincing testimony comes best from those who live it. Also, because they experience the world differently they have a better sense of what research questions need to be addressed.

As a feminist, the interview method was also politically appealing based on the fact that

access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather than the words of the researcher....is particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women (Reinharz, 1992:19) .

Lastly, I welcomed the academic challenge of refining my interview skills and generating Canadian information on the neglected topic of lesbian partner abuse.

The interviews were semi-structured. Defined by Reinharz (1992:18) this method

is a qualitative data-gathering technique. It differs from ethnography in not including long periods of researcher participation in the life of the interviewee and differ from survey research or structured interviewing by including free interaction between the researcher and interviewee. Survey research typically excludes, and interview research typically includes, opportunities for clarification and discussion. Open-ended interview research explores people's views of reality and allows the researcher to generate theory.

Because I was interested in participants' perceptions and experiences, and because I had anticipated that abused and non-abused lesbians would be interviewed, my interview question invited respondents to "talk to me about what you know and think of lesbian partner abuse". Response to the question was encouraged by what Grant McCracken (1988:38)

calls "planned" and "floating" prompts, itemized in Appendix 3. According to his definition, 'planned' prompts are used to ensure "that data are collected for all of the categories and relationships that have been identified as important". A variety of these prompts were employed to ensure that the literature's lesbian-specific variables of silence were thoroughly addressed.

To gain insight into the individual level of silence, I used planned prompts to explore participants' isolation, shame, denial, love, fear of abuser retaliation, and child-related concerns. Regarding isolation, I probed participants' feelings about having their sexual orientation disclosed by their abuser or made known to their families of origin, as well as their perceptions of dependence or intimacy in their relationships with abusers. Because no black women or women of colour volunteered to be interviewed, the potential loss of ethnic community support if women's sexual orientation or abuse was made known was not addressed. Concerning shame, the potential shaming influence of respondents' feminist politics or their larger physical size were investigated. With regard to participants' denial, their experience and perceptions of 'mutual' abuse, abuse as a 'lover's quarrel', and stereotypes of abused/abusive lesbians were explored. The role, if any, of gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse in facilitating their denial was also addressed. On the subject of

participants' love for their abusers, I explored their opinions on labelling partners 'abusive', affecting partners' friendships in close-knit lesbian communities, and their empathy based on their specific or shared childhood histories of abuse or their common experiences of misogyny. No planned prompts were used to investigate participants' fears of abuser retaliation or their child-related concerns. In addition to 'planned' prompts, several 'floating' prompts were used "to identify and cultivate data on categories and relationships that have not been anticipated in the interviews" (McCracken, 1988:38). On the subject of isolation, participants were asked whether they and their partners were 'out' at the time of the abuse and asked to comment on their feelings about their lesbian orientation. As well, respondents were queried on whether and to whom they confided the abuse, whether they perceived others' awareness of the abuse, and whether they disclosed the abuse to their families of origin. Of their love for their abusers, respondents were asked whether they thought that abuse by a woman differed from abuse by a man.

At a social level of silence, planned prompts were used, where appropriate, to elicit participants' comments on the criminal justice system, medical health profession, and shelters for abused women. In cases where respondents reported a lack of experience, probes were not employed. In other cases, probes

were used to investigate their perceived and experienced attitudes and response of the police, legal system, medical and mental health professions, and shelters for abused women. Concerning the legal system, participants' perceived or experienced response, as well as questions of abuser accountability, restraining orders, and co-habitation requirements were probed. Planned prompts were also used to explore respondents' imagined or real experiences with the medical profession and their specific concerns with confidentiality of treatment or treatment records. Of the mental health profession, participants' experiences and assessment of therapists' attitudes and the 'couples therapy' model were probed. Lastly, respondents were asked whether they had accessed or thought of accessing shelters for abused women and whether any specific confidentiality or safety concerns had influenced their decision. Floating prompts were only used to ascertain whether participants sought therapy during or after their relationship(s) with abusers and the sex and sexual orientation of their therapists.

At a community level of silence, planned prompts were used to gain insight on specific silencing factors such as fear for the internal solidarity and external image of lesbian communities, ideological beliefs, and community uncertainty on how to act on the problem. With regard to the internal solidarity of lesbian communities, planned probes encouraged

participants' comments on the perceived effect of disclosure on themselves and their abusers, the possibility that abusers might falsely label their partners abusive, and the risk of exposing abusive community leaders. Of the issue of concern for communities' external image, participants' perception of heterosexual reaction to disclosure of lesbian partner abuse, and the deterrent impact of disclosure on women 'coming out' were addressed. Because no black lesbians or lesbians of colour participated, possible fears of inciting racist stereotypes could not be explored. To explore the silencing impact of utopian or feminist ideologies, participants were asked whether, at the time of the abuse, their expectations of lesbian relationships corresponded to their perceptions of heterosexual relationships, and whether their belief in gendered feminist analyses of heterosexual partner abuse had influenced their silence. Lastly, insight on community uncertainty on how to act on the problem of lesbian partner abuse was gained by probing respondents' perceptions of community awareness and support. Unplanned probes were also used to explore this area. Respondents were asked what, if any, community resources would have helped them at the time of their abuse, what resources for abused and abusive lesbians should be available, and who they perceive responsible for the creation of those resources.

As well as exploring operationalized variables with planned

and unplanned prompts, other questions were generated by suggestions in the literature, my reflections on the subject, and emerging themes in the interview process. With respect to the literature's suggestions of cycles or patterns of abuse, participants were asked to comment on the abuse over the course of their relationship. Proposed typologies of lesbian partner abuse were assessed against participants' descriptions and interpretations of their abuse. To explore the 'fit' of popular terms like "battering" and popular concepts like "domestic violence", respondents were asked what, if any, kind(s) of abuse they considered most harmful, and whether they lived with their partner at the time of the abuse. Insight into the role of lesbian 'community' was provided by soliciting participants' definitions. Lastly, to investigate the literature's suggestion that lesbians' disclosure is unusual or event-specific, participants were asked to whom they disclosed their abuse while they were involved with their abusers and after their relationship(s) ended.

My own reflections on the subject of silence also prompted me to explore a variety of issues. For example, my curiosity as to whether lesbians quickly leave abusers motivated me to query the length of respondents' relationships with abusers. In questioning the transition point at which participants identified their treatment as abuse, I was interested in whether there was a visible relationship between the high

level of public awareness of physical forms of heterosexual partner abuse and the point at which abuse was named. My thoughts about expectations of lesbian 'community' led me to explore whether respondents had received assistance in leaving their abuser, and from whom that assistance was forthcoming. As well, my perception that community traditions of silence continue to characterize lesbian partner abuse and inhibit action prompted several community-based questions. These included asking women whether lesbian partner abuse is currently discussed within their respective community friendship networks, what kind of resources would have helped them, whether and how they have or would assist abused lesbians, and what, if any, services should be available to abused lesbians and who should be responsible for the creation of those resources.

Emerging themes in the interviews also generated questions. My observation that several women had been 'single' for some time prompted me to ask "in what ways, if any, has your experience or knowledge of lesbian partner abuse affected you?". The revelation that three participants now consider that they abused lesbian partners in previous relationships and the fact that several abusers are believed to have abused subsequent lesbian partners led me to question whether respondents perceive that community action should involve abusive lesbians. Women were invited to provide closing

comments on the subject of silence on lesbian partner abuse.

The Sample

With regard to the merits of qualitative social science research, Grant McCracken (1988:17) writes that

the first principle is that "less is more". It is more important to work longer, and with greater care, with a few people than more superficially with many of them. For many research projects, eight respondents will be perfectly sufficient.

Twelve abused lesbians responded to my interview advertisement, included as Appendix 1. While I had hoped to embellish their input with that of non-abused lesbians, only one such individual volunteered to be participate. Rather than run the risk of generalizing one person's perceptions and experiences, I decided to exclude her interview and focus exclusively on abused lesbians. Of her study involving interviews with abused lesbians, Claire Renzetti (1992:13) notes that "it is doubtful that one could obtain a truly random sample of a group as hidden and highly stigmatized as battered lesbians".

As far as a demographic profile of respondents is concerned, three issues constrain this discussion. First, given evidence of traditions of silence on lesbian partner abuse at all levels, and evidence of lesbians' particular reluctance to break community taboos of silence, I believe that my guarantee

of confidentiality was instrumental in attracting interview participants. To protect marginalized respondents' "crucial" concerns with anonymity, Kirby and McKenna (1989:118-119) maintain that

names and places can be changed, places of work or types of work, age and sex can be altered....[and] researchers may alter some or all of the situation, experience, personal identity and time frame in an effort to provide anonymity with minimal change to the context and meaning of the participant's experience.

To honour my promise of confidentiality and maintain my reputation as a trustworthy researcher, more than the use of pseudonyms was required. By necessity, identifying details such as participants' ages and the length and status of their relationships have been amended. The number of respondents sharing particular characteristics, such as occupation or income, have also been omitted. Second, while some participants' experiences with abusive partners were more than five years old, and despite the fact that few women were still living in the same area or still in contact with their abuser(s), their consistent efforts to conceal their abusers' identities and omit identifying information reflected the strength of codes of silence on lesbian partner abuse and extant fears of disclosure. For example, only one participant named her abuser(s) and only one woman identified the locale in which her abuse took place. A third, less specific difficulty derives from the reality that silence is, in itself, a powerful inhibitor of memory. According to

psychologists Kent Harber and James Pennebaker (1992:369) "by not talking about an inhibited event...people usually do not translate the experience into language that aids in the understanding and assimilation of the event". Compounding the impact of suppressed memory, most respondents reported that two to ten years had elapsed since their first experience of partner abuse. The end impact of these elements is captured in Grant McCracken's (1988:23) observation that

most respondents have difficulty giving a full account of what they believe and what they do....[because] long ago, their beliefs became assumptions and their actions became habits....[and] both are now almost completely submerged beneath the surface of consciousness.

The fact that many respondents were, for instance, vague or confused about the contexts or chronologies of their abuse speaks to this problem.

I share sociologist Claire Renzetti's (1992:13) comment on her survey group of abused lesbians that

there is no way to determine how representative this sample is of all battered lesbians in the population. Although it is doubtful that one could obtain a truly random sample of a group as hidden and highly stigmatized as battered lesbians, the difficulties this poses with respect to the generalizability of the research must be kept in mind when one examines and interprets the data.

The characteristics of this study's convenience sample are as follows. Working, middle, and upper class lesbians were included. At the time of their abuse, respondents reported

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being unemployed, students, workers in traditional and non-traditional occupations, or professionals. Five participants held university degrees or college diplomas and seven women had completed some university or college courses. Women from English-speaking cultural groups were represented in greater numbers than those from French-speaking cultural groups. No black lesbians or lesbians of colour volunteered to participate in this project. As a result, I was unable to explore the same-sex literature's suggestion that black lesbians or lesbians of colour are especially isolated by their perception that disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or abuse will result in their estrangement from homophobic ethnic communities. Both rural and urban living experiences with abusers over the past twenty years were also represented in this sample. Of the twenty-one relationships with lesbian abusers experienced by respondents during their adult lives², fourteen (67%) involved co-habitation. All of the women interviewed self-identified as lesbian at the time of their abuse, although a few stated that they were "not proud" of their sexual orientation at that/those time(s). Respondents' ages during the period(s) of their abuse ranged from twenty to fifty years old.

² Unlike researchers' usual survey focus on lesbians' most recent experience of partner abuse, the interview method allowed me to probe all past and present experiences of lesbian partner abuse.

