

TALES FROM ANOTHER CLOSET

*Personal stories of domestic
violence in same-sex relationships*



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There hasn't been much discussion or education in the gay and lesbian communities about domestic violence in our relationships. Therefore, the voices and stories of gay men and lesbians who have experienced it have rarely been heard.

It is hoped that this collection of personal stories, written by gay and lesbian survivors of abuse and violence, goes some way to building a picture of what same-sex domestic violence looks like.

In many ways these stories highlight some of the common experiences that gay men and lesbians living with domestic violence share. In other ways they highlight the unique experiences of each of the authors.

This collection isn't meant to represent the full range of experiences of domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships. As every case of domestic violence is different it's impossible for any collection to do this. But these stories can contribute to our understanding of this issue.

This collection forms part of ACON's same-sex domestic violence community awareness campaign. The last page of this resource has general information about same-sex domestic violence as well as important contact numbers.

Thanks to all the authors for contributing their story.

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Terrified To Go Home

David (27)

I met Anthony through work when I was 22. The relationship seemed okay in the beginning, but in hindsight, there were warning signs of what was to come. They were little things at first: coming over unannounced; showing up unexpectedly when I was out with my friends; phone calls that seemed to be a little too frequent. I made the mistake of interpreting these early signs as strong romantic interest. Before long he had moved in with me and his behaviour had become obsessive and controlling.

Anthony was really threatened by my friends and my social life. He hated that other guys would look at me, or that I'd slept with other guys around our neighbourhood, even that I had quite a lot of friends who he felt "competed" with him. Tiny things that had not even occurred to me as being possibly offensive would cause enormous rage. The more I was attacked, the more and more I withdrew. It was a self-defence mechanism – I figured if I could stay away from anything that might cause him to get upset then that would keep him calm. That didn't work of course – he simply found new things to be insecure about. I realise now the whole strategy was to keep me feeling perpetually blamed, inadequate and not doing enough to keep the relationship together. I isolated myself from my friends, my family and from everything that I used to enjoy doing. To get me away from my previous life, friends and sex partners we moved to a different city where I knew no one except him.

I was by nature a very happy, outgoing person, but I quickly became cautious and scared all the time. My fear escalated when the physical violence began. The first time was because he had seen me talking to someone I'd had a fling with in the past and he punched me in the face because of it. From that time on, even though the physical violence was occasional, the fear of it happening pervaded my life and he would threaten me with it often. Punching, pushing, restricting my physical movements (like blocking doors if I was trying to leave a heated situation), destroying or giving away my property and refusing to take care of me if I was sick were punishments that would be meted out when simply threatening me or humiliating me in public wasn't enough.

Anthony was from a racial minority. One of the biggest headfucks was being told that the violence was part of his "culture" and the fact that I had a problem with it meant that I was racist. The problem according to him was not the violence – it was the fact that my racism meant I couldn't accept who he was. It was me not him,

that had to change. I now understand that violence is not culture – there is no ethnic group on the planet that celebrates partner abuse as a cultural identity.

Apart from my massive social withdrawal, the affect on my sexuality was really destructive. I became ashamed about being gay, about being sexually attractive and about having sexual desires. It was like going back in the closet.

Money was another big problem. Successive rent periods came where Anthony would spend all of his pay on gambling and alcohol within 48 hours of receiving it, leaving me to pay all the rent and then provide food for us for a fortnight – impossible and it meant instant poverty. As a “solution”, Anthony put me in control of his finances but it was only a licence for him to be as irresponsible as he liked and simply demand more money whenever he wanted it. Of course, refusing because the rent needed to be paid for example, was a dangerous move. On top of all of this, he would also frequently get me to do his work for him. It wasn't uncommon for me to be producing his reports until all hours of the morning while he watched TV. I had given up on my life ever being enjoyable again. My whole sense of individual identity was gone and I felt as though I barely existed.

One of the biggest head-fucks was being told that the violence was part of his “culture” and the fact that I had a problem with it meant that I was racist.

A lesbian friend from the previous city I lived in sent me a book about SM sub-cultures (one of her favourite things) that contained a chapter on the difference between an SM relationship and domestic violence. There was a checklist of questions to ask yourself to determine whether you were in an abusive relationship and when I found I was answering yes to almost everything, a crack appeared in the brainwashing and manipulation that had filled my head. I suddenly realised that I had to accept that I was in a domestic violence relationship.

I took the grand leap of confiding in someone I worked with about my situation and one afternoon, after Anthony threatened to “break both my legs” when I

got home that night, this colleague generously lent me his spare room for a week while I “disappeared” from my home. During that week I found a new place to live and, with a Gay and Lesbian Police Liaison Officer, I went to pick up my belongings and left.

