Abstract

The success of recent same-sex marriage campaigns worldwide arguably reflects a shift towards recognising parity between lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans (LGB and/or T) and heterosexual relationships, whereby LGB and/or T women and men are credited with the same needs and rights regarding intimacy and family life. This contrasts starkly with previous, and to some extent, continuing, discourses of difference which either celebrate LGB and/or T distinctiveness, or conversely emphasise difference to preserve heterosexual privilege. This article explores how discourses of sameness and difference are reflected in interview data gathered from 23 practitioners who provide perpetrator interventions primarily for domestically violent and abusive heterosexual men. When reflecting on the suitability of these interventions for abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners, discourses of sameness dominated practitioners' assumptions about the needs of LGB and/or T perpetrators. Our conclusions problematise this emphasis on sameness and argue that the development of interventions for abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners needs to be informed by more nuanced understandings of both difference and sameness within and across LGB and/or T and heterosexual people's intimate relationships.

Keywords

Domestic abuse, violence, perpetrators, LGBT, sexuality

Making sense of discourses of sameness and difference in agency responses to abusive LGB and/or T[1] partners

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Introduction

Successful campaigns for same-sex marriage legislation across the world have been hailed by many as the ultimate achievement in equality for lesbians, gay and bisexual men and women and/or trans (LGB and/or T) women and men with their cisgender, heterosexual counterparts. State recognition of 'the love that dare not speak its name' finally includes lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or trans women and men in what have traditionally been seen as the heart or building blocks of society: marriage and the family. Underpinning the winning arguments have been human rights discourses emphasising that we are all the same, regardless of our sexuality and/or gender identity; humans with the same human needs for shelter, food, family life and the opportunities to obtain them. Indeed, that the United States President, Barack Obama, drew on this language in his re-inauguration address in 2013, is a measure of its success. He said:

> Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law…If we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to each other is equal as well (Obama, 2013)

Yet, whilst these discourses of sameness have been politically expedient, counter discourses have challenged them in favour of different ends. For example, those who believe that LGB and/or T people cannot and/or should not be equally valued or entitled to the same legal and civic rights as heterosexual people have focussed on differences across sexuality and gender identity in attempts to undermine campaigns for equality. The previous pope, Benedict, for example, warned that same-sex marriage threatened the future of humanity (Pullela, 2012). Others still, from within LGB and/or T communities, have also challenged the premise that equality with existing norms based on heteronormative benchmarks should be the goal (see for example, Bindel, 2014). Indeed, Richardson (2004, 2005; and with Monro, 2012), amongst others, has commented on some of the – perhaps unintended – consequences of a normalisation process that constructs 'good gays' who conform to those benchmarks, embracing marriage, parenting and 'traditional' family life, and pits

them against ‘bad gays’ who continue to engage in ‘deviant’ behaviours: casual sex, anonymous sex, non-monogamy, child-free lives and alternative family models. Race- and class-based critiques have extended this argument, contending that equal marriage reflects white, middle class aspirations. Kandaswamy (2008) for example argues that under neo-liberal responsibilisation, the reification of marriage for financial stability has correlated with the withdrawal of state welfare support. Like Richardson, she predicts a demarcation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ gays, whereby good equals white, middle class, married and financially independent; while bad equals black, working class and financially needy (Kandaswamy, 2008).

Still other discourses of difference maintain that legal equalities are only part of the quest for ‘real’ equality: that the latter will only be achieved when homo/bi/trans-phobia, hate crime and/or bullying are no more; when the suicide, mental health and substance use rates of LGB and/or T people are similar to their heterosexual counterparts; and when coming out will no longer be necessary or cause for remark, shame, fear and rejection. For these commentators, whilst legislation and policies provide a framework for equalities, it is only in the enactment of them in everyday life that real change will be evidenced (Hunt and Fish, 2008; King and McKeown, 2003; Lewis et al., 2012; Whittle et al., 2007). Thus it is that discourses of sameness and difference

currently pervade understandings about the lives of LGB and/or T people. This article explores the consequences of these discourses for making sense of LGB and/or T people who are violent and abusive in their intimate relationships.