The Data Analysis

In preparation for data analysis, Grant McCrackin (1988:41) writes that

a verbatim transcript of the interview testimony must be created...by a professional typist using a transcribing tape recorder....[and] transcription should take place on a word processor, so that both a hard copy version of the interview and a machine-readable file are created.

To honour my promise of interview confidentiality, and helped by past secretarial experiences, I used dictaphone and computer technologies to produce individual, unedited and verbatim transcripts. Hard copies and computer files were created. Each interview was coded according to the three levels of analysis and their related variables and probes. Similarly coded interview comments were then grouped together. In addition to established or variable and probe-specific themes, new silencing themes emerged from the data, as listed in Appendix 4. These included lesbians' relationship to women, their relationship to community, their knowledge of rights/resources and knowledge of lesbian partner abuse. The established and emerging themes were then compared to "ascertain intertheme consistency and contradiction" (McCracken, 1988:42) and set the stage for "talking [not] about the particulars of individual lives but about the general properties of thought and action within the community or group under study" (McCracken, 1988:46). It should be noted that in coding and analysing the interview data,

distinctions between individual and social and community features and themes of silence were often 'blurred'. I suggest that this overlap speaks less to the framework of analysis than to communities' mediating and filtering influence on lesbians' experience of abuse, illustrated in Appendices 5 and 6.

At an individual level, the interview data was examined for comments that supported or contradicted the same-sex literature's indication that particular features of abused lesbians' isolation, shame, denial, love for their abusers, fear of abuser retaliation, and child-related concerns may exacerbate or distinguish their silence from that of abused heterosexual women. Two new themes emerged from this review. Respondents spoke to how lesbians' relationship to women and their relationship to the lesbian community affects silencing. At a social level, the interview data was scrutinized for remarks that substantiated or disputed the same-sex literature's suggestion that abused lesbians are uniquely silenced by homophobia, heterosexism, and ignorance of lesbian partner abuse in the police, legal system, medical and mental health professions, and shelters for abused women. Three new themes emerged from this process. Participants spoke to how lesbians' relationship to women, their relationship to the community, and their knowledge of rights and resources shape silence. At a community level, the interview data was

similarly studied for input that reinforced or challenged the same-sex literature's speculation that abused lesbians' silence may be distinct or compounded owing to their concern for communities' internal solidarity and external image, ideological belief in a lesbian 'utopia' or gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse, and communities' inaction on the problem. Three new themes emerged from this process. Respondents spoke to how lesbians' relationship to women, their relationship to the community, and their knowledge of lesbian partner abuse shape silence.

In this section I have described the methodological process through which potentially lesbian-specific features of silence were investigated, and outlined the established and emerging themes of silence on lesbian partner abuse. In the next section the voices of abused lesbians will speak to the validity of those themes and the particular mediating and silencing role of lesbian communities.

Results

Participant Profiles

In previous sections I explored evidence of a tradition of silence in the literature, definitions, terminology, prevalence and theories of lesbian partner abuse. I also introduced potentially obscured individual, social, and community features of abused lesbians' silence. The methodological process by which the literature's speculations were assessed and established and emerging themes of silence were identified. In this section, the voices of abused lesbians will, as summarized in Appendix 7, speak to the 'real world' validity of those themes and the particular silencing influence of lesbian community.

The thesis that lesbian partner abuse is characterized by a tradition of silence, particularly within lesbian communities, was supported by the experiences of the abused lesbians I interviewed. For example, three years after her abusive partner ended their relationship, Colette still feels compelled to keep her long-term experience of economic, emotional, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse a secret. During the relationship, Colette reported that she only once sought support from mutual lesbian friends. While she was safely sheltered in their home for a few hours, she recalled that "they knew something was wrong because I said so but there was no reaction, no nothing". Today, except for a very

few close lesbian friends, Colette maintains her silence for fear that if her abuser learned of her disclosure to the community "it could be potentially very dangerous....[because] she'd kill me" (Interview 1).

France revealed that she had been involved with two abusive lesbians: the first a brief relationship with an emotionally abusive lesbian and the second a three-year relationship in which she was emotionally, psychologically, and physically abused. She credits the break-up of the first relationship to a clash of ideologies, rather than the abuse. While the catalyst for the second ending was an argument over her partner's jealousy, she perceives that problems stemming from their different needs had been present for some time. During that relationship an incident of physical assault prompted France to first disclose her abuse to a group of lesbians. Since then she has discussed the abuse with her mother and another abused lesbian. France now believes that she may have been unconsciously abusive in past relationships and is focusing on improving her relationship skills (Interview 2).

In Elizabeth's case, the fact that she was a "brand-new, not fully out, not at all proud lesbian" during her two-year experience of emotional, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse compounded her silence. Without a sense of lesbian community or those friendship networks, Elizabeth's only

confidante was a heterosexual woman. As far as support, she recalled that her friend "didn't make my abuser answer so I really didn't have any support except [that] I could tell her all this stuff and she'd say 'oh, that's awful'" (Interview 3). Because she perceived that they would be informed by other sources, Elizabeth felt it necessary to disclose her sexual orientation and abuse to her parents while she was still involved with her abuser. After successfully ending the relationship, Elizabeth confided her abuse to a new lesbian acquaintance. Later she extended this disclosure to a network of trusted friends she had established in the lesbian community. Elizabeth attributes her commitment to breaking the silence on lesbian partner abuse to her ethic of open communication. While she imagines that it would be uncomfortable to be confronted by her abuser on speaking out, she refuses to be silenced (Interview 3).

Three lesbian partnerships in which emotional, physical, and sexual abuse were respectively experienced consumed six years of Suzanna's life. To a large degree, Suzanna credits her silence to being new to the city, "ashamed" of her lesbianism, and involved with women whom she perceived had more credibility than she in the lesbian community. Ironically, she recalled that rumours of lesbian partner abuse were "often...a discussion at the same dinner table with my [abusive] lover" and that abused lesbians were, at times,

sheltered in the home Suzanna shared with her abuser. Needing assistance to leave her abusers, Suzanna recalled that she was repeatedly "rescued by a new abuser" to whom she disclosed the previous abuse. After three such attempts, she succeeded in receiving positive support from a new partner. Aside from disclosures to lovers and this interview, Suzanna remains silent about her abuse (Interview 4).

More than ten years ago, Dana was involved with an abusive partner for one year. At the time of the emotional, psychological, and physical abuse Dana self-identified as a lesbian. Although she had previously been involved with a woman, she "still felt really, really new to the [lesbian] scene". Also new to the city, she had few lesbian contacts aside from her abuser. Shortly before fears for her safety caused her to abruptly end the relationship, she recalled that she had hinted to her sister that "things weren't going that great". Dana received shelter and emotional support from two "unbelievably supportive" lesbians when she left her abuser. Today, fearing community judgement, Dana chooses to selectively disclose her experience of partner abuse to friends she perceives will be supportive and non-blaming (Interview 5).

Over the past ten years, Lisa has been abused by three women. Verbal abuse characterized the first two-year relationship that Lisa left without outside help to pursue a relationship

with a woman who was economically, emotionally, physically, and sexually abusive. After two years, Lisa left that abuser and began a five-year relationship with an economically abusive lesbian. She also terminated that relationship of her own accord. With one exception, Lisa reported that she was silent during the ten-year period of abuse. During and after the second relationship, a couple of lesbian friends provided emotional support, an acquaintance offered assistance, and Lisa's mother validated her perceptions of her abuser. Because she finds that "the lack of support in the community is very disheartening", she is committed to confronting the abuse she hears about and witnesses (Interview 6).

After almost ten years with her partner, Jill is uncertain whether she will leave because of her economic, physical, psychological, and verbal abuse. She has threatened to end the relationship on several occasions and once managed to stay away for a year. Besides the shelter offered by a friend and her parents at that time, Jill received "wonderful" emotional support from another lesbian to whom she finally confided her "secrets" of abuse. However, having chosen to return to her abuser, she now feels that the lesbians to whom she originally confided the abuse are more disappointed, angry and judgemental than supportive. Based on her years of silence, Jill is "definitely" prepared to talk to friends she suspects are being abused, and highlights the need for more community

"awareness....[as] articles written, support groups made available and people talking about it" (Interview 7).

Since she first identified as a lesbian about twenty years ago, Ellen has been involved with five abusive lesbians and has, for the most part, maintained a code of silence. She credits one "particularly important" lesbian friend with consistent support over the years. Her first relationship with a woman was characterized by emotional and verbal abuse. Because she was in the process of 'coming out' she had no connections with the lesbian community or its friendship networks. Ellen's first relationship was followed by a year-long relationship in which there was physical and psychological abuse. Following an incident of physical assault, Ellen sought support from her mother, contacted a therapist, and ended the relationship. She reported that her third experience of partner abuse was physical, psychological, and sexual. Again following an incident of physical assault, positive support was provided by the police and lesbian friends offered her shelter until her partner vacated the home. Ellen's fourth encounter with an abusive partner lasted four years. During that time she was psychologically, sexually, and verbally abused. Ellen could not recall the circumstances surrounding the end of that relationship. Some years later she became involved for a short time with another woman who was psychologically and sexually abusive. Today she

believes that "if I knew that you were going to get involved with someone who was an abuser, I'd tell you" (Interview 8).

Three years ago, Heather was involved for one year with a woman who was emotionally, physically, and sexually abusive. Except for disclosures to her therapist, Heather remained silent about the abuse while she was in the relationship. Toward its end she did, however, hint to her sister and her mother that her partner was not good to her. Following an incident of physical abuse, Heather was forced to retaliate in self-defence in order to escape from her abuser. Although the relationship ended with that incident, months of depression followed before Heather reluctantly agreed to talk about the abuse to her best friend. Aside from that friend and this interview, Heather remains silent on the subject of her abuse (Interview 9).

For three years Pat experienced economic, emotional, physical, psychological, sexual, and verbal abuse from a female partner. During that time she recalled that "there was only one [friend] that I really kept in touch with and they knew the whole situation". During and after the relationship she also maintained contact with her therapist and judged her to be very supportive. At times when Pat attempted to confide in other people she used a pseudonym to disguise her partner's identity. Other times she hesitated to confide in mutual

friends who could take sides. Pat began only recently to break her silence by making herself available to support other abused lesbians because "if there had been that support for me I would have gotten out of it sooner; I would have realized it a lot more" (Interview 10).

Manon experienced abuse by two lesbian partners. In the first instance of emotional and physical abuse, neither Manon nor her lover had been previously involved with women and were isolated from the lesbian community. Although the second emotionally and psychologically abusive relationship was terminated by her abuser within a year, Manon was deeply affected by this loss. Except for one close heterosexual woman friend she confided in during the relationship and a therapist she contacted after the relationship ended, Manon did not disclose the abuse to another lesbian until recently. In her words "it was a secret - that I was guilty of something that I didn't understand, a bit like incest" (Interview 11).

Two years have elapsed since the mutually agreed upon dissolution of Clara's ten-year relationship with a partner who was emotionally, physically, psychologically, and verbally abusive. During those years she recalled that although her partner confided in mutual friends, she only spoke to a therapist originally contacted on another matter. Today she continues to feel silenced and pained by that silence. With

the exception of her children, Clara recalled that "I guess the awful part for me is that I still don't talk about it. I don't talk about it to my friends. You're one of the few people that I have ever talked to about it. I talked to a lover about it but it was because she doesn't know my abuser and she doesn't know that part of my life" (Interview 12).

Participant Definitions

As well as speaking to a past tradition of silence on lesbian partner abuse, respondents pointed to the perpetuation of that tradition, particularly within lesbian communities. When asked whether partner abuse is discussed within their immediate friendship networks, Elizabeth reported that friends only "talk about it in klatches" (Interview 3). Ellen's friends don't talk about lesbian partner abuse at all, while Dana's friends "don't talk about it really that much" (Interview 5). Jill observed of her friendship network that "there's not a lot of people talking" (Interview 7).