A new phase of harassment and stalking that included a wide range of manipulations and threats (ranging from “Come back - I've changed!” to “If you have sex with another man I'll kill you and him”) followed.

When I Was Twenty-Two

Kim (42)

She was my brother's friend. Someone who was mysterious and extremely funny and entertaining. Small in stature, chocolate coloured with a beautiful androgynous face and a mischievous smile. My brother had told me about Vivian as she had the same name as another of his friends and he differentiated between them by colour. I was young and about to leave home for the second time and planned to live with my brother until I was sure-footed once again in the big bad world. John and I decorated a room in readiness and I felt free once again.

My brother, a gay man, had many friends and I got to know most of them. They were kind and generous to me and most helped me on my way as a young lesbian. Viv had immediately intrigued me and started to visit my brother regularly. It was a while before my attraction to her was noticed then she would smile every time she saw me.

She would come round and make us laugh and we would smoke a few joints and just not be able to stop. My brother noticed my attraction and warned me off getting involved with her but could never tell me why. What did he know about lesbians? We became lovers soon after I moved in and she fell in love with me and opened her tortured heart. Viv had a lot of things just not going her way. She was on the dole, her heart had been broken by a very nasty piece of work and her mother, brother and sister were poor and lived in the rooms above her granny flat. She came from a mixed race family and her father had left her when she was six. She wanted to be tall and become a blues musician - everyone had got her wrong.

I wanted to rescue her, give her my heart and everything. I had to heal those wounds and show her a love that was real and let her know how talented she really was.

However, after six months together I knew something wasn't right. I felt I had got myself into something that perhaps wasn't very good for me but I wasn't going to let my friends and family know I had made a mistake. This was a relationship that was going to work.

Viv smoked a lot of drugs and took a lot of speed. She needed dope to wake up, speed to party and get herself through the day and dope to bring her down and help her sleep. She never wanted to take drugs by herself and it became a priority on our shopping list. I say this because drugs would deepen the moods and fuel the sudden changes and verbal attacks. She

wasn't physically violent at that stage but was capable of shooting me down in words and making me feel humiliated and scared.

I left my brother's after a big row that was instigated and fuelled by Viv. She managed to drive a huge wedge between my brother and I. I didn't speak to my brother until the relationship with Viv came to an end three years later. I moved into her granny flat underneath her family in a big, run down, Edwardian house.

Two years had gone by and I was starting to look ill. I had lost an enormous amount of weight through nerves and drugs and had isolated most of my friends. We would only go and see friends that she trusted. She said I was wasting my time with members of my family and friends as they didn't understand me and didn't understand us. Sex between us had dwindled and I began to feel nauseous whenever she would touch me. The good times together were getting few and far between. She controlled my days, my social calendar, the clothes that I wore and the people I would speak to. She kept me from going to see my family by starting a big row just before I would leave. My sanctuary was my work. How I managed to work and survive this relationship I don't really know but eventually the phone calls at work started. After three years, I was extremely unhappy with no one to talk to. Something was happening to me that nobody could know about.

I was ashamed and afraid of what people would think. When she had taken speed during the day I knew we would be arguing all night. She wouldn't let me sleep until I had come round to her point of view. She would argue points again and again until I would fall asleep staring at her, which would start her off once again.

I thought if we moved into a place we could call our own everything would be better. I borrowed money, got a mortgage, and told her that she now had a home of her own to share with me and that I loved her. From now on things were going to get better. They never did.

Eventually when the calls at work became embarrassing and I would have to leave work to go home and row with her, physical fights started to happen. She hit me and I hit her back and I started to feel sick but couldn't pull away from the relationship. All our friends knew by now and would avoid us because Viv would like to humiliate me in front of

them. One good dear friend who is now dead, said that one day I would find the strength and that he and his boyfriend would support my decision. He was one of Viv's closest friends and I started to think about things and talk to people and decided enough was enough.

The end was very messy. I had to be sneaky and think carefully about how I would pull this off. No dramatics - I was exhausted. I had to distract her from what was going to happen and I hated myself for it but I wanted peace. Eventually it would come, but at a price.

She said I was wasting my time with members of my family and friends as they didn't understand me and didn't understand us.

That relationship, while enriched with valuable lessons, left me sick and untrusting of anybody for a very long time but eventually I fell in love again. We lived in a small town but whenever Viv and I would meet she looked right through me as if I didn't exist. She had been betrayed. Nobody could understand why we weren't friends.

Healing for me has been talking about it and here I am eighteen years later still talking about it.

Midnight Mass

Brad (35)

I met Joshua through my best friend on Christmas Eve, 1984. He invited me on a date to midnight mass. I was 16 he was 32.