There is no longer any debate about whether domestic violence and abuse (DVA) occurs within relationships where at least one partner identifies as LGB and/or T (Donovan et al., 2006, Donovan and Hester, 2014). In the UK, the Home Office definition of DVA recognises that it can occur 'regardless of gender or sexuality' (Home Office, 2013). The recent *Serious Crime Act 2015* introduced the offence of coercive and controlling behaviour in an intimate or familial relationship, which applies irrespective of gender and sexuality. Civil law also recognises the equivalence of same-sex relationships with heterosexual relationships for the purposes of securing non-molestation, occupation and domestic violence protection orders[2]. In principle, therefore, the fact that a couple comprises two women or two men (nor whether they are cisgender or transgender) should make no difference when legal remedies for DVA are sought.

What is less clear is how the enactment of LGB and/or T domestic violence and abuse is understood by practitioners. (Donovan and Hester, 2014) have identified that LGB and/or T survivors' experiences of help-seeking may

be adversely affected by the 'public story' about DVA. The public story about DVA identifies/constructs this as a problem of heterosexual men's, typically, *physical* violence towards heterosexual women; and as a problem of the presentation of gender in that it is the bigger, 'stronger' embodied heterosexual man who is physically violent against the smaller 'weaker' embodied heterosexual woman. Donovan and Hester (2014) have also suggested that the public story can conjure up limiting assumptions about 'race' and ethnicity, physical ability and capacity as well as age and social class. Whilst the empirical evidence underscores the reality that heterosexual women are numerically most often the victims/survivors of DVA (Smith et al., 2012; Scottish Government, 2013), this public story makes it difficult for other stories either to be told to, or heard by, informal or formal sources of help, and underpins incorrect assumptions about same-sex couples. Ristock (2002) found that the feminist approach to understanding DVA, as a problem of patriarchal connivance across societal structures and individual heterosexual men's sense of entitlement, made it difficult for practitioners to both make sense of how lesbian survivors might be experiencing DVA and how practitioners might respond to their needs. Other research from Canada and the USA confirms that assumptions about gender and sexuality make it more difficult for practitioners to identify risk in different relationships: lesbian survivors, especially if their

presentation of gender is perceived to be more masculine, are believed to be less at risk than heterosexual women, whilst gay men are assumed to engage in 'a fair fight' because of their assumed shared masculinity (Brown and Groscup, 2009; Little and Terrance, 2010; Pattavina et al., 2007; Poorman et al., 2003). In other words, heteronormative, cisnormative assumptions about gender can result in difficulties for victim/survivors, abusive partners and practitioners accepting that women can be violent/abusive and that men can be victimised. Whilst this article focuses on sexuality and gender, multiple intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1989) are crucial to understanding how individuals make sense of their experiences in abusive relationships and their help-seeking, as well as the responses of policy makers and help-providers (Donovan and Hester, 2014).

With respect to abusive LGB and/or T partners, even less is known. Some work, again in North America, has explored the impact of what has been called 'minority stress' on partners in same-sex relationships. Here the argument is that belonging to a minority group – in this case being lesbians and gay men – results in negative consequences due to homophobia which may in turn be expressed as violent and abusive behaviours in intimate relationships (Balsam and Szymanski, 2005; Lewis et al., 2012; Mendoza, 2011). For these scholars, LGBT DVA is therefore positioned within a discourse of difference.

Yet, there are a number of problems with this argument. A methodological concern is that many studies identify as a 'perpetrator' anybody who reports that they have enacted at least one violent act with no reference to the context in which this might have taken place and different indicators of 'stress' are used within and across studies. Further, there is a lack of theoretical explanation for why it is that, although most LGB and/or T people experience minority stress, only some are perpetrators – or victims – of DVA (Donovan and Hester, 2014; Donovan, 2015; Donovan et al., 2014). Consequently, such findings and analysis must be read with caution.

The study which this article reports on examined the abusive behaviours of LGB and/or T people in their intimate relationships and sought to develop recommendations for improving practice for these groups of abusive people. This included speaking to practitioners currently providing mandatory and voluntary interventions predominantly for heterosexual men. Analysis of practitioners' accounts identified discourses of sameness and difference across sexuality and gender that are drawn on by practitioners when discussing abusive LGB and/or T people. The extent to which practitioners foreground sameness and/or difference, we argue, has consequences both for how practitioners construct 'the problem' of abusive LGB and/or T people, but also for the type of intervention recommended for them. Accordingly, the rest of the