Although participants' definitions of their abuse were not explored in depth, emotional (11), psychological (9), and physical (10) abuse were named more often than economic (5), sexual (7), or verbal (5) abuse. With the exception of Clara (Interview 12), eleven participants rated non-physical abuse as more damaging than physical abuse because, as Heather noted "bones heal but hearts and souls don't" (Interview 9). In the

course of the interviews, five respondents referred to a 'cycle' (Interviews 1, 3, 5, 10, 12) and three others noted a 'pattern' (Interviews 7, 8, 9) of abuse. Four participants viewed abuse as 'control' (Interviews 6, 8, 9, 11) and four others saw it as 'power' (Interviews 7, 9, 11, 12). No such terminology was used by Elizabeth and Pat (Interviews 3, 10).

To better understand how lesbian communities' tradition of silence shapes abused lesbians' silence on partner abuse, participants' definitions of lesbian community were explored. Only Pat considered the spatial dimensions of 'community' to be "global" (Interview 10), rather than local. While Suzanna, Ellen, and Pat included gay men in their concept of local community (Interviews 4, 8, 10), Clara recalled that at the time of her abuse her interpretation was limited to "the lesbian feminist community" (Interview 12). Nine respondents identified community as lesbians they know and don't know. Participants' emotional expectations of shared support, security, understanding, political vision, and/or sub-cultural identities with other lesbians in a homophobic social world were also explored. For Elizabeth, Lisa, and Manon, lesbians' ability to care for other lesbians was an ideal, if not always realized, criterion of lesbian community. As Lisa explained

when I think of community I think of
people helping other people and being
there for a friend....[but] I don't
believe that there is a lesbian
community per se. I mean there's
women who won't talk to other women

and haven't for fifteen years and there's really, in my opinion, no place to go if you're destitute. If your house burned down you'd expect more support from the United Church community than you could from the lesbian community (Interview 6).

For Dana, Jill, Ellen, Heather, Pat, and Clara, political work and/or gay/lesbian political organizations are important features of lesbian community. In Pat's words "it's a group of people who are in the same position as I am of struggling for our rights and fighting for respect among the heterosexual community" (Interview 10). The importance of shared identity 'as a lesbian' was noted by all respondents. Some women speculated that this identity is maintained through lesbian bars (Interviews 4, 7), dances (Interviews 4, 7), sports teams (Interviews 6, 7), businesses (Interview 8), media (Interview 7), and organizations (Interviews 8, 9). In Ellen and Heather's opinion, gay/lesbian organizations are "almost a nucleus to the whole [identity] thing" (Interview 8, 9). Community diversity was only acknowledged in Lisa's statement that "there really is no such thing as a [sic] community" (Interview 6) and Heather's reference to "differently aged lesbians" (Interview 9).

Reported Themes of Individual Silence

At an individual level the same-sex literature suggests that abused lesbians are uniquely or more profoundly silenced than abused heterosexual women with respect to their isolation,

shame, denial, love for abusers, fear of abuser retaliation, and child-related concerns.

On the theme of isolation the same-sex literature suggests that abusers' threats to disclose their partners' sexual orientation may uniquely silence both 'hidden' and 'out of the closet' lesbians by deterring them from reaching out to friends, the lesbian community, or social supports. Although many respondents were isolated by family-related hesitations, only Suzanna who was "ashamed" of her sexual orientation at the time, recalled a "fear that the situation would blow up" in the workplace if her sexual orientation was disclosed by her abuser through "phone calls...around outing" (Interview 4). This response hints at the possibility that abused lesbians who are 'hidden' may be more vulnerable to and more isolated by the potentiality of abusers' disclosure than abused lesbians who are 'out of the closet'.

More evidence was found for the literature's intimation that abused lesbians are isolated and silenced by fear that disclosure of their sexual orientation will negatively affect existing relations with their families of origin. At the time of their abuse Elizabeth, Manon, Pat, and Suzanna had not disclosed their lesbian orientation to their families of origin (Interviews 3, 11, 10, 4). This silence made it difficult, if not impossible, for them to share the abuse. It

should be noted that Elizabeth took her parents into her confidence toward the end of the relationship when she feared that they would be informed of her lesbianism and abuse by other sources (Interview 3). Some support was found for the suggestion that abused lesbians may be isolated and silenced by fear that disclosure of the abuse to their families of origin would provoke misperceptions that the abuse is evidence of the 'sickness' of their lesbianism. Colette and Clara stated that they deliberately did not inform their families of the abuse (Interviews 1, 12). For example, Colette resisted telling her family about the abuse because they "don't even come to grips with the fact that I am a lesbian [so] how are they going to come to grips with the fact that I'm a lesbian that was abused on top of it?" (Interview 1). In Clara's opinion "my mother was the last person who could have done anything about it....because she's very judgemental [and] she was sort of judgemental of us as lesbians" (Interview 12). While Dana, Elizabeth, Ellen, Lisa, Heather, France, and Jill disclosed the abuse to their families of origin, they tended to 'manage' how much information, to whom, and when they told. Aside from Elizabeth for whom circumstances forced disclosure before her relationship ended (Interview 3), and Jill's experience of a "great family who are aware of issues as far as the abuse" (Interview 7), all other respondents confided in their mothers or sisters toward (Interviews 2, 5, 6, 8, 9) or at the end of their relationships (Interviews 2, 5, 6, 7, 8,

9). For example, Dana recalled that she "started sharing with her [sister] that things weren't going that great" - not in any detail though" (Interview 5). France spoke with her mother after she had recognized that she was feeling "emotionally abused" (Interview 2), while Ellen confided in her mother at a point of crisis when she was "really at a low ebb" (Interview 8). At the "very end" of her relationship Heather disclosed the abuse to her sister and her mother although "I didn't tell her about the push and the shove or anything....[because] she doesn't really want to hear stuff like that" (Interview 9). The potential for safe communication appeared to influence whether or not lesbians chose to disclose their abuse to their families of origin. On the one hand, where lesbians perceived that their sexual orientation would be or was negatively regarded, they chose not to confide the abuse. On the other hand, where lesbians perceived that news of the abuse would be met critically by some family members, they selectively filtered those people out. As Claire Renzetti discovered in her (1992) survey of abused lesbians, mothers and sisters were most often believed trustworthy. For half of the respondents, 'family' in the sense of mothers and sisters appeared to have played a role in breaking abused lesbians' isolation and silence.

According to the same-sex literature, women who have not 'come out' or self-defined as lesbian may be particularly vulnerable

to isolation and silence because they perceive their partner as their only like-minded contact. The validity of this suggestion could not be assessed in this sample of women because all of the respondents had some degree of awareness of their lesbianism at the time of their abuse. Instead, participants spoke to an emerging theme of relationship to community and its role in exacerbating their isolation and silence. For instance, Elizabeth had been in the process of 'coming out' as a lesbian. Her alienation from the lesbian community and its friendship networks is captured in her statement that "because she was the first woman that I had been with I had nobody to really tell that would understand" (Interview 3). Colette (Interview 1) echoed Jill's sentiment that because of her isolation in the relationship "I didn't have my own supports as far as within the lesbian community" (Interview 7). Because they were new to the city, Dana and Suzanna were alienated from lesbians other than their abusers (Interviews 5, 4). As Dana explained

I was new to the job [and] I was brand-new to the city so I really didn't know many people to begin with. I was very isolated and throughout the first few months of the relationship I became even more isolated from the friends I did have [and] family members too (Interview 5).

Likewise, Suzanna commented that "I didn't know anybody.... [and] these people are...in the community and I'm new so it's unlikely you can really talk with anybody about that [abuse]" (Interview 4). From these comments it appears that abused

lesbians who are lacking a relationship to community may be more profoundly silenced by their isolation than abused lesbians who interact with gay/lesbian community 'spaces' and friendship networks.

Are abused lesbians uniquely silenced by shame that their feminist politics or larger size did not prevent the abuse? None of the participants expressed shame over the latter. A link between the theme of shame and feminist politics was only found in one of the two instances where respondents identified as feminist at the time of the abuse. As Clara explained

in feminist relationships we always talked about equality. Everything we did was structured around the equality of women and I know...on an intellectual level the group I was involved in did explore the whole idea of power relationships in collectives but we never extended that to our personal relationships - at least I didn't. I mean, maybe if I'd seen it clearly I wouldn't have stayed in that relationship. I wouldn't have continued to try and nurture it, to make it better, to fix things....I felt as a feminist that I had to make it work (Interview 12).

In general, questions probing the theme of shame in silencing abused lesbians provoked two kinds of reactions not found in the same-sex literature. First, shame was clearly perceived as a result of abuser manipulation, rather than as a self-directed and "painful sense of having done something wrong, improper or immodest" (The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 1989:664). This distinction is reflected in Colette's comment that "I didn't feel shame for what was happening in my

relationship; I was shamed by my partner" (Interview 1). Lisa agreed that abusers' "guilt and shame - it's all placed back on you", while Suzanna realized that her feelings of shame derived from her partner's criticism (Interview 4). Second, where participants internalized feelings of shame they tended to either judge themselves negatively, like abused heterosexual women, or fear negative judgement by other, primarily lesbian friends. Among those respondents who judged themselves, Heather recalled feeling ashamed at fighting back "when it came to push and shove" (Interview 9). For Lisa her shame evolved from "being hit and then going back and then letting her come back and believing and forgiving" (Interview 6) while Pat "felt ashamed of who I became" (Interview 10). Of those women who feared judgement by other, primarily lesbian friends, Clara explained that shame was silencing in the sense that "you don't want people to judge you for making what was basically a bad decision" (Interview 12). Dana's silence was reflected in her tendency not to publicly acknowledge the relationship, let alone the abuse. She explained of this decision that "shame is probably part of it and wondering how that person will react when they hear it - whether they're going to support me or whether they're going to reject me" (Interview 5). Manon stated that owing to her shame the abuse "was always my secret....I never really shared it" (Interview 11). While shame was only a clearly silencing influence on Clara, Dana, and Manon, its more frequent

association with negative internal or external judgement raises other questions. For instance, do lesbians have different ethical expectations of themselves or their partners than heterosexual women? Does feminist or gay/lesbian political consciousness or 'insider' knowledge of lesbian communities influence abused lesbians' tendency to self-judge or exacerbate their fears of external judgement, and if so, how?