The first few months were great; he introduced me to the gay scene and to sex, bought me presents, took me to the theatre and generally made me feel special. It was my first real relationship and I finally felt like I was becoming an adult.

After a few months he began to change. He started getting jealous when I spent time with friends but as I still lived with my family it didn't seem like a big deal. As my 18th birthday approached he put pressure on me to move into his place. I was uneasy about it but wasn't sure why so I went along with it.

Over the next couple of years I progressively lost my independence, and my self-esteem (which wasn't that strong to begin with) was totally undermined. Joshua wasn't physically violent but he was manipulative and controlling and had a frightening temper. During one argument he smashed the iron through the ironing board, slammed the bedroom door so hard the frame broke and threw a shoe at me that smashed a group of photo frames. At other times his anger became such a white-hot rage that the veins on his forehead and neck would pulsate and he'd be unable to talk.

As the relationship went on I became increasingly isolated from everyone I had known. He pushed, demanded and guilted me into working with him at his shop. Which, combined with my usual part time job and going to university meant that I almost never had free time to see my friends or family or to do the things I wanted to. He generally didn't pay me for the work either, he considered the hours I did as rent and board. So once I'd paid for my uni fees, books and travel expenses I never had any money for myself.

Joshua constantly made fun of my weight. At every opportunity he'd make jokes about me being fat. When I asked him not to he said I couldn't take a joke and then went on anyway. It got to the point where I hated my body so much that I wouldn't even take my shirt off before getting into bed without turning off the light. I reckon I went for 5 years without ever taking my shirt off at the beach. I still hate the sight of my body even though I know, logically, I'm not fat.

He used to get angry all the time and over the smallest things: if I got home from uni or work late; if I got home before him and hadn't started cleaning the house or

wasn't studying; if I spent too much money; talked on the phone for 'too long', or argued with his point of view. Almost everything I did made him angry and there was rarely a day when he didn't yell at me.

Although I gave up so much during the relationship, like friends, hobbies, my time and my family, I always tried to keep a little of myself from his control. For example, if he expressed a point of view about something on the news I'd take up an opposite point of view – regardless of what I actually thought. These 'discussions' often turned into arguments and sometimes into fights but I always held onto the idea that no matter how much of my life he controlled he couldn't control my opinion.

From about two years into the relationship I knew I wanted to get out but I just didn't know how to end it. I was scared of what he'd do if I broke up with him. Also, my parents (who were always very supportive) had made it clear that they thought he was too old for me but because I told them I loved him they accepted my decision. I didn't want to admit to them that they were right. Joshua was also very charming and giving at times. He could be quite affectionate and sweet. One year he gave me a surprise present for each of the twelve days of Christmas.

On Christmas Eve, exactly five years after our first date, he tried to trick me into going to midnight mass. I said no. Again he got angry but this time he punched me. That was the last straw. In my head I decided there and then that the relationship was over but it took me four months to get up the courage to leave.

“I only chose someone as young as you so I could make him the boyfriend I wanted. It's too hard to do that again.”

I finally walked out one night after I'd been to a uni function. I got home at 11:30pm – about an hour later than I said I would. As soon as I got into bed he got up and turned on the light saying “You've kept me awake waiting for you, now you can lay awake.” I turned the light off. He turned it on again. So I got up, told him he was acting like a child, packed a few things and left. It was April Fools Day and he even joked that I couldn't survive without him and I'd be back.

For about 18 months after I left him he'd call me and say things like he was drunk and had taken a packet of sleeping tablets or that he'd just been diagnosed with HIV and didn't know who else to turn to. For a long time I believed him and offered support until I finally realised that he was manipulating me and that he'd just keep on calling. Finally I said that it had to stop; we weren't going out any more and he needed to get used to that. “Move on and find someone else” I said. He replied “I can't. I only chose someone as young as you so I could make him the boyfriend I wanted. It's too hard to do that again.” I was horrified.

It was during the months after the relationship ended that I realised what I'd experienced with Joshua was domestic violence. I was reading Dolly or Cleo mag and saw a quiz. I read the questions: Are you afraid to talk to your boyfriend about money?; Does your boyfriend humiliate you in public?; Does your boyfriend fight with your family?; and Does your boyfriend control your free time? followed by the statement ‘Then you are probably experiencing domestic violence.’ It was like a bolt out of the blue. It put everything into perspective.

I have now been in a new relationship with a fantastic, loving, caring, gentle and understanding guy for more than 10 years. However, the effects of my relationship with Joshua took a long time to get over. Some of them I still haven't. In the early years of this new relationship I was adamant that I wasn't giving up any of my independence. I insisted, often unreasonably, that he accept me doing my own thing and I kept our finances totally separate. I've since learned that he isn't trying to control me and have let him into every part of my life.

