



Wednesday Workshop: Supporting Survivors of Sexual and Domestic Violence

Podcast Transcript

Season 3 Episode 9: June 2, 2021

Domestic Violence & Sexual Abuse in the LGBTQ+ Community

Presented by Marissa, Adult Domestic Violence Advocate, and
Nouchee, Dual Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Advocate

NOUCHEE: Hello and welcome to The Women's Center Wednesday Workshop, a podcast that shares helpful insight for survivors, community members, and service providers alike. The Women's Center is based out of Waukesha, Wisconsin. We welcome and serve survivors of all ages, races, gender identities, sexual orientations, abilities, nationalities, and immigration statuses. The mission of The Women's Center is to provide safety, shelter, and support to empower all impacted by domestic abuse, sexual violence, child abuse, and trafficking. Each episode will feature instruction on a healing topic. Today, our topic is Domestic Violence & Sexual Abuse in the LGBTQ+ Community. We are your hosts, my name is Nouchee and I'm the Dual Domestic Abuse/Sexual Violence Advocate.

MARISSA: And my name is Marissa. I'm the Adult Domestic Violence Advocate here with The Women's Center. June is pride month where we honor and celebrate those of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, plus other identities under this umbrella term including intersex, asexual, non-binary and more. We will include a link to a glossary put together by PFLAG on our website. So follow along if there are any terms that you're not quite sure about that we don't define here.

Pride Month is held each year in June in the United States to commemorate the Stonewall demonstrations, which took place in June of 1969 in New York City. During that time, being of the LGBTQ+ community in public was essentially illegal in almost every state. This was upheld so tightly that bars and restaurants could get shut down for having employees or serving patrons who were out or openly LGBTQ+. The Stonewall Inn was a safe haven for the LGBTQ community. Police raids on gay bars were common at that time. However, on this day, the patrons at Stonewall decided to fight back against the oppression and sparked a movement.

Liberation Day was held on June 28th, 1970 and sparked the first anniversary of the Stonewall demonstrations. With pride marches in Los Angeles and Chicago, these were

the first pride marches for the LGBTQ+ community in the US history. The next year pride marches took place in Boston, Dallas, Milwaukee, London, Paris, West Berlin, and Stockholm. We will link more information about the Stonewall demonstrations and the origin of pride.

So again, this month we recognize and celebrate pride month while acknowledging the unique challenges that LGBTQ+ survivors of domestic and sexual violence face. Every day and always, all genders and sexualities are welcome here. And alongside the plentiful amount of resources we have to accompany this podcast, we've also created another Spotify playlist for you to celebrate pride. Again, all of these will be on our website: www.twcwaukesha.org/podcasts

NOUCHEE: We wanted to give a content/trigger warning as we will begin this podcast by discussing different forms of abuse and barriers that the LGBTQ+ community regularly faces. As always, please continue to listen only as it remains helpful to you. If at any time you experience a trigger and would like additional support, The Women's Center, your local DV/SA organization, LGBTQ+ hotlines, and national hotlines are all available to you whenever you need. We will also share affirmations for LGBTQ+ victims and survivors, as well as local and national resources in the final portion of this podcast.

MARISSA: So in order to paint a better picture of what's going on, we wanted to share some statistics. Research shows that LGBTQ+ members fall victim to domestic violence at equal or even higher rates compared to their cisgender or heterosexual counterparts, and that's via The National Network to End Domestic Violence. They also say that 44% of lesbian women and 61% of bisexual women experienced rape, physical violence, or stalking by current or former intimate partners.

Studies also show that 40% of gay men and 47% of bisexual men have experienced sexual violence as well. Gender, sexual orientation and transgender identity based violence impacts not only survivors' physical safety, but also their emotional and economic safety. And sexual orientation ranks as the third highest motivator for hate crime incidents.

Looking at statistics specific to the transgender community, via the Violence Against Women network, nearly half or 47% of respondents were sexually assaulted at some point in their lifetime, and one in 10 were sexually assaulted in the past year. In communities of color, these numbers were higher. 53% of black respondents were sexually assaulted in their lifetime, and 13% were sexually assaulted in the last year.