According to the same-sex literature, a third theme of denial may play a distinctive role in silencing abused lesbians. It suggests that abused lesbians who retaliate in self-defence, believe in feminist analyses of partner abuse that present men as the perpetrators of woman-abuse, or hold stereotypes of abusers may be more inclined to view their abuse as a 'lover's quarrel', or be less inclined to identify their situation as abusive. No evidence was found to support the claim that because of internalized homophobia lesbians who retaliate in self-defence are particularly vulnerable to mislabelling or denying their abuse. Because of a tradition of silence, none of the participants had been aware of the phenomenon or language of partner abuse prior to her experience(s) of it. Lacking knowledge of its non-physical manifestations, incidents of physical abuse involving retaliation in self-defence appear to have counteracted, rather than encouraged, abused lesbians' silence by denial. Rather than silencing

respondents, physical retaliation was more often a catalyst for recognizing that the abuse was more than a 'lover's quarrel' in which both partners shared equal responsibility. Clara recalled knowing that "her rage...had nothing to do with me. I didn't cause that rage to happen. Something else caused it to happen, whatever it was, and I'm sure there's a reason for it but it wasn't me" (Interview 12). For Lisa the emotionally painful experience of retaliation allowed her to see crucial differences between her usual behaviour and her partner's abuse. In her words "it took her a long time to hit me again....I would never, ever hit anybody again though. I felt like there was this horrible, big, dark, ugly, evil thing inside me. The rage that I felt was so tremendous [that] I don't want to look at that monster again" (Interview 6). This ability to distinguish between normative behaviours and abuse is also reflected in Jill's statement that she is still "not proud" that she was provoked to do "things that I wouldn't have done" (Interview 7) and Heather's memory of feeling "sick to my stomach when I finally pushed her across the room 'cause I was just as low as she was" (Interview 9). Rather than silencing abused lesbians, physical retaliation was also a catalyst for a decline in abusers' power over partners or respondents' decision to terminate the relationship. For Colette, 'the beginning of the end' of her abuser's power and the relationship was motivated by her retaliation in self-defence because "I had been pushed many times, and I just

couldn't handle it any more...something snapped....[but] I think that's when she started to back off a bit" (Interview 1). Ellen decided to leave her abuser after an incident of retaliation in self-defence that required medical treatment (Interview 8).

As far as the speculation that lesbians are particularly susceptible to denial and silence owing to feminist analyses that present men as the perpetrators of abuse, only Clara linked her denial and minimization to being "caught up in the ideology of women loving women" that prevented her and the feminists around her from acknowledging that women can also be abusive (Interview 12). No evidence was found to support the same-sex literature's suggestion that stereotypes of abusers enable abused lesbians' silence by inhibiting their ability to identify partner abuse. While no one directly credited their silence to belief in these myths, a few lesbian-specific stereotypes were noted by respondents. For example, Lisa commented that she "thinks people often mistrust what my family would have called 'diesel dykes' or someone who is very tough-looking and aggressive" (Interview 6). On the other hand, Jill reported hearing partner abuse attributed to "jock" lesbians (Interview 7). While Suzanna could not recall hearing partner abuse attributed to any specific group, she perceived that it "happens a lot with women recently coming out because you're learning about yourself....[and] with older

couples by virtue of aging, less patience" (Interview 4).

On the fourth theme of love for abusers, the same-sex literature suggests that abused lesbians, and especially abused lesbian feminists, may be particularly silenced by their empathy with abusers' particular or their common experiences of childhood abuse. Only Lisa and Pat spoke directly to this proposition and neither linked it to their silence. Lisa recalled that "I would say well, she's from this sort of an [abusive] background - but so was I" (Interview 6). For Pat, the fact that her partner had been abused was all the more reason "she should have realized what her abuse was doing" (Interview 10). In Colette's case, her empathy with her abuser was exacerbated by non-abuse related commonalities in their childhood experiences (Interview 1). The same-sex literature also speculates that abused lesbians' silence may be exacerbated by their belief that their love and concern are crucial to their abusers' survival. In this particular group of women, however, only Jill recalled feeling like her abuser's "only support" and fearing that "she won't make it without me" (Interview 7).

To gain insight into the nature of abused lesbians' love for their abusers, participants were asked whether they thought that abuse by a woman differed from abuse by a man. From their comments, a second new silencing theme emerged. That is, that

abused lesbians' relationship to women may distinguish or exacerbate their silence on lesbian partner abuse. In Clara's mind lesbian partner abuse "is not the same because she's a woman. She has her problems. She's been oppressed. We have to sort of help each other through this" (Interview 12). Likewise, France commented that "I tend to want to defend women. I feel that women don't have a fair chance[and] that women have a lot of abuse to work with" (Interview 2). Colette spoke to her special "connection" to women (Interview 1), while Lisa believed that if her abuser had not been a woman she "would have been gone in an instant" (Interview 6). Elizabeth explained that

I love them [women] a lot more in a way. I relate to them a lot better which makes my emotional attachment to them much, much stronger and much, much more meaningful than with a man so I guess yes, I probably would make a lot more allowances (Interview 3).

For Jill, her silence derived from the fact that "there's so many negative attitudes around being a lesbian and the thought that I could tell someone that this person that I loved and trusted and another woman was putting me through a lot of abuse I just couldn't imagine" (Interview 7). At the time of her abuse Pat took for granted that between lesbians "emotionally the feelings are more intense and they run deeper" (Interview 10), while Suzanna felt strongly that

if it was a man, it would be different. You wouldn't excuse them in the same way. You'd call them an asshole or call them despicable and heave them out of your life and move on or confront them. But

women you tend to think no, they're a lesbian. They've been through a lot. They're enlightened. They're aware. They wouldn't do this to other women (Interview 4).

On the theme of abuser retaliation, none of the participants supported the same-sex literature's suggestion that abused lesbians are uniquely silenced by fear that abuser(s) will retaliate against them for leaving the relationships by disclosing their sexual orientation. Similarly, no support was found for the literature's speculation that child-related concerns uniquely silence abused lesbians. Lacking heterosexual parents' legal protections, it proposes that non-custodial abused lesbians may be silenced by the custodial abusers' threats to deny them access to the children. To the contrary, the only non-custodial parent represented in the interviews, Pat, emphasized that "that's something she's never done" (Interview 10). The literature also speculates that abused custodial lesbians may be silenced by abusers' threats to disclose their sexual orientation to their children's father (Grover, n.d.) or others (Renzetti, 1992), or by a perceived lack of support if their abuser kidnaps their children after they leave the relationship (Grover, n.d.). These concerns were not shared by Clara, the only custodial parent represented in the interviews (Interview 12).

Reported Themes of Social Silence

At a social level the same-sex literature suggests that abused lesbians may be uniquely or more silenced by their real and perceived fears of the criminal justice system, medical health profession, and shelters for abused women. Just as ethnicity-based distrust and alienation from the police have been reported by abused heterosexual aboriginal women (MacLeod, 1987; Canadian Council on Social Development, 1991), the same-sex literature suggests that police homophobia and heterosexism may uniquely silence abused lesbians. Some respondents spoke to the silencing power of perceived homophobia. Manon expressed scepticism in her statement that "I didn't have faith in the police system" (Interview 11) and Clara acknowledged that her "political mistrust of the police and how they would deal with an issue like that" (Interview 12) played a role in deterring her from telling the police about her abuse. Dana recalled that

I never thought about [calling the police] except for the night that I left because she really lost it...and I certainly considered it, if not that night, then to call after the fact, but I didn't. I don't know why. Maybe I didn't feel I'd be supported. Maybe I didn't want to deal with the situation anymore (Interview 5).

While the same-sex literature conveys the impression that ill-treatment by police due to homophobia and heterosexism is a 'social fact', the comments of the two abused lesbians who received police assistance suggest otherwise. Suzanna reached out to the police when her decision to leave her partner

prompted her abuser to attempt suicide. Their reaction to her lesbianism and the circumstances of the incident were, in her words, "amazing...very good" (Interview 4). Likewise, when neighbours called the police to intervene in Ellen's physical abuse "it was a female officer and she was fine" (Interview 8). Other participants' comments suggest that lesbians' perceptions of negative police response may owe more to reports of abused heterosexual women's ill-treatment than actual experiences of police homophobia. For example, Heather did not consider involving the police because "straight women who are abused, half the time in front of the man they say if you don't charge him I can't do anything but if you charge him he's back in the morning and you're dead" (Interview 9).

Of the same-sex literature's proposition that abused lesbians are uniquely silenced by their fear that police will see lesbianism as the problem rather than the abuse, Lisa noted that generally "people don't believe us. All we need is a good man and that [abuse] will all come to an end, won't it?" (Interview 6). Of a further suggestion that abused lesbians are distinctly silenced by their fear that partner abuse will be misperceived by police as 'mutual' or as a female 'cat fight', only Colette imagined that the police "would have just laughed. I think they would have thought it was pretty funny to see two women, lesbians, fighting together" (Interview 1). Clara, the only custodial parent represented in the interview

sample, did not relate her silence to a fear that her lesbianism and abuse would be used by the police to justify the removal of her children from an 'unsuitable' home (Interview 12). As well as illuminating established social themes of silence, the theme of lesbians' relationship to women re-emerged from dialogue on the police. First, while love for abusers may deter police reporting by heterosexual women and abused lesbians alike, lesbians' relationship to women may exacerbate their silence. This woman-to-woman bond is suggested in Elizabeth's comment that

we see men as brutalizing their partners physically so I guess I wouldn't tend to have seen women that way as much so it would have been less likely for me to want to call the police and, yes, I suppose because my connection with women is so much stronger I would let them get away with a lot more (Interview 3).

Similarly, Jill noted that "I see a lot of street cops and I know what their attitudes are....[and] overall [women are] not going to get the support" (Interview 7). Lesbians' relationship to community may also exacerbate their police-related silence. Commenting on reporting to and resourcing police assistance, France commented that she

wouldn't do that because it's something that belongs to our community....and it's a lifestyle that's so different, so marginal, and to have the police involved I feel the need to protect my world and to try to solve it ourselves rather than having somebody else come in trying to clean up the situation (Interview 2).

A third emerging theme of silence concerned abused lesbians'

knowledge of rights and resources. In contrast to North American public awareness that physically expressed heterosexual partner abuse is a crime, the tradition of silence on lesbian partner abuse may prevent abused lesbians from recognizing the criminality of physical abuse. Ironically, although Suzanna failed to charge her abuser with a physical incident in which she "thought my back was broken" she resourced the police after her abuser's suicide attempt "not to punish her but to get help" (Interview 4). Elizabeth explained that "she wasn't nearly as violent with me as she could have been or as a man could have been so yes, I guess that's where her being a woman might have made a difference" (Interview 3). Despite the fact that Clara's physical abuse was recurrent, she failed to resource the police because "I certainly never would have expected anything short of a criminal approach to the whole issue but I didn't think of her as a criminal" (Interview 12). Likewise, Pat explained that she did not consider resourcing the police because "I never literally got the shit kicked out of me. It wasn't that dramatic" (Interview 10).

Turning to the legal system, the same-sex literature suggests that general fears of homophobia and specific fears for their job security and personal safety may distinguish or compound abused lesbians' silence. Only Colette supported the insinuation that perceived or experienced homophobia uniquely

silences abused lesbians. In her opinion "they won't even accept that two women living together can be married....[so] there's no support there" (Interview 1). Rather than homophobia, the theme of lesbians' relationship to women resurfaced in discussion of the legal system. Like abused heterosexual women, participants spoke to the silencing effect of perceived or experienced misogyny or anti-woman sentiment. For instance, Elizabeth expressed cynicism that the legal system is ideologically committed to women of any sexual orientation because

the law is built around men, and for men,
and by men and not enough of that has
changed and unfortunately it's going to be
years before it changes. And if this law
system that we live with had of been done
with some sort of equity in mind it would
never have gotten this far (Interview 3).

Similarly, Dana commented that "I don't know if the judicial system works...because it tends to victimize further the victims in [partner abuse]" (Interview 5). She added that based on the experience of abused heterosexual women, she was sceptical whether abusers "will be held accountable even through the criminal justice system" (Interview 5). Perhaps owing to respondents' lack of practical experience with the legal system, no one expressed concern for their job or personal safety if their sexual orientation was disclosed. Similarly, participants failed to address the unavailability or selective availability of restraining orders, the stipulation that partners co-habit, the American trend toward

obscuring the identity of the abuser through mutual orders, or the possibility that abused lesbians have not been treated as fairly by the criminal justice system as abused heterosexual women.

