

Spring 2014

Slachtofferhulp: An Analysis of the Amsterdam Police Department's Response to Lesbian Domestic Violence

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**Slachtofferhulp: An Analysis of the Amsterdam Police Department's
Response to Lesbian Domestic Violence**

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Europe, Netherlands, Amsterdam
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
The Netherlands: International Perspectives on Gender and Sexuality
SIT Study Abroad, Spring 2014

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Acknowledgments

I would like to give special thanks to my advisor, Josee Rothuizen for being an incredible mentor throughout the ISP period. She offered up so much of her time and effort to help me be successful in my endeavors as well as put me in contact with other professionals and interviewees. She was always willing to meet with me to discuss my research and was enthusiastic about my topic from the start. Josee certainly went above and beyond and I look forward to staying in touch with her. Many thanks go to my eight interviewees who gave up their personal time to meet with me and discuss this difficult topic. You each added so much insight to my research and were all lovely women to speak with and get to know. Thank you so much Yvette and Astrid for all the love and support you have given all of us this semester. You each put countless hours into making this semester safe, happy, and successful. I appreciate all that you have done for us and I would not have gotten this far in my research without you. Lastly, many thanks to the entire SIT staff, professors, lecturers, module coordinators, hosts, and of course, my peers and friends who have made this the experience of a lifetime. I have learned so much about not only gender and sexuality, but also about myself. Without such a comfortable learning environment and so many people to share my thoughts and opinions with, I would not have learned nearly as much as I did this semester.

Abstract

This independent study project examines the role that the Amsterdam Police Department plays in the context of lesbian domestic violence. Amsterdam is a city well-known for its tolerant culture and large LGBT community, yet there is little to no discussion between the government, the police, and the citizens of Amsterdam. This article examines the taboos surrounding lesbian domestic violence, perceptions of how the police are handling such cases, and asks who should be initiating discussions. Although the research looks at lesbian domestic violence as a general topic, it looks specifically at the way the Amsterdam Police Department networks Roze in Blauw and the Domestic Violence Unit address the reporting and underreporting of abusive cases amongst lesbians. This article provides the opinions and insights of police officers, LGBT therapists, researchers, and LGBT community members and analyzes what the Amsterdam Police has done in the past, what they are doing now, and what can be done in the future to address the specific needs of lesbians affected by domestic violence. The police have acknowledged that this is an issue they should be working on, but have not yet found the best way to spread awareness and handle the cases that come in. If Amsterdam can figure out a way to make this subject less taboo and more talked about, perhaps the rest of the Netherlands, Europe, and the world can keep the conversation flowing and break the silence surrounding lesbian domestic violence.

Introduction

Amsterdam is a city built on tolerance that works on local, national, and international levels to spread equality to the LGBT community. Known as the “gay capital of the world,” Amsterdam has enacted LGBT emancipation policies since 1980. The Netherlands recognizes gay rights as human rights, being the first country in the world to hold same-sex marriages in 2001. Over the years, Amsterdam policies have received awards at the national level for LGBT workplace safety and pride, LGBT anti-discrimination policies and practices, prevention of anti-gay violence, as well as several other LGBT attainments (City of Amsterdam: Factsheet Amsterdam LGBT Policy, p. 1). The city of Amsterdam, home to over 150 different cultures, has placed much stress on combatting violence against minority groups, especially the LGBT community. The most well-known of these combatants is Roze in Blauw, or the Pink and Blue Police.

Roze in Blauw is a unit within the police department exclusively in Amsterdam. Amsterdam solidified its title as the “gay capital of the world” during the 1998 Gay Games which took place throughout the city of Amsterdam. It was this historic event that brought over ten thousand LGBT members and allies to the Netherlands to celebrate LGBT sport, music, and art. According to member of the Amsterdam Police Department Marja Lust,

“In Amsterdam there was a group of gay and straight officers who said, ok, we need to do something. This is a huge event and we know that there are going to be a lot of people that have good reason to be afraid of the police. We need to ensure that it is safe in Amsterdam to approach an officer, that we are gay friendly, so you know, that’s basically what started. And after the Gay Games they said, well, let’s continue” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

Thus, Roze in Blauw was born.

This was not always the name in which Roze in Blauw was recognized. During the Gay Games, this unique unit of the police was known by their catchy slogan which still remains today: Proud to be Your Friend. The idea of this slogan was to make it clear to the international LGBT members coming into the Netherlands for the duration of the Gay Games that they had the support and protection of the police and that this was a country of tolerance. The city of Amsterdam, as well as the Amsterdam Police Department wanted the events to go off as safely as possible and realized that not all members of the LGBT community would feel safe coming to a foreign country not knowing how people would react to their sexualities or lifestyles.

According to fellow member of the Amsterdam Police Department, Désirée Geritz, who was actively on duty during the Gay Games,

“We had this little police office in the center during the Gay Games and there we met a lot of people from abroad and they would come and were very surprised at finding us in the center of the Gay Games and all the events that were around. We had a bus that we would use to visit all the events during the games. It was a big red bus and we drove through the city and visited all the events and it was very special. Very special. There was a very special feeling in the city, not only inside the police but also in the city around, it was a very special time” (Geritz, 2014, Interview).

Both officers mentioned that the Amsterdam Police heightened the level of security in the city for the first couple days of the festivities. After realizing that those in attendance were generally a peaceful group of people coming to celebrate the LGBT community, they scaled their numbers down and relaxed for the remainder of the games.

Roze in Blauw has remained an important part of the Amsterdam Police Department since then. Today, they are a network which represents the interests and safety of lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgender people both within and outside of the police force (Amsterdam Police Department, Roze in Blauw, Web). The responsibilities of Roze in Blauw are to foster a safe community for LGBTs and to assist them in any way possible when it comes to legal and safety matters. This includes creating an understanding environment within the Amsterdam Police Department via courses on homosexuality and LGBT-specific issues at the Police Academy, working on combatting homophobic violence against the LGBT community, and strengthening ties between officers and Amsterdam LGBTs.

Roze in Blauw has been successful with most of these tasks but has struggled getting lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women to report crimes and offenses committed against them. According to the Amsterdam Police Databank, since 2011, Roze in Blauw has shifted their focus on these women because of the lack of reporting. Up until 2010, the unit was called the Gay Network Pink and Blue, therefore they broadened the name to include all members on the LGBT spectrum. This has not made much of a difference as women are still least likely to report harassment taking place in the streets, restaurants, and bars of Amsterdam. Many of these women do not realize that what they are experiencing could be punishable by law and that Roze in Blauw specializes in these issues. There is a lack of realization that lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people have every right to seek help just like everyone else.

Not only are the police having a difficult time getting LBT women to understand their victimization and report these instances from threats outside the LGBT community, but threats

within the LBT community, such as lesbian domestic violence, is even more difficult for the Amsterdam Police Department, and other professionals, to work with. Domestic violence is there in lesbian relations but is not a visible issue. Violence amongst the LBTs in Amsterdam is rarely talked about or addressed. Just as there are numerous instances of violence against LBT women out in public, instances of domestic violence in the private sphere could be equivalently present.

Domestic violence not only refers to the physical acts of violence, but also to verbal and emotional abuse. The power of control and dominance can be just as inhibiting and isolating to a woman than a slap or blow to the face. The feeling of inescapable terror can be equally difficult to deal with emotionally as the cuts and bruises left on the body. These issues keep occurring, yet what is being done about them? Are battered lesbians seeking and receiving help? How many instances of lesbian domestic violence go unreported each day, week, month, and year? What can be done differently by the Amsterdam Police to minimize these occurrences and create safer environments for women?

This article is an analysis of how the perceptions of social workers, researchers, and police officers compare and contrast circumambient the resources provided by the Amsterdam Police in cases of lesbian domestic violence. The purpose of this study is to look at the Amsterdam Police Departments' attitudes and reactions to domestic violence in lesbian relationships. The goal is to collect stories and interviews from police officers, researchers, and professionals who can speak on the role that the Amsterdam Police plays in handling such cases.

This is an important issue because the people of Amsterdam, as well as the LBT community could be made a better and safer place. If LBTs would be more vocal about their private lives, more professionals would be aware that this violence occurs and that it deserves attention. If the Amsterdam Police are aware of what is going on behind closed doors, and if they press lesbians to report their victimization and abuse, then the police can better prosecute violators of lesbian domestic violence. With this information, the police can provide useful help and resources to victims and can help to prevent these actions from occurring in the future. This research will benefit the Amsterdam Police, the LGBT community, as well as battered women in general by sparking communication and spreading awareness. I expect that this research will reveal what is currently being done about lesbian domestic violence, what can be done better to help these victims, and what can be done in terms of prevention. Lesbian domestic violence is rarely spoken about. It is either not considered a real issue within the LGBT community or it is

seen as a taboo and therefore ignored. The goal of this paper is to create further dialogues amongst professionals in this field, especially amongst the Amsterdam Police so they may better improve their reactions to lesbian domestic violence.