There also can be barriers in accessing services as well, and this is via Room to Be Safe, a local partner of ours and a program of Diverse and Resilient. According to their 2019 Milwaukee Pridefest survey, 87% of respondents would feel most comfortable getting support from an LGBTQ+ organization, rather than a mainstream, or not specific to LGBTQ+ issues, organization if they were a victim of violence. The Pridefest survey was voluntary based on surveys completed, which was a sample size of 951 participants.

Though this disparity of accessing supportive services is important to note, it may not reflect all LGBTQ+ individuals across Wisconsin and the US. But again, these are important statistics to keep in the back of our minds when we're talking about this issue.

NOUCHEE: We talk about power and control wheels often and we wanted to present some specific tactics that abusers may use against victim/survivors who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. We will link this wheel on our website as well. One way that an abuser may exert power control is by using coercion and threats. And specific to the LGBTQ+ community, this can look like threatening to out you without your consent or reveal publicly that you are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Economic abuse is another way that abusers may exert power and control. And this can look like threatening to out you to an employer in hopes of getting you fired. While gender identity and sexuality are federally protected classes, individuals who are at will employees may be fired for, “another reason” after an employer finds out that they are part of the LGBTQ+ community.

Emotional Abuse- so questioning if you're a “real” gay, lesbian, “real” man or woman, using slurs against you, purposefully using the wrong pronouns or dead name, which is the name that a trans or non-binary person was likely born with but no longer identifies with, when referring to you.

Using Isolation, so saying no one will believe you especially due to your identity.

Denying, minimizing and blaming- so saying women can't abuse women, men can't abuse men, that LGBTQ plus relationships are non-violent, or blaming your identity as a stressor in the relationship.

Using children- so threatening to tell your ex-spouse or authorities that you're LGBTQ+ in hopes that they will take the children away.

Privilege is another tactic. So using privilege or the ability to “pass”. For example, to look like you are cisgender to discredit you, put you in danger, cut off your access to resources or use the system against you.

And lastly, intimidation. So using looks, actions, gestures to reinforce homophobic, biphobic or transphobic control. And Marissa will explain what these terms mean next.

MARISSA: Yes, so on the outside of the power and control wheel, it shows that abusive tactics are upheld by large scale oppression against the LGBTQ+ community. To define a couple of those terms, homophobia is the animosity, hatred, and/or bias based off of a person's sexuality being outside the “norm”, or in other words, not straight. Homophobia is enforced by heterosexism, which favors straightness as the default or normal human sexuality.

Sometimes homophobia is used as an umbrella term to discuss all biases against the LGBTQ+ community, though there are more specific terms for biases against certain identities. For example, biphobia is animosity, hatred, and/or bias based off of somebody's attraction to multiple genders. This can look like not seeing bisexuality as valid. So, claiming that somebody is pretending to be gay or pretending to be straight based off of their partner, or saying that all bisexuals are cheaters or promiscuous and so on.

Transphobia is the animosity, hatred, and/or bias based off of someone's gender identity being different than their assigned sex at birth. This can look like, again, not using someone's correct name or pronouns, as well as excluding trans people from bathrooms or harming or killing trans people based off of their identity. To give an example of this, black trans women are disproportionately murdered in the United States, so we can see that oppression really has a major role here to play in the power and control that survivors face.

NOUCHEE: There are certain barriers for LGBTQ+ individuals seeking support for domestic violence and sexual assault. For most of this information, I will be quoting an article from thehotline.org. So, one reason why someone may not feel comfortable seeking support is the fear of isolation or ostracization from your family or community stemming from their prejudice. Abusive partners may use isolation to increase your dependence on them or limit your ability to access support. If you haven't come out publicly yet or belong to a religious community, traditional family, or oppressive home environment, fear of what will happen when you reveal your identity might prevent you from seeking help. Depending on your social circumstances, a small or tight knit LGBTQ+ community can make you feel increasingly isolated if you fear no one will support you because your abuser is well liked.

Shame or embarrassment around your identity as a result of internalized homophobia can be another barrier to seek support. Abusive partners may try to exert power and control over your life by insulting you based on your insecurities, refusing to respect your pronouns or chosen name, attempting to shame you over how you choose to have sex, or threatening to out you to others.

Another barrier may be fear of not receiving services because of discrimination or stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people or relationships used to minimize the abuse you're experiencing. Abusive partners may try to convince you that you won't be supported if you seek help. Remember that there are service providers across the country that offer support, specifically to LGBTQ+ survivors, in organizations that serve all survivors of all identities.