Turning to the medical health profession, the same-sex literature infers that abused lesbians are uniquely silenced by fear that professionals' homophobia will adversely affect the sensitivity of their care. Although Jill, France, and Suzanna consider that they should have received medical attention for abuse-related injuries, they were not able to identify the roots of their reluctance to do so (Interviews 7, 2, 4). Ellen, the only respondent who sought medical treatment, recalled that she "made up some bullshit about how I tripped over the rug and slammed my hand on the chair" (Interview 8). When asked why she had lied about her abuse, she could only speculate that it was "because I was out of [the relationship]....I was with my friends...and I was free of the situation" (Interview 8). Regarding the literatures's suggestion that medical professionals' lack of awareness of and failure to screen for lesbian partner abuse silences abused lesbians, Heather recalled instead that a female friend who joined her in accompanying her abuser to the hospital for self-inflicted injuries was "accused" of partner abuse by a female health professional (Interview 9). The silencing potential of concerns for the confidentiality of medical

records or the possibility that abusers may be invited to be present as support during their medical treatment was not mentioned by respondents.

With respect to abused lesbians' hesitation to access the services of mental health professionals, the same-sex literature maintains that perceptions of homophobia may distinguish, and distrust of heterosexual therapeutic models may compound, abused lesbians' silence. Based on the fact that eight of the twelve respondents had engaged in therapy (Interviews 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) homophobia did not appear to be a unique deterrent and silencer. Only Heather reported first-hand experience with a specific therapeutic model. Like many abused heterosexual women, she found that the family systems approach or 'couples therapy' failed to acknowledge her partner as the perpetrator of the abuse. She explained that "I was on the hot seat all the time....[and] they would ask me things like, 'what are you prepared to give up?'" (Interview 9). Based on this one example, however, it is unclear whether homophobia, heterosexism or misperceptions of 'mutual' abuse or provocation underscored that particular clinician's approach. More support was found for the resurfacing theme of ignorance of lesbian partner abuse and the fact that knowledge of and sensitivity to lesbian lifestyles are especially important in abused lesbians' healing and therapy. While eight respondents (Interviews 3,

4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12) had interacted with therapists, more positive experiences were reported by those women who had been receiving counselling on non-abuse related matters and had established a rapport with their female clinicians before the abuse (Interviews 9, 10, 12). For example, Clara described how "I came to learn how to stand up for myself and to defend myself and to say 'no' to that abuse. So in that sense the therapeutic side of it helped me and was the big, positive change for me" (Interview 12). Heather reported that her "therapy...was fine....we did really well" (Interview 9) and Pat found her therapist "very understanding" (Interview 10). An unanticipated danger of therapeutic support, rather than a lack of awareness was highlighted by Heather's comment that "just knowing I had back-up gave me a little more courage to stay when I should have had the courage to leave" (Interview 9). The feelings of abused lesbians who entered therapy because of the abuse and had no established rapport with clinicians were more inclined to be ambiguous or negative (Interviews 3, 4, 5, 8, 11). On the one hand, Dana felt that her heterosexual male therapist "wasn't the greatest". On the other hand she explained that

the fact that this therapist knew about her
...[and] had worked with other lesbians that
had been involved with her in a way made me
feel good that I wasn't the only one that
[her abuser] treated that way, and in another
way it was like...she needs to be stopped
(Interview 5).

Elizabeth assessed her female therapist as "patient" but

concluded that for her more productive therapy "has happened in [friendship] circles because I find that professionals who I've dealt with...don't even have as good an analysis as I do about the whole thing" (Interview 3). Ellen found her female psychologist somewhat helpful in re-building her self-esteem (Interview 8), while Suzanna judged the experience unhelpful (Interview 4). New questions also arose from respondents' comments on the mental health profession. For instance, the fact that Manon and France were abused by partners who were lesbian therapists prompts the question whether lesbians will continue to have confidence in lesbian professionals once the silence on lesbian partner abuse is broken. Heather's note that her partner thought therapy "was a farce but she went because she thought I needed to go" (Interview 9) and Suzanna's statement that she entered therapy "because my abuser guilted me into doing it" (Interview 4) point to the need for research examining whether lesbian abusers pressure their partners to pursue therapy as or more often than heterosexual abusers.

Regarding shelters for abused women, the same-sex literature speculates that homophobic or heterosexist reactions and fears for confidentiality are themes that distinguish and exacerbate the silence of abused lesbians. In all cases shelter-related probes evoked startled reactions and little or no response. Participants' comments did not overtly support the suggestion

that perceptions of shelter workers' homophobia had exacerbated their silence. At the same time, feelings of exclusion based on perceived heterosexism may have contributed to their ignorance of shelters as a right and resource for abused lesbians. For example, although Colette "didn't even think of shelters" (Interview 1), Jill imagined that "it's all men as partners of women" (Interview 7). The fact that seven of the twenty-one relationships identified by respondents did not involve co-habitation raises the question whether abused lesbians are less likely to access shelters because they are more often independently housed and less needy of emergency housing than abused heterosexual women. Fears for confidentiality were not found to be unique and silencing. None of the respondents spoke to the fact that shelter locations are common knowledge in lesbian communities, that lesbians are employed in shelter networks, or that abusers may be employed in the shelter network. Likewise, no concerns were voiced on the possibility that a female abuser claiming 'mutual' abuse could gain entry to the same shelter as the partner she abused. The theme of lesbians' relationship or bond to community re-emerged via their comments on inclusion in and preference for community-based assistance and lesbian friendship network support. For example, Dana recalled that she "was lucky that I had a friend who made an offer" and added that she couldn't imagine that she'd "feel safe going somewhere like that to complete, total strangers" (Interview

5). Manon proposed that "maybe if I had no [lesbian] friends I would go [to a shelter]" (Interview 11). France credited her feelings of exclusion from shelters to her preferred inclusion and "need to believe in our system, whatever system it will become, but in the lesbian community" (Interview 2).

Reported Themes of Community Silence

Respondents confirmed the same-sex literature's suggestion that disclosure of partner abuse at the community level is both unusual and event-specific. For example, during their relationships only six women confided in female, primarily lesbian, friends. Elizabeth and Manon each confided in one heterosexual woman friend (Interviews 3, 11), while Lisa and Ellen primarily relied on the support of a close lesbian friend (Interview 6, 8). Suzanna only disclosed her abuse to new lovers (Interview 4), while Dana confided in a lesbian family member "not in any detail though" (Interview 5). Physical abuse was found to be one event-specific catalyst for disclosing the abuse to other lesbians. For example, while still involved with her abuser, fear for their safety after particularly severe incidents of physical abuse motivated Colette and Ellen to seek the support of lesbian neighbours (Interview 1, 8). Similarly, France's experience of physical abuse with one abuser prompted her to confide in a group of lesbian friends (Interviews 2). Interestingly, two of these women chose not to disclose the 'whole story' of their abuse.

Colette only informed her lesbian neighbours that "something was wrong" (Interview 1). Although France believed that she "broke the silence right away", emotional and psychological abuse had been present before she disclosed the assault (Interview 2). Decisions to leave their abusers were found to be a second event-specific catalyst for disclosure to other lesbians. Speaking to their need for practical support, Dana, Ellen, Lisa, and Pat were temporarily housed by lesbian friends when they left their abuser(s) (Interviews 5, 6, 8, 10). Lesbians who did not co-habit with their abuser(s) were as or more likely to require emotional assistance. For Colette, Elizabeth, Heather, Lisa, Jill and Manon, one or two lesbian friends provided initial emotional support after the break-up of their relationship (Interviews 1, 3, 6, 7, 9, 11) while Clara and Suzanna confined their disclosures to new lovers (Interview 12, 4).

At the community level of analysis the same-sex literature suggests that fears for its internal solidarity and external image, ideological belief in a lesbian 'utopia' or gendered analyses of partner abuse, and a lack of awareness due to community inaction uniquely silence abused lesbians. First, the same-sex literature speculates that because identities are obscured in lesbian partner abuse, concern for the misuse of the label 'abuser' may motivate abused lesbians' silence and their desire to protect the internal solidarity of

communities. Some consciousness of the danger of false labelling was reflected in Elizabeth's statement that "there's a lot of grey areas. If you think somebody speaking in a louder-than-normal voice is aggressive and violent then we're talking about perspectives...because I don't think that somebody getting angry and yelling is necessarily violent behaviour" (Interview 3). The silencing power of misuse is reflected in Clara's expectation that "that is the response you would get - a kind of justification for doing it" (Interview 12). Other respondents reported their actual experiences with partners' claims to 'mutual' abuse, or partners' distorted rationales for the break-up of the relationships. Of the former, Pat recalled that

you wouldn't think that my partner would go around and do that [claim abuse] because she's the one who's doing all the abuse so you think she's going to shut up about that part, right? But then again, like everything else, things turn around. The stories are turned around (Interview 10).

Of the latter, Lisa noted that "I don't feel that there's anything wrong with me and yet friends heard about how I wouldn't have sex" (Interview 6). For Jill "the whole issue was I left her for another woman. That was the story" (Interview 7). The theme of lesbians' relationship to community and their relationship to women resurfaced from this line of inquiry. Some participants viewed the silencing power of false labelling as a problem of the lesbian community rather than an abuser's personal problem. Dana noted that "I

certainly don't talk about it with all of my friends.... [because] I probably have a sense of who's going to take it well and support me around it as opposed to who's going to judge me on it" (Interview 5). France commented that lesbian communities are "so incestuous. People talk, say anything about you. We're still living a very marginal life" (Interview 2). Likewise, Manon observed that she generally "finds the problem in the community. If you start to express your feelings about a woman I'm afraid the other women will start to judge. So it's like you're on this side or you're on that side" (Interview 11). In Elizabeth's opinion "the trouble with our community is that it's condemning" (Interview 3) while Suzanna's experience of "leaving these abusers and my [lesbian] friends taking their side" resulted in feelings of "alienation" from her community (Interview 4).

The same-sex literature additionally suggests that because of concern for the community's internal solidarity, abused lesbians may be too intimidated to risk breaking their silence and exposing abusers who are community leaders. This proposition was validated by Suzanna who perceived that as a newcomer to the community, her word on "relatively high profile" abusers would not be taken seriously (Interview 4). Similarly, Colette felt that disclosure "wouldn't have helped a bit" because her abuser is "a prominent person so...you can't win" (Interview 1). For Lisa, "this woman is so popular

with certain groups that not only did no one want to hear anything about it, but they refused to believe" (Interview 6). The themes of lesbians' relationship to women and their relationship to community resurfaced in this discussion. Evidence of lesbians' efforts to protect abusers' reputations in the community is suggested by the fact that few respondents had yet disclosed their experience of abuse and none had, beyond confidantes, revealed their abusers' identities. France explained that "within our own community we have a certain amount of respect for the fact that we know what people can lose if they are discovered so maybe we just tend to leave well enough alone" (Interview 2).

Concern for communities' external image is a second silencing theme suggested in the same-sex literature. From this perspective, disclosure opens the door to heterosexual criticism, including accusations that lesbians are 'sick' and no better than heterosexual abusers. All respondents agreed that public knowledge of lesbian partner abuse could fuel anti-lesbian sentiment. The expectation of heterosexual criticism offers some insight on lesbians' lived realities of homophobia and marginalization. Despite this agreement and context only Clara felt that disclosure should wait until "heterosexuals are far more willing to be accepting of lesbians and gay men" (Interview 12). In her opinion

because of general stereotyping of lesbians
by the larger society, [and] the hate that

a lot of people feel for lesbians and gay men...you don't want that information in their hands because somehow you feel that it will be used even further against you because you're not really safe in a heterosexual world anyway (Interview 12).