Literature Review

Reports have found that homosexual domestic violence is just as common as heterosexual domestic violence, yet fewer homosexual victims are seeking help or reporting their victimization. Whether victims do not realize that the abuse they are experiencing is considered domestic violence or they do not realize that their rights are protected just like any other battered woman, they do not seek help. The Roze in Blauw Politie are a unit of the Amsterdam Police that focus specifically on anti-gay violence. They have their own separate hotline for people to call about LGBT issues and are well-aware of LGBT specific places, areas, and crimes. It is their responsibility to cater to LGBT discrimination within the Amsterdam commonwealth. Despite the high rate of lesbian domestic violence occurring all over the world, it is rarely talked about or researched, especially from a police standpoint.

Domestic violence in any relationship is highly stigmatized. The idea of people fighting and using violence, power, or control within their own four walls can often be difficult to rationalize. On one hand, couples often fight with one another, and small arguments can quickly escalate into high-energy screaming matches. On the other hand, these disputes can quickly cross the line from a harmless disagreement to a violent fight or acquisition of power.

Domestic violence between partners is everywhere. Studies show that forty percent of the Dutch population has experienced domestic violence at some point in their lives, ten percent of which experience it on a weekly basis (Ministry of Justice, 2004, Web). According to this same source, an estimated 500,000 domestic crimes are committed in the Netherlands each year, and only 56,000 are entered into the police database. This means that only twelve percent of domestic crimes are reported to the police each year (Ministry of Justice, 2004, Web). Even fewer crimes committed against minority groups are reported to the police. In a 2010 study, half of the participants reported experiencing domestic violence at one point in their lives while twenty-three percent reported having these experiences within the past five years (Dijk, Veen & Cox, 2010, p. 1). This same study also reported that about one in five victims of domestic violence reports their case to the police, which is consistent with the 2004 study done by the Ministry of Justice (Dijk, Veen & Cox, 2010, p. 1).

Even in heterosexual relationships, it is often very difficult for the outside world to know that domestic violence is occurring between two partners. Oftentimes, neither the perpetrator nor

the victim want to speak out about the dynamics of their relationship. The aggressor never wants to admit that they are abusing their partner and will do anything in their power to keep that a secret from other people. The victim lives in a constant state of denial and fear. They often do not think that the abuse they are experiencing, whether physical or psychological, is indeed domestic violence or that what is occurring in their home is worthy of reporting to the police. It is also terrifying for many victims to vocalize their experiences in fear of reprisal from their partner. If their partner finds out they have been telling friends, family, therapists, or especially the police, they fear the abuse will be even more fierce than before. Most victims remain silent, do not fight back, and just hope that someday the abuse will end (Dijk, Veen & Cox, 2010, p. 4). This lack of discussion and acknowledgement of domestic violence creates an unbreakable taboo. Rarely does a perpetrator want to admit that they mistreat their partner just as victims believe that they are not strong enough to leave or fight back. Domestic violence is a universal taboo.

The dynamic between people from the same sex is different from that of heterosexual couples. As stated earlier, domestic violence, whether it be physical, emotional, psychological, or power control, is just as commonplace within the LGBT community as it is among the heterosexual community. Same-sex violence occurs in approximately 25-50 percent of LGBT relationships (Girshick, 2002, p. 13). Although this violence is just as prevalent, it is rarely mentioned. There is a double taboo, or a double stigma associated with same-sex domestic violence.

Claire Renzetti acknowledges the silence within the LGBT community when it comes to domestic violence. She mentions a nationwide study in the United States of violence in her book "Violent Betrayal" and discusses how many lesbians look away when this topic comes up (1992). They do not wish to speak about it and do not want to accept that it happens within their tight-knit community. She suggests that this could be because the LBT community refuses to accept that such strife as domestic violence can happen to them. When a population such as the LGBT community is isolated, its members will deny that they have faults in their relationships just like everyone else. According to Lori Girshick, many LGBTs fear that revealing this violence would simply provide more homophobic ammunition for those who are already non-supporters of the LGBT community and movement. Many see this silence as a loyalty to the

LGBT community in order to not expose the negative aspects of abusive same-sex relationships (Girshick, 1992, p. 57).

Homosexuals feel that they must prove to the heterosexual mainstream that they can be in loving relationships. There is a third stigma, or taboo, for lesbians who experience domestic violence. Lesbian perpetrators of domestic violence find it difficult to identify themselves as perpetrators because it is not consistent with female socialization (Movisie, 2013, Web). In her lecture “Thinking Female Violence,” Dr. Genevieve Pruvost discusses what female violence is, why it is rarely studied, and what she has found in her studies. She claims that “Yes, women are violent despite their gentle nature” (Dr. Pruvost, 2014, Lecture). Dr. Pruvost recounts several instances in history and in more recent cases where women have raped, battered, killed, and massacred. She ascertains these actions by stating that women are in fact, by nature, cruel. Young girls are socialized from a prepubescent age to be competitive with one another based off of their looks and self-representation. Instead of getting into fist fights like boys, they attack one another verbally and emotionally. Adolescent girls are catty and destructive towards one another. Dr. Pruvost assures the audience in her lecture, as well as in her book, that female violence *does* exist and is more prevalent than we all might think because the police simply overlook it (Dr. Pruvost, 2014, Lecture).

Many of these stereotypical female traits carry over into lesbian relationships. The general consensus that has emerged from research on lesbian domestic violence is that major conflicts in lesbian relationships tend to develop around a specific set of issues or sources of strain such as dependency versus autonomy, jealousy, and the balance of power between partners (Renzetti, 1992, p. 29). In a society where heterosexuality is still the social norm, it can be difficult for LBTs to find support outside of the general LGBT community. Not all lesbians, for example, feel comfortable coming out of the closet at their workplace or to their families. Therefore, in LBT relationships, it can often be very difficult for partners to branch out from their small, safe circles. In any relationship, balancing between autonomy and interdependence with a partner can be difficult, but this has been proven to be an even larger challenge in lesbian relationships (Renzetti, 1992, p. 29).

When two women are in a relationship within a closed system where they do not have a lot of outside support, the co-dependence becomes insuppressible. LBTs may not only feel repressed by the heteronormativity in their daily lives, but may also experience homophobia

within their families. This fosters an emotional closeness and intensity within the relationship. Oftentimes this leads to the partners relying on each other for support and, consequently, giving up their autonomy. Although this loss of autonomy occurs in all relationships, it is more severe in lesbian relationships as they form strong dyadic bonds unique between two women. Over time, jealousy becomes a major factor. The two partners get used to only being with each other and being so reliant on the other that as soon as one starts to develop new opinions, branch out, or make new friends, the other gets jealous. It becomes a competition over who has the most friends or who depends on the other partner more (Renzetti, 1992, p. 30).

This dyad causes jealousy, distrust, and possessiveness. It is at this point when one partner becomes the antagonist. This is not necessarily based on who is the “man,” the butch, or the dominant partner in the relationship. Oftentimes it is about who has more support, whether that is because they are open to their family who supports them, are open at work, make more money, have a larger friend network, are more emotionally stable, or has a history of abuse (Renzetti, 1992, p. 41). The authoritative partner then begins, whether consciously or not, to take advantage of this position of power. They use their partner’s insecurities and loss of autonomy to dominate the relationship. Sometimes the abuse is strictly psychological where they financially cut off and/or limit their partner or do not permit the victim to leave the house or see their friends. Other times it escalates to physical brutality or threats of violence.

Studies show that psychological abuse is more common in lesbian relationships than physical violence (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001, p. 40-41). Physical abuse is still common in instances of lesbian domestic violence and is often triggered when the victim starts to fight back or rebel against the aggressor. Oftentimes physical violence is not used until the balance of power begins to slip out of the perpetrator’s hands (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001, p. 43). Just as heterosexual victims deny their abuse, so do lesbian women when they are suffering from domestic violence. They prefer not “air out their dirty laundry” for the outside world to see and instead would rather keep their private business behind closed doors (LARS, 2011, p. 7). As Pam Elliott finds, however, emotional or psychological abuse can often be more intimidating than a direct slap. In these situations it is often the abuser’s goal to put the partner down using insults or shaming language. Perpetrators may also threaten to harm the partner’s pets or children, threaten to kill themselves, tell manipulative lies, and control the partner’s every move” (Elliott, 1996, p. 4).

Despite the frequency of psychological and physical abuse with lesbian relationships, oftentimes the victim does not define their situation as domestic violence. They either do not understand what is happening to them, do not recognize that lesbians can experience domestic violence, or are in denial and refuse to acknowledge to themselves or anyone else that they are victims of domestic violence. Consequently, these women remain silent and refuse to report their experiences to the police or any other authority. Studies show that sexual minorities are least likely to report abuse to local authorities. (Alexander, 2002, p. 98). Again, this could be because they do not see themselves as victims of domestic violence or because they doubt the abilities of police officers, medical professionals, and mental health workers on assessing same-sex domestic violence (Alexander, 2002, p. 98).

As stated previously, about twelve percent of domestic violence cases are reported to the Dutch authorities each year. This number is much smaller for lesbian domestic violence cases. In one survey of battered women, the police were rated least successful of nine different help providers or resources and were considered least helpful and most indifferent of thirteen other help providers. (Renzetti, 1992, p. 90). In many places around the world, LGBT victims do not call the police or report crimes committed against them for fear of harassment or more abuse by the police (Renzetti, 1992, p. 91). They fear that the police will do nothing to help them and instead victim blame them for being gay or lesbian, etc. There is also the fear that police will not know how to handle situations of same-sex domestic violence.