article is divided into three sections. In the first we outline the study's methodology. In the second section the data is discussed to illustrate how discourses of sameness and difference are utilised in three ways to underpin understandings about DVA in the relationships of LGB and/or T people. These ways are all positioned along a continuum where discourses of sameness are at one end and discourses of difference are at the other, and where in between they overlap. The implications of these discourses for the design and delivery of interventions for LGB and/or T perpetrators are also considered. In the final section, conclusions focus on the limitations of relying exclusively on discourses of sameness or difference to make sense of abusive behaviours by LGB and/or T intimate partners. We particularly warn against over-emphasis of sameness, arguing that this obscures differences between heterosexual and LGB and/or T relationships, whilst also homogenising LGB and/or T individuals and relationships. Instead, we argue that in spite of some parallel issues, attending to the differences is key to the development of suitable interventions.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed methods approach to exploring the abusive behaviours of LGB and/or T people in their intimate relationships. A national community survey was conducted asking LGB and/or T participants what they have done in their intimate relationships when things have gone wrong; follow-up in-depth interviews subsequently took place with volunteers from the survey; interviews were conducted with practitioners who provide DVA perpetrator interventions; and finally focus groups took place with a range of practitioners providing what we called 'relationship services' (including sex and relationship educators, youth workers, counsellors and therapists as well as practitioners working with survivors and perpetrators of DVA) (see Donovan et al., 2014). In this article we focus on the data from the interviews conducted with 23 practitioners providing perpetrator interventions in England and Scotland including mandatory programmes provided within prisons by forensic psychologists or in the community by the probation service (n=11, including seven from probation and four from prisons); and voluntary programmes provided primarily by non-governmental organisations (n=12). Participants' professional roles included being programme facilitators, supervisors and managers, probation officers, forensic psychologists in training and having involvement in programme design, training and consultancy. Participants were almost evenly split by gender and, where details were given, had between 18

months and over twenty years' experience of working with those affected by domestic violence. Whilst we did not routinely collect data on practitioners' sexuality and/or gender identity, two women self-identified as lesbian, one woman self-identified as bisexual and one man as a gay man. All interviews were conducted face-to-face and most lasted between one to one and a half hours. All were digitally audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed.

To identify and recruit practitioners, first a database of voluntary, community-based perpetrator interventions from across the UK was compiled. In total, 50 services were identified, and where information was available on websites or leaflets, it appeared that four of these offered services to perpetrators in same-sex relationships. Bisexual and transgender perpetrators were never mentioned. The information collated was used to contact practitioners working on voluntary programmes with invitations to participate in the research. Practitioners working on mandatory programmes were recruited through the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) after receiving research approval from NOMS.

All practitioners were asked a series of questions asking them to initially describe the interventions they offered including content, duration, referral, measurement of 'success', and the availability of parallel support for victims. The interviews then focussed on the current response to LGBT perpetrators –

whether or not an intervention can be provided and if so, the form that this takes; their views on LGBT DVA and whether LGBT perpetrators need the same interventions or different ones. Logistics were also probed – whether group or individual interventions are most apt, whether the gender and sexuality of the facilitators matter and how groups should be composed. Since most of the services only offered interventions for heterosexual male abusive partners, it was also pertinent to ask whether LGBT interventions were planned and/or what the barriers were to developing this work.

The sample is self-selected and therefore participants can be seen as a motivated group of practitioners with an interest in provision for abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners. This might explain the generally positive approach of participants, all of whom drew on equality discourses to argue that this group should receive equal – the same – treatment as their heterosexual counterparts. Some participants described the lack of provision for this group as discriminatory.

Thematic analysis was informed by grounded theory approaches insofar as the interview transcripts were read and re-read to elicit emerging themes that both addressed specific research questions about the readiness of practitioners to provide interventions for abusive LGB and/or T people and reflected the content of their accounts which were not pre-determined by specific questions

(Braun and Clarke, 2006). This was how discourses of sameness and difference emerged as core themes in the analysis and it is to these that we now turn.

Findings

In the following section, there is an analysis of practitioner accounts in relation to whether they drew mainly on discourses of sameness at one end of a continuum, mainly discourses of difference at the other end, or occupied a middle ground that drew on both.

