

# **WOMEN CAN BE VIOLENT TOO:**

*A Review of the Hidden New Zealand and  
International Literature on Female to Female  
Violence in Intimate Partner Relationships*

*by*

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## Acknowledgements

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## About the author

Craig Jackson is a former child and educational psychologist now retired who joined the New Zealand branch of '*Families Need Fathers*' in the late 1970s prior to the establishment of the Family Court in 1981. He also helped to establish the Wellington-based '*Equal Parental Rights Society*' and trained fellow psychologists to complete psychological reports to help guide the Family Court in issues affecting the custody of, and access to, children. He has maintained this interest over the entire 33 year history of the Court, also making submissions to the Ministry of Justice's Review on the Family Court. He made separate submissions on domestic violence and the repeal of the Bristol clause to the Electoral and Justice Select Committee hearing submissions on the Family Court Bill subsequently enacted in October 2013.

Craig was the lead author for the '*Fathers Report*' on intimate partner violence from the men's lobby groups perspective which included (unlike the ideologically driven Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports), a section, on intimate partner violence in same sex relationships.

This paper further expands on the topic by tracking down and reviewing New Zealand studies which are not quoted or discussed in these documents and which, unlike the **Fathers Report**, have attracted wide media publicity.

He continues to this date to act as a support person and advocate for fathers caught up in Family Court processes.

*“...most theorists agree that there are many similarities between lesbian and heterosexual violence...the frequency of the abuse; the cyclical nature of the abuse; the severity of the abuse—including the possibility of it being lethal; the types of abuse—physical, emotional, psychological and sexual, and the purpose of the abuse which is often to maintain the power and control within the relationship.”* (pg 8)

*“Lesbian violence does occur and the Refuge Movement, the Lesbian Community and Male Violence Programmes must work together to set up systems that help all violent abusers and all victims of violence no matter what the sexual orientation of the person.”* (pg 33)

From:

Karena Brown's  
**Report on Lesbian Violence:  
The Hidden Face of Domestic Violence**  
Christchurch: University of Canterbury  
Sociology Department

October  
**1995**

## 1 Introduction

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In a previous report on intimate partner violence (Jackson *et. al.* 2014), a section on violence in same sex relationships featured on page 12, section 14, entitled '**Intimate partner violence in lesbian, gay and trans-gender persons and heterosexual civil unions**'. Quoting McLeod's thesis on '**Exploring the Second Closet**', it was noted that one of her findings showed that I.P.V. was more of a problem in lesbian unions than in male homosexual partnerships with almost half of lesbian and bisexual women reporting abuse.

To more openly acknowledge that violence is as much of a problem in same-sex relationships as in heterosexual relationships demonstrates that the Duluth 'male on female' 'power and control' model as emphasised in the recent Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports with the male exclusively described as the 'perpetrator' and the female as the 'victim' is not therefore accurate or justified, nor does it provide any valid or general explanation of the true dynamics and origins of I.P.V.

Thus, the fact that I.P.V. is seldom or never discussed in femicentric reports demonstrates their '*selective inattention*' to any studies that would challenge their mostly exclusive emphasis on heterosexual domestic abusive situations with the male as perpetrator and woman as victim.

But what it also demonstrates as McLeod and Machen originally claimed, is that there was (and still is), a '*conspiracy of silence*' to deny the existence of violence in lesbian relationships which also involves the suppression of studies both local and international that highlights female I.P.V.

The purpose of this paper is to expose and cast light on this hidden problem and to propose that a more effective Governmental response to current initiatives to tackle the growing 'epidemic' of I.P.V. must have proper regard for the reality that all marriages, partnerships or civil unions, irrespective of genders of the couples involved, all struggle with relationship conflicts and power plays, including couples in long-lasting, successful intact partnerships as grandparents to their children's children.

## 2 Government Policy Statements on Family Violence (1996)

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While there have been a number of Government policy documents issued subsequently, the Bolger Report<sup>1</sup> is notable as it defines family violence in all its manifestations including abuse of older people, sibling to sibling abuse; teenage abuse of parents; violence between gay and lesbian partners and the abuse of men by female partners. (pg 5)

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Government (1996) '**Statement of Policy on Family Violence**', Wellington: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Social Welfare, Family Violence Unit. ISN 0-475-06027-0.

### **3 Coverage of lesbian violence in the Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports on I.P.V.—2014**

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There is one brief indirect reference to female on female violence in ‘**The Way Forward**’ on page 12 where one of the so-called ‘myths’ surrounding I.P.V. is that there is no violence in male gay and female to female partnerships which is to say more directly that there is. Nonetheless the topic is nowhere else mentioned in the report and given the large number of papers, articles and reports that have been written about the topic by New Zealand authors, this is both a troubling and significant omission. It is one designed to under-report and to obscure the reality of what the wider literature refers to as ‘*gender-symmetry*’ in I.P.V., that in less serious incidents, assaults are usually mutual. Similar comments apply to the first Glenn report and more notably the Tolmie Death Review report where discussions of lesbian violence is conspicuous by its complete absence.

### **4 The coverage given to lesbian violence in the Goodyear-Smith and Laidlaw literature review – 1999**

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This is the only New Zealand report on intimate partner violence that mentions physical assaults initiated by women on men—maintaining that even if men perpetrate most of the serious incidents of I.P.V., addressing the issue of female violence will significantly reduce the overall level of domestic violence including female to female assaults. The review provides scientific evidence which challenges the popular prevailing feminist stance of man as invariably the perpetrator and the women invariably the victim, a position taken by recent femicentric reports on intimate partner violence based on the Duluth male ‘power and control’ wheel. A finding from the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study in 1996 replicating international findings, found that women reported perpetrating as much violence against their partners as men and although this study does not directly address lesbian violence as such. International studies do (Renzetti 1992), with the expression of various forms of physical violence not dissimilar to male to female and female to male abuse in heterosexual couples (pg 22 and 23).

Renzetti found that the two most important factors contributing to lesbian violence were jealousy and dependency issues, findings replicated in the MacLeod study. For those of both genders, mental health issues including recurrent depression (as identified in the Welch report), increased the risk of violent behaviour in both same sex as well as heterosexual couples.