Probably owing to the fact that they had experienced its damaging effects, most respondents opposed silence because, as Colette explained "we're setting ourselves up playing ostriches" (Interview 1). On the one hand, some respondents were unconcerned with the possibility of heterosexual backlash. Heather felt that it was unlikely that they would "bother with us" (Interview 9). Ellen noted that "they already dredge up their own goddamn ammunition....[and] I could [not] care less" (Interview 8). Colette felt that "it doesn't matter what it is, it's always going to give more ammunition so what are we supposed to do, not say anything?" (Interview 1). In Pat's opinion "we have our own ammunition too.... [because] even in heterosexuals there's women beating up on women" (Interview 10). Other respondents were somewhat concerned with heterosexual response to the reality of lesbian partner abuse and spoke, by implication, to the theme of knowledge of lesbian partner abuse. Lisa imagined that

certainly it will give some of them ammunition and I think it will also develop a kinship in others - make us more human, less exotic, if you will. I guess it all comes down to what people think of homosexuals anyway. If you don't like gay people or lesbians and you don't have any respect for them, then this isn't suddenly going to give you more [laughter]. (Interview 6).

Elizabeth added that

I just don't want any more things to make us look like we haven't got our shit together. I guess I want our community to have our shit together a lot more than straight people do because we've taken so much shit from them that I want to be able to say that we're all nice people and we are all extra nice, more nice than you guys because I just don't want people to say 'fucking little lesbian' and stomp all over me (Interview 3).

The theme of knowledge of lesbian partner abuse was reinforced by participants' emphasis on community agency and its responsibility for raising awareness and challenging false assumptions and stereotypes. For example, of Colette, Elizabeth's and Jill's position that negative impressions of lesbians could be overcome through education (Interviews 1, 7), Jill explained that

I certainly say that I don't believe we should stay quiet and we have to deal with this. The press and the media would jump on the negative stuff and that's something we'll have to fight and that's something that we'll have to educate and struggle with and make sure that's not the only perception of what a lesbian is (Interview 7).

Perhaps owing to the fact that obstacles are a taken-for-granted challenge of lesbian life, or perhaps reflecting their relationship to community, all respondents were surprised and sceptical of the suggestion that abused lesbians may be silenced by fears that external knowledge of lesbian partner abuse will deter women from 'coming out' as lesbians.

According to the same-sex literature, ideological themes also

play a role in silencing abused lesbians. Belief in a lesbian 'utopia' appears to be constructed on the presumption that, unlike men, lesbians' exposure to and understanding of the power differential of misogyny enhances their commitment to egalitarian relations of power in all areas, including intimate partnerships. While the notion of lesbian superiority underlying this assumption may be personally and politically empowering, it may silence abused lesbians in two key ways. For one, within lesbian communities this utopian vision may inhibit abused lesbians' awareness of and ability to identify partner abuse. For another, in the process of distancing lesbians from heterosexual men, the superiority grounded ideology of a lesbian 'utopia' may inadvertently alienate lesbians from heterosexual women and constrain their ability to recognize commonalities between their experience of abuse by women and heterosexual women's abuse by men. The unique silencing capacity of belief in a lesbian 'utopia' and the emerging theme of lesbians' relationship to women were substantiated by eight of the twelve participants (Interviews 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12). For instance, Dana spoke to "this general view [that] you put two women together and there are no problems at all. You're supposed to be very nice and kind to each other in all aspects. Two women together is supposed to be ideal...as opposed to a male/female couple" (Interview 5). Likewise, Ellen noted that lesbians "have a somewhat idealized idea of what we hope female relationships will be -

an equality" (Interview 8). France noted that unlike heterosexual couples, "I don't think that lesbians start out with the idea that one is in the power situation" (Interview 2). Jill recalled being surprised that "there was a power imbalance...in everything" (Interview 7), while Heather recalled believing that lesbian relationships should have "more communication....[be] more equal" and better than heterosexual relationships (Interview 9). Like Heather, Lisa believed that compared to heterosexual couples, "lesbian relationships were more of an equal kind of thing" (Interview 6). For silenced feminists and non-feminists alike, their experience of lesbian partner abuse challenged their belief in a lesbian 'utopia'. Clara explained that

the thing that made it so hard was the fact that we were feminists and...we were in this community that was striving for this ideal of the women's community. I mean, that was being a woman-identified woman, and being a lesbian, and being a feminist, and being in a women's community was an ideal. It was an ideology. We couldn't really escape that ideology. Even if people around us knew what was going on they couldn't escape it either (Interview 12).

While her experience prompted Manon to think that "it's just like men [so] what's the point being with a woman?" (Interview 11), the contradiction between her abuse and her utopian, egalitarian expectations of lesbian relationships left Ellen wondering "what happened?" (Interview 8).

A fourth theme of the same-sex literature proposes that abused

lesbians are uniquely silenced by their ideological belief in gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse that present men as its perpetrators. This suggestion and the theme of lesbians' relationship to women were substantiated by both of the respondents who identified as feminist at the time of their abuse. Of her silence Clara explained that

I guess what is relevant is the context... for us as lesbian feminists. We were into being supportive of other women and of each other as women. We were into 'manhating' in a fairly big way. So I think in a lot of ways I would make excuses for that - it's not the same thing, you know, as a guy beating up a woman. She has her problems; she's been oppressed. I think that certainly that was very conscious on my part (Interview 12).

The silencing influence of feminist 'women loving women' ideologies on abused lesbians was also reflected in Jill's position that "my god, how can you tell people that you're a lesbian and that you have an abusive relationship....[when] women are supposed to be so wonderful and gentle and nurturing and caring?" (Interview 7).

A fifth and last established theme suggests that abused lesbians' silence may derive from communities' inaction on the problem. Respondents validated the lack of knowledge of partner abuse in lesbian communities and pointed to the need for "more awareness" (Interview 7) because, as Elizabeth said, "so much of getting out of an abusive relationship depends on a person's awareness" (Interview 3). Lisa noted that "it's almost like you have to be abused before you're even aware of

it" and explained that

the lack of support in the community is very disheartening and women go to rallies and midnight vigils and yet we treat each other with such a horrible lack of respect. It hurts. I guess I expected things I had no right to expect of being gay - that it was going to be 'all for one'. It was going to be more [supportive] than it was (Interview 6).

Some respondents substantiated the literature's suggestion that listening to abused lesbians is a first step in transforming lesbian communities' tradition of silence on lesbian partner abuse. For example, Elizabeth recalled that

in my experience my help has come from people that I feel safe around. Nobody gets paid. Somebody goes home probably feeling a little more stressed than they did before because they're trying to help one of their friends through a hard time and you might go away feeling better because somebody just helped you through a hard time (Interview 3).

France perceived that breaking the silence involved creating an environment where lesbians can "talk about our dissatisfactions in relationships" (Interview 2). Likewise, Clara, Heather and Manon craved the freedom to "talk" about lesbian partner abuse (Interviews 12, 9, 11) without "feeling guilty" (Interview 12). Participants felt that within the community "everybody should be involved" (Interview 1) in enabling abused lesbians' voices. As far as the support of friends and strangers, Lisa felt that she would have been helped by "more support among friends" (Interview 6) while Lisa recalled that following one break-up with an abuser, a woman that she barely knew "reached out to me....[and] I think

that for the first time there was someone there who listened, that I could cry in front of, that I could just really express myself [with]" (Interview 6). For other participants, information-sharing on abusers and "warning the people they're with" (Interview 9) was a preferred means of 'reaching out'. For instance, Clara recalled that

I think my friends could have helped me a lot more and I wish they had....In a way by confronting her, confronting me even on a political level. I'm not sure how I would have responded. I might have responded in a like 'fuck off and go away and don't talk to me about this' way but I think we needed somebody to do that (Interview 12).

Similarly, Jill reported that after the fact a friend "told me that my partner had a reputation for doing this in the community....I was really angry at that. Why didn't anybody tell me? If anybody was concerned ...why didn't anybody tell me that?" (Interview 7). Elizabeth also felt that "it might not have mattered what anyone had said to me then...and it might have too. You never know how much these things tweak in the back of your head" (Interview 3). These feelings were echoed in Colette's statement that "it shouldn't be the sole responsibility of the ex-abusee to watch out for the new people in that partner's life" (Interview 1).

Faced with the possibility that "there are so many women out there who are all by themselves and a lot don't want to talk" (Interview 6), and because respondents like Elizabeth "find

the system out there really quite scary" (Interview 3), the need for community-based systems and resources that promote awareness and encourage disclosure was emphasized. At the time of their abuse in provinces across Canada, no informal or formal lesbian-specific systems or resources were available to any of the respondents and none currently exist within their local community. Some respondents like Dana, Elizabeth, and Suzanna spoke to the role and responsibility of gay/lesbian organizations in formulating a community code of ethics that addresses the problem of lesbian partner abuse. Based on their own frustration and knowledge or suspicion that partners would repeat their abuse, they suggested that a community code of ethics should, above all else, address abuser accountability. For example, Dana is still angry that her abuser has

never been held accountable for anything she's done. She got away with it and I mean I know that she has continued it since then too. I know that she hasn't made any changes in her life so there's just one woman after another that has been victimized (Interview 5).

In Jill's words she "thinks [abusers] need to have support and they need to know that their behaviour is unacceptable....They need to know that they can get some help but it's their responsibility and it's going to be their choice" (Interview 7). Elizabeth noted that

the most important thing is that we have accountability, we have penance, and we have forgiveness and inclusion at the end of it all so that together we can be

a stronger community and so that as human beings we have some system for working things out with each other (Interview 3).

As well as creating systems to deal with lesbian partner abuse and abusers, gay/lesbian organizations were perceived responsible for creating community-based resources. In Ellen's view, community-based programs "might help the people who are in situations realize that what this person is doing is abuse" (Interview 8). Access to written material on lesbian partner abuse was the resource of preference for six participants. According to Pat

it's one thing for someone to tell you but it's another thing for you to read it. I think you tend to realize it more if you're by yourself and you're actually reading it because you don't want to admit to other people that that's what you're going through (Interview 10).

Dana spoke to the 'safety' of print material in her comment that "I was reading the local gay paper at the time so if things like that had been advertised and talked about in that type of media I probably would have accessed something" (Interview 5). Like Dana, Heather noted that "written material would have been good because she didn't pay too much attention [to] what I was...reading" (Interview 9). The importance of accessibility is reflected in Elizabeth's call for "pamphlets of any kind" (Interview 3), and Lisa's opinion that "I think you have to reach people so handouts or posters of some kind are a good idea initially" (Interview 6). The importance of lesbian-specific books on the subject of partner

abuse is reflected in Jill's statement that "one of the most important things was reading Naming the Violence. That was probably a godsend" (Interview 7).

Four respondents favoured gay/lesbian telephone crisis lines. For Elizabeth the benefit derives from the fact that "there's an anonymity; there's information; there's usually, hopefully, a person on that line that...can be friendly and warm and say, if nothing else, if you're feeling shitty, come out to this or that" (Interview 3). Despite the fact that Dana wasn't sure whether she would have accessed one, she believed that a lesbian crisis line "would have been great while I was still in the relationship - someone to call to talk" (Interview 5). Similarly, Clara explained that "I think the phone line is good because of the isolation that people do feel and because of the shame and feeling judged by others" (Interview 12). Two respondents, however, were not in favour of gay/lesbian telephone crisis lines. Suzanna said that she "identifies phone lines with tele-care" (Interview 4) and Pat noted that she would not have called (Interview 10).