We're all the same

In these accounts, practitioners understand that domestic violence and abuse can occur in any kind of intimate relationship; that abusive relationships can be understood similarly to be the result of the exertion of power and control by one partner over the other; and/or that abusive partners can be understood to be motivated by similar factors – for example, their childhood experiences, substance use or other psychological 'symptoms' such as problems with attachment or dependency. For example, Matt, who worked in the voluntary

sector on interventions for heterosexual male perpetrators, warned against the tendency to ‘reinvent the wheel’ and explained that DVA is a problem of power and control that can occur in any relationship:

> [A]t some point somebody no doubt will say ‘LGBT domestic violence: that's an issue. We need to do something about that.’ And the frustrating part about all that is whenever they do it they start from ‘go’ as though this is something unique to this community and of course it's not. The issues around power, control, abuse are pretty much the same and then what you've then got…are kind of things that are more particular to a certain community…in the case of LGBT relationships…around how the issues of gender and sexuality are used as part of that abuse…Then ultimately you're into the same stuff, you're into how…abuse manifests itself and how it’s used to belittle someone else, control someone else. So I don't think it has to be hugely other. (Matt, voluntary programme)

Mary, a manager of a voluntary perpetrator programme, also believed that ‘a lot’ of the programme for heterosexual men ‘transfers’. She would not bring gay

men or women into the group for fear of the gay men experiencing homophobia and the women, misogyny. Nevertheless, she argued:

> I've heard people say ‘oh well gender's not present’, well gender's always present you know…it is all about how you see…feminisation of that other person and…because it's still linked into ideas about what's powerful and what's not and those are ultimately…patriarchal ideas and I don't see patriarchy as different to racism…it’s all part and parcel of the same thing…putting other people down to feel good about yourself…and when you see that the way people say they're treated in same-sex relationships by their abuser um it's very much the little women even if they're not a woman, it's that kind of position. (Mary, voluntary programme)

For Matt, Mary and others, the central issue is how power and control is operationalised in any relationship, albeit recognising that there might be differences in types of identity abuse used that rely on knowledge about identities, threatening to out somebody to their faith community, for example. Otherwise, the overall pattern of power and control is considered similar regardless of sexuality or gender.

Other accounts also draw on discourses of sameness to emphasise the 'human' nature of the motivations of abusive people. Here a mixture of social and psychological factors are typically listed to explain how 'anybody' can become abusive if they are feeling threatened in some way. For example, Harry, who works in the prison service as a forensic psychologist, explains:

> [A]s far as I'm aware…the attachments we have, the personality that we have …has nothing to do with our sexuality. You know…homosexual[s] will learn in exactly the same ways as…people who are not homosexual, so they can have similar attachment problems, similarly learnt how to deal with anger, similarly learnt…when to use anger, when to use violence and when not to use violence. So I think knowing what the treatment targets are…which are, attitudes that support the abuse and violence of [sic] women which we've sort of roughly split into patriarchies as I've been talking about, misogyny, so the hatred of women, and the use of violence as a conflict strategy, so I think all of those things I would sort of reasonably expect to possibly exist in any type of relationships. (Harry, mandatory programme in a prison)

What is interesting about Harry's account is that in his list of what he presents as 'human' failings and underlying motivations for domestic violence he also includes misogyny and patriarchy as underpinning beliefs that anybody might hold and that will be responsible for their violence. Yet this list, echoed by other participants as human traits, is evidenced in the research literature as being factors associated with the violence of heterosexual men (Anderson and Umberson, 2001; Dobash et al., 2000; Hearn, 1997). Thus, heterosexual masculinity is, as elsewhere, understood as the default benchmark, in this case for violent and abusive intimate partners. Roger, a practitioner on a voluntary programme also refers to the:

> [S]imilarities of some of the underlying issues about why the violence is there is about communication, one person not feeling able to communicate…so feeling that the other person is more able to communicate and therefore they can't win arguments…so it [violence] kind of creeps in because it's a way of closing down the argument or it's a way of establishing…hierarchy within the relationship...I think sometimes one of the similarities that can emerge from this is something to do with jealousy, so within couple relationships…so the person's self-esteem is low and their fear is

> that their partner is going to go off with somebody else and so there is a similarity…in both communities, of a fear that 'my partner is going to leave me'. (Roger, voluntary programme)

For these practitioners there is apparently no tension in presenting these lists of behaviours, characteristics and emotions as human even when they are most often typically associated with, and arising from research on, and practice with, violent and abusive heterosexual masculinity. Further, this slippage between what behaviours are 'human' and behaviours associated with 'abusive heterosexual masculinity' occurs in spite of these practitioners having admittedly limited – or no – experience of working with abusive LGB and/or T partners and of there being scant empirical evidence of relevant 'treatment targets' for this group.