When police officers are called to the scene of abusive episodes between two women, they are often completely unfamiliar with the proper protocol. They behave in intrusive manners, make homophobic comments, fail to make appropriate referrals to available resources, or say a few brief words and leave, failing to help the situation at all. Oftentimes, the police enforce heterosexist laws or wrongfully charge the abuser with battery instead of domestic violence. Sometimes officers even arrest the victim, assuming that the bigger partner is the abuser simply based off of physical appearances (McLaughlin & Rozee, 2001, p. 51). This lack of recognition of the rights and dynamic differences of the LGBT community leads to mistrust of the police and underreporting of crimes.

Very little research has been done thus far on how police in general handle lesbian domestic violence. In the United States context, police, attorneys, and medical officials were reported as the least helpful resources for victims of same-sex domestic violence (Potoczniak et

al, 2003, p. 256). Research suggests that police officers be better trained to recognize domestic violence amongst same-sex couples and to discern the victim from the abuser rather than simply assuming mutual battering or that the bigger, more butch or masculine partner is the abuser. In 2009, the Netherlands passed the Temporary Domestic Exclusion Order Act under which, in the case of actual, or the suspicion of, domestic violence, the perpetrator would be removed from their home for ten days (Ministry of Justice, 2013, Web). This was a step in the right direction in terms of how the Netherlands deals with domestic violence in general. In the Netherlands, gay rights are human rights, therefore there is no discrimination based on sexuality, gender, class, race, etc. The Temporary Domestic Exclusion Order Act protects lesbian victims of domestic violence and gives them ten days to seek shelter, get help, and take a break from their abuser.

Even less research has been done on how the Amsterdam Police Department handles lesbian domestic violence. The Amsterdam Police Department has several different networks for the various groups and cultures within Amsterdam such as the Christian, Surinamese, Moroccan, and Turkish networks (Amsterdam Databank, 2013, Web). Two of these networks are the Roze in Blauw Network, which works with the LGBT community, and the Domestic Violence and Child Molestation Unit. No one to date has done research on how either of these units within the police force address cases of lesbian domestic violence.

Roze in Blauw, as mentioned previously, focuses on violent acts committed against the LGBT community. Starting in 2011, they have worked to target lesbian, bisexual, and transgender women in order to increase the reporting rate of crimes they have experienced. Research has found that gay, bisexual, and transgender men are more likely to report if they have been victimized in the streets, restaurants, and bars of Amsterdam than women (Amsterdam Databank, 2013, Web). Roze in Blauw believes that this is because the women do not realize that the abuse they are experiencing in public is punishable by law. A common misconception is that the police will not do anything with the report. Therefore, since 2011, Roze in Blauw has been encouraging the LGBT community, and women in particular, to report more of the crimes they experience (Amsterdam Databank, 2013, Web). Roze in Blauw focuses to spread awareness among the LGBT community about the homophobia and anti-gay discrimination from outside of the LGBT community, yet has made little headway broaching the subject of spreading awareness about violence within and among the community.

Most of the previous research on lesbian domestic violence has been done in the United States. Very little research has been done within the Netherlands or Amsterdam specifically. A few small organizations, such as Taboe Kwardraat, have done research on this topic, but it has not picked up enough momentum to reach the entire Amsterdam LBT community. Another gap in the current research is how the police are handling lesbian domestic violence. There is little to no information about what it is the police do when a lesbian files a report for domestic violence. Many officers do not know how to handle these situations or know how to recognize who is the abuser and who is the victim.

This research will look into what the police have done in the past, what they are and are not currently doing to deal with the issue of lesbian domestic violence, and what can be done differently. This study will also analyze whose responsibility it should be to look further into this topic and what other professionals and members of the community think about the role of the police.

Methodology

This study was conducted using topical interviews with specific questions centered around the frequency of reports of lesbian domestic violence, resources in which the Amsterdam Police provide for these victims, and opinions on who, within the Amsterdam Police Department, should be concerned with this population. I believe that the best way to determine the effectiveness of the Amsterdam Police on how they handle this topic is to speak with police officers, policy makers within the police administration, social workers and therapists who work with LBT victims, community outreach researchers, and professionals who work within the LBT community. Topical interviews ranging from thirty to ninety minute allowed me to ask specific questions directly related to the lesbian domestic violence, ask for professional and personal opinions, and gain more knowledge about the topic. I was interested to learn exactly what it is the Amsterdam Police do for victims of lesbian domestic violence once reports are filed, whether these responses are successful, and what can be done differently to better accommodate victims. I wanted to hear other professional's opinions on who they think should be handling lesbian domestic violence. I wanted to know what resources are being utilized and what can be done to improve and even prevent future domestic violence from becoming a more prominent problem. Using topical interviews with separate interview guides for each profession allowed me to ask specific questions of the interviewee in order to best analyze the differing opinions.

Four of my subjects came from the Amsterdam Police Department. I interviewed two officers who work within the Domestic Violence Unit as well as two officers from Roze in Blauw. I was able to ask each officer what they knew about lesbian domestic violence, how they defined this term, what their department was doing to combat this issue, and whose responsibility

they thought it was to address lesbian domestic violence. I thought that these officers who worked with either the LGBT community or the female population on a daily basis would have sufficient experience and knowledge of lesbian domestic violence cases. One interviewee was a social activist within the LGBT community who is very involved with LBT women on a grassroots level. I interviewed two researchers/academics to learn about lesbian domestic violence in general in order to have a proper overview of the subject. I also interviewed one therapist/social worker who had experience working with lesbian couples to hear her perceptions on what lesbian women in particular need and if she had ever had LBT clients who have been in situations of domestic violence. Those who have worked with battered women can provide an insight as to what resources are currently available and most frequently used as well as which resources survivors did or did not use, why or why not, and what they found the police's role in these situations to be.

All potential ethical concerns in this research were addressed before the project was conducted. Domestic violence can be an emotional and triggering subject to discuss. When I spoke with social workers or therapists, the idea of patient confidentiality was the utmost priority and no names or specific information that could identify clients were given. The professional and I were ethical in what information I took down. In terms of interviewing police officers, they each had permission to speak with me from their unit director. All research participants signed a consent form and were told they could refuse to participate or withdraw from the research at any time. They were also told that at any point they could request that the recordings of interviews be withdrawn without any questions asked. All recordings were destroyed within one week of the interviews as to protect the identities and private information of the participants. Each participant gave permission for me to use their names in this research as they each want the public to know who they are, what they do in the public, and that they are available to help those in need.

Each interview took place in an area of the interviewee's choosing. All interviews with Amsterdam Police officers were conducted in different police departments throughout the city. One interview was over the phone with a participant in Rotterdam, and all other interviews took place in local cafes (one in Utrecht). All interview questions were screened beforehand to rid them of any bias before presented to interviewees. I think that by using topical interviews, I was able to avoid most bias as I avoided stating my own opinions and let the interview move in a natural flow. I also avoided bias because I had no hypothesis going into the research. I did not

know how the Amsterdam Police handle lesbian domestic violence. I did not know what resources are available for victims. My only assumptions were that the Amsterdam Police officers would have had much more experience with lesbian domestic violence cases than was expressed in my research and that there would be less of a taboo in the “gay capital of the world” Amsterdam than in the United States.

An important note to make in my methodology section is that several of these interviews were conducted two at a time. That is, I interviewed both officers from the Domestic Violence Unit together because they requested that they be together during the interview and also because of time constraints. This was the same for the two officers from Roze in Blauw. I also interviewed the LGBT community activist and a LGBT researcher together because it was most comfortable for the interviewees. Although I do not think that this method of interviewing hampered my research in any way as it actually helped me with the language barrier, there is a possibility that interviewees did not say everything that they normally would have if their colleague had not been present. At the same time, however, there is also the possibility that by having a colleague present, they felt more comfortable giving out information and answering my questions. It really is impossible to know.

Analysis

Occupations and Backgrounds of Interviewees:

Susanne Kers is a leading researcher in the field of lesbian domestic violence in the Netherlands. After traveling for a few years, she attended university as a part-time student to focus on studying these particular relationships. Her thesis advisor discouraged the topic, declaring that male dominance is the causal factor in domestic violence and that fundamentally, there needs to be a male perpetrator. Susanne insisted that there was more to domestic violence than heteronormativity and male dominance. She decided to stick with her studies, claiming that once she started transferring the knowledge from herself to others, that even if there were only two or three people a year that *really* picked up the subject, then it would start to grow into a more important and popular topic. In the early 2000s, Susanne's research picked up momentum and she started her own small organization called Taboe Kwadraat. This organization allows her to receive funding from the European government to continue her research, collaborate with other organizations, and make something of her work. Today, she gives trainings, workshops, and presentations to professionals in the field of domestic violence to give them information about violence in LBT relationships.