### **5 Leibrich’s et al’s Hitting Home: Men speak about abuse of women partners—1995**

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This was a major report, one suggested by the then Manager of policy and research at the Department of Justice. A small group of key people gave invaluable input into the project, some still active today in the field including Janet Fanslow, now of the University of Auckland; Brenda Pilott of

MSD's Family Violence Unit and from the Organisation of Men for Non-Violence, Stephen Jacobs. Judge Ellis of the Family Court and Jan Jordon of Victoria University are still well known names in the field as is Professor David Fergusson from the Christchurch Longitudinal Studies on I.P.V. and Hillary Lapsley of a women's study group based at the University of Auckland.

2,000 men were surveyed following by a smaller sample of 200 men. In both samples men's attitudes to the abuse of women; the importance given to the need to control women and male loss of control of anger and anger management difficulties were all canvassed. An important qualification was that a man could be included in an abusive group on the basis of a '*one off*' incident leading to the statement that, '*...when using the information in the report, it would be misleading and even dangerous not to be clear about that fact*' (p 14).

According to the report male violence could be triggered by the distress at his sense of powerlessness and a wish to regain power by an assault on his female partner. Such men showed marked tendency to blame the women.

Circumstances which often lead the women to be blamed were finding her in bed with another man, abuse of their child or the woman hitting the man first. There is otherwise no further reference to female assaults male regardless of provocation or any female to female assault scenarios. The most commonly reported acts of male physical abuse were pushing, grabbing, slapping or throwing objects, behaviours which are also typical of lower level I.P.V. assaults of women on men, or woman to woman. In the section on suggestions for future research (pg 150) it was recommended that there be a study to establish prevalence rates for abuse in same sex relationships but not on the dynamics of such relationships which lead to physical or psychological abuse (pg 150).<sup>2</sup>

In the seven pages of references, pp 237–243, there is not one reference to the New Zealand and international literature which specifically refers by title to lesbian violence even though many studies were dated around the time '**Hitting Home**' was also published.

Given that allegations of psychological or emotional abuse were more frequently made than physical abuse per se, what were some of the behaviours that constituted non-violent I.P.V.? Note that such behaviours as swearing, tongue lashing; verbal put-downs and humiliating or ridiculing the partner in public; ranting and raving and chronic nagging (verbal violence), are all behaviours manifest in heterosexual, gay male and lesbian unions, including long term intact marriages that do not terminate in separation or divorce.

## **6      The Wallis Report on 'An agenda for Family Violence Research'—1998**

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There is one citation given to the topic of lesbian violence on page 39 of the Wallis Report, that to Karena Brown's thesis on lesbian violence, originally begun in 1991 by the Lesbian Refuge Workers

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<sup>2</sup> Further 'triggers' initiating male on female assaults are to be found on page 174 where 20 provocative female behaviours are described ranging from sloppy housekeeping; coming home drunk; persistently saying 'no' to sex or making fun of him sexually; chronic nagging (a form of verbal violence) and making him look stupid in front of family and friends.

Network. The project lapsed but was then taken over by Karena as part of her honours degree at the University of Canterbury. Machen reports that she had great difficulty in tracking down and locating her report as there were no records of where it was and even the Library of the University had not recorded it on its own database. Brown's main finding was that the prevalence of domestic violence within homosexual (lesbian), and heterosexual relationships is similar and is the issue of '*power and control*' and is not part '*...of the biological inevitability that becomes with being male*' (pg 40). She urged that those who work in the domestic violence area as well as members of lesbian communities try to discover why this issue is kept hidden and what can be done to address the situation, a situation which still remains to be openly debated to this date.

The Wallis report is a very comprehensive blueprint, summarising and providing an annotated bibliography and commentary on existing studies as well as suggestions for proposed or intended studies. Over 160 New Zealand studies are reviewed including on page 2, a suggestion that a study on the prevalence of abuse in same-sex relationships, including lesbian relationships be conducted by the Ministry of Social Development, Family Violence Unit. This is found as proposal No. 9.

## 7    **Lesbian mental health: Thesis by Sara Welch—1995**

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Written at a time when lesbian women faced prejudice and were a stigmatised group, Welch distributed a questionnaire to twelve hundred lesbian women around New Zealand raising issues concerning their sexual orientation; social contacts; mental health history, sexual abuse and drug and alcohol consumption. Approximately half (561) returned the completed questionnaires. To assess mental health issues the General Health Questionnaire was administered, responses from her sample indicating higher mean GHQ scores; a higher incidence of recorded suicide attempts and higher rates of past sexual abuse as compared with controls. The respondent group were New Zealand Europeans who were highly educated urban women in the 25 to 50 year age bracket and who had openly identified as lesbian for more than five years.

80% of the sample had used mental health services at some stage of their lives with what is described as '*anti-lesbian*' treatment from these services reflecting the social stigma concerning gay male and same sex female relationships prevalent at the time. A major finding from the study as revealed by literature searches was the paucity and ready availability of articles on the topic. Because medical research on human sexuality then regarded same sex attraction as deviant, it was maintained that mental health issues faced by lesbians arose from the societal disapproval of this lifestyle choice.

In New Zealand the Homosexual Law Reform Act of 1987 applied mainly to men and not women although an amendment of July 1993 to the Human Rights Act made discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, including lesbian lifestyle choices, legal. New Zealanders attitudes to male homosexuality were far more tolerant than in many other countries which suggested lower levels of stigmatisation within New Zealand Society. This eased the personal process of 'coming out' and openly identifying as lesbian and gay male and to take pride in that lifestyle choice rather than 'closeting' it. To that extent, the type of social isolation and disapproval of gay and lesbian relationship lifestyles no longer currently apply, now that same-sex marriages are legal.

Given that same sex lifestyles are socially condoned and gay people have no longer to face homophobic prejudices and may contract into civil unions and marriages with the same rights and legal entitlements as married heterosexual couples, would this lessen the pressures that would otherwise lead to reliance and dependency on mental health services and lead to substance abuse and emotional difficulties most notably depression? It is a significant finding from this study that the lesbians surveyed, while apparently happy with their lifestyle, still exhibited poor mental health compared to other women in the general population (pg 139). Women are more prone than men to depressive episodes as the very title of the MacLeod thesis '*Lesbian Blues*' implies.