We're not the same

At the other end of the continuum are those practitioners whose accounts draw more on discourses of difference to argue that LGB and/or T perpetrators cannot be likened to, or conflated with, heterosexual men. Instead, fresh approaches are required to address their violence and abuse. Not many participants are found at this end which to some extent evidences the greater

dominance of discourses of sameness over those of difference in society more generally. Lucy, a practitioner on a voluntary programme for heterosexual men, is one. She draws on her experience of working with an abusive trans man to explain her position:

> [T]he majority of people coming through [the programmes] are heterosexual men who often…have a sort of fairly patriarchal sense of entitlement around their behaviour towards women…so it is very much a gendered programme, which isn't, it's not gender-neutral, it's not one that we can just say it will work the same for gay men, or you know lesbians, or someone who's trans. (Lucy, voluntary programme)

Lucy was interviewed jointly with Jack who is an independent consultant specialising in LGBT DVA. As the discussion developed they agreed that issues of power, as in heterosexual DVA, are central to understanding LGB and/or T DVA. Nevertheless, they also argue that this is operationalised differently in LGB and/or T relationships, thus maintaining an emphasis on discourses of difference. Lucy explains that for heterosexual men their insecurities are linked

to their masculinity but for LGB and/or T people it is linked to something else other than gender:

> [T]he difference obviously is…the issue of masculinity as a heterosexual man isn't the issue in LGBT relationships.…I think it's about the sense of powerlessness coming from somewhere else, an insecurity and so some of the stuff to explore…[is] around where does that sense of insecurity and powerlessness come [from]. (Lucy, voluntary programme**)**

Jack reinforces the focus on difference by also talking about the parallels he believes exists between heterosexual and LGB and/or T DVA but that are expressed in different ways. Thus, Jack refers to the pressures that heterosexual couples can experience from their families to stay together regardless of the DVA being enacted within them and argues that in his experience, LGB and/or T friendship networks exert similar pressures around a couple where LGB and/or T DVA is being enacted:

> I think I see a lot of pressure from friendship groups as well because they become so close knit especially when they…may be more

> isolated from family members or friends they may have had when growing up because they've come out …and then they become very much co-dependent on their friendship groups…so if a new partner comes into that friendship group they do then become part of the family and I've seen it quite a lot that friendship groups will say, “We'll try and help you, don't go to the police…we'll try to…resolve this without having to take any sort of outsider help”, so I think that's an additional barrier as well because these couples don't want to break up because it will then upset the relationship within their friendship group as well, and especially if your partner's using the fact that if you were to break up then your friends are going to disown you and you’re going to have no one, you’ve got no family to go to, it’s an added pressure there as well. (Jack, consultant working with LGB and/or T DVA)

Above, Jack focusses on the ways in which the friendship network of the partners in an abusive relationship might act to try to keep the relationship together because of their own investment in the relationship as part of their own supportive family network. However, Jack and Lucy went on to talk about how LGB and/or T people, like Black, Asian and other ethnic minority group

members, are also reluctant to approach mainstream agencies for fear of experiencing hostility and discrimination (see for example Gill, 2004; Izzidien, 2008). In addition to finding parallels between different marginalised identities, when individuals inhabit multiple marginalised identities, these intersecting identities shape the nature of the DVA and the perceived and actual opportunities for help-seeking (see also Donovan and Hester, 2014).

Accounts that emphasise difference often focus on how interventions must consider the pressures that exist in LGB and/or T lives and relationships that result from living in a heterosexist society. Referred to above as minority stress, this might be mediated by intersecting identities of 'race', age, social class, immigrant status and disability. Power dynamics as the framework for understanding how and why DVA occurs are typically suggested to be the same across sexuality and gender. However, for participants who draw on discourses of difference, interventions must develop from those differences and not merely replicate programmes designed for heterosexual men but with language and illustrative materials substituted to reflect same-sex relationships. For these practitioners, difference must be embedded in the *design* of interventions.

We are similar but different too

Most accounts fall between the ends of the sameness/difference continuum. On the one hand these focus on heterosexual masculinity as the lens through which differences are articulated and, on the other, reveal a lack of knowledge about LGB and/or T lives. Similarities between abusive heterosexual men and LGB and/or T abusive partners are emphasised. However, unlike Lucy and Jack above, most draw on little, if any, experience of working with lesbian or gay/bisexual male abusive partners and have never had any experience of (knowingly) working with bisexual or trans abusive women and men. The emphasis on *knowingly* highlights that when a trans man defines as heterosexual or a bisexual man has a female partner, non-normative sexualities and gender identities may remain invisible, obscuring the potential need for a LGB and/or T intervention.