The First Cut Is The Deepest

Lisa (38)

I grew up in suburbia, went to an Anglican Girls School and had never had a serious relationship with a guy. I had thought my lack of interest in boys was due to "immaturity" - the idea of being a lesbian never crossed my mind!

Two school friends and I used to go out and see bands together all the time. They were wild and fun but were more interested in sleeping with the band than listening to music! I met Kim at a gig when I was 18 and she was 20. She approached me as I was trying to ignore the behaviour of my friends. Kim said that she had seen me at other bands. We clicked straight away, and when she suggested we go and see a band together I said I'd love to.

We made arrangements and the following week we saw a great band, had a brilliant night and, later hit Oxford Street – for my first time. I LOVED it – it felt so "free". The more we drank, the better time I was having – she was so nice and we had SO MUCH in common. Later that night she told me that she was recovering from a very difficult break up and she was still heart broken. As I listened to her story my heart broke for her, she was such a great person. A little later she told me the relationship had been with a girl...I wasn't shocked. However, at that moment I thought, "she is the sort of person I would like to go out with. But she's a girl! Shit!" I'd realised why I had never "connected" with boys. The more time we spent together the greater my attraction to her grew. We connected in a way that I never had with anyone else. She enchanted me and I was falling in love. Finally one night we kissed and it was on.

Kim told me her mother had sent her to a psychologist when she came out and said that no one could know about us – they'd try to break us up. I believed her. Also I thought our relationship was too "special" to share with the world. No one else would understand what we had! She told me how special and gorgeous I was; bought me presents and we had fun together. I had never been so happy. After 3 months we moved in together. It seemed the right thing to do, however this is when the cracks started to appear.

Kim told me that my mother would never accept us, and that she would try to break us up so I saw less and less of my family.

One night we were out seeing a band and I was having a great time. I turned around to find Kim wasn't anywhere to be seen. I thought she must have gone to the toilet or bar so didn't worry, but the gig ended and there was still no sign of her. I went outside to find her with a furious expression on her face. At first I thought she'd seen her ex-girlfriend but I soon worked out that she was mad with me. She kept saying that maybe we should call it quits – as I wasn't ready to commit to a relationship. I was devastated. She kept accusing me of trying to come on to a guy on the dance floor. It took hours of me saying sorry and telling her how much I loved her for her to get over this 'hiccup'. But I was left rattled.

During the next six months this sort of thing happened regularly, and I began to change my behaviour to prevent it. I didn't talk to anyone except friends when we were out and I gave Kim 110% of my attention. I kept thinking that she just needed to see that I wasn't like her ex-girlfriend and things would be okay. But no matter what I did the jealous episodes continued. I began to think of them as proof of how much she loved me and how much her ex had hurt her.

We wanted to spend all our time together so we both quit our jobs. I thought this would be a great opportunity to prove how committed I was. We spent 24/7 together; going out all night and sleeping all day! Mum had made it clear that she didn't like Kim, even without knowing we were together. Kim told me that my mother would never accept us, and that she would try to break us up so I saw less and less of my family. It hurt, but Kim was the most important thing in the world.

I'd lost contact with my friends, I wasn't working – and still the jealous rages continued. I was baffled. Eventually I got bored and wanted to work so we both got new jobs. After a few weeks Kim quit hers; she said she hated it and would find another job – she never did. She took over control of 'our' money (ie. my salary) and started calling me at work all the time. We often argued about money - particularly when I wanted some for myself. Every day she would make my lunch, drive into the city, pick me up and we would have lunch together in the park. I couldn't ever have lunch with my work colleagues. One Melbourne Cup I desperately wanted to go to a champagne breakfast with my work mates but knew that I wouldn't be "allowed". So that morning I started a huge argument which allowed me to "storm out" of the house – straight to the breakfast!

Over the two years we were together, my confidence with people disappeared. All my energy was spent on keeping her happy and I desperately missed seeing my family. While we continued to have great nights out I was miserable and felt like I was continually walking on eggshells. She held my self-esteem in the palm of her hand. If she was happy so was I, if she wasn't I tried to 'fix' it. Eventually she left me for someone else - I was crushed. I felt unable to function without her. It was a very dark time of my life.

It wasn't until many years later, that a counsellor described my experience as domestic violence. I nearly fell off my chair: Me? A victim of domestic violence? Couldn't be! However, the more aware I've become about domestic violence, I realise that my relationship with Kim was abusive - emotionally, psychologically, financially and spiritually. That relationship ended nearly 20 years ago, my relationship with my family has healed and I am in a loving and respectful relationship – life is good. I now thank God she dumped me; I hate to think where I'd be now if she hadn't!