Marloes Meuzelaar, a queer-identified Amsterdammer is the coordinator of Stichting OndersteBoven which is a foundation that represents the visibility of lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer women. Currently, with a subsidy from the ministry, they have a project called Visibly Lesbian aims to increase the visibility of LBT women in Amsterdam. Stichting

OndersteBoven creates events, programs, meetups, blogs, and decorates a boat for the canal Pride Parade every year to spread awareness of issues within the LBT community, to create dialogues between different groups, and to bring people together that normally would not get into contact otherwise. Marloes is also a Dutch language teacher.

Josee Rothuizen is a retired LGBT therapist who is still extremely active within the LGBT community. She works with organizations to address issues surrounding the LGBT community and advises on policies regarding these issues. She has several contacts all around Amsterdam, the Netherlands, Europe, and the world who she speaks with frequently about subjects such as lesbian domestic violence and other problems the LBT community faces on a daily basis. She does as much outreach as she can and hosts a local meetup group called the Pink People where she facilitates conversations about the LGBT community.

Marianne Steijnis is a counselor who has many years of experience working with the LGBT community. Her therapist expertise is within the LGBT community where she works with clients from the ages of nine to one hundred. She works with LGBTs as well as their connections such as friends and family. She mostly works with gays and lesbians who have experienced negative reactions from their support systems after coming out or who are experiencing psychological problems because of their sexuality. Marianne also has expertise working with couples who have experienced same-sex domestic violence.

Marja Lust is entering her tenth year with the Amsterdam Police Department. She is currently in the process of finishing her thesis and getting her MCI, Master's in Criminal Investigation. She performs many tasks within the police force, her main task being an instructor at the Police Academy. Here she discusses issues of homosexuality with the students. She addresses LGBT related issues within the Amsterdam Police Academy as well as out in the community. Marja has been a member of the Roze in Blauw Network for eight years now. She is a general board member of Roze in Blauw, educates other members on LGBT issues, and answers the 24-hour hotline.

Désirée Geritz is a neighborhood watcher in the area of the Eastern part of Amsterdam. This is the third area in Amsterdam that she has worked. She is a constant presence for all of the people that live and work in that area. Désirée has been with the Amsterdam Police Department for twenty-one years. She volunteers for Roze in Blauw when she can by attending events and

meetings, spreading her knowledge about LGBT issues in the areas she works, and helping teach courses at the Police Academy.

Lilian Liem-Kon-Tja is also a member of the Amsterdam Police Department. She is the Regional Coordinator for Domestic Violence and Child Molestation. She works on a regional level to spread awareness to both her officers and the community at large about domestic violence issues in the Netherlands. Lilian is trying to bridge the gap between the Domestic Violence Unit and the other networks of the Amsterdam Police Department.

Ingrid Fiene is also a member of the Amsterdam Domestic Violence Unit. Like Désirée, she is a neighborhood police officer. She does not have one neighborhood to herself but instead works in Islamic neighborhoods where domestic violence occurs. Ingrid visits groups of women who have non-western backgrounds and gives them information on what it is she does as a police officer, what domestic violence is, and what they can do to get help. She tries to build trustful relationships with the Turkish and Moroccan women in the neighborhoods of Amsterdam.

Definitions and Perceptions of Lesbian Domestic Violence:

Domestic violence can be defined in many ways and these definitions are not restricted to heterosexual couples. Violence can come in the form of physical, emotional, psychological, control, power, and financial abuse. Although this terrorism is extremely complex and multi-layered, most people agree that domestic violence is not just the physical abuse but also the psychological. It is usually invisible to those on the outside. Normally there is one perpetrator and one victim. Mutual battering may exist, but this typically occurs when the victim is fighting back or sticking up for themselves.

The members of the Amsterdam Police that I interviewed all agreed that the definition of domestic violence was the same for both heterosexual and homosexual couples. They refused to differentiate their definitions between the LGBT and straight communities. All four of them also agreed that same-sex domestic violence is just as prevalent as its heterosexual counterpart. It was a general consensus among the police that lesbians abuse one another just as often as any other couple but do not realize that what they are experiencing is considered domestic violence. As Désirée explained, it is what happens at home, within your own four walls. Marja also defined domestic violence in a similar way,

“I would say that domestic violence in lesbian relationships is violence in different forms between two women in an intimate relationship behind the front door, in the privacy of their living arrangement, in the privacy of their home. And violence, as I said, in different forms. So not just physical violence, also psychological violence, or any kind of abuse” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

Many lesbians do not realize that they are protected by the same human rights as heterosexual women and that domestic violence is a federal crime. They often refuse to seek help, do not realize that they can get help, or refuse to report their victimization.

Therapists and social workers label domestic violence as a mental health issue, claiming that only when someone has mental health disorders, is unstable, or has a history of violence will they use violence against their partner. Everyone has disagreements within their relationships, but in many cases, there is one partner who has poor mental health, excessive drug use, or alcohol abuse issues who does not learn to cope with their anger and frustration and becomes aggressive towards their partner. Or, the partner with the substance and personality disorders becomes the abuser by manipulating the other partner into staying with them, claiming they need to be taken care of and that it is their disease that is causing them to be abusive. If they have the agency to get out of the relationship or the ability to make the conscious decision to leave or get help, then sometimes domestic disputes can be avoided.

In many cases, therapists and social workers hear that the violence is not out of malice but instead the outcome of desperation. As Marianne put it, the partners love each other and care for one another so much, but something in the dynamic is just not working. Lilian agreed with this notion,

“But it’s very difficult because oftentimes the woman still loves the man or the man still loves the woman and they don’t want to leave but they want that the fight stops and it’s still very difficult because some perpetrators, they don’t want to be treated by the health care so it goes in a circle and the circle doesn’t end” (Liem-Kon-Tja, 2014, Interview).

This requires more effort to make things work. Eventually one partner snaps and cannot handle the tension any longer. The couple gets so frustrated that their relationship is failing that instead of separating, they remain together and these domestic partnerships become unhealthy. Sometimes women feel that it is their personal fault for the break in harmony which allows for the other partner to use them as a scapegoat and also blame them for all the problems in the relationship. Professionals say that this is when the stress builds until the point where it can no longer be controlled and the relationship is no longer healthy.

The researchers in this study both agreed that domestic violence is systematic. It does not just occur once but repeatedly. There is control within the relationship where one partner is well

aware that they are mentally or physically stronger than their partner and they use this to their advantage. As Susanne describes it,

“But in fact the thing is, if one person in a relationship is controlling another partner’s actions, belief systems, freedom, freedom to be the person they want to be and they do it by either physical violence, sexual violence, or psychological violence, and any would be important, then there is a system of abuse going on, domestic abuse. It has to be systematic. I do not feel that one slap at one time, I feel that it has to be a system in which one person is controlling the other or people, two people are controlling one another which is mutual domestic violence. But it has to be systematic” (Kers, 2014, Interview).

Control can also take the form of outing a partner to their family, friends, or coworkers. Sometimes, abusive partners use this as leverage to get what they want from the victim. Not all lesbians are open about their sexuality and this can be a major breach of trust if the partner divulges this personal information.

Another cause for domestic violence within lesbian relationships is the balance, or lack thereof, of power and autonomy. Unlike in heterosexual relationships where roles are more clear, it can be difficult for same-sex couples to negotiate gender roles. One partner may be the more dominant in some aspects of the relationship and insist on being the decision-maker. Many couples insist on maintaining an egalitarian relationship, but the balance of power usually ends up shifting. This also sometimes leads to what Susanne and Marja would call symbiosis where lesbians become so close and co-dependent that where they first had a life of their own, everything is done together. Marianne recalls a situation between two female partners in which one became very ill. The healthy partner became her caretaker twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. The relationship dynamic quickly changed and everything revolved around the woman who was ill. Eventually, the caretaking partner no longer felt that she was in control of her own life or had autonomy. She felt she was only a nurse. This created a lot of tension and the caretaker became aggressive. This scared the ill woman, forcing her to call the police in fear that her partner would harm her.

Josee, Susanne, and Marja all agreed that it is not always the butch lesbian or the “man” in the relationship that initiates the violence or holds all the control and power. It often has little to nothing to do with the size of the partners but about the autonomy and the dynamic between the partners. If one partner makes more money, has a better education, or has some sort of power over the other partner, she will most likely be the one calling all the shots in the relationship

regardless of who is stronger or more dominant. It can be almost impossible to tell from the outside looking in which partner is the abuser.

A common misconception surrounding lesbian domestic violence is that, since they are both women, they cannot actually hurt one another. In heterosexual relationships, the man is seen as much stronger than the woman, therefore she needs help. When two women are fighting, many people believe that it just entails hair pulling and shoving. They assume that there is no need for the police to get involved because the violence is not harmful. All of the social work professionals and the officers in the Amsterdam Police Department agreed that this was not the case and that lesbian domestic violence should be taken just as seriously as heterosexual domestic violence. They all agreed that a woman could do just as much damage to another woman as a man could.

Most existing research on lesbian domestic violence has been done in the United States. Very little research has been conducted in the Netherlands, let alone Amsterdam. Although the United States and the Netherlands are very different in terms of the quality of their gay rights, the views on domestic violence within same-sex relationships is very similar. This seems counterintuitive since Amsterdam is the “gay capital of the world.”

