

Coming Out Women Meeting #4: 3/16/11

The Hurt of Homophobia

Two characteristics inherent in the abuse of women and children are **violence** and **silencing/isolation**. The abused woman or child experiences **physical/sexual battering** intensified by **verbal/emotional tirades**. Then the survivor is silenced, as she faces threats—often life-endangering—if she “tells.” The **isolation** assures the abuser continued **control**: The survivor’s vulnerability persists via **inaccessibility** to supportive, potentially empowering relationships. Such support might have allowed the survivor to develop the self-esteem, self-respect, and independence to break the cycle of **abuse** ← → **isolation**. Without such support, negative self-images persist.

I am struck by the similarity of such abuse to the experience of lesbians who are **violated** and **silenced/isolated** by a society that works diligently to ignore, deny or extinguish our existence. **Violence** against LGBT people may occur by **intimidation** or **assault** (“gay bashing”)—including **murder**-- motivated by homophobia. In 2008, **1,617 hate crime offenses** based on sexual-orientation bias were reported by U.S. law enforcement agencies--up 50% from 2005. **Physical abuse** or **assault** related to lesbianism has been reported by at least 10% of surveyed lesbians.

List phrases you’ve heard used to describe LGBT persons: **“verbal violence.”**
Then write examples of how LGBT women are kept **“isolated”** from each other.

“Name-calling” of lesbian/gay women	Mechanisms for isolating L/G women
<p>“Which one of you is the guy? And who’s the lipstick lezzie?”</p> <p>“You’re all going to hell.”</p>	<p>“If anyone sees you with those dykes at softball, they’ll say you’re queer too.”</p> <p>“If you <u>have</u> to be lesbian, at least keep it to yourself. Don’t talk about it. And don’t FLAUNT it!”</p> <p>“You get hitched to that broad, and I’ll take the kids so fast they’ll forget they ever knew you!”</p>

Verbal and emotional violence have been experienced by almost every lesbian: “Lesbians are sick, deviant.” “No way can you have a career working with children... You’re recruiters, perverts... your girlfriend will molest the children.” “Bull dyke, butch dyke.” “God hates gays... the Bible says it’s an abomination against nature.” “Oh, she can’t be a lesbian—she’s too good a mother.” “Sex is all

you think about...you all have AIDS.” “You’re after every woman.” “All you need is a man...you can’t get a man...you hate men...you want to be a man.” “I’d rather that you’d told me that you’d been sexually abused (than that you’re a lesbian).”

Such **denigrating messages** prey upon us directly or by innuendo in religious harangues, coworkers’ jokes, or family admonishments. It’s an uphill battle to ignore them and retain our integrity in the face of recurrent ripping attacks. Over time (a lifetime), women-loving-women who are continually **abused** and **isolated** by husband, other family, church, and society, may descend into the depths of self-loathing. This is *internalized homophobia*.

The burden of such **verbal, emotional and physical abuse** and **isolation** weighs heavily upon us—like a pack full of rocks strapped upon our backs each morning—we carry this burden constantly. Acknowledge our courage and the strong backs we develop to shoulder such heavy loads. Focus on what an incredible job we do, surviving and even thriving each day. Recognize the growth in ourselves as we face homophobia (society’s and our own). We embrace this challenging trek together, on our women-loving-women trails, rather than simply “falling in” on the hetero-herding highway paved by society. Continue to gain support and share it with others at ComingOutWomen.

Write phrases that describe LBGT women **POSITIVELY**.
Then write examples of how LBGT women can “come out of the silence.”

Affirmations of LBGT women	How we can counteract silencing and isolation
<p>“ We’re STRONG women.”</p> <p>“I value being authentic. I live my life as the woman I REALLY am.”</p>	<p>Respond to a gay-bashing joke: “Some of my closest friends are women-loving-women. Quit your gay-bashing!”</p> <p>Read: lesbian literature: <i>The Coming Out Stories</i>.” Watch: “Hannah Free” or “Prayers for Bobby.”</p> <p>Attend a PFLAG-Tacoma meeting, a Pride event (Out in the Park, 7/11), a lesbian concert (Lucie Blue Tremblay at the OLOC Gathering: Tacoma LaQuinta, 7/30/11). Join women at a TLC event: dinner, cards and games.</p> <p>Mimic heterosexual behavior in public: Hold hands in a restaurant.</p>