Blind Faith

Kent (35)

Jason and I met through mutual friends when we were both 23 and he had just arrived from the UK. He was the sort of guy that everyone adored, well spoken, well mannered, and incredibly handsome. As soon as I looked into his eyes I felt an instant attraction. Physically he was everything I wanted in a guy and we got on so well.

The first 12 months with Jason was a fantasy of domestic bliss. This was my first serious relationship and it was perfect. It was the first and only time my father would say to me "I am really proud of you son, you have met a great guy and I am happy for you."

I have joint nationality so we decided to move back to the UK when Jason's visa expired. Two weeks after arriving in London however, things started to change. Jason found the 'stress' of having to find a job too much, and regularly visited his friends down the pub to forget about his woes, leaving me in the house. He said he needed time alone with his friends before introducing me to them and we didn't have enough money for both of us to drink. Later he told me I was a social embarrassment and that's why he didn't want me to meet his friends.

When Jason did start introducing me to some of his friends he was always putting me down in front of them. He'd blame me for anything that went wrong and tell everyone I was the closest thing he had ever experienced to 'working with a chimpanzee'. But after each of these occasions he would apologise and tell me he loved me.

Six months after arriving in London Jason stopped all physical contact with me. We stopped having sex, cuddling or even kissing. He blamed his abusive behaviour on stress from work and 'other' problems. If I said or did anything that upset him, he would lock himself in the bedroom and I would feel terrible for making him feel bad. Sometimes I would take his dinner up to him and leave it by the door. When I'd come back it'd be eaten, the door still locked and the lights out.

I was not happy in the relationship, but I knew no one, had no money, and much to my detriment, I loved him. I was living on the edge, feeling worthless and always stressed. The few sweet words he said were always an apology for shouting at me, locking me out of the bedroom or for throwing his dinner across the room. I was living on the memory of the good times we'd had and hoping that he would change and things would go back to the way we were when we first met. I was living on blind faith.

We had a joint bank account which was always over drawn. Jason blamed me for spending all our money but it was him who had new clothes and a new car. I was not working at this point and scrapping by on a series of cash in hand jobs. Jason started taking my car and house keys, as well as any cash I had to work with him every morning. I spent the days locked in the house. It was then that I found a huge collection of bottles, vodka, gin, Bailey's, hidden in a cupboard. All the times he'd locked himself in the bedroom he was drinking.

The response to any question I asked would range from a terse "If I felt the need to tell you I would", to being thrown against the door or being held by my throat while he yelled, "mind your own fucking business". I couldn't understand what I did wrong. I knew I could never hit him, I loved him too much. For him to have done this to me, I started to believe I must have really deserved it.

After nine months without any affection or sex Jason admitted it was his problem and suggested that I have an 'affair'. After three months of thinking about his suggestion I went out and met Warren. It was great to be with someone else. Warren introduced me to his family and friends and the more time I spent with him the more I realised how unhappy I was and how dependent I had become on Jason.

I got home late one night from work and as usual Jason wasn't home. So I decided to go to see Warren. As I walked into his bedroom I found he and Jason asleep together. I was so calm about the situation. All I knew was that I finally had proof that Jason had been lying to me about his nights at the pub and his sexual dysfunction.

A few nights later Jason and Warren met up at the pub I was working at. That night Warren told us he never wanted to see either of us again. On the way home Jason was calling me 'a worthless piece of shit' and blaming me for everything that went wrong in his life. He said he wished he'd never met me and wished I were dead. I sat there, feeling the weight of his words like stones around my neck dragging me deeper into myself. I hated him. I hated everything he put me through and I hated myself for letting him. As he drove along pouring venom on me I clenched my fist, screamed "I hate you" and smashed him across the face causing the car to swerve off the road.

As I ran out of the car he chased me and threw me against the road, smashing my head repeatedly on

the gravel only stopping to punch me in the chest. Eventually we stopped, I wiped the blood from my head and we got back in the car. At the house he tried to lock me out and we started fighting again. I kicked him and yelled "Come back and fight you miserable coward. It's not much fun now that I'm fighting back, is it?"

As he drove along pouring venom on me I clenched my fist, screamed "I hate you" and smashed him across the face...

We ended up back in the house where he threw me on the bed and pounded my chest with his fist. He then started strangling me. His face was contorted and I could read his lips saying 'I'll fucking kill you,' then everything went black. When I came to he was beside me and had put a wet towel on my forehead. He looked at me and said "Now look what you made me do you little piece of shit."

That was it. I played along being as nice to him as I could and saying nothing. I secretly did extra jobs and saved enough money to move out. I then saved up enough to pay off all our debts and get my name taken off our joint account and finally to come back to Sydney.

I didn't go out at all for the first 6 months in Sydney. I hated myself and felt the biggest failure. My friends could not understand what I went through, nor the quiet and withdrawn person I had become. They all held fond memories of Jason and many refused to believe he could have done what he did.

