

Domestic violence hits gays more than homophobic assault

But most abuse goes unreported

By Vicki Haddock
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SAN FRANCISCO — Homosexuals are more likely to be victims of domestic violence than anti-homosexual violence, a survey by the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs suggests.

Yet the findings indicate that most homosexuals injured by a lover never report the abuse, much less see their batterers brought to justice. The survey, released Tuesday, seeks to document that little-acknowledged truth that homosexual relationships can be ravaged by abuse just as heterosexual relationships sometimes are.

It comes as the San Francisco District Attorney's Office is launching a campaign to heighten awareness of the crime in homosexual relationships, and as local activists are on the verge of creating a hotel voucher program to shelter male victims.

Last year, San Francisco's Community United Against Violence (CUAV), which participated in the survey, logged reports from 347 people who called its hot line seeking help from same-sex domestic violence. At the same time, CUAV reported 324 incidents of anti-homosexual harassment — from insults to violence — motivated in part by the victim's sexual orientation.

The survey, which bills itself as the first national set of statistics on homosexual domestic violence, is really an unscientific tabulation by community activists in six American cities: Chicago, Columbus, Minneapolis, New York City, San Diego and San Francisco. Combined, they documented 1,566 incidents.

Activists in four of the six cities logged more cases of domestic violence than anti-homosexual hate violence.

Yet the homosexual community has been slower to rally around the cause of domestic violence, in part fearing it would feed into prejudices about the nature of gay relationships.

"The time has come for us to confront domestic violence as bravely as we have hate violence," said Constance Potter of the Gay and Lesbian Community Action Council in Minneapolis.

Indeed, CUAV insists that the number of domestic-violence re-

ports logged last year in San Francisco represents only a tiny fraction of the actual incidents of abusive relationships among homosexual, bisexual and transgender victims.

The District Attorney's Office reported handling at most a dozen cases.

"If a case makes it to the [police department's] domestic violence unit, it's handled very well," said Greg Merrill, CUAV's director of client services. "And the prosecuting DAs are excellent. The problem is people don't report that they're victims . . . and if they do, it's a crapshoot whether they get a responding police officer who handles the case appropriately."

Researchers only recently have begun to explore same-sex domestic violence. A study presented at the Fourth International Family Violence Research Conference found that abusive homosexual men held many of the same psychological traits as abusive straight men: poor self-esteem and an inability to sustain intimate relationships.

Other studies of abusive lesbian relationships report that batterers tend to be overly dependent, using violence to squelch their partners' independence, and that alcohol and drugs often figure into the abuse.

The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs estimates from its review of the scanty research that domestic violence occurs in a quarter to a third of same-sex relationships.

One 50-year-old artist, identified in a CUAV testimonial as Ben Abraham, said that after enduring 18 years of abuse at the hands of his lover — who he said beat him and regularly pointed loaded guns to threaten him — he walked out for good, moved and got counseling.

"I never called the police," he said. "I did not believe anyone would believe me or help me."

Homosexuals who do report abuse sometimes confront police at a loss for how to handle the case.

"For years in gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender situations, police didn't ask the right questions," said Susan Breall, managing attorney for the DA's Domestic Violence Unit. "A lot of situations were chalked up to mutual combat and police reports were just filed away."

CULTURE, et cetera

The Point

by William J. Mann

Linda Guida is a children's librarian in upstate New York. Standing among the shelves of books and the rows of reading tables she is, in a very real sense, in the midst of a battlefield.

"Sometimes it sure feels that way," she says. "Every time a child picks up a certain book, I worry, 'Is this going to lead to a battle?'"

Those "certain books" happen to be the Gay-themed titles. And not just any book: what worries Guida most are the Gay-themed picture books — *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* and their ilk — the ones aimed at the youngest readers.

con. There's an ongoing battle in Kansas City, Mo., over Gay-themed children's books in school libraries, where the Lesbian-themed young adult novel *Annie on My Mind* by Nancy Garden was actually set on fire in a public book-burning in 1993. In Rutland, Vt., last year, the public library had to ward off attempts by parents to have *Daddy's Roommate* removed from the shelves. And just last month in Anchorage, Alaska, the school board voted to keep as part of the curriculum the book *Earthshine*, which deals with a child whose father is Gay and has AIDS, after some parents had called for its removal.

"There's no question that Gay and Lesbian-themed

for homosexuals, of spreading "lies and myths about the Gay and Lesbian community."