Since most of the New Zealand studies are dated back to the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s with no more recent studies able to be located, this question can only be answered by reference to the more recent international literature unless initiatives by the New Zealand feminist academic lobby to initiate contemporaneous studies of their own are taken.

According to Welch, a common feature of the psychological 'climate' of lesbian unions is that of couple 'merger' or 'fusion', defined as a loss of individuation and separation between the couple given that both are female with similar personality characteristics and profiles.<sup>3</sup>

Respondents had a high use of mental health services—80% having done so; usually a counsellor (67%), followed by a GP (35.3%).

In respect to diagnoses, 91.4% suffered from depression; 25% had eating disorders and 12.5% exhibited phobic reactions (i.e. fears and anxiety disorders).

Suicide ideation or actual suicide attempts were common (pg 71), with half (52.9%) reporting that they had serious thoughts about committing suicide. 20% had made an attempt to do so. A further 28% had self-harmed. For those who had attempted suicide this attempt coincided with their first self-awareness of their sexual orientation.

As reported by Welch, there were no significant differences between alcohol and drug consumption patterns in the lesbian community as in the general population of New Zealand women (pg 127). An exception was the higher use of marijuana.

A higher percentage of lesbian women (56%) reported an unwanted sexual experience, considerably higher than proportions of reported sexual abuse in the general population of women. Welch postulates that this might be explained by reference to the fact that, quote:-

"...because the lesbian community is historically linked with feminism and many lesbians are feminist, these women are more likely to interpret certain (sexual) experiences as sexual abuse because the precepts of feminism may enable women to define sexual abuse more readily than other women who have not come in contact with such schools of thought" (pg 130).

She further postulates that experience of sexual abuse by male partners in previous relationships may be another determinate in their decision to be lesbian, thus increasing the number of sexual abuse survivors within the lesbian community.

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<sup>3</sup> A dynamic also discussed by Renzetti in her text '**Violent Betrayal**', 1999.

Lesbians who were not prepared to be open about their lifestyle were more likely to be socially isolated or to have limited social networks and were more likely, as a consequence, to have poor mental health.

Respondents were asked for the reasons why they had partnered with another woman. Answers were listed (pg **60**) as a more open and equalitarian coupling; similar thought patterns and ways of thinking; more loving and affectionate behaviour and thus a greater level of compatibility and freedom from power struggles and abusive behaviour from their male partner, whether physical or psychological. 62% of the sample had never married, 26% were divorced and 8% were separated from a male partner. 65% were childless.<sup>4</sup>

## **8 National Lesbian Health Studies (1998/1999)**

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This survey was completed on an unremunerated basis and involved 791 lesbian women returning a questionnaire detailing their medical status and the prevalence and causes of any physical injuries suffered. There was a return rate of 29%. Responses returned from Maori women were 8% of the total. At the time of the study up to 12% of Doctors were negatively judgemental explaining why few respondents consulted with their Doctor either for illness or for actual physical injuries. Their self-assessed health status indicated lower scores on measures of mental health, social functioning, emotional functioning and bodily pain. Scores were lower still among low income groups, Maori and lesbian mothers, than a control (North Health) sample. This gave rise to a number of recommendations to improve this situation including more research to investigate the use of mental health services by lesbian women; improving the knowledge base by mental health professionals of the stressors unique to this lifestyle choice and why so many lesbian women suffer physical injuries and poorer health generally (pg **6**).

The studies by Welch (1995) and Machen (1998) are cross-cited, studies also reviewed in this paper.

There is no specific data on physical injuries suffered from I.P.V. assaults with cause of injury multi-factorial, such as accidents in the home, or sporting injuries, although 31% of the sample had experienced threats of violence because of their sexual orientation from the general community (pg **16**). 80% of the sample had revealed (outed) their lesbian lifestyle choice and orientation to others (pg **23** and pg **25**).

82 respondents mixed alcohol consumption with medications taken most usually for anxiety or depression or both (pg **31**).

A notable finding was that the lesbian respondents used natural and alternative healers more frequently, consulted and used General Practitioners less or delayed making an appointment (pg **39**).

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<sup>4</sup> The borrowing record of this thesis is illuminating. There were four requests in its year of publication; the second to last borrowing was in 2004 with only one request. There was an 11 year gap with no requests at all up until 2015 with this author's own request to interloan her thesis.

While this study does not directly address lesbian I.P.V. and female to female assaults, 31% of the sample had suffered threats of violence (if not actual violence) as a result of homophobic attitudes in the wider community.

## **9 Machens' thesis: Lesbian Blues: Abusive behaviours in lesbian couple relationships—1999**

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Larger than the subsequent McLeod (2001) thesis sample, this study questioned 95 self-identified lesbians to ascertain their beliefs concerning female same sex abuse, including those women who had been abused by their partner or had been the abuser.

Half of the multi-racial sample reported having been an abuser or had been abused by their intimate partner. Just 14% reported no experience of abuse. Psychological abuse was the most common form of abuse, a finding replicated in studies of heterosexual I.P.V. situations thus giving added weight to Machens' observation that a study of the nature of lesbian relationships could provide valuable information applicable to both lesbian and heterosexual theories of domestic abuse.

The author openly identifies as lesbian with personal experience of abuse by her partner and in her childhood frequent exposure to corporal punishment.

Machen quotes a definition by Bird (1999), which would ring equally true of female to male I.P.V. as to male to female I.P.V. and which incorporates the Duluth 'power and control' dynamic. It encompasses physical as well as psychological violence which results in '*...behaviour adopted by a woman to control her victim which results in physical, sexual and/or emotional damage, forced social isolation, economic deprivation, or behaviour which leaves a woman living in fear*' (Bird 1991, pg 4, quoted by Machen, pg 4). She maintains that a female who slaps their same sex partner is not 'real abuse' even if physical because (sic) '*...there is no fear engendered in the partner and no long term effects*' (pg 6). Similarly, 'nagging' (verbal violence) is not counted either even if chronic because the blame lies with the events not the persons. While it is acknowledged that female to male partner violence is 'considerable' and should not be condoned, male to female violence is more critical from a policy standpoint in terms of its higher societal costs such as the justice system and medical and social service supports' (pg 11).<sup>5</sup>

Note MacLeod's modification of the Duluth power and control wheel to apply to lesbian couples on page 40 of her thesis. These forms of behaviour whether physical or psychological, are described as 'pretend' violence or as 'pseudo' violence.