Even though Jason remained in the UK he continued to send me death threats and vile postcards signed by him and his current partner while at the same time sending my parents sickly sweet Christmas cards.

For years I wouldn't let anyone get close to me. If I see the slightest hint of abusive behaviour from a partner I end the relationship immediately – no explanation. And I've never again shared joint finances with a partner. It has taken me a long time to be able to deal with what happened.

I did not think of my experience with Jason as domestic violence until several years later, when I heard about it at a workshop. I just saw it as a bad relationship I needed to get away from.

Feminist Loyalty

Ruth (48)

My story begins in 1983, I was 27 years old, and this was my third 'serious' relationship with a woman. I met her through a friend and she was a real charmer. I was chronically depressed and suffered very poor self-esteem but I didn't realise that at the time – I just blamed myself for "being so useless."

I was completing a one-year course, working in crappy jobs to support myself and partying, clubbing and taking speed.

My experience is not extreme compared to many other people's, it didn't go on for very long but I didn't recognise the warning signs.

I had enrolled at University, which was a huge step for me. I felt like I had messed up my life and was now struggling to 'do something' with it.

I think the first signs that something wasn't right with our relationship was that my partner really resented me going to university. She was from a working class background, with an abusive father and abusive brothers. She had a lot of bravado and a butch demeanour. She continuously came into the little room I had set up as a study and interrupted me, mocked my attempts to study and would put the university and me down.

At one point I became very sick. I couldn't even walk to the bathroom on my own. She refused to drive me to the doctor and said I was "exaggerating."

We were still clubbing and doing a lot of drinking and speed. I felt I had to keep up with that scene or seem like I was dull and boring. It was a real struggle for me to keep up with working, studying and partying. Her manner became more aggressive and there were lots of angry words exchanged between us. Then one day she hit me. That was the first black eye.

There were the apologies and the 'making up.' We both explained it away as a speed induced come-down drama and left it at that. I remember a friend remarked on the black eye and that she wasn't happy about it. I got defensive and brushed off her comments. I don't recall the two other women we lived with saying anything about it – but my memory of those times is pretty blurry.

I didn't go and see any support services because I didn't think of what was happening as 'domestic violence'. I explained it away as drugs and her abusive

childhood. Part of me wanted to rescue her and it seemed very anti-feminist and wrong to blame someone for their behaviour when they had come from an abusive background.

The relationship soured and she took to partying without me and to bringing women home. One morning after she had brought another woman home I 'lost it'. I threatened her and she lashed out and gave me my second (and last) black eye.

... my feminist politics at the time meant that I shouldn't 'blame' another woman for anything because we were all oppressed by 'patriarchy'...

I think it was only the physical abuse that woke me up to the subtle control and domination that had been going on in the relationship. I tolerated the put-downs, the mocking and the emotional manipulation. When someone has poor self-esteem to start with it's so easy to erode what little confidence she has down to zero. After that I decided that I really needed to salvage what dignity I had left. So I left. I did keep paying rent on the house for months as I felt guilty, coerced and bullied. She used to come around to collect the rent from me every week like clockwork and I dutifully handed it over. It wasn't until months later that I found out that the rent never got paid. She stole my money and eventually did a runner from the house!

About eight or nine years later I did have another very short term (three months), rebound relationship with a woman (another charmer) who I didn't realise was an alcoholic. With the help of a friend I identified the warning signs more quickly. There was immense pressure for me to support her drinking habit – she would start drinking at 10 or 11am and keep going until well into the night. She pressured me to do everything with her and to spend all my money on going out with her. She was jealous, coercive, manipulative, aggressive and threatening. One night, when she was extremely drunk she aggressively tried to force me to have sex with her. It was very scary. I felt really, really stupid but didn't seek any help. I managed to extricate myself from the relationship but she continued to harass me with abusive letters for some time afterwards.

Even if I had thought I had a right at the time (of either situation) to access services I didn't think of myself as a victim. I just felt "it's my fault for being so stupid, so pathetic and not being able to stand up for myself". I also think that my feminist politics at the time meant that I shouldn't 'blame' another woman for anything because we were all oppressed by 'patriarchy' and to 'blame' another lesbian would be particularly 'wrong'. I suspect in some ways those unsophisticated politics might still be around today – troubling some women and inhibiting them from seeking support or identifying the problem.

I think these situations have taught me to be hyper-vigilant for signs of manipulation and abuse in any interpersonal exchanges. They have made me fierce about my independence and overly sensitive to comments and jokes from others – especially my partner. They have also made me aware that we need a culture that supports the development of women/lesbians with a robust sense of self, a strong sense of self-respect and a sense of their right to non-coercive, non-violent relationships. We also need legal systems, health services and personnel that are well promoted and well equipped to deal with same-sex domestic violence.