Some Amsterdammers have never thought about domestic violence within same-sex relationships. When Marloes was asked if she had heard about lesbian domestic violence or had come into contact with it, her response was, “No, nope. Never” (Meuzelaar, 2014, Interview). She recalled one article she read in college about it as well as a theater production that Stichting OndersteBoven funded a few years ago, but other than that she had never thought about the issue. Her definitions of lesbian domestic violence matched those of everyone else in the study, yet she had never thought about the topic. She further explained,

“Well, if I think about violence, it’s, I think it’s a broad spectrum of what it can be. I mean, it can be physical and also mentally. I think what Josee said about controlling somebody, that’s also very applicable on lesbian relationships, and um, I think we have to change our, our definition of violence in this manner. If you see, if you look at, I think everything is different for different groups. Like, politics are different for lesbian women than for men, or gay men. Uh, I think in this, we should, redefine our notion of violence in this. But you asked me if I know violence, lesbian violence, I said no, but if I broaden my own scope of what is violence, I think I know some relationships that have this, that have that controlling, that have that. Uh, there’s also, it’s fluid in some way” (Meuzelaar, 2014, Interview).

It is still a common misconception that domestic violence is only physical.

Domestic violence is everywhere; in all countries, cultures, and types of relationships. The main problem is recognizing that it occurs and accepting that it is an issue all around the world, even in Amsterdam. As both Lilian and Ingrid have been working in this field of work for many, many years, they said simultaneously “Domestic violence *IS* a taboo” (Liem-Kon-Tja & Fiene, 2014, Interview). Every single interviewee agreed that domestic violence itself is a taboo. As Ingrid described it, domestic violence is a taboo “because it’s behind your front door. And it’s a private thing. And it’s about shame...It’s about maybe losing control of yourself” (Fiene, 2014, Interview).

Susanne also agreed with the ideas of shame and stigmatization.

“Part of it is connected to the stigmatization of the relationships or the devaluation. It’s very important to feel for yourself that your relationships are meaningful and good and that you’re safe and the image of domestic violence disturbs it but also, gives the feeling that when they are going to talk about it, it confirms the idea that they are not okay in these relationships. So that is very important starting of creating taboo” (Kers, 2014, Interview).

There is a large stigmatization surrounding the way people handle their private issues in public. Just as parents who hit their children in public get dirty looks from bystanders, it is a part of human nature to avoid conflict and disapprove of those disturbing the peace. It is also a common judgement that if a couple fights frequently, gets to the point of yelling and screaming, uses violence, or are controlling one another, then they should not be together. These fights or arguments belittle the couples’ relationship. Similarly, it is often more difficult to take criticism from family or friends when they insist that your partner is not good for you, but until you realize that yourself, you will never listen.

Just as outsiders may be ignored when they tell the victim that they are in an unhealthy relationship, they may also avoid the confrontation altogether. Since domestic violence is so highly stigmatized and there is very little discourse on it, many people assume that the couple is just going through a rough patch in their relationship, or that the argument will blow over in a few hours, or that it is simply none of their business. No one wants to be identified as a victim for that gives off a helpless aura and causes a sense of powerlessness. Conversely, no one wants to be the one to tell someone that they think their friend or family member is a victim because that, too, removes the agency from the victim and can be very embarrassing.

Embarrassment is a major deterrent from speaking out about domestic violence. It can be disappointing for a couple when the relationship does not work. Many therapists see this happen within LGBT relationships. According to Marianne, about fifty percent of the clients she sees about relationship issues contain two people who love each other very much but reach a point, a dynamic within the relationship where they cannot stop fighting each other. This is not always the fault of one partner but of

both. The couple tries so hard to make things work on their own, but when they cannot, they sometimes are too stubborn or embarrassed to separate and instead stay together and continue to live unhappily and unhealthily.

Denial is another reason why couples stay together. Oftentimes, they think that this fight will be the last, or that this was just a fuse that was blown once and it will not happen again. As Ingrid described, “And it’s mostly, like, there’s a fight and then there’s it’s ok and it’s sweet and then the tension comes and then there’s a fight. And I don’t think it’s different in the lesbian relationships. That’s the same” (Fiene, 2014, Interview). Many victims tell themselves that it was just a one-time occurrence or that the abuse will stop. Lilian believes this is also a reason why women do not report these instances of domestic violence, “Because, uh, most of uh, sometimes police officers think that when you get hit, you pack your suitcase and you walk out. And she also told that she is stupid, she couldn’t make the decision to walk out of the home. Get away from home” (Liem-Kon-Tja, 2014, Interview). Another aspect of denial is refusing to acknowledge that the balance of power has tipped. Marloes described this phenomenon:

“I don’t think they see it. I think there’s always, when you’re in a relationship, a balance between uh, how much am I my own, and how much am I still in the relationship, and how much am I on my own? And I think with lesbians, when the balance is off, they think oh, this is just me in a relationship and I lose something of myself. But it’s very difficult to see where the balance is. It’s in everything” (Meuzelaar, 2014, Interview).

Although half of the interviewees had never come into direct contact with lesbian couples experiencing domestic violence, they all agreed that there was a double stigma surrounding lesbian domestic violence. It is not only infrequently discussed, but is often silenced by the LGBT community. Despite the Netherland’s tolerance, the Amsterdam LGBT community encourages, or at least there is a perception of encouragement, to remain silent about this issue. Susanne had lot to say about this silence:

“And then there are norms within the communities. There is like, norms and it might differ per country for instance uh well yeah lesbians are a little more aggressive than heterosexual women so they might give a slap or we have to be so close together that it causes friction. Those also create taboos because you’re not supposed to go against those thoughts. So they are within those relationships or communities... So there’s a lot of invisible mechanisms that create the taboos, the not in my backyard, not for us, you know we don’t hang out our dirty laundry. All those kinds of, yeah. And for a community it might be different. It’s very important to look at what values are present in a community to see what hinders people in speaking out because that might be different per community...So each community has its own little things that add to the taboos” (Kers, 2014, Interview).

According to Susanne, the norms and values of the LGBT community are to remain silent on the subject of same-sex domestic violence.

One of the reasons for this silence and lack of recognition may be because the LGBT community is already stigmatized enough as it is by nonconforming to the heterosexual model. Although the Netherlands is a highly tolerant country, the lesbians of Amsterdam still do not feel that they are at the cornerstone of the community. Even though gay rights are human rights by law in the Netherlands, the LGBT community is still not viewed as legitimately as the heterosexual community. Marja described this,

“You know, there’s violence in the relationship and it is true that many times, let’s talk about women, only here, that women are very embarrassed about that. So it is, that is why it is a double stigma, it is a double taboo. Because it is not just the fact that you’re in a lesbian relationship but dv in and of itself is a taboo too. Plus, many times, it is not acknowledged as domestic violence like I said. It’s not recognized as such...But it is also, you know, a lack of acknowledgement within the community” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

There still remains a stigma against two lesbian mothers and they are often denied the recognition as a “real” family. The heterosexual norm accepts the existence of the LBT women, but makes a clear distinction between heterosexual and homosexual couples. There is an acknowledgment of the “other” but with more of an “us versus them” attitude.

This silence has created a veil of ignorance amongst the LGBT community, especially in regards to lesbian domestic violence. All of the interviewees agreed that it is more difficult to imagine two women fighting, arguing, and manipulating one another than a man and a woman fighting. Lesbians themselves are socialized to believe that it is an issue of male dominance. Susanne provides a perfect example of this,

“I have interviewed women about the violence they met in their own relationships and how difficult it was for them to acknowledge that it was violence and I distinctly remember one of them saying: ‘I worked in a women’s shelter and my partner was hitting me and I didn’t realize it was domestic violence. I just didn’t realize.’ And there was someone else who said ‘I work in the field of domestic violence, I do research and I speak to friends who have problems in their relationships and I don’t see it as domestic violence.’ We are so, I think it has something to do with...violence is a difficult one. And it still is even though we can see now that it’s become much more normal. Not even thinking specifically of domestic violence but of aggressiveness. So, even that used to be not acceptable. It becomes more and more clear that women are climbing up the ladder, finally, it took a while, but a lot of us still have this idea of peaceful, soft, outgoing, emotional, caring, all those kinds of things, nurturing. So, this doesn’t, this clashed with the subject of domestic violence and I’ve noticed that specifically in lesbian perpetrators, it makes it difficult to accept their role. When they talk about themselves, they talk about themselves as a victim. And they use the words, the language, of the victim. And that has something to do with history. I mean, the way we were raised as women, socialized as women, the way we think about ourselves” (Kers, 2014, Interview).

This image of women as sweet, passive, nurturing, unfrontational beings maintains the taboo that women cannot be physically violent or psychologically abusive and inhibits lesbians from realizing

that their partners are abusing them. Women can be violent. Lesbians can be violent. It is not just a heterosexual male issue.