Machen concedes that most of the studies she quotes are on the dynamics of male on female I.P.V. These studies have however failed to account for same sex partner abuse partly because of the relative silence surrounding lesbian domestic violence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Men lacking similar supports are also a burden on society and also suffer from mental health issues such as depression or suicidal ideation as women do.

<sup>6</sup> A theme in common with the MacLeod thesis as well as the Machen thesis as the very titles of their theses attest.

The argument that one contributing factor contributing to same-sex I.P.V. relates to the fact that lesbians are part of a hidden, stigmatised sector of the population is no longer a valid explanation.

In accord with the findings of Renzetti, an international authority, manifestations of psychological abuse were the most commonly reported although more serious manifestations of physical abuse such as throttling and attempted strangulation were also recorded.<sup>7</sup>

The most frequent physical abusive behaviour, slapping the partner, was followed by forced sexual attentions and violence against property as in throwing objects at walls or overturning furniture. Some respondents recorded the observation that these abusive behaviours were the same as those experienced in heterosexual relationships (pg 75). Over 60% of the replies reported that '*power and control*' dynamics were operating.

As in heterosexual unions, respondents reported that the abuse grew progressively worse over time, usually under the influence of alcohol or drugs, jealousy or, unique to female partnerships, the role played by severe pre-menstrual tension and heightened irritability (pg 89). Men too can experience 'short-fuse' temper outbursts and irritability but for different reasons such as sexual tensions.

Over three-quarters of the sample either retaliated or defended themselves with only 20% answering 'no'. Thus, lesbian partners used assertive counter-retaliatory strategies to challenge their female partner, and while there are obvious exceptions with truly violent men escalating the violence progressively against the female partner, most men, by contrast, are reluctant to hit their partner back or try to take out a domestic protection order following an I.P.V. incident.

If a woman is the subject of systematic ongoing violence from her male partner, her own retaliatory behaviour is seen as an act of desperation, and of provocation rather than 'true' domestic violence (pg 91).

In keeping with findings from McLeod's thesis, female victims of abuse most commonly sought help from friends, counsellors or relatives, less often the Police or lawyer, followed by a call to a women's refuge (pg 92).

Some 'mannish' lesbians who are considered 'pseudo' males known colloquially as 'butch-lesbians' or 'dykes' and the passive partner as the 'femme', or 'lip-stick lesbians', mimic heterosexual gender roles. These roles however do not automatically dictate who has the more power in the relationship or the desire to exercise more control (pg 38), a similar dynamic encountered by heterosexual couples.

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<sup>7</sup> Attempted strangulation in heterosexual abusive situations is to become under proposals to 'strengthen' domestic violence in legislation, a new criminal offence. Penalties for attempted strangulation should therefore apply to women as much as to men.

That support from women's refuges did not rate highly could be attributed to the fact that this would require staff conditioned into believing the Duluth model to face the reality that violence in same sex partnerships is as common as in heterosexual relationships.<sup>8</sup> Thus paradoxically, this organisation was itself prejudicial to and discriminated against fellow women. Respondents seeking support from a lesbian helpline mostly regarded the advice given as ineffectual (pg 119). Half the sample had not been aware of lesbian domestic abuse for as long as they had identified as lesbian (pg 129).

## 10 McLeod's thesis: The Second Closet—2001

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McLeod, in her thesis '**The Second Closet**', begins by stating (as the very title of her thesis implies), that there is a 'conspiracy of silence' around violence in lesbian relationships both in terms of policy, research and the manipulation of statistical data. It should be of no surprise to her therefore, that thirteen years further on, there is no mention of her thesis in the Glenn and Tolmie reports, and only a brief, veiled mention of lesbian violence in the Herbert report, all authored by feminist academics. And she would wonder why the Domestic Violence Clearing House based at the University of Auckland doesn't quote from her research either in their various newsletters or, the New Zealand studies, approximately fourteen in all, which she cross-cites.<sup>9</sup>

She begins her thesis by stating that her area of study is subject to a conspiracy of silence in policy, research and statistics (pg 2). Her thesis was carried out under the broad theoretical umbrella of feminist research, used a discursive, analytic method and involved semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten self-identified lesbian women living in Christchurch.

While all subjects acknowledged the existence of domestic violence in these same sex relationships, two 'repertoires' of response were identified. One group not only acknowledged such violence, but also directly acknowledged their own exposure to it. This group were described as '*exposed*' lesbians. The other group however, denied their own personal involvement in any violence and that it had never happened to them (pg 28). This group were described as '*invincible*' lesbians. Either they were in denial or their relationships were actually violence-free which was probably unlikely. There was some acknowledgement that violence could be mutual and that only more '*severe*' incidents should be described as violent. Where violence was mutual both acknowledged their culpability and were therefore prepared to devalue and under-play its part in their relationship. Thus, certain levels of violence (particularly as physically expressed) were tolerated and regarded as acceptable. These episodes could be described by use of the terms 'spats', 'rages', 'spitting', 'cat-fights' with scratching and hair-pulling with verbal aggression manifest as nagging or heckling (**not** as explicitly described as such by McLeod in this way within the context of her thesis), but accurately descriptive also of low level heterosexual mutual couple fighting or common couples abuse (Jackson *et. al.*, 2014, pg 16).

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<sup>8</sup> As also discussed at length by Renzetti (1999).

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note that the Australian Domestic Violence Clearing House has a paper on 'Domestic Violence' in gay and lesbian relationships authored by Carrie Chan, its Senior Researcher, dated 2005, also reviewed in this paper.

Psychological violence present in all forms of intimate partner relationships (including still functional and intact heterosexual unions), can involve put-downs, emotional hurtful comments undermining self-confidence, and the partner's self-esteem; intimidation and controlling behaviours by a variety of tactics common to all intimate partners regardless of their sexual orientation and lifestyle choices.