Accounts that fall under the 'we're similar but different too' tend to exhibit a tension between wanting to subscribe to discourses of sameness and point to the humanness of abusive behaviours, yet simultaneously wanting to hold onto the usefulness of problematising heterosexual masculinity in interventions addressing violent heterosexual men (see also Ristock, 2001). For example, John, who provides a voluntary perpetrator programme, illustrates this dilemma. In one part of his account he draws on discourses of sameness to argue that

some parts of the existing intervention he provides would be of use in addressing abusive behaviours in anybody:

> [S]ome of the issues are the same…there's an issue around attachment and attachment styles and…there are some people who…will cling together who they really shouldn't be together and…there's a lot of violence and a very low likelihood that they're actually going to separate…and for…those people, men or women, heterosexual or gay, whatever I think…they are attached to each other for whatever reason and there's real kind of possessiveness and jealousy. Then I think those issues are kind of the same across, probably all sexualities. (John, voluntary programme)

In this part of his account John echoes the reflections of those participants who are in the 'we're all the same' group. However, later in his account John draws on discourses of difference to emphasise the importance of what he calls 'gender' in addressing the behaviour of heterosexual men:

> We do have a gendered analysis of domestic abuse because…I think some people disagree with [a] gendered/feminist analysis of

> domestic abuse but I don't think ignoring issues of gender and sexuality or sex rather and the way we are (pause) gendered by society, I don't think that does heterosexual men any favours when it comes to looking at the issues around domestic abuse. (John, voluntary programme)

Yet, whilst John is clear that heterosexual men need a gendered analysis, he, like other participants, struggled to articulate whether and how gender might operate, and need to be addressed, in abusive LGB and/or T relationships. This is unsurprising, given that gender has been under-theorised in relation to LGBT DVA (Barnes, 2013), yet it can lead to attempts to understand and address LGB and/or T abusive people as if they are like, or behave in similar ways as, heterosexual men. The implications of this are first that abusive LGB and/or T relationships might be assumed to be 'like' heterosexual relationships; and second that victim/survivors might be like or behave in similar ways as heterosexual women. For example, Vicky, a practitioner in a prison, thought that there might be a heteronormative trend in same-sex relationships based on her experience of her sister's lesbian relationship:

> My sister is in a gay relationship, I've got friends who are [gay] and I think…there are some different dynamics…because…they're the same sex so there isn't any...of the kind of like - in my relationship there's still some things that my partner will do because he thinks he's better at it than me [laughter]…whereas…my sister's relationship there does seem to be a little more equality.…but…my sister has fallen into the more feminine role so she will do a little more of the housework that sort of thing, traditional feminine role and her partner is a little bit more masculine but that could just be them. (Vicky, practitioner on mandatory programmes in prison)

What is evident here and in the accounts of some other respondents who draw on discourses of both sameness and difference is how gender in same-sex relationships is assumed to be enacted and identifiable through heteronormative gender roles. This is in contrast to Lucy who draws on discourses of difference to argue that lesbian and gay people have completely different models/understandings of gender that depart from this heteronormative approach. However, regardless of the discourses being drawn on, the point is that there is a spectrum of experiences and ways of organising relationships that will be informed to a greater or lesser extent by the dominant

(heteronormative) scripts for intimacy available. Furthermore, whatever a set of relationship practices look like from the outside, the meanings of them within the relationship might be quite different, for example, when a particular role is chosen or negotiated rather than imposed (Barnes, 2013).

An unreflective, surface, assessment of how relationship practices are enacted, including violent and abusive practices, can result in assumptions being made about gender that are attached to and/or reified in heteronormative binaries. In these binaries, relationship practices (especially those attached to sharing a household such as cooking, DIY, laundry, shopping etc) are read unproblematically as heteronormatively gendered (male/female) and implicitly loaded as indicative of heteronormative power dynamics (male = more power in the relationship/female = less power in the relationship). Our previous work has problematised these assumptions in same-sex relationships (Donovan and Hester, 2014) and has argued that whilst gender is a feature of same-sex relationships (Heaphy et al., 2001; Donovan and Hester, 2014), it needs to be understood in more complex ways (Barnes, 2013). Attempts to map binarised heteronormative gender roles on to LGB and/or T relationships can reinforce the public story by making it difficult to reconfigure abusive partners as women and victimised partners as men. Further, they may lead practitioners developing

interventions for LGB and/or T abusive partners to assume that the 'problem' is a proxy heterosexual masculinity, rather than engaging with the varied dynamics of LGB and/or T relationships and different manifestations of gender therein. Here it is useful to consider the analytical insights of queer theory that challenge binary thinking through a radical interrogation and deconstruction of binaries and the functions of binaries themselves (for example, Butler, 1990). This encourages a more open-minded approach to hearing accounts of DVA and relationship practices that transcend heteronormative assumptions attached to the public story of DVA. Yet, it is also important to remember that a queer analysis, which relies on the destabalisation of categories, including identities, can make it difficult for praxis, which is necessary for improving service provision for partners in abusive relationships whose experiences are not reflected in the public story of DVA.