Even when offered help, it is difficult for lesbians to accept it or feel that they need it. Josee described lesbian relationships as symbiotic. Women can be very similar and over time can become one. There is a pressure to tell each other every little detail about their lives and their days. This pressure encourages physical and intimate closeness as well as emotional closeness. The two women become dependent on one another for support and refuse to let anyone else inside their dyad. Désirée personally experienced a situation similar to this. One day, while on call, she received a phone call, a complaint from one of her neighborhoods. Neighbors were reporting a disturbance between a lesbian couple. They reported hearing a lot of yelling and screaming repeatedly. Once at the scene, Désirée confronted the couple and immediately sensed that something was not right within the relationship. She asked what was going on and the couple refused to answer, claiming that there was nothing going on. When she offered to meet with who she perceived to be the victim, both responded that it was unnecessary. Even after offering and insisting several times, the couple denied Désirée's assistance. The couple was too ashamed to admit that there were problems within their relationship, even when the evidence clearly pointed to a potential domestic violence dispute.

When asked why she thought they refused her help, Désirée claimed "I think they were embarrassed. Not coping and not able to make a good thing of a relationship they fought hard for. It doesn't work out" (Geritz, 2014, Interview). She clarified by explaining that these women had most likely overcome many obstacles to be in the relationship that they were in and had worked too hard to admit to anyone outside of their relationship that they had problems or were unhappy. Marja supplemented this explanation,

"We have had to fight for our relationships, we have had to fight for acknowledgement of our relationships, you know, it's not the most easy "choice" still. There's a lot of things still that people have had to overcome and then they are in a relationship you know, they have overcome family, friends, they've done the coming out process. It all seems to be accepted. But the relationship is not a healthy one" (Lust, 2014, Interview).

When a community has already had to fight for the same recognition that everyone else was born with, it can make it difficult to acknowledge that there are imperfections within the community. There is a pressure for same-sex couples, once they gain their equal rights, to be the perfect citizens, have the happiest and most successful relationships, and raise the perfect families. There is little to no room for failure.

Viewpoints on How the Amsterdam Police Department Handles Lesbian Domestic Violence:

Lesbian domestic violence is not taken seriously by the heterosexual or LGBT communities, however there is one organization that cannot ignore this issue: the Amsterdam Police Department. As gay rights are human rights in the Netherlands, and domestic violence is a federal crime, the police must have a part in handling this issue on a city-wide level.

Several of the interviewees did not know how the police handle lesbian domestic violence. Susanne has worked with Marja Lust in the past and has given workshops for Roze in Blauw on the subject, but she still feels that the majority of the police in Amsterdam are unaware that domestic violence occurs in lesbian relationships.

“I mean um, if I live somewhere and I have my friends and my wife and maybe my children and I go to a lesbian bar once in a while and that’s it and I read my *Zij aan Zij*, the magazine, that’s the one magazine that we have I think, and I wouldn’t know that the police were informed about my experience. I don’t think so. So no” (Kers, 2014, Interview).

For the average LBT Amsterdammer who does not research lesbian domestic violence, the police are not a visible source for help and support.

Other people discussed how active Roze in Blauw is within the LGBT community but that they had never heard them talk about more private issues such as domestic violence. Marloes and Josee spoke in depth about Ellie Lust, the President of Roze in Blauw. Everyone knows her face and name in Amsterdam, Holland, and all throughout the Netherlands as she appears on television frequently and is one with the people. Although she is so well-known amongst the LGBT community, she has not been known to speak about the issues that occur within the private sphere. The primary focus of Roze in Blauw is to create a safe space for police officers who are open about their sexuality as well as to create a trustful relationship with the LGBT community.

Roze in Blauw does a lot of outreach about different issues surrounding the LGBT community in Amsterdam. They have worked on informing the community that domestic violence is an issue and have participated in events by providing goodie bags with stress balls, handing out fliers at Gay Pride, and being present in booths at information fairs. Marja herself does a lot of outreach as well. Her primary position within the Amsterdam Police Department is to instruct courses on homosexuality at the Police Academy. She discusses the topic of domestic violence in each of her classes.

“We talk about it here indeed. It’s, it’s something that I have done an interview on for a magazine for lesbian and bisexual women, I have spoken on this at a national dv conference that is being organized annually, all with Susanne Kers because eventually, ultimately, she’s the one, the authority on this topic. So I try to include her as much as I

can. I've been to a play on domestic violence, talked about it at several occasions. So whenever I get a chance, you know, it is being discussed. Um, are we, we aren't proactive about it, we are more reactive about it, I would say. But that also has to do with the fact that Roze in Blauw is not our primary work. We are doing this next to our primary work and it would be kind of difficult to start up this project about domestic violence in lesbian or gay relationships" (Lust, 2014, Interview).

The Police Academy is where most of the police force learns about topics concerning the LGBT community. Marja recalled multiple accounts where new officers coming in had no idea what Roze in Blauw stands for, what they do, and how broad their scope is within Amsterdam.

The Police Academy is a vital aspect of changing the attitudes surrounding domestic violence in same-sex couples. Marja describes how important it is for those enforcing the law to know what and who the laws are protecting, what domestic violence in all relationships can look like, and how to react in an efficient and professional manner:

"Domestic violence of course is not restricted to just intimate partners. It's about all relationships that can go wrong. I think that this law (The Temporary Domestic Exclusion Order Act) is there of course, it does not exclude any relationship, but then again it, it has to be in the, the cops, the people that have to enforce this law have to be aware of the fact, there needs to be an awareness, I guess, a development there that we are trying to accomplish by making this topic also part of our teachings here at the Police Academy. Because, you know, this is our time when we talk about this subject and what we want to do is at least make people aware that this is going on in the community. And they might not encounter it as often as the standard domestic violence situation, but at least be aware of it. And that it's very possible that there is a situation where you need to intervene in that way in a lesbian relationship or in a gay relationship" (Lust, 2014, Interview).

The Amsterdam Police Academy values the education of its police force. As a board member of Roze in Blauw, Marja feels it is important to hold classes discussing sexuality so that all citizens of Amsterdam can feel safe and that their voices are heard.

Roze in Blauw is a network within the Amsterdam Police Department, but it is not a full-time recognized position. Officers who work within Roze and Blauw are doing it on top of their day job and on their own time. They are doing what they can on the topic of domestic violence, but it is difficult with the limited amount of time and resources the network has.

When asked about Ellie Lust's position within Roze in Blauw, Marja and Désirée agreed that she is a well-known icon within the LGBT community, but that just because she is not talking about domestic violence within same-sex couples on the television and at her lectures does not mean that the topic is not being discussed by other members of Roze in Blauw. Although Ellie Lust is the face of the police in Holland, she is not the only officer in the force. It is important that Amsterdammers realize that just because she says something does not mean it is

the end all be all. Likewise, if she does not mention an issue or topic, that does not mean that the issue is not important and should not be addressed.

A couple of years ago, Josee and Désirée decided to hold a discussion at the Zeeburg local Pink People, an LGBT group that gets together to talk about issues and share stories and experiences. The topic of this particular meeting was domestic violence in same-sex relationships. Both women stressed the point that it was not something the people at the meeting wanted to discuss. Désirée described the general reaction, “they thought oh my god, we have to talk about it, no no” (Geritz, 2014, Interview). Josee told a similar story about when Désirée introduced herself and the topic of domestic violence at the meeting:

“She wanted to say I’m here, if you need me, here is my number, also on the item of domestic violence. She said, call me, not too late because I can help you. And nobody responded. For her, she wanted to open the discussion and ask things. Everyone was standing there. Ok, they said, is that true? Especially men, they said is it true? Domestic violence in gay relationships? So, it’s a taboo” (Rothuizen, 2014, Interview).

As a neighborhood watcher, Désirée felt it her duty to spread the knowledge she had as a police officer and member of Roze in Blauw to the public. It is not a topic often discussed, even within the comfort and safety of a small LGBT get-together.

After discussing this topic with Lilian and Ingrid from the Amsterdam Police Department Domestic Violence Unit, I learned that they do not treat cases of same-sex domestic violence any differently than heterosexual cases. Part of why the Amsterdam Police Department has so many different networks is because in the past, the police force had a lot of trouble connecting with the one hundred and forty different cultures residing in the city. They discovered that it was easier to communicate, understand, and gain trust with these communities if there were members of the police force who had specific knowledge of each culture. By adding members of their own country, the Amsterdam Police could better connect with the migrants and inhabitants of Amsterdam. This is one of the reasons that Roze in Blauw was started, to create a bridge between the police and the LGBT community. The Domestic Violence Unit was created to specifically deal with cases of domestic violence with officers trained to work with each community. That is why Ingrid specifically works with Islamic communities in the realm of domestic violence.

The two officers admitted that they personally did not hear a lot of cases of same-sex or lesbian battering, but they had no doubt that it occurs and that it is just as prevalent as all other forms of domestic violence. Lilian and Ingrid were not surprised that more lesbian women do not

come forward about their victimization. Lilian explained that typically a victim needs to be hit an average of forty times before they inform the police about it. Ingrid confirmed this fact, stating that many victims never come forward because they are afraid that the police will not do anything about it. The underreporting of domestic violence crimes is incredibly high.

There are multiple reasons why victims of domestic violence do not report these crimes to the police. Lilian describes one of these:

“Yes. What I’ve heard is that people are in situations where they find it difficult to come to the police station if it is a man and the man, the police officer man stays at the counter and they have to talk to him, they find it very hard. I’ve talked with a lesbian woman who was in a domestic violence relation and she told first that it was normal and when she got hit more and more she was very ashamed to go to the police station” (Liem-Kon-Tja, 2014, Interview).