Note that the extension to 'psychological violence' in I.P.V. as described in the 1995 reforms following the Bristol murders (section 3(2)(c)), a single manifestation of psychological violence could justify the granting of a domestic protection order or under section 3(4)(b), a number of acts that form a pattern of behaviour may amount to (psychological) abuse even though some or all of these acts when viewed in isolation, might appear minor or trivial, a remarkably low threshold for granting a domestic protection order. No wonder the Glenn report claims that there is an 'epidemic' of family violence justifying the further strengthening of the legislation (see Jackson *et. al.* 2014, pg iv).

McLeod states on page 91 that violence in lesbian relationships is not seen as 'real' violence but what she describes as '*pretend*' violence which is more psychological than physical, yet how often do women in same sex relationships apply for a domestic protection order even though the violence in same sex relationships is recognised in law as indeed is the entitlement of any family member regardless of gender to apply for a domestic protection order?

Thus physical abuse was trivialised, minimised and taken less seriously than the circumstances demanded (pg 114). In disintegrating, unstable, heterosexual partnerships the female 'victim' would usually not hesitate to apply for a domestic protection order if not for physical then 'psychological' abuse yet the male partner is more often than not reluctant to do so and is generally not believed if he does.

A study by Farley quoted by Machen on page 32, revealed that all his subjects were psychologically abused as children; 88% were physically abused and 94% sexually abused. 81% were similarly abused psychologically by their adult partner and 44% physically abused. 81% also mentioned their own parents or guardians had themselves been abused as children. Thus, as in many heterosexual studies, abuse has been found to be intergenerational in lesbian studies of I.P.V.

On page 80 of her thesis, Machen includes a table on perceived differences between lesbian and heterosexual domestic violence based on respondents replies to this questioning whereas sexist attitudes in a patriarchal society can condone male to female I.P.V., lesbian couples often isolated from their families of origin have no such role expectancies with a 'female' lesbian partner exercising power and control domination over her more masculinised partner or the reverse may apply. Just as in heterosexual unions, the ultra feminine partner may be the power behind the throne and not her alpha male husband.

A further unique stressor for the lesbian couple is their 'utopia' expectation for their coupling that lesbian relationships will be more compatible sexually and emotionally and free from the inevitable communication breakdowns and misunderstandings universally encountered in heterosexual unions, and more particularly the expectation that her lesbian partnership will be free from domestic violence and abuse.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Renzetti's landmark text on lesbian violence is aptly titled '**Violent Betrayal**' for just this reason. What might be called the '*same body, same mind*' idealisation of female couplings is revealed to be a myth.

## 11 Karina Brown's Report on Lesbian Violence: The hidden face of domestic violence—1995

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This report (not a thesis), was prepared by Karina Brown of the Sociology Department of the University of Canterbury for the National Collective of Independent Women's Refuges and the Family Violence Unit of the then, Department of Social Welfare. It was interloaned by the Wellington City Library Information Service from the New Zealand Family Violence Clearing House of the University of Auckland. This copy had never been issued to any other researcher apart from the writer, nor had it been cross-cited in any of the Clearing House Newsletters. Authors of the Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert Reports do not refer to this report either.

Brown drew on books and articles from the Ministry of Social Development's very well resourced library. She had also taken over and advanced an earlier project in 1991 also funded by Ministry of Social Development and the Collective.

At the time her background research began, the major drivers of domestic violence were a result of traditional gender roles and of the domination of women by men in a patriarchal society. The 1992 Victims Task Force had included only those case studies that dealt with women physically abused by men and not the reverse although it was conceded that emotional (psychological) abuse could be used against their male partners (pg 6). She notes that Police guidelines of that era did make specific mention of same-sex intimate partner violence and later amendments to the domestic violence legislation did allow victims of lesbian violence (or any other family member) to apply for a domestic protection order.

Her sample comprised fourteen subjects in all four abusers, eight survivor victims and two women's refuge workers. Half were of Maori ethnicity. Extreme violence (described as *over-kill* in the Tolmie report), was a feature as in stabbings, attempted strangulations and beatings with a baseball bat (pg 15).

Mutual battering was more common in lesbian than in heterosexual relationships, Brown concluding that '*...fighting in self-defence (in lesbian relationships), may be much more common than in heterosexual relationships as women are trained in self-defence practical strategies*' (pg 32).<sup>11</sup>

She also discusses the 'utopia' hopes of women that her lesbian partner will not be violent thus making it difficult to disclose the violence and to be able to seek help:

"The lesbian relationship has often been portrayed as the only true egalitarian relationship and one which is utopic. Women do not batter women—lesbians live in loving, passionate, non-violent relationships. This inherent belief can make it difficult for both the victim and the batterer to be able to get help as this disruption is 'not one that is wanted within the community'." (pg 13).

Thus her attempts to get help from friends, family, and even agencies such as Women's Refuges could be met with disbelief and distrust.

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<sup>11</sup> Self-defence was also used as a rationalisation by subjects in the Renzetti study reviewed in subsequent sections of this paper.

Other dynamics in common with heterosexual I.P.V. situations include intergenerational transmission and selective mating with both partners coming from violent families of origin, thus perpetuating violence into subsequent generations.

## 12 Two Australian papers on lesbian I.P.V.

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To what extent do findings from Australian researchers on the topic show similarities and finding correspondences to the New Zealand literature?

Brief mention has been previously made to the study by Carrie Chan (2005) which is now discussed in greater detail and a second study by Justine Hotten of the Brisbane Domestic Violence Services is now reviewed all more recent than the New Zealand studies on same sex I.P.V.

## 13 The Chan paper—2005

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According to this report forms of abuse that are unique and specific to same sex relationships were said to include homophobia; threats to 'out' the victimised partner and advising her/him that abusive behaviour is a normal and to be expected feature of their relationship.<sup>12</sup> Disclosing the partners HIV status can influence decisions as to whether to stay with the abusive partner or leave, particularly if the abusive partner disclosed their HIV status to parents or employers (pg 3). Thus the victimised partner could not depend on the support of families and friends nor from victim support services. This is compounded by '*myths*' that same sex violence is not as severe as heterosexual violence; that violence in same sex relationships is usually mutual and therefore tolerated by both partners which are all misconceptions that place the safety of the abused partner at continued risk (pg 5). So too is the reluctance of the abused partner to take out apprehended violence orders.