Designing and delivering interventions for LGB and/or T perpetrators: the implications of these discourses

In discussion about the practicalities of organising interventions for abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners, practitioners continue their engagement with discourses of sameness and difference to support their responses. Existing programmes are, predominantly, run as groups with two facilitators, ideally one

female and one male, and over at least twenty-six sessions[3] with structured support for victimised partners. Practitioners were asked to consider whether or not similar factors would be needed in a programme for abusive LGB and/or T abusive intimate partners. Generally, discourses of sameness were drawn on to argue that group interventions are the best option, since this is the case with abusive heterosexual men, and that two facilitators are also needed for any group. For example, Mike, a manager of a voluntary perpetrator programme argues, based on his experience in favour of group work interventions for violent/abusive partners:

> [S]o I think there's arguments for and against but aye if I was to boil right down I believe in a group work model certainly and I think the benefits are more tangible and are more long-ranging than perhaps a one-to-one and I'm even actually comparing the…men I've worked with on a one-to-one basis. (Mike, voluntary programme)

And, Mark, another manager of a voluntary perpetrator programme, explained his belief that, regardless of how the group was made up – whether it was for abusive lesbians or heterosexual men – that co-facilitation with a woman and a man is best practice:

> Because I think it's very important…whoever the client group is, to see that that both genders are equal in the work that we're delivering…and we've got a male and a female who are delivering the programme…so um I think that still needs to be in you know if it's all women I think it's good cos you know a female group could start to gender stereotype and you have that balance to be able to address that as well…because it's about the abuse…not who is the abuser, …in the relationship. (Mark, voluntary programme)

In addition, lessons from work with abusive heterosexual men have led to best practice guidance reinforcing group work and co-facilitation of group work to minimise risks of (inadvertent) collusion with abusive heterosexual men by individual practitioners and the encouragement of group and peer challenges of abusive mindsets and behaviours (see also Rees and Rivett, 2005). Abusive partners regardless of sexuality or gender identity were believed to act in similar ways requiring similar precautions. Yet many practitioners also recognised that resources might act to prevent setting up group work for abusive LGB and/or T partners and in one probation area an existing one-to-one module for offenders

of domestic violence and abuse related offences had been amended to provide a one-to-one module for LGB and/or T perpetrators).

Accounts were more confused about whether or not there needed to be a mixed-sex pair facilitating or not; and whether separate groups for LGB women and men and/or for trans women and men would be necessary. Practitioners were running up against the limits of their knowledge about these groups and their intimate relationships, particularly bisexual and trans women and men. Attempts to promote equalities in provision often led to drawing on discourses of sameness to argue that interventions could and should be relatively easy to design, drawing on existing interventions but creating new materials reflecting same-sex relationships instead of heterosexual relationships. The main stumbling blocks were considered to be resources and viability of groups if insufficient participants were available. However, on closer examination of practitioners' accounts the analysis suggested that both gender and sexuality posed potential challenges because of differences that proved complex to untangle.

Discussion

In accounts of practitioners who provide interventions for domestically abusive heterosexual men, discourses of sameness and difference between heterosexual and same-sex, bisexual and trans intimacies and abuse are drawn on to consider the appropriateness of those programmes for LGB and/or T abusive partners. Practitioners were recruited to this study knowing its topic and, unsurprisingly perhaps, all subscribed to an equalities discourse, agreeing that interventions for this group were needed. Most draw on discourses of sameness to explain that DVA can occur in any relationship regardless of sexuality or gender and that abusive behaviours are human behaviours: problems with attachment, dependency, anger and/or control can potentially be experienced and expressed in abusive ways by anybody. These accounts conclude that with a change in the illustrative material to reflect diverse relationships, much of the existing programme material could be used to good effect with abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners. A smaller group are convinced that power and control are the central features of any abusive relationship and as such existing programmes offer enough to be able to begin the work of designing interventions for abusive LGB and/or T partners. Most practitioners see the main barrier to the provision of group interventions as one of resources: that it would be difficult to justify the resource unless sufficient numbers were available to make an intervention viable. Others, whilst agreeing

that much of the existing programmes could be used for any abusive partner, got stuck on the issue of gender.