My advice to anyone else in a similar situation is don't blame yourself, that is part of the cycle of abuse and control. The other person needs to take responsibility for their own behaviour, no matter what their own circumstances are or have been. Get help and get out.

My Life Ripped Apart

Adam (35)

I met and fell in love with Dennis when I was 24 and he was 30. This was my first relationship. I thought he was handsome, urbane and sexually magnetic. At first we could not stand being away from each other. We loved driving in the country and going to shows together. He brought me out of my shell sexually. I believed I had found the great love of my life.

He suddenly revealed that he was still living with a partner who was interstate visiting family. He assured me they were finished anyway and his future was with me. When they split I agreed to move in with him. My family and friends welcomed him with loving open arms.

He changed immediately. He was regimented, controlling and paranoid. He would snipe at me when I spoke to my straight male friends on the phone, thinking they were my lovers. We were encumbered with baggage from his previous relationship.

I found out his true age was 40. He explained that he lied because he feared losing me. I forgave him, believing we could overcome our obstacles.

I was a professional musician. He initially loved watching me perform but decided he would not tolerate living with a 'shift worker,' demanding I get a 'real' job. Fearing rejection I agreed to sell my car and possessions and move interstate together. At my last performance he violently evicted a man standing too close to the stage who was not hurting anybody. Dennis insisted he was protecting the band.

One letter to my mother falsely claimed that I had AIDS. The stress of this gave her a mild heart attack.

Moving interstate was initially pleasant, but I became confused and isolated without any support system. Reluctantly he permitted me to resume performing when I could not match him financially.

His moods would change abruptly. He fluctuated between being caring and loving to cruel and abusive. If I expressed dissent with the way he treated me he would force me to retreat by threatening to throw me out.

After an overseas trip he took I found a photo of him there with his ex-partner. He claimed it was a coincidence that Paul was there then started yelling at me saying I was 'nosy and ungrateful'.

He regularly accused me of infidelity. I was never unfaithful. When I tried to defend myself he would force me out of the house refusing to let me in for hours, sometimes well into the night. These incidents were very traumatic. When the accusations happened before a performance he tormented me by denying me access to the car, causing me embarrassment and disruption as I couldn't get to the gig.

We eventually returned to our home city. When he involved my parents in his finances he orchestrated a falling out by falsely claiming they had been negligent. He told me he would sue them if I left him or was disloyal. This estrangement took a toll on my parents' health.

Mental abuse became physical. One day I was vomiting and could not respond to a question. He accused me of ignoring him and hit me hard across the face. Another time when we were walking around the city he accused me of cruising the beats then jabbed me in the stomach with his elbow causing me to collapse.

He pressured me to disassociate from many of my friends when he realised they liked me better than they liked him. He became increasingly aware of their knowledge about the violence.

The last 2 years were a cycle of throwing me out then 'rescuing' me when I could not function. He exercised emotional control by threatening suicide if I did not return. He finally made an attempt after he threw me out once too often.

With the encouragement of his family - who blamed me for his suicide attempt - he harassed my parents with poison pen letters and phone calls. One letter to my mother falsely claimed that I had AIDS. The stress of this gave her a mild heart attack. He maliciously accumulated a huge phone bill in my name. He visited my straight friends, maligning me with sexual anecdotes and tales about supposed infidelities.

Most of my musical equipment was taken and sold, forcing me to discontinue working. He wrote a letter to Centrelink claiming I was working illegally.

The last time we were together I confronted him about

the various letters. When a fight ensued I retaliated. He tried to have me charged with assault. The allegations were so unprovable and exaggerated the police did not take it further.

After this incident he posed as a victim and formed a gay domestic violence forum!

He kept everything. I walked away with a few boxes of junk. I had one pair of shoes for a year. For 2 years I was broke, depressed and suicidal. Other times I felt homicidal. Although my friends and family supported me I eventually sought professional counselling.

Though I am still a loving person I don't know when I will be ready for another relationship. I never imagined that being genuinely loyal and monogamous for 7 years would bring such bizarre retribution.

He still occasionally harasses my family but we never respond. Whilst I would like my possessions back I do not want my day in court. I don't seek revenge. I just want to be left in peace.

I am now 35 and have a new career. My quality of life is better and I am independent. I am happy with my appearance and am getting into music again but I still have issues. Sometimes I become fearful of things blowing up in my face and losing everything again. Living here in a different state from him helps, but I do miss home.

Although I sustained much injury the ordeal was a learning curve. I have overcome the limitations that he placed on my life and remain comfortable in the knowledge that I am not capable of treating another human being the way he treated me.

Another Closet

Information on same-sex domestic violence

What is domestic violence?