Access to the services of domestic violence refuges or assisted accommodation programmes were as difficult as the situation in New Zealand. The most effective interventions were those described as the family systems approach where partner abuse arose from the relationship dynamics specific to that union, contrasting with traditional feminist theories which attribute domestic violence to male gender oppression (pg 9).

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<sup>12</sup> Chan, C, (2005). 'Domestic violence in gay and lesbian relationships', Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearing House pp 1–15. Note that there is no similar paper on this topic originating from New Zealand's Domestic Violence Clearing House.

## 14 Justine Hotten's '*The Utopian Nightmare*'—2010

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Hottens points to the inadequacies of domestic violence service provision for lesbian, gay, bi-sexual and transgender couples complicated by issues specific to these communities. The paper relies on international research for its conclusions since very little Australian research has been conducted. A study by Leonard *et. al.* in 2001 quoted on page 1 of her paper found that 120 of a sample of 135 lesbian or bi-sexual females (89%) had been involved in an abusive relationship with another woman (see Jackson *et. al.* 2014 pp 12–15).<sup>13</sup>

This abuse was trivialised and excused, exactly the observations in Machen's thesis and in the Chan paper. Internalised homophobia where one woman reflects her own self-hatred onto her partner seems counter-intuitive given the utopian expectations both initially bring to their relationship (pg 2). These specific features of lesbian violence requires in principle, anger management programmes to address women's use of violence since anger management programmes geared for men deal with quite different relationship dynamics. In Brisbane the community is less accepting of same sex lifestyles so being 'outed' is still a significant stressor, still evident circa 2010. This would not be the case in New Zealand given the more tolerant attitudes now evident in the wider community.

The paper recommends that there be more service provisions available for lesbian couples; more understanding from providers of the unique features of lesbian I.P.V. and that the dominant feminist frameworks that trivialise or ignore lesbian violence be more critically evaluated (pg 5). The first step was to publicly acknowledge that lesbian I.P.V. does exist, a first step to improving support services, referrals and training.<sup>14</sup>

## 15 International text-books on partner abuse in lesbian relationships

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Claire Renzetti's '**Violent Betrayal: Partner abuse in lesbian relationships**' 1992<sup>15</sup>.

*"Acknowledging that lesbian battering is a serious problem may indeed be unpleasant, even painful, for the lesbian community. But until such acknowledgement is made, until victims needs are effectively and sensitively met, and until batterers are challenged and held accountable for*

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<sup>13</sup> Hotten, J. (2010). '**The Utopian Nightmare: Key Issues about Lesbian Domestic Violence According to Brisbane Domestic Violence Services**'. Sydney: The Australian and New Zealand Critical Criminology Conference. Institute of Criminology; the University of Sydney Law School.

<sup>14</sup> Two more Australian studies not reviewed are Haridan, A. (1997) '**Out of Limbo: First National Conference on Violence in Lesbian Relationships**'. Adelaide: April 10 and 11  
and  
Vickers, L. (1996) '**The Second Closet: Domestic Violence in Lesbian and Gay Relationships: A Western Australian Perspective**'. Perth: Murdoch University Electronic Journal of Law 3:4. December.

<sup>15</sup> Renzetti, C. (1992) '**Violent Betrayal: Partner abuse in lesbian relationships**' California: Sage Publications.

*their behaviour, all lesbians are unsafe and the struggle for the creation of a peaceful, egalitarian community of women is violently betrayed.”*

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Renzetti's text is regarded as a 'landmark' contribution to the field although hers is by no means the only text-book on the subject. She recruited her subjects by advertising widely including national publications in an era where lesbian women were regarded as a stigmatised population; thus limiting the number of subjects approached who returned the questionnaire. It was mailed to more than two hundred lesbian and gay newspapers and over one thousand lesbian and gay organisations throughout the United States and Canada. Of 200 requests for questionnaires only one hundred usable questionnaires were returned for analysis from the victims perspective, rather than from the 'batterers' perspective given that there is frequently little compatibility between individuals perceptions of the same relationship (pg 14). The over-representation of well-educated, middle to upper-class women clearly showed (as do heterosexual studies) that I.P.V. is to be found across all classes and occupational groups. In 85% the person subsequently terminating the relationship was the partner who had been abused. Respondents who did not volunteer to interview were usually those still involved in an abusive relationship. Of 77 respondents who did volunteer only 40 were actually interviewed.

One reputable survey of 169 lesbians found that over 70% reported experiencing physical, sexual or verbally aggressive acts, another that just under 50% of the sample had used physical aggression (pg 17). In Renzetti's study two-thirds of her sample (65%) had been involved in an abusive relationship whereas only 25% and 33% of straight couples had been physically violent to each other. Renzetti concludes that the manifestation of gay relationship abuse is broadly similar, slightly more frequently encountered in same sex relationships but with some unique distinguishing features evident in lesbian I.P.V. situations.

In the context of the feminist movement lesbian relationships were often idealised as egalitarian, non-competitive and free from power struggles plaguing heterosexual relationships (pg 28). But in reality, irrespective of the gender of the partner, issues of dependency versus autonomy, jealousy and 'power and control' issues are common to all. However these issues are more intensively experienced by lesbian couples because theirs is a '*closed system*' of mutual dependency particularly if their families of origin disapprove of their lifestyle choices. Initially, they value commitment, fidelity and spent less time with friends in preference to closer bonding with each other (pg 31). There is a '*same body same minds*' mind-set and fusion in the earlier part of the relationship which leads to a sense of betrayal, if over time the relationship starts to disintegrate and the illusion of the relationship as a utopian one, shatters. Thus the abusers dependency on the abused and the abused partners need to be more independent constitute a major source of conflict, tension and strain (pg 34). Jealousy as a consequence of over-dependency was the most frequently cited source of conflict, as indeed it is in heterosexual and gay male relationships (pg 39). The more closely fused the bonding, the more likely jealous and extremely possessive feelings were acted out in physical assaults and psychological abuse particularly if infidelity was suspected even though rarely, was there any substantial evidence to confirm the suspicions (pg 43)?

Equality in sharing major decisions in the relationship and to use strategies to minimise inequalities between the partners are important goals for lesbian couples but also characteristic of healthy heterosexual and gay male relationships (pg 45). But an equally important dynamic in all partnerships is that the perpetrator is usually the partner with the most power (pg 48). This was also related to the victim's economic dependence on and diminished earning capacity in comparison to the abusive

partner. Half the sample, 20 respondents, mentioned the imbalance of power in the relationship as problematic.