Discourses of difference are most often drawn on by these practitioners when they have a feminist understanding of DVA which problematises heterosexual masculinity. In these accounts practitioners are keen to retain a gendered analysis to challenge and address heterosexual men's abusive masculinity. Gender, or (heterosexual) masculinity, is offered as a fundamental factor underpinning the causes and/or motivations for heterosexual men's abuse. Conversely, gender is not problematised in LGB and/or T abusive relationships, amidst confusion regarding what the characteristics are of abusive heterosexual men and what are 'human' failings, generic to any abusive partner. Yet in some accounts practitioners stumble on their limited knowledge about how LGB and/or T people enact intimacy. Some consider whether or not LGB and/or T relationships might be 'like' heterosexual relationships; in other words, gender in LGB and/or T relationships might operate such that one partner might be 'like' a heterosexual man, exhibiting masculine traits, behaviours, and more importantly, inhabiting more relationship power and the other 'like' a heterosexual woman exhibiting feminine traits, behaviours and inhabiting less relationship power.

Working within a professional framework that is based on the public story of DVA – and which thus makes assumptions about the identities of legitimate victims and abusers – has consequences for practitioners' ability to make sense of relationships and abusive partners that do not fit this story. Consequently, the extent to which those with LGB and/or T and other intersecting identities can recognise their own experiences as DVA and name them as such to help providers is limited; as well as making it difficult for help providers to hear non-normative accounts of DVA. For the practitioners in this study, the pervasiveness of this public story is compounded by their usually very limited experience of working with LGB and/or T people and their consequent retreat to what is familiar and normative: an understanding of relationship dynamics based on heteronormative, binarised gender roles.

How practitioners make sense of LGB and/or T relationships and DVA has critical implications for the development of appropriate interventions for abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners. There are dangers in assuming that abusive LGB and/or T relationship dynamics might be like those of heterosexual relationships; that the abusive partner enacts abusive heterosexual masculinity and the victim/survivor enacts heterosexual femininity. Interpreting LGB and/or T relationships as heteronormatively gendered, for instance, enables practitioners to ostensibly be inclusive and open up existing interventions for

heterosexual men to abusive LGB and/or T partners, but without destabilising the public story of DVA.

Whilst gender is problematised in abusive heterosexual relationships, it is the discriminatory societal context that some participants point to as an explanatory factor for DVA in the relationships of LGB and/or T people. In these accounts discourses of difference are drawn on to explicate the impacts on the relationships and behaviours of LGB and/or T people of living in a homophobic or transphobic society. Here, there is recognition that living in a hostile society makes LGB and/or T people vulnerable to identity abuse, such as threats of outing. Moreover, there is also recognition of LGB and/or T people's different social support mechanisms: support may be more available from friends rather than family, but fears of losing or disappointing LGB and/or T friends may influence decisions about remaining in or leaving an abusive intimate relationship. For these practitioners, their arguments move more towards the need to start from the beginning in developing different interventions rather than an unproblematic lifting of parts of existing programmes for use with abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners. However, these are in the minority.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is some evidence in this study that the discourses of sameness that have successfully promoted legislative change are creating a new orthodoxy of thinking about the intimate lives of LGB and/or T lives: that they are the same as heterosexual lives and require the same responses when DVA occurs. In exploring the ways in which discourses of sameness and to a lesser extent discourses of difference underpin discussions about what interventions abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners might require, the conclusion reached is that the public story of DVA is extremely resistant to change or challenge. More nuanced responses to abusive LGB and/or T intimate partners need to take account of the broader context of homo/bi/trans-phobia as well as the different ways in which gender and power might operate within and across LGB and/or T relationships depending on individuals' intersecting gendered, 'raced', classed and other identities. The orthodoxy relying on discourses of sameness should be challenged to be better informed about the ways in which differences occur across sexualities and gender identities, between LGB and/or T individuals, and across their relationships to better reflect the actual needs of these abusive partners.

Notes

[1] The expression LGB and/or T is used to acknowledge that those identifying as T might not identify as LG or B but as heterosexual.

[2] *Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004*.

[3] These characteristics reflect the standards required for accreditation by Respect, the national umbrella organisation for perpetrator programmes in the UK, of which most of the participating voluntary agencies were full accredited members or affiliates.

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