Domestic violence is any form of abusive behaviour that one partner or ex-partner uses to gain and maintain control over the other.

Domestic violence will often include physical or sexual violence but many types of abusive behaviour are not physical.

Types of abuse

There are a range of ways one partner might try to get and maintain control over the other. The ongoing presence of any of these behaviours in a relationship indicates domestic violence.

Emotional Abuse - where one partner tries to make the other partner feel worthless, eg: name calling, ridicule and public humiliation; threats to hurt themselves, their partner, children or pets; or threatening to or actually outing their partner in terms of their sexuality or HIV status.

Social Control - where one partner tries to isolate the other from friends, family or community activities, eg: monitoring phone calls or bills; causing fights with, or preventing family or friends visiting, preventing participation in gay/lesbian or other cultural/social events.

Financial Control - where one partner attempts to make the other financially dependant, eg: taking control of all the couple's income; threats to, or actually withdrawing financial support; and making them account for all their spending.

Sexual Abuse - when one partners uses sex as a form of control, eg: forcing them to have sex or engage in activities like threesomes or group sex against their will; non-consensual BDSM; tricking a partner into unsafe sex; and other forms of sexual assault.

Physical Abuse - where one partner uses physical violence to maintain control, eg: punching, slapping, biting, wrestling, strangling or burning; or using weapons like knives, guns or blunt objects.

Stalking - any behaviour that one partner uses to monitor or harass the other, eg: calling, texting or emailing inappropriately; or following their partner to and from or loitering around their home, work or social settings.

Domestic violence as a gay and lesbian issue

The police, health care providers, gay and lesbian organisations and legal services are aware that domestic violence happens in same-sex relationships as they are working with the people who have, or are experiencing it.

Studies from around the world show that the overall patterns and effects of domestic violence in same-sex relationships are very similar to those in heterosexual relationships.

Effects of domestic violence

Over time a victim of domestic violence may suffer a wide range of negative effects, eg: physical injuries; emotional and mental health problems like stress and anxiety; social and cultural isolation; loss of family relationships; and loss of confidence and self-esteem.

Myths and facts

Myth - *Women aren't violent and men can't be victims of domestic violence.*

Fact – Domestic violence happens in same-sex relationships. We know from research and the personal stories of those who have experienced it that women are capable of committing violence against their partners and men can be victims of violence in relationships.

Myth - *Violence between same-sex partners is a mutual fight.*

Fact – An abusive relationship will almost always involve a number of forms of abuse. Physical violence will only be one of those. Being able to fight back, however, does not mean the person isn't being abused.

Myth – *Drugs make him/her violent.*

Fact – Alcohol or other drugs (including amphetamines) may trigger violent behaviour in some people. However if someone uses drugs/alcohol knowing they may become violent and/or the violence is targeted towards their partner, then this is domestic violence and that person is responsible for their actions.

Myth - *The law can't help and the police aren't interested.*

Fact – Threats, stalking and physical and sexual violence are all illegal. The law in NSW offers the same protection to same-sex victims of domestic violence as it does to heterosexual victims including police protection, access to Apprehended Violence Orders. After two years together the law allows for division of joint property.

The police have a duty of care to provide protection to everyone in NSW, regardless of their sexuality. If you feel the police response hasn't been adequate or appropriate you have the right to make a complaint.

Safe and healthy relationships

Domestic violence affects not only the people in the relationship but their friends, family and community. These effects can be painful and destructive but there are services that can offer help, information and support.

Most gay and lesbian relationships are based on love and respect and everyone has the right to seek a safe and healthy relationship.

More information

To find out more about domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships check out www.anothercloset.com.au or call ACON on 1800 063 060 (10am – 6pm, Mon-Fri).

The police

In an emergency call 000.

If it's not an emergency you can ask if a Gay & Lesbian Liaison officer (GLLO) is available. Alternatively, you may wish to speak with a Domestic Violence Liaison officer (DVLO). These officers have had special training. To contact a GLLO or a DVLO call the police switchboard on 02 9281 0000.

Support and referral

If you think you, a friend or a family member may be in an abusive relationship call the NSW Department of Community Services Domestic Violence Line on 1800 65 64 63 (24 hours, 7 days) for info and referrals for same-sex and heterosexual domestic violence. These calls can be anonymous.

For more information visit anothercloset.com.au

ACON's Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project

9 Commonwealth St Surry Hills NSW 2010 | PO Box 350 Darlinghurst NSW 1300

Tel (Report Line): (02) 9206 2116 | **Tel (Enquiries):** (02) 9206 2000

Freecall: 1800 063 060 | **Hearing Impaired:** (02) 9283 2088

Email: avp@acon.org.au

For tips on how to equip your service to respond visit:

www.anothercloset.com.au

