

Domestic Violence Against Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender People of Color

Heterosexism, homophobia, and transphobia are likely to be the primary social oppressions faced by white lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) victims; these interact with racism to complicate the situation for victims of color. LGBT people may encounter homophobia/transphobia in situations that are supposed to be safe for people of color, and racism in places that are supposed to be safe for LGBT people.

Triple Jeopardy

LGBT victims of color encounter a kind of triple-jeopardy:

- RACISM among DV advocates and in LGBT community
- HETEROSEXISM in community of color
- DOMESTIC VIOLENCE involving additional abusive tactics

Racism among service providers and authorities.

LGBT survivors of color are usually not in policy-making and leadership positions in DV service agencies, so advocates may not consider their perspectives, or may not be aware of, important parts of their experience, including:

- Their experience of encountering helpers (even in shelters and support groups that are promoted as safe for victims) and authorities who make stereotypical assumptions:
 - That the partner of color in a racially mixed relationship is likely to be the abuser.
 - That people of color are more aggressive and more likely to fight back than white victims (making it particularly unlikely that authorities will recognize the fact that they are being abused).
- The reluctance of victims of color to report their partners to the criminal justice system, because:
 - police and courts respond much more strongly to violence *by* people of color than to violence *against* them,
 - they don't want their partner to be exposed to racist attacks in jail (and abusers may use this to keep their partners from calling the police).

- The conflicting loyalties that can trap LGBT victims of color in relationships with abusers.
 - For instance, "...many lesbians of color who are experiencing relationship violence express a need to protect both their communities and themselves from the retaliation of the dominant White and heterosexual society that would use lesbian battering to further stigmatize and oppress them."
- The need to protect their community of color can affect an LGBT victim of color's choices about whether and where to seek services.

Racism in LGBT communities.

Primarily white LGBT agencies may view the concerns of people of color as diversionary or irrelevant to LGBT work, leading people of color to feel excluded from LGBT spaces and organizations. Again, they may not be included in policy-making and leadership positions. LGBT victims of color may feel pressure to "choose" which identity is most central to them (either you're black or you're gay).

Homophobia and transphobia in communities of color.

Some communities of color may not want to recognize that LGBT people of color exist, much less affirm them. They may try to "protect themselves from further racist attack by dissociating themselves from 'social deviants' [LGBT people] that not even White people want to have in their midst." Communities of color may see LGBT people of color as betraying their community by choosing to live their sexual identity rather than perpetuate the community by marrying and having children. (This is an example of how a stereotype of LGBT people--that they don't have children--interacts with racism, which makes the community feel that its existence is threatened).

Race-related tactics

- Using racial epithets & negative racial stereotypes.
- Using partner's reluctance to involve police and knowledge of history of police abuse of people of color to discourage them from seeking help.

Victim is person of color

The abuser may batter by:

- Using white (or light skin) privilege.
- Using master/slave S/M scenes.
- Exploiting partner's internalized racism.
- Outing or threatening to out partner to family, or others in community of color.

Abuser is person of color

If the victim is white, the abuser may batter by:

- Blaming own abusiveness on partner's use of white privilege.
- Dismissing partner's objection to violence as white uptightness.
- Labeling partner a racist for accusing them of abuse.
- Excusing own abusiveness as "culturally appropriate" communication or behavior.
- Insisting that *abuser* would be subjected to racist responses if partner sought help. (For instance, telling them that their calling the police would expose partner to racist attacks in jail.)

Difficulty Finding Help

Victims and perpetrators *do* encounter racist responses from helpers and authorities; the knowledge that this may happen can *also* be used by abusers to confuse and immobilize their partners. Victims of color frequently encounter service providers and authorities who:

- Are *both* racist and homophobic/transphobic.
- Believe that it's *normal* for people of color to live with abuse.
- Are not sensitive to DV, *and* racism, *and* homophobia *and* transphobia.
- Have a history of hostile response to both LGBT people and people of color (treating victims as perpetrators, seeing violence as mutual, etc.).
- Locate services only in white communities.
- Apply a one-size-fits-all approach to domestic violence.

SUMMARY: Advocates and service providers should:

- Not assume that one form of oppression has a greater effect than others on the experience of an individual LGBT victim of color.
- Not assume that the domestic violence is more significant than the social oppression – or vice versa.
- Remember that LGBT victims of color also live with the possibility of violence from whites because of their race, and from heterosexuals of any race because of their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Individual victims' fear of encountering racist responses from others, or of being accused of racism themselves, can be used by their abusive partners as controlling tactics. (Remember that people can be controlled and damaged through any area of their lives in which they feel themselves to be particularly vulnerable.)

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