On the viability of lesbian-only groups in reducing abused lesbians' isolation and providing support, Clara, Jill, and Manon felt that it would have helped them to attend a support group while they were in their relationships (Interviews 12, 7, 11). In Jill's words, it "would have been really

beneficial to get together with other women and to hear them because there is so much isolation and feeling that you're alone" (Interview 7). Like Jill, Manon felt that "for me it would have been breaking the silence and being serious about it and being connected [to other lesbians]" (Interview 11). Dana perceived that access to a support group after her relationship ended would have helped her "hear from other women that it has happened to them and this is what it was and this is where they are now in their lives" (Interview 5). At the same time, Ellen, Manon, and Suzanna spoke to the fact that support groups for abused lesbians may be less practical for women who, like themselves, are "shy" (Interview 11) or uncomfortable "getting personal with a whole group of people" (Interviews 8, 4). Abused lesbians who, like Heather, weren't "allowed anywhere...without her" (Interview 9) may also be constrained from attending support groups. Fear of confidentiality was an obvious deterrent to Pat who felt that based on her past exposure to lesbian-only groups, "I couldn't be open and honest...because of the fact that...anonymity is bullshit" (Interview 10).

Other respondents believed that the community's practical efforts to assist abused lesbians need to go beyond the creation of written material on lesbian partner abuse, a gay/lesbian telephone crisis line, and support groups for abused lesbians. Elizabeth highlighted the need to lobby for

the inclusion of gay/positive images and sex education in primary and secondary schools (Interview 3) so "you don't get all fucked up that it's a woman you're falling in love with...and end up with somebody that isn't suited but just because she's a woman". Suzanna envisaged an educational campaign "partnered with existing agencies" (Interview 4). Of educational outreach, Colette noted that "the community always ends up doing the work but you need legislation and money and everything else from the government" (Interview 1). For Suzanna, an "elder program" similar to peer supports or 12-step program 'sponsors' would have been "the only thing that would have helped me" (Interview 4). In her view

there are enough people in the [lesbian] community who have had enough experience in life and live 'balanced' lives, whatever that might be, but they can recognize [that] I'm going through a bad time and to come up and say 'I've been around. You're a nice person. I know [that] you're going through a hard time because I can see it. If you ever want to talk, call me - here's my number'. That's it; that's all (Interview 4).

While she acknowledged that shelters for abused women are valuable in ensuring that "nobody gets killed", Colette stressed the need to create a place for abused lesbians "to go that is not necessarily your friends'...to have a third party type of thing" (Interview 1). The themes of lesbians' relationship to women and their relationship to community resurfaced via participants' unanimous agreement that community-initiated resources must include lesbian abusers. For instance, France envisaged the existence of a group that would

include abused and abusive lesbians committed to "a deeper level of communicating" about relationships than traditional support groups (Interview 2). Colette advocated a community-wide "public education [campaign] that touches both [abused and abusive lesbians]... [because] if you don't attack the whole problem then you're missing a big part which is the abuser who...keeps going" (Interview 1). In Pat's opinion

we read about abuse in heterosexual relationships in the regular papers and slowly you're starting to see the gay aspect and I think that it has to be brought out more because a lot of the women, especially the abusers, don't pick up our magazines so they're not seeing the articles. But if they were to pick up a mainstream newspaper and boom, it's staring them right in the face, maybe they would think twice (Interview 10).

In this section respondents have, based on their experiences of partner abuse in lesbian communities across Canada, spoken to established and emerging themes of silence at all levels of analysis. The next section will address some limitations of this study, summarize and discuss its findings, and highlight areas in which more research is required.

Discussion and Conclusion

Across North America the subject of lesbian partner abuse has been and continues to be characterized by a tradition of silence. Since 1983, less than a dozen academics have conducted research in this area. As a result, much of the information circulating as fact in the same-sex literature is either speculative, or generalized from what has been learned of heterosexual partner abuse over the past twenty years. Despite the lack of statistics on lesbian partner abuse, as yet there is no reason to believe that it is any less prevalent or any less important than the problem of heterosexual partner abuse.

This study explores the same-sex literature's assumptions about silence on lesbian partner abuse. In contrasting and comparing the literatures on heterosexual and lesbian partner abuse, lesbian-specific variables emerged, suggesting that silence is 'kept' for different reasons among lesbians. These unique or exacerbated silencing factors were probed in semi-structured interviews with twelve abused lesbians. For all its merits, the interview method was limited in its ability to fully answer my questions about silence on lesbian partner abuse. First, the sample could not and did not represent all lesbians' experiences of partner abuse. Abused lesbians who are not aware of or in regular contact with gay/lesbian or women's communities, those who are very isolated by or fearful

of their female abusers, or differently located abused lesbians who, because of disability, ethnicity, sexual practice, and other factors are marginalized within lesbian communities may not have been conscious of or able to participate in this study. Given these and other limitations, the interviews could not and did not capture all dimensions and details of silence. Accordingly, the silencing themes, particularly those that received little support like shame, fear of abuser retaliation, and concern for children, merit further investigation. Ethical concerns also constrained my efforts to know more about lesbian partner abuse. For instance, despite my interest in pursuing the revelation that three respondents abused former female partners (Interviews 2, 10, 11), because they had consented to be interviewed as abused lesbians I judged that probing the point would violate the basis of our agreement and exploit their trust. As well, while I had originally intended to investigate how respondents interpreted different kinds of abuse, their observable reticence, coupled with the lack of follow-up resources for abused lesbians in the event of triggered, disclosure-based trauma (Harber & Pennebaker, 1992:371), dissuaded me from pursuing that line of inquiry. Analytically, the individual, social and community categories were quite useful. Academics developing theories, supports, or working on other facets of lesbian partner abuse should, however, be aware of their tendency to overlap and prepared for the often difficult task

of differentiating one category from another (Appendices 5, 6). For example, lack of awareness and perceptions of homophobia may deter individual abused lesbians from approaching social agencies, like the police. Conversely, the lack of lesbian-positive information generated by social institutions may limit lesbians' knowledge of partner abuse and perpetuate homophobia.

Despite the fact that the sample was small, non-random, and white, the voices of these abused lesbians casts new light on the themes and influences purported to 'silence', or deter lesbians from naming, telling, and speaking of their abuse at individual, social, and community levels of analysis. First of all, 'silence' is the act of not naming abuse. While respondents provided little support for the same-sex literature's speculations at individual and social levels, at the level of the community, their belief in a lesbian 'utopia' and their lack of awareness of lesbian partner abuse due to the community's inaction on the subject were found to be major constraints on their ability to name their abuse.

As well as not naming, 'silence' is the act of not telling others of the abuse. For example, at an individual level, respondents were, as suggested in the same-sex literature, constrained from telling of their abuse due to their isolation. They did express concern with the effects of

abuser disclosure on their job security, the potentially negative ramifications of disclosing their lesbianism to their families of origin, and the possibility of fueling families' anti-lesbian sentiment if the abuse was disclosed. Beyond the literature's established themes, however, the indirect, mediating influence of community emerged from discussions of silence at all levels of analysis. At an individual level this mediating effect is seen, for instance, in the finding that respondents who were just 'coming out', lacked friendship networks, or were new to the area were more isolated than others. As one respondent, Elizabeth, recalled "because she was the first woman that I had been with I had nobody to really tell that would understand" (Interview 3). Suzanna noted that "I didn't know anybody [and] these people are...in the community and I'm new so it's unlikely you can really talk with anybody about that [abuse]" (Interview 4). At a social level, respondents' failure to tell about their abuse was affected not by 'real' homophobia, as the same-sex literature suggests, but by their lack of knowledge of rights and resources and their preference for community-based, rather than institutional resources. As France explained, "I need to believe in our system, whatever system it will become, but in the lesbian community" (Interview 2). In addition to speaking to the community's indirect silencing effects, respondents also spoke to its direct silencing influence. Telling others about their abuse was found to be unusual, selective, and

almost always event-specific, or triggered by the need for family or community members' support in leaving abusers. All respondents agreed that the lack of community-based systems and resources for abused lesbians played a major role in discouraging their disclosure. Although a few respondents spoke to the suggestion that lesbians may fail to disclose because partners could label them abusive or distort the reasons for the break-up of relationships, they credited such problems to the judgemental nature of the lesbian community, rather than individual abusers. For example, Elizabeth stated that "the trouble with our community is that it's condemning" (Interview 3).

As well as not naming and not telling, 'silence' is the act of not speaking of or politicizing abuse. As with 'naming', the individual themes suggested in the same-sex literature had little silencing effect on this particular group of abused lesbians. The emerging theme of lesbians' relationship or bond to women did, however, discourage them from speaking out about their abuse. Individual respondents suggested that because of misogyny-based empathy with their female abusers, they believed that they made more allowances or excuses for their behaviour than they would have if they had been male. In Jill's opinion "there's so many negative attitudes around being a lesbian and the thought that I could tell someone that this person that I love and trusted and another woman was

putting me through a lot of abuse I just couldn't imagine" (Interview 7). At a social level, a few respondents reported that they failed to speak out because they perceived a need to protect their abusers from misogyny within the criminal justice system. Participants' beliefs echoed Elizabeth's statement that "the law is built around men, and for men, and by men and not enough of that has changed" (Interview 3). Even more support was found for the literature's community-based themes. For example, because of concern for its internal solidarity, some respondents failed to speak out about abusive community leaders and all respondents still protect their abusers' identities from the lesbian community-at-large. France captured this concern in her statement that "within our own community we have a certain amount of respect for the fact that we know what people can lose if they are discovered so maybe we just tend to leave well enough alone" (Interview 2). Regarding their concern for the community's external image, all respondents acknowledged that speaking out about lesbian partner abuse could fuel anti-lesbian sentiment.

These and other findings suggest that, contrary to the same-sex literature's assumption, respondents' silence is more strongly affected by the lesbian community's response than either social homophobia or individual factors like shame, denial, or love for abusers. They highlight the fact that community not only has indirect effects via its impact on

individual and social factors, but it also makes a direct contribution to lesbians' silence on partner abuse. The significant influence of community has important implications for future strategies, theories, and research.

For one, the finding that unique features shape abused lesbians' silence speaks to the fact that strategies replicating heterosexual models are unlikely to assist abused lesbians. As well, the silencing effects of the community's response and respondents' preference for community-generated systems and resources, rather than institutional supports, speaks to the challenge of overcoming community codes of silence, the need for consciousness-raising within rural and urban lesbian communities, and the question of how to inspire commitment and action-oriented initiatives in lesbian and gay/lesbian community organizations.

As far as theorizing lesbian partner abuse, most existing theories of heterosexual partner abuse fail to acknowledge and explain either lesbian-specific themes of silence or the particular silencing role of lesbian communities. As a result, they silence abused lesbians who, like the two respondents who identified as feminist at the time of their abuse, were unable to name their abuse because they believed that only men could be its perpetrators (Interviews 7, 12). By most feminist accounts, the "social problem" (Dobash &

Dobash, 1992:32) of partner abuse is an extension and manifestation of sex-based inequality and unequal gender relations that pervade society and typify the institution of the heterosexual family (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:2, Green et al, 1986). As far as agency is concerned, most feminist theories of heterosexual partner abuse propose that its solution lies in "the elimination of male dominance within the family and society" (Dobash & Dobash, 1992:246). The tendency to generalize gendered feminist theories of heterosexual partner abuse to lesbian partner abuse has attracted very little scholarly attention. One social scientist, Mary Eaton (1994:207), believes that "heteronormative frameworks" (Eaton, of explanation are inadequate. She notes that their presumption of sameness overlooks crucial differences between heterosexual and lesbian partner abuse. She also cautions that theories of heterosexual partner abuse run the danger of presuming gendered behaviours between lesbians. Instead, Eaton (1994:219) proposes the creation of theories that are based on lesbians' "invisibility", and that go beyond individual to social levels of explanation. While I support Eaton's suggestion that feminist theories of lesbian partner abuse must embrace both individual and social levels of explanation, I believe that it does not go far enough. Specifically, the individual-social paradigm Eaton proposes obscures community levels of explanation that this research found to be key and critical. The search for feminist

theories of lesbian partner abuse has led Eaton and a few others to speculate that it may be a response to lesbians' experience of homophobia or internalized homophobia. In my view, theories of lesbian partner abuse based on homophobia and internalized homophobia are inadequate explanations - for example, because they fail to explain abuse between 'out and proud' lesbians, and because community-based themes, rather than social homophobia, were found to be primary silencing influences on this study's participants. That few people have explored the alternative 'fit' of misogyny-based theories suggests that lesbians may avoid ideas about power and the role of misogyny-based theories because of their desire to preserve communities' notion of a lesbian 'utopia' in which egalitarian power relations are purported to be not only a norm, but a superior feature of those relationships. In future attempts to theorize lesbian partner abuse, I suggest that if the whole story of lesbian 'invisibility' is to be told, individual, social, and community levels of silence must be acknowledged, explained, and integrated. As well, based on evidence of its silencing influence at all levels of analysis, the potential link between misogyny and lesbian partner abuse merits further investigation and theoretical speculation.