It can be difficult for a woman to speak with a male police officer about domestic violence, especially if she is a lesbian. There is not enough trust between the police and the LGBT community outside of Roze in Blauw. In the Netherlands, a victim does not necessarily need to make a report herself. If an officer sees bruises or hears from neighbors that there are issues within the house, the police can bring them to court and further investigate the situation.

Ingrid and Lilian said that the police treat everyone the same when dealing with cases of domestic violence. All relationships are seen as legitimate. Battering and abuse is against the law and punished to the same degree regardless of the sexual orientation of the couple. If mutual battering is occurring, both partners are taken into the police station. The Domestic Violence Unit works consciously to meet the needs of all Amsterdammers, but they acknowledge that there is still much work to be done around the region in regards to same-sex domestic violence.

Despite what the Amsterdam Police Department is and is not doing regarding lesbian domestic violence, it is impossible for them to change their practices or know how to handle these disputes if victims do not report their experiences. There are not enough reports for the police to know how to best handle these situations. Marja once did research on lesbian domestic violence and found similar results:

“I know there aren’t. When I did this research project, it was 2011 I want to say, yep. And I asked my co-workers from Roze in Blauw to check the system on domestic violence and reports being done by gay men and he counted ten in 2010 which is ridiculous, you know? And that is not an accurate reflection of what’s going on looking at what research shows as happening as often and with the same frequency as domestic violence in straight relationships. And I have not asked him to do the same for lesbian relationships but I can’t imagine. I’ve been for instance handling this 24-hour hotline for years now, just, just a few times I’ve talked to women who have called because of the situation that they were in a home with their wives or their partners, or...” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

Marianne, who has seen this from a therapist's point of view many times, says it is a huge step for lesbians to go to the police which is why it probably does not happen frequently. Only in extreme cases with blood, bruises, and broken limbs do lesbians report domestic violence. Most of the time they fail to report because they fear retribution from their partner if they go to the police.

Where the Responsibility Lies:

There are many different opinions on whose responsibility it is to start the conversation about lesbian domestic violence. The lack of acknowledgement amongst the community will not change on its own. So who should be addressing this topic; Roze in Blauw, the Domestic Violence Unit, the ministry, grassroots organizations, or the community itself?

Susanne believes it is too large an issue for just one group of people to tackle. She does, however, feel that the Domestic Violence Unit could do more to spread the knowledge on this topic:

“Yeah, in all honesty, because I think you asked the question earlier about the domestic violence unit in general and if you talked to them they give you the specific information, it's about the same prevalence and things like that but then they stop going into it. And it's again a difference between them and us. And because it's them, they don't have to know about it. And that's their responsibility. So, you need people from the big world to give their time and their status and um, resources, channels, to open up the subject to others because I can be a calling person in the desert and everyone sees me, but they all turn around and go their own separate ways. And I understand because there are a lot of big problems they are working on, but specially the higher up people should say ok, part of my budget is going to this part of the subject. It's really, in very many cases, a question of funding” (Kers, 2014, Interview).

This idea of using existing power that exists in the Domestic Violence Unit of the Amsterdam Police Department was also supported by Marja and Désirée. Although neither officers wanted to point fingers at anyone, they both recognized that this is an issue that the Domestic Violence Unit had more resources to handle with. Since the Domestic Violence Unit's primary focus is on domestic violence in Amsterdam, perhaps it is the responsibility of that unit. The officers agree that there must be a joint effort but that the funding would have to come from the top and the specific knowledge on domestic violence would need to come from the unit that specializes in domestic violence.

Marja recalled an event that Lilian was able to manage funding for from the Domestic Violence Unit budget:

“And she’s (Lilian) been very helpful, you know, to get us a budget. Part of what we did after I wrote this paper on it with a coworker of mine from Den Haag, is we organized an informational afternoon on this topic. Susanne Kers was one of the speakers. We had social workers invited, we had police invited. It was attended quite well, I think there were about 60 people overall, and um, you know, she (Lilian) organized a budget so that we could do this. Since we have talked about this in class here, teachers include this as a situational, as an example, to again teach the students that this is a possibility, too. So, you know, it’s kind of the ripple effect. The first domino stone has been turned over and it is slowly spreading out. And I would love to do an extra project on it. And I’ve said that once I’m done my studies I’ve promised Lilian to work with her for some time. And of course what I’m going to do then is some up with some ideas on how to make THIS topic, this something that we could, I don’t know, give more publicity, advertise maybe” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

There has been work done by both the Domestic Violence Unit and Roze in Blauw to address lesbian domestic violence. It is clear that both networks are working at sparking a change, but the word still needs to be spread throughout the community and there needs to be more training within the Amsterdam Police Department.

Marja accepted some of the blame on behalf of Roze in Blauw.

“We’ve also had a blind spot in Roze in Blauw because we’ve only been focused on the incidents that happen in the public arena. Are you being spit at? Are you being assaulted? Are you being insulted? You know, let us know. But what happens if it is behind the front door? And we have never really thought about that” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

It is the responsibility of Roze in Blauw to work alongside the LGBT community and to listen to them and to hear what the issues are. Perhaps if Roze in Blauw would address the topic of domestic violence, it would relieve some of the stigma, especially within the LGBT community. Roze in Blauw already has the trust of the community and can more easily access the target audience.

“WE are doing what we can. But is there room for improvement? Absolutely, absolutely. Whose responsibility is it? I think it’s a joint responsibility. I think yes, the police has a responsibility to educate its people on this topic. I think that it is important that we continue as an LGBT unit within the police department to spread the news about this topic in the community. I think that’s important too, I think you could consider that part of our responsibility. And aside from that, the informational points of domestic violence also have a responsibility, social work also has a responsibility there. So, I don’t think it’s any one particular organization...” (Lust, 2014, Interview).

If the police work on educating themselves as well as the community, more people will be aware of this subject and can combat the silence by speaking out. As Marja suggested, it is not just the police who should be working on breaking this taboo.

Lilian suggested that the police work together with social workers. Social workers, counselors, and therapists have the special skills to work with victims and uncover the story behind the violence while the police have the expertise and legal ability to put an end to the

violence. Since the police cannot do much more than get the abuser out of the home and press charges, it is up to therapists to work with the victim and get them to talk about what happened. Most of the time, victims of lesbian domestic violence will go to a therapist or social worker and talk about the abuse they receive, yet never go to the police. Lilian did, however, express that not all social workers are knowledgeable about same-sex relationships specifically and that more training should be provided to them.

As an LGBT counselor herself, Marianne highly recommends that victims see a social worker who can work one-on-one with them to figure out the best solution for each individual. A common belief is that the police need more information on where they can send victims of lesbian domestic violence. The police should have more training on how to handle these specific scenarios and where they can send victims once their legal part is done. Marianne also says that it should be up to organizations such as the COC Netherlands or Gay and Lesbian Switchboard to start these discussions at a grassroots level and within the LGBT community. It is these large organizations that have connections at the top and who can attain funding for more research and outreach.

There is a lot the community could do as well. Although it may sometimes be better to take advice from an authority figure, it can also be useful to hear things from peers. As Josee commented, “It starts within the community. Women themselves, they have to talk about it. Because you can make policy, Movisie can do things, but I think it needs to start within the community. Talk about relationships, and that’s also taboo” (Rothuizen, 2014, Interview). Sometimes all it takes is for one person to stand up and say something to start a movement. If the community acknowledges that domestic violence occurs in same-sex relationships and starts the dialogue about it, the taboos will break down, the silences will be disturbed, and a change will occur.

It is not always as easy to get help from certain resources. The police may not understand, the social worker may be too expensive, the organization might turn the topic down, or the community might not accept that there is an issue within. Marloes mentions this:

“Right, I’m not going to call the police if my partner is calling me names. Or forbids me to see my friends, then you’re not going to call Ellie. Ellie! (laughs). And it has to be cheap, or free. Because then again if I’m rich, I can go to a therapist and pay for it. But if you don’t have money, then everything stops. Certainly with all the budget cuts in the health system now” (Meuzelaar, 2014, Interview).

There is only so much that can be done when there are budget cuts and less funding to support research and outreach campaigns.

The general consensus is that it should be a joint effort by multiple parties to solve this problem. There should be a middle ground where those at the top such as the ministry and the policy makers meet those at ground level, such as the community and grassroots foundations. More funding is needed for community outreach programs. More agency is needed for research projects. There is still, even in Amsterdam, a heterosexual picture of domestic violence. The government has campaigns against domestic violence, but they focus on heterosexual couples, children, and the elderly. Same-sex victims are just as important as any other victims, yet there are no images for lesbian and gay victims. There is no voice for this population.

Conclusion

Domestic violence does occur, and it occurs in all relationships. Lesbians are just as susceptible to experiencing turmoil and abuse in their relationships. Whether it is physical, psychological, or an issue of power and control, domestic abuse should never be tolerated. The taboos surrounding domestic violence must be broken down before a real change can be made, especially within the LGBT community.