Another barrier may be legal protections that vary state by state affecting your ability or willingness to seek legal recourse against your abusive partner. Something that we wanted to note is that the systems, like the legal or criminal justice system, don't always have an understanding or training on unique dynamics in LGBTQ+ relationships. For example, you may be inadvertently outed with your relationship or dead name in court

or erasing romantic connections while supporting a victim survivor of abuse. An example is seeing an altercation as a brawl or a cat fight, arresting or charging both victim/survivor and abuser over an altercation, and more.

MARISSA: And with this, we want to say loud and clear that abuse and hate are never your fault. And we want to break some myths and stigmas associated with DV/SA in this community.

So this is one typically associated with childhood sexual abuse and/or male survivors of abuse. Being that if your abuser was the same gender as you, then the abuse has “made you gay”. And another myth, this one using a heteronormative lense of abuse, so assuming that the man is an abuser and a woman is a victim. A myth that surviving abuse has “scared you off of men”, and now you're a lesbian because you've experienced abuse. These stigmas are not rooted in fact in any way, shape, or form. And they're mostly meant to disparage those who identify within the LGBTQ plus community.

Abuse does not make you gay, but in healing, you may gain insight about yourself that you may not have realized in the past. In healing from abuse, victim/survivors regain the power to make decisions for themselves free from the threat of violence. Oftentimes, this may lead a victim survivor to revisit their values and identity. We'll talk about this a little bit more broadly in our next podcast episode, Identity After Abuse, Who Am I?

We want you to know that your identity is valid, whether it's always stayed the same or if it changes from time to time. Gender and sexuality are fluid, meaning that your perception of self may change over time. For instance, originally thinking you're a lesbian, and figuring out that you're bisexual, coming out as transgender or non-binary later in life, discovering that you are asexual, and so on.

Questioning is a valid identity too. According to PFLAG, questioning describes those who are in the process of discovery and exploration about their sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, or a combination thereof. Questioning people can be of any age, so for many reasons, this may happen later in life. Questioning is a profoundly important process and one that does not imply that someone is choosing to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer. If you want more support and understanding or discovering your identity, you can find LGBTQ+ therapists or organizations. For instance, Psychology Today can filter by sexuality and/or gender. And LGBTQ+ community centers near you may also have some recommendations.

NOUCHEE: So we wanted to end the podcast with some affirmations and resources. We want to remind you that it's not okay for anyone to use your identity against you to cause harm. Remember that your identity is to be celebrated. There's nothing wrong with you and you did not cause this to happen. You are allowed to be in control of your identity and your story and you can share as much or as little as you want. You do not have to hide your identity to seek support. There are people and organizations that support you. You deserve a life free from hate whether interpersonal, systemic, and/or

anything in-between. Celebrate you and your identity. Some resources that we wanted to leave with you are:

- Room to Be Safe Anti-Violence Resource Warmline: 414-856-5428.
- The Milwaukee LGBT Community Center: 414-292-3070
- LGBT National Hotline: 888-843-4564
- The National Trans Lifeline: 877-565-8860

MARISSA: Thank you so much for joining us to learn more about Domestic Violence & Sexual Abuse in the LGBTQ+ Community. Again, our next episode will be about Identity After Abuse: Who Am I?

The Women's Center focuses our work in partnering with clients to overcome barriers and gain a life free from violence. Our work is grounded in equity, upheld by inclusion, accountability, self-reflection, and continual growth.

We believe that it is important for survivors to feel seen and heard. We believe that Black Lives Matter because we cannot end violence without addressing the distinct injustices that Black and Indigenous People of Color face. We know that all forms of oppression are ultimately connected, and when we center individuals most impacted, we are also supporting survivors who have faced any form of violence. While we are not experts in anti-racism work, we aspire to be allies in this movement; we all have a responsibility to contribute to unlearning racism and intersecting forms of oppression that take place in our communities.

If you would like to talk with an advocate about your own experience with abuse, please call our 24-Hour Hotline at 262.542.3828. Learn more about The Women's Center at www.twcwaukesha.org, and find the resources mentioned on this episode by clicking Resources, then Podcasts on our website. Thank you and be well.