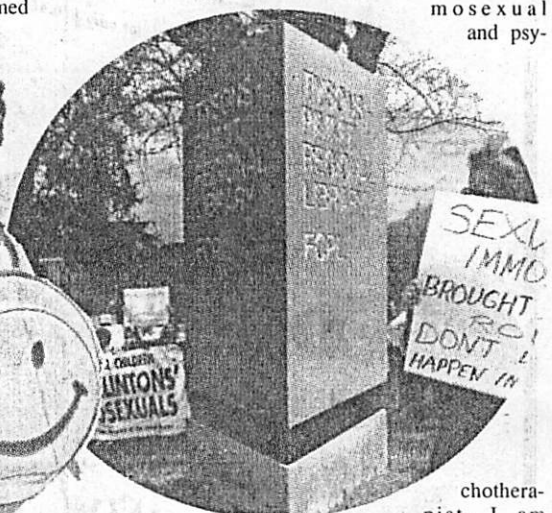
The book, first published in 1993, tells the story of a boy who thinks he might be Gay. In the course of therapy, however, the boy realizes his attraction for other boys stem from being sexually abused by an uncle and from his father's neglect. Alfie ends up straight, even married to a woman.

Cohen, who lives in Maryland, says he believes that *Alfie's Home* presents an alternative perspective for "those who wish to change their sexual orientation."

"As a former homosexual and psy-

Shaping minds

Cultural warriors seek place on children's bookshelves



"I've had parents come to me worried about what their children are reading," she says. "It's funny how the picture books often cause the greatest stir. We had to remove *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *Daddy's Roommate* for a time."

She says rather than risk a highly public controversy, the school board quickly acceded to the parents' demands to take the books off the shelves. "They didn't want a repeat of what happened in the city," she said.

"The city," in this case, is New York, where a protracted fight in 1992 over the inclusion of *Heather* and *Daddy's Roommate* in the school curriculum drew national headlines. Schools Chancellor Joseph A. Fernandez eventually lost his job over the "Rainbow Curriculum," an attempt to bring books representing a multicultural spectrum into school libraries.

The American Library Association noted a dramatic increase in reported challenges to Gay-themed books in public and school libraries after the New York City fracas, and the trend has continued unabated ever since. Some of the challenges have been successful, others have not.

The issue arouses fierce public sentiment, pro and

materials in schools will continue to be lightning rods for the right," says Deanna DUBY, director of People for the American

Way. DUBY tracks censorship issues for the liberal watchdog group based in Washington, D.C. "The right gets a ton of mileage out of these cases. Anything that mentions homosexuality in anything but a negative way can be charged with 'promoting a lifestyle.'"

DUBY says that children's picture books are often the hottest issue.

"There's always more concern the younger the children are," she says. "The right loves to charge that [such books] are 'teaching sodomy to first graders.'"

Taking the offensive

Now the tables have turned. Alan Klein, national communications director for the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, says his pro-Gay advocacy group is taking a different strategy in the war over children's literature.

"This time, we're going after them," he says.

The group recently spoke out against *Alfie's Home*, a picture book by Richard Cohen, through press releases and online postings. GLAAD accused the author, Richard Cohen of the International Healing Foundation, an organization advocating "reparative therapy"

chotherapist, I am standing up for what I believe, and the journey that I have chosen," he says. "I respect the choice of those who wish to fulfill their homosexual desires. I would equally appreciate the reciprocal respect for my choice."

In any case, *Alfie's Home* is a first. There are no other such blatantly anti-Gay picture books aimed at children. In fact, Gay issues and characters have been treated quite favorably when they do (admittedly rarely) appear.

"I cannot think of a single trade book that has had a negative Gay character," says Roger Sutton, the editor of *The Horn Book*, an influential review of children's literature. Might then *Alfie's Home* signal a trend? GLAAD's Klein says he doesn't know, but he's cautious. "It very well might be a portent of things to come."

Shaping minds

Meanwhile, the children for whom these books are intended remain at the heart of the debate.

"The Christian radical right, for that's who really leads these protests, has the perception that we're trying to recruit children into homosexuality via these books," says Lesléa Newman, author of *Heather Has Two Mommies*. "But *Heather* isn't about the mothers' sexual orientation. It's about a little girl who views all sorts of families around her. It's absurd to think some kid is going to read *Heather* and become Gay."

Indeed, the book is more about having tolerance for *Heather*, a little girl in a special situation, than for her mommies — although there is a clear message that their family is equal to any other. It's that message — some would call it subversive — that so concerns opponents: Opinions formed at a very young age often last a lifetime.

"That's what so frightens the Christian right," says Newman, "who think we're going to influence children's minds before they have a chance to."

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