More research must be done on this topic. There is not enough recent research with up-to-date information and statistics, especially not within the Netherlands and Amsterdam. With such a large LGBT presence, Amsterdam is a prime place to conduct this kind of research. Roze in

Blauw as well as most of the other networks within the Amsterdam Police Department are unique to Amsterdam. The city of tolerance should be taken advantage of more by researching the LGBT community and the issues surrounding the taboo or domestic violence in same-sex relationships.

There are two networks within the Amsterdam Police Department that could further look into the subject of lesbian domestic violence; Roze in Blauw and the Domestic Violence Unit. Neither focuses on this topic. No one in Amsterdam is honing in on this specific population. Based on the eight interviews I conducted, yes, the Amsterdam Police could be doing more to help victims of lesbian domestic violence, but it is not the sole responsibility of the police.

There are several other networks within Amsterdam and the Netherlands as a whole that can utilize their resources to spread knowledge about this topic and get people discussing it. The police, social workers and therapists, grassroots organizations, and community need to pool together their resources and work on a solution. Even if all of these resources and organizations come together, nothing will change until the silence is broken. The community has to open its eyes and recognize that lesbians can be victims of domestic violence just like any other women.

My research could be expanded upon with more time and more interviews. Although I conducted eight interviews, it would be best to gather more information and from various other sources. It was in my original proposal to interview lesbian victims of domestic violence themselves to hear what help they received. With the time constraint and lack of lesbians willing to discuss the topic with me, I was unable to interview any victims of domestic violence. This would have given me a great idea of how the police handle lesbian domestic violence. It would have also been more useful if I had interviewed several other members of the Amsterdam Police Department, more therapists, and more grassroots organizations.

Recommendations

Based off of the various perceptions of my interviewees, the most important takeaway from this research is that domestic violence, although a taboo, happens everywhere and in all types of relationships. The “us versus them” attitude must be torn down and replaced with a “we are the same” attitude. Domestic violence is a serious issue and all victims deserve to tell their story, have support systems to get out of their situations, and have their experiences validated. The lesbian community has been silent for too long and someone needs to start the conversation.

The first step is getting more funding for research on this topic. It is imperative that more information and statistics are gathered on instances of lesbian domestic violence. Those who have the power, resources, and funding to do this research need to step forward and start. There needs to be a general consensus that this issue should be addressed and dealt with. Only with a proper budget can the information be spread to those who need it. This topic should be talked about at all levels: the government level, legal level, and community level.

The second step is the continuation of the education of the Amsterdam Police Department. It is imperative that all members of the police force are aware that same-sex couples can also have domestic disputes. There needs to be proper training on how to identify when abuse is occurring, how to handle the situation, and where to send the victims for help. If the police, who are responsible for maintaining the peace and upholding the law, are more aware of different domestic violence situations, they can better prevent and react to cases. The Amsterdam Police Department should also continue to work on encouraging victims to report their experiences. With a lack of reporting, it is almost impossible for the police to do anything about the violence.

Another step that should be taken is determining whose responsibility this topic is. If there are two networks within the Amsterdam Police Department that have the expertise to work with lesbians in domestically violent relationships, then they should either work together to address this issue within the police force as well as the community, or either Roze in Blauw or the Domestic Violence Unit should take responsibility for this particular population of people. If both networks assume that the other network is focussing on this topic, then both will either overlook the lesbian population or will neglect to address the issue. There needs to be more conversation between the different departments of the Amsterdam Police.

A suggestion for Roze in Blauw would be to create more visibility of the entire network and to spread the word about what it is they exactly do. Although Ellie Lust is the face of Roze in Blauw and even the Amsterdam Police Department in general, she is not the only officer in Amsterdam and what she does and does not say should not be taken as the sole voice of the police. If there is a single icon within Roze in Blauw, the LGBT community will only look to that one person. There needs to be more of a dispersion of power within the network. Similarly, just because Lilian is the Regional Coordinator does not mean she should be the only name that Amsterdammers know. If the police work on creating more of a diverse image of the Amsterdam

Police Department, all of the pressure will be relieved from the leader and spread equally amongst the police force.

Another important step that should be taken is within the Amsterdam and Netherlands health care system. With the recent budget cuts, therapy and counseling is less affordable than it once was. For those people uncomfortable going to the police about domestic violence disputes, for whatever reason that may be, they should have full access to an LGBT counselor who is trained to handle cases concerning the LGBT community. It would also be very helpful for healthcare professionals to automatically ask clients and patients during the intake process if they are experiencing domestic violence within their homes. If this subject becomes a standard question that all healthcare professionals are required to ask their clients, than this relieves the pressure from the patient to bring up a taboo subject and allows for an easier transition into the topic.

A final suggestion is to get the community more involved. According to a researcher of lesbian domestic violence, “Community interventions are as powerful, or more powerful, than private therapeutic ones for the very same reason that they are not private” (Kaschak, 2001, p. 4). When the conversation does not leave the privacy of the home or the counseling office, the conversation does not pick up momentum. It remain stagnant and no changes occur. The community needs to be pushed into making a difference and sparking a conversation about lesbian domestic violence. If the community is assured that the police will respond appropriately, they will be more likely to report open up about the topic.

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Appendix

Interview Guide for Amsterdam Police Officers:

- What is your name?
- What is your position within the police force?
 - Do you enjoy it?
 - What's most rewarding about your occupation?
- What are your thoughts about lesbian domestic violence?
 - What do you consider to be lesbian domestic violence?
 - What do you think the prevalence of lesbian domestic violence is?
- How do you feel that the Amsterdam Police handles LGBT issues?
 - What resources do they provide to victims of LGBT violence?
 - Do you find these resources to be sufficient?
 - Do you find these resources to be necessary?
- Do you think that it is necessary to have people within the police department focusing on this community?
 - Should there be a separate sphere of police officers that are trained and aware of these issues?
 - Do you think it is a responsibility of the Amsterdam Police to spread awareness of domestic violence?
 - What do you think the responsibilities of the Amsterdam Police should be?
 - Which unit of the Amsterdam Police Department should be combatting this issue: Domestic Violence or Roze in Blauw
- Should lesbian domestic violence be tackled from a top-down approach stemming from the government or from a bottom-up approach starting from within the community?

Interview Guide for LGBT Therapists / Social Workers:

- What is your name?
- What is your occupation?
 - What's most rewarding about your occupation?
 - Do you work with members of the LGBT community?
- What are your thoughts about lesbian domestic violence?
 - What do you consider to be lesbian domestic violence?
 - What do you think the prevalence of lesbian domestic violence is?
 - Do you think that there is enough outreach by the police for lesbian victims of domestic violence?
 - What resources are there for lesbian victims of domestic violence?
 - Do you work with any lesbian victims of domestic violence?
 - What resources do they use?
 - Do they ever go to the police?
- How do you feel that Roze in Blauw handles LGBT issues?
 - Are you aware of the resources that they provide?

- Do you find these resources to be sufficient?
- Do you find these resources to be necessary?
- Do you think that it is necessary to have people within the police department focusing on this community?
 - Should there be a separate sphere of police officers that are trained and aware of these issues?
 - Do you think it is a responsibility of the Amsterdam Police to spread awareness of domestic violence?
 - What do you think the responsibilities of the Amsterdam Police should be?
- As a professional who works with this population, where do you think we should go from here in spreading the word about this topic?
 - Should lesbian domestic violence be tackled from a top-down approach stemming from the government or from a bottom-up approach starting from within the community?

Interview Guide for LGBT Community Researchers / Outreach:

- What is your name?
- What is your occupation?
 - What's most rewarding about your occupation?
 - Do you work with members of the LGBT community?
- What are your thoughts about lesbian domestic violence?
 - What do you consider to be lesbian domestic violence?
 - What do you think the prevalence of lesbian domestic violence is?
 - Do you think that there is enough outreach by the police for lesbian victims of domestic violence?
 - What resources are there for lesbian victims of domestic violence?
 - Do you know any lesbian victims of domestic violence?
- Are you aware of Roze in Blauw?
 - How do you feel that Roze in Blauw handles LGBT issues?
 - Are you aware of the resources that they provide?
 - Do you find these resources to be sufficient?
 - Do you find these resources to be necessary?
- Do you think that it is necessary to have people within the police department focusing on this community?
 - Should there be a separate sphere of police officers that are trained and aware of these issues?
 - Do you think it is a responsibility of the Amsterdam Police to spread awareness of domestic violence?
 - What do you think the responsibilities of the Amsterdam Police should be?
 - Whose responsibility is it to start the dialogue about lesbian domestic violence?

Should lesbian domestic violence be tackled from a top-down approach stemming from the government or from a bottom-up approach starting from within the community?

Interviewees in Alphabetical Order:

Geritz, Désirée – Amsterdam Police Department (Roze in Blauw)

Fiene, Ingrid – Amsterdam Police Department (Domestic Violence)

Kers, Susanne – LGBT Community Researcher (Taboe Kwardraat)

Liem-Kon-Tja, Lilian – Amsterdam Police Department (Domestic Violence)

Lust, Marja – Amsterdam Police Department (Roze in Blauw)

Meuzelaar, Marloes – LGBT Community Outreach (Stichting OndersteBoven)

Rothuizen, Josee – LGBT Community Researcher and Therapist / Social Worker

Steijnis, Marianne – LGBT Therapist / Social Worker