Studies vary on the relationship between alcohol and drug abuse, some studies indicating that as many as 25% to 35% of lesbian women engage in problem heavy drinking, a percentage matched in heterosexual and gay male relationships as well as although women suffer greater impairments to their function with a smaller alcoholic intake than men. 90% of the sample reporting on the topic became very aggressive while drinking, more prone to verbal anger outbursts and 50% being physically assaultive and violent while drunk (pg 63). Thus substance abuse along with dependency issues and jealousy were the most significant explanatory variables in determining the severity of I.P.V., although in one third of the cases studied, neither partner was under the influence of drugs at the time of an abusive incident (pg 67).

The inter-generational transmission of I.P.V. is a well established as a causative dynamic in all relationships. One quoted study by Lie, Shlitt, Bush *et. al.* (pg 69), found that lesbians who had both witnessed and experienced violence through corporal punishments as children were significantly more likely than lesbians from non-violent households to be victimised in their adult relationships. This finding was not replicated in the Renzetti sample since almost as many abusers grew up in non-violent households as grew up in violent ones (pg 70).

Battered lesbian women were often reluctant to leave an abusive relationship just as heterosexual women are (pg 81).

A finding in common with the New Zealand studies was that her sample's experiences with women's shelters or refuges were largely negative despite the fact that many activists in these organisations are themselves lesbian (pg 93).

Renzetti concluded on the basis of her subjects comments that there was an especially strong reluctance within the lesbian community to recognise and acknowledge the problem of partner abuse in lesbian relationships, an observation also found in the New Zealand studies.

## 16 Unique pressures placed on women in same sex relationships

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While there are stressors common to all partnerships irrespective of gender, there are features identified in the New Zealand, Australian and overseas literature that describe particularly intense interpersonal conflicts in lesbian relationships. The first is that this relationship is expected to be more harmonious and free from the power-plays and communication difficulties inherent in heterosexual relationships. These include preserving a balance between becoming over-close (emotional dependency) and, on the other hand, maintaining independence and autonomy, issues which face all couples including couples in long term, committed and stable unions. Although seemingly, there are more supports for women in disintegrating heterosexual relationships as in the services provided by the Auckland-based '*Shine*' and Women's Refuges, not all lesbian women feel safe in doing so or in relying on the support of their family if their parents disapprove of their lifestyle choices and their loss of opportunity to become grandparents. If they then face the same kind of domestic violence scenarios in their new relationships as in their previous heterosexual relationships, then their sense of betrayal and entrapment can be profound. Female perpetrators of abuse can claim that they are

victims instead, a perplexing situation for others if they try to help. Family Court funded counselling is not available to lesbian couples, only to heterosexual couples with lack of support services liable to increase the level of stress and frustration. Some studies show that psychological violence is more common in lesbian than in heterosexual relationships, particularly the isolation of the abused partner from other friends and people in the outside world.

Another dynamic reported in the literature is the displacement on to the hapless, more emotionally needy female partner of anger, hostility and rejection arising in the early mother-daughter relationship or at the extreme, maternal filicidal impulses (Kaschak 2001, pp. 78).

Lesbian abusers, according to the same source reject closeness, mainly revolving around fears of abandonment with their need to be self-sufficient, masking feelings of loneliness and isolation as well as anger and hostility about being excluded by others. They wait for others to initiate contact but continue to maintain more interpersonal distance, rejecting expressions of affection or tenderness when it is offered. This defence is also commonly seen in emotionally distant and aloof men who reject close-binding displays of affection from their female partners (Ibid, pg 99).

Misogynous men and misandrous women have this much in common.

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## **17 Untraceable references to New Zealand studies on lesbian violence**

In spite of the valued assistance given by the Domestic Violence Clearing House's Library, the Library of the National Collective of Women's Refuges and the Information Services of the Wellington Public Library, the following documents had been lost, misplaced, or could not otherwise be traced. These were:-

- A      Proceedings of two conferences on domestic violence in the lesbian community, one held in Nelson in 1998 and a second held at Victoria University of Wellington in 1999.
- B      Two studies, a further report on lesbian health (Saphira and Glover 1998/1999) and on discrimination against lesbian and bi-sexual women in 1997 by Rankine, have not been traced.

Articles which specifically mention the term 'lesbian' in their title were not reviewed but illustrate the scope and extent of the New Zealand literature on the topic.

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## **18 Main findings**

- The available New Zealand as well as the international literature indicates that the prevalence of domestic violence within lesbian relationships is comparable to violence in both heterosexual and gay male relationships. Similarities include the inter-generational

transmission of violence; alcohol abuse; conflicts around dependency and autonomy and power imbalances.

- The Duluth ‘power and control’ wheel of male to female violence has actually been adapted to account for the dynamics of I.P.V. in lesbian relationships.
- The recent Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports make no direct reference to I.P.V. in female same sex relationships in spite of the fact that there is a surprisingly large New Zealand literature comprising policy statements, theses and reports on the topic most dating back to the mid- to late 1990s preceding and following the 1995 changes to the Domestic Violence legislation.
- As well as tracing New Zealand reports, this review has discussed Australian studies and representative international text-book studies with findings broadly comparable across all three main sources of information.
- A previous review of the literature on I.P.V., Jackson, Laven and Roberts (2014) discussed I.P.V. in same sex relationships yet little weight has been accorded so far to this document although it has been widely circulated. Nor has it attracted any publicity in proportion to the extensive publicity given to the three polarised and politicised reports from the powerful women’s lobby groups.
- The ‘**Fathers Report**’ claims that the various progressive changes to the Domestic Violence Act have been punitive and have badly disadvantaged men and men as fathers. They have failed precisely because of the failings of the Duluth model. The radicalised feminist perspective on I.P.V. has become a widely accepted model and ‘world-view’ on I.P.V. achieved by the allegedly deliberate suppression of I.P.V. in same sex female relationships, including media suppression of dissenting viewpoints.
- This second review provides further evidence which casts real doubt on the scholastic integrity of the authors of the recent Glenn, Tolmie and Herbert reports who had the resources available to them to provide a more balanced and gender-neutral perspective on and the true dynamics of I.P.V. yet they have not done so. Theirs are undoubtedly ‘femicentric’ reports which have manipulated their data to fit their own agenda which constitutes a very serious indictment on their motives in doing so.<sup>16</sup>
- For this reason the blueprint they have provided to Government on how to more effectively address what they falsely describe as a growing epidemic of I.P.V. is highly suspect and reflects a corruption of the processes of impartial scientific inquiry.