As well as informing future strategies and theories on lesbian partner abuse, this study's evidence of lesbian-specific silencing distinctions and the community's silencing influence

bespeaks the need for further research. For example, the contradiction between respondents' lack of support for 'real' homophobia as a theme of silence and the popularity of homophobia-based conceptualizations of silence in the same-sex literature points to the need to investigate homophobia within social institutions. Given that the same-sex literature is predisposed to generalize findings of heterosexual partner abuse to lesbian partner abuse, we also need to know more about lesbian-specific definitions and experiences of partner abuse. As well, the importance of community to abused lesbians' experience of silence suggests the need for information on how support varies within and among differently located groups of lesbians, community friendship networks, and organizations, and how those discrepancies influence abused lesbians' silence. In pursuing these or other aspects of lesbian partner abuse academics should, however, be aware that abused and non-abused lesbians may be reluctant to share their 'insider' knowledge of community with researchers on the 'outside'.

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Interview Advertisement

LESBIAN PARTNER ABUSE PROJECT

If you have ever experienced economic, emotional, physical, property, psychological, sexual, verbal and/or other abuse by a lesbian partner or are concerned about partner abuse in our lesbian community, I would like to include your experience and thoughts in my master's thesis in sociology at Carleton University. Your participation in this project will increase our body of knowledge of lesbian partner abuse, and help us design services that address lesbians' needs. Please call me, Catherine Browning, at XXX-XXXX, to arrange a safe and totally confidential interview. Thank you.

Letter of consent

I am in the process of gathering personal and general information on lesbian partner abuse, in partial fulfillment of my master's degree requirements in sociology at Carleton University. The subject of my thesis is "Silence on Same-Sex Partner Abuse in Lesbian Communities". This interview will focus on your experience of, or thoughts on this phenomenon.

Your participation in this project will require one interview in a safe location of your choice, for a period not to exceed three hours. You are free to stop or withdraw from this interview process at any time, for whatever reason. Equally, you are free to respond only to those questions with which you are comfortable, without penalty.

This letter of consent clarifies the nature of my research, my responsibilities as a researcher, and your rights as a respondent. Any complaints relating to this interview process may be communicated to Flo Andrews, Chair of the Sociology Department, Carleton University.

With regard to confidentiality, the following precautions will be taken.

- . I will personally transcribe each tape recorded interview.
- . I will erase each interview tape after transcription.
- . I will eliminate any identifying information from the transcripts of this interview, from my thesis product, and from any speeches, research, or articles or books not yet written or published.
- . To protect your anonymity, you will not be asked to sign this letter of consent. Instead, a typed copy of this agreement will be included in my thesis as the only proof of our confidentiality agreement.

For your interest, a copy of my thesis will be available for your perusal in the library of Pink Triangle Services, 2nd Floor, 71 Bank Street, as soon as possible after it is defended and bound. Thank you very much for your time and input.

Catherine Browning

Interview Probes

Individual level of silence

1. Isolation
 - . fear abuser will disclose sexual orientation
 - . fear disclosure lesbianism to families of origin
 - . emotional dependence/intimacy of the relationships
 - . loss ethnic community if lesbianism/abuse is disclosed
- ...unplanned prompts
 - . were you 'out of the closet' at the time of the abuse
 - . how did you/your partner feel about being a lesbian
 - . to whom, if anyone, did you confide the abuse
 - . did you perceive that anyone was aware of the abuse
 - . did you disclose the abuse to your family of origin
2. Shame
 - . influence of feminist politics
 - . influence of larger physical size
3. Denial
 - . myth 'mutual' abuse
 - . myth 'lover's quarrel'
 - . stereotypes of abused/abusive lesbians
 - . gendered feminist analysis partner abuse
4. Love
 - . effect labelling partner 'abusive'
 - . effect on abusers' friendships
 - . empathy with specific/common childhood histories abuse
 - . empathy with shared experiences misogyny
- ...unplanned prompts
 - . does abuse by a woman differ from abuse by a man
5. Fear of retaliation
6. Child-related concerns

Social level of silence

1. Police
 - . nature of response
 - . level of awareness: mutual abuse/lover's quarrel
 - . ability to protect lesbians and their children
2. Legal
 - . nature of response
 - . abuser accountability
 - . protection orders
 - . co-habitation requirements
3. Medical
 - . nature of response
 - . confidentiality of treatment
 - . confidentiality of treatment records
4. Mental
 - . nature of response
 - . assessment of therapists' attitudes
 - . assessment of 'couple therapy' model
- ...unplanned prompts
 - . during abuse or after end relationship
 - . therapist male or female
 - . therapist heterosexual or lesbian
5. Shelters
 - . awareness/use of shelters
 - . confidentiality/safety concerns

Community level of silence

1. Concern for internal solidarity community
 - . perceived effect on themselves/abuser
 - . potential false labelling by abuser
 - . risk of exposing community leaders
2. Concern for external image community
 - . perceived heterosexual reaction
 - . deter women 'coming out'
3. Ideological factors of silence
 - . belief in a lesbian 'utopia'
 - . belief in heterosexual model partner abuse
4. Inaction on same-sex partner abuse
 - . perceived community awareness/support

Interview Questions

Talk to me about what you know and think of lesbian partner abuse.

Did the abuse change over the years?

What kind(s) of abuse did you experience?

Are all kinds of abuse equally harmful?

Did you co-habit with your partner at the time of the abuse?

How do you define lesbian 'community'?

To whom, if anyone, did you confide the abuse at that time?

To whom, if anyone, did you confide the abuse afterwards?

How long were you intimately involved with your abuser?

At what point did you name your abuser's behaviour 'abuse'?

Were you helped in leaving your abuser? By whom?

Is lesbian partner abuse discussed by your lesbian friends?

Have you/are you willing to help abused lesbians?

What kind of resources would have helped you?

What, if any, resources should be created for abused lesbians?

Who should be responsible for the creation of these resources?

In what ways, if any, has your experience or knowledge of lesbian partner abuse affected you?

What, if any, kinds of resources should be created for lesbian abusers?

Do you have anything that you would like to add on this topic?

Themes of Silence

Established Themes

Emerging Themes

Individual Level

Isolation
Shame
Denial
Love
Abuser Retaliation
Child-Related Concerns

Relationship to Women
Relationship to Community

Social Level

Homophobia/heterosexism
Ignorance

Relationship to Women
Relationship to Community
Knowledge of Rights/Resources
Knowledge of Lesbian Partner Abuse

Community Level

Internal Solidarity
External Image
Lesbian Utopia
Feminist Analyses
Community Inaction

Relationship to Women
Relationship to Community
Knowledge of Lesbian Partner Abuse

Proposed Major Themes of Silence

Reported Major Themes of Silence

Response to Established Themes of SilenceIndividual Level of Analysis

1. Isolation		
fear abuser disclosure on job security	1	(Interview 4)
fear disclosure lesbianism on family relationships	4	(Interviews 3, 4, 10, 11)
fear anti-lesbianism if disclose abuse to family	2	(Interviews 1, 12)
selective disclosure abuse to some family members	7	(Interviews 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)
late disclosure abuse to some family members	5	(Interviews 2, 5, 6, 8, 9)
fail to identify as lesbian	0	
2. Shame		
larger physical size did not prevent abuse	0	
feminist politics did not prevent abuse	1	(Interview 12)
3. Denial		
due to retaliation in self-defence	0	
due to gendered feminist analyses of partner abuse	1	(Interview 12)
due to stereotypes abusers	0	
4. Love		
empathy abusers' or common experiences childhood abuse	0	
belief love crucial to abusers' survival	1	(Interview 7)
5. Abuser Retaliation		
fear disclosure lesbianism	0	
6. Child-related Concerns	0	

Social Level of Silence

1. Police		
perceived homophobia	3	(Interviews 5, 11, 12)
reported homophobia	0	
perceived ignorance	3	
will minimize abuse		(Interview 6, 9)
will see as mutual		(Interview 1)
fear removal children	0	
2. Legal		
perceived homophobia	1	(Interview 1)
reported homophobia	0	
fear impact on job/safety	0	
concern protection orders/ conditions	0	
double standards lesbians	0	
fear removal children	0	
3. Mental Health		
perceived homophobia	0	
reported homophobia	0	
distrust couples' therapy	0	
4. Medical Health		
perceived homophobia	0	
reported homophobia	0	
perceived ignorance	0	
concern confidentiality records of abuse	0	
concern abuser will be present at treatment	0	
5. Shelters		
perceived homophobia	0	
reported homophobia	0	
fear confidentiality	0	

Response to Established Themes of SilenceCommunity Level of Analysis

disclosure unusual	6	(Interviews 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11)
disclosure event-specific: physical abuse	3	(Interviews 1, 2, 8)
disclosure event-specific: decision to leave	11	(Interviews 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)
1. Fear internal solidarity perceive false labelling by abusers	2	(Interviews 3, 12)
report abusers' distorted rationale for break-ups	3	(Interviews 6, 7, 10)
reluctant expose abusive community leaders	3	(Interviews 1, 4, 6)
2. Fear external image reluctant to fuel anti-lesbian sentiment	12	(Interviews 1-12)
3. Belief lesbian 'utopia':	8	(Interviews 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12)
4. Belief feminist analyses	2	(Interviews 7, 12)
5. Community inaction	12	(Interviews 1-12)

Response to Emerging Themes of SilenceIndividual Level of Analysis

Isolation

lack community reln: just coming out	1	(Interview 3)
lack community reln: no friendship networks	2	(Interviews 1, 7)
lack community reln: new to the area	2	(Interviews 4, 5)
Love		
reln to women: allowances/excuses abusers	8	(Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12)

Social Level of Analysis

relationship to community: its support not legal	1	(Interview 2)
relationship to community: its support not shelters	3	(Interview 2, 5, 11)
relationship to women: protect abusers from police	2	(Interviews 3, 7)
relationship to women: protect abusers from criminal justice system	2	(Interviews 3, 5)
lack awareness rights and resources police and legal	4	(Interviews 3, 4, 10, 12)
lack awareness rights and resources shelters	2	(Interviews 1, 7)

Community Level of Analysis

relationship to community: false labelling its problem	5	(Interviews 2, 3, 4, 5, 11)
relationship to community: protect abusers' identities	12	(Interviews 1-12)
relationship to community: its responsibility for creating systems/resources	12	(Interviews 1-12)

END

0 3-0 6-9|6

FIN