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<sup>16</sup> As defined in the first 2014 Fathers Report on page 2 ‘femicentric’ reports are those reports which do not draw impartially on the wider literature on I.P.V.; fail to cross-cite and discuss New Zealand studies which are well respected internationally; rely on a questionable statistical database to over-exaggerate the problem and use sensationalism to gain the sympathies of the public at large.

- 'Violence is Not OK' publicity campaigns funded by the Ministry of Social Development coupled with the femicentric reports have together been so successful that the myth of the male as invariably perpetrator and female invariably as victim of family violence is now perceived by the public at large to be factually accurate and truthful.
- Unless I.P.V. is more widely acknowledged to be present in all human relationships irrespective of age or gender, present Government policies to further strengthen community response to the problem of family violence will continue to be of questionable efficacy and unlikely to be successful.

## 19 New Zealand studies on lesbian violence

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Almore, C. (1990) '**Everything Isn't for Everybody: Some experiences of being lesbian in the work place**', Wellington. Victoria University of Wellington: Department of Sociology and Social Work. Working Paper No. 5. Unpublished mimeo.

Bowman, R. (1983) '**Beyond the pink triangle: The New Zealand public's attitudes towards homosexuality**'. In, M. Hill; S. Mast; R. Bowman and C. Call-Grigg (Eds.). '**Shades of Deviance**', Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 99–113.

Bradford, J. and Ryan, C. (1985) '**The National Lesbian Health Care Survey**', National Lesbian and Gay Health Foundation: Unpublished mimeo.

Brown, K. (1995) '**Lesbian Violence: The hidden face of Domestic Violence**', Wellington: Report to the N.C.W.R. and M.S.D. Domestic Violence Unit, Wellington.

Glover, M. (1993) '**Power and Control in Lesbian Relationships**' *Broadsheet* 197, 36–39.

Jones, D. (1988) '**Domestic violence in the Lesbian Community**'. Report to the lesbian community of Aotearoa. National Women's Studies Workshop at the 1998 conference. Nelson: 19–21 August. Also report of a workshop, Wellington: Te Aro. P O Box 6386.

Kirkbride, R. (1997) '**The Final Frontier?: Lesbians Health, Leisure and Space**'. Lincoln, MA thesis.

Lesbians and the Law Group (1993) **Lesbians and the Law** Wellington: South Community Law Centre: Unpublished mimeo.

Liddicoat, J. (1997) **Report to the Law Commission on Consultation with Lesbians for the Women's Access to Justice**, Wellington Law Commission.

McBride, S. **'Lesbian Mental Health'** Hamilton: University of Waikato. Masters thesis for the degree of Psychology. Unpublished mimeo.

McLeod, S. (2001) **'Exploring the Second Closet: A discursive exploration into the silencing and acknowledgement of family violence within the bonds of lesbian relationships'**. Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Public Health. Dunedin: University of Otago.

Machen, M. (1999) **'The Lesbian Blues: The silence surrounding abusive behaviours in lesbian couple relationships'**. Auckland: Master of Science Thesis, University of Auckland.

Paulin, K. (1996) **'Putting pakeha into the picture: Analysing lesbian/ bisexual politics in Aotearoa/New Zealand'**, In. S. Wilkinson and C. Kitzinger (Eds.) **'Representing the Other'**, London: Sage (pp 113–117).

Rankine, J. (1997) **'The Great Late Lesbian and Bisexual Women's Discrimination Survey'**, Auckland: Discriminatory Survey, P O Box 44056, ISBN 0-473-04-984-1.

Saphira, M. and Glover, M. (1999) **National Lesbian Health Survey**. 1998/1999 Auckland. Papers Inc. Health Consultancy Group. ISBN 1-908780-33-8.

Tuck, W. (1991) **'Women's Sexual Orientation: A study of diversity'** Hamilton: University of Waikato. A thesis for Master of Psychology.

Welch, S. (1995) **'Lesbian Mental Health'**, Dunedin: Thesis for Bachelor of Medical Science: University of Otago: 27 July.

Welch, S., Howden-Chapman, P. and Collings, S. (1998) **'Survey of drug and alcohol use by lesbian women in New Zealand'**, *Addictive Behaviours: An International Journal* 23:4, pp 543–548.

## **20 International text-books on lesbian I.P.V.: A representative study**

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R. Dobash, and R. Dobash (1992) **'Women, Violence and Social Change'** London: Routledge.

P. Elliot (Ed.) **'Confronting Lesbian Battering: A manual for the battered women's movement'**. Minnesota: Coalition for Battered Women. 1990.

G. Herek and K. Berrill (Eds.) **'Hate Crimes: Confronting violence against lesbian and gay men and bi-sexuals'** California: Sage. 1998.

E. Kaschak (Ed.) **'Intimate Betrayal: Domestic violence in lesbian relationships'** New York: The Haworth Press. 2001.

G. Kaufman and L. Raphael (Eds.) '**Coming Out of Shame: Transforming gay and lesbian lives'**  
New York: Doubleday. 1996.

B. Leventhal and S. Lyndy (Eds.) '**Same Sex Domestic Violence: Strategies for change'**.  
California: Sage. 1999.

K. Lobel (Ed.) '**Naming the Violence: Speaking out about lesbian battering**' Seattle: Seal 1986.

Ristock, J. (2002) '**No More Secrets: Violence in lesbian relationships**'. New York: Routledge.

C. Renzetti and C. Miley (Eds.) '**Violence in Gay and Lesbian Domestic Partnerships**'. New York:  
Harrington Park Press. 1996.

E. Rothblum and E. Coles (Eds.) '**Loving Boldly: Issues facing lesbians**' New York: Harrington  
Park Press. 1989.

J. Taylor and T. Chandler (1995) '**Lesbians Talk: Violent relationships**' London: Scarlett Press.