

Domestic violence and companion animals in the context of LGBT people's relationships

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Abstract

The link between domestic violence and animal abuse has now been well established, indicating that where there is one form of abuse, there is often the other. Research on this link, however, has almost exclusively focused on heterosexual cisgender people's relationships. Lacking, then, is an exploration of the possibly unique links between domestic violence and animal abuse in the context of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people's relationships. In this paper we adopt a feminist intersectional approach informed by Critical Animal Studies to advocate for a non-pathologising approach to understanding LGBT people's relationships with regard to the link between domestic violence and animal abuse.

Keywords: Domestic violence, animal abuse, companion animals, LGBT, relationships

Introduction

In this paper we consider the interlinked nature of animal abuse and domestic violence and abuse (DVA) in the context of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) people's relationships. Following an outline of the terms, scope and theoretical positioning of the paper, we provide statistics on animal companions before briefly outlining research on the links between animal abuse and DVA. In regards to the latter we note that extant research has focused primarily on cisgender (i.e., people whose assigned sex

normatively aligns with their gender) heterosexual couples. We then consider how the failure to examine the links between animal abuse and interpersonal violence in the context of LGBT people's relationships perpetuates heteronormativity and cisnormativity. To counter this, we use our own research, along with others', to highlight issues specific to the link between animal abuse and interpersonal violence in the context of LGBT people's relationships. We conclude by drawing upon the field of Critical Animal Studies (CAS) to outline a future agenda for research in this area.

Terminology, scope and theoretical framework

We use the term domestic violence and abuse (DVA) throughout this paper to acknowledge the varieties of abuse that can occur in intimate relationships (see Donovan et al, 2006), and thus to avoid limiting our focus to physical violence alone. DVA can include, for instance, sexual, spiritual and/or financial abuse, where intimates have limited or no capacity to give sexual consent, practise their spirituality in a respectful home environment, and/or have access to finances and sufficient input to financial decision making (Fraser, 2008). Cutting across these forms of abuse is emotional abuse, which can include acts of control, intimidation, confinement, isolation, degradation and the denial that such acts are taking place (Elliot, 1996). Mason and colleagues (2014) identify this cluster of behaviours as psychological aggression. It can also include state sanctioned forms of abuse, such as Zimbabwean President Mugabe's declaration that homosexuals are worse than dogs and pigs (Shoko, 2010).

We use the term animal abuse to refer to both the individual instances of animal abuse that co-occur with human-human abuse in the home and the day-to-day, socially sanctioned, abuses that some humans visit upon animals as a result of speciesism, and that extend beyond individual acts of physical violence. This definition extends the

limited definition of animal abuse that circulates within much of the existing literature on the topic, in which animal abuse is seen more narrowly as involving ‘cruelty to animals defined as socially unacceptable behavior that intentionally causes unnecessary pain, suffering, or distress to and/or death of an animal’ (Ascione, 1993: 238). This definition, we argue, is too narrow as it hinges on ‘socially unacceptable’ behaviours. In contrast, we suggest that many forms of animal abuse have wide social acceptance precisely because of speciesism, such as, animal testing in laboratories, the mass and routine slaughter of animals bred on factory farms, and live overseas animal transportation in overcrowded but officially sanctioned processes (Wicks, 2011), or through the mass euthanising of unwanted or relinquished dogs and cats, sometimes because humans are unable or unwilling to pay veterinary fees (Nowicki, 2011).

Speciesism relies on the assumption that humans are the most morally advanced group of animals (Hanrahan, 2011; Ryan, 2012); that it is our right to determine how non-human animals are treated (Matsuoka and Sorenson, 2014). Speciesism silences many forms of everyday violence humans perpetrate against animals, such as slaughterhouse violence for human meat-eating (Pachirat, 2011; Weitzenfeld and Joy, 2014). This silencing is precisely what scholars have criticised, and fought against, in DVA research historically (see, e.g. Hague and Mullender, 2006). We argue that for similar reasons (i.e. the interlinking of multiple - often silenced - oppressions), the definition of animal abuse must be extended and brought into line with definitions of DVA. We return to this in more detail later in the paper.

In terms of the populations that we focus on in this paper, we acknowledge that to speak of LGBT people is ambitious given that LGBT people do not constitute a homogenous group. Not only are the populations subsumed by this acronym differentiated by gender, making sexism and misogyny factors to be considered, they

are also differentiated by sexual orientation, making homophobia and biphobia potentially relevant (see Carrington, 1999; Elliot, 1996; Kecojevic et al, 2012).

Differences in and between gender and sexual identity make cisnormativity and transphobia also possible.

In order to emphasise these differences amongst LGBT people, in this paper we specifically concentrate on heteronormativity and cisnormativity. Heteronormativity (the presumption that heterosexuality is normal) has negative implications for people who do not identify as heterosexual (Kitzinger, 2005). Cisnormativity, or the presumption of a normative relationship between assigned sex and gender identity, marginalises and pathologises the experiences of trans people (Pyne, 2011). While we use these two concepts in tandem with one another, we are mindful of their differential effects. Specifically, we are aware that many trans people identify as heterosexual, just as we are aware that the majority of LGB people are cisgender. We make this point to acknowledge that discrimination may be imposed upon LGBT people from both outside and inside LGBT communities.

Our theoretical position is (pro)feminist in terms of how we understand DVA. While we see power as central to any understanding of interpersonal violence, we nevertheless acknowledge the debates about the relevance and applicability of orthodox feminist constructions - of patriarchy for instance - to LGBT populations (Donovan and Hester, 2014). Similarly, we are aware that DVA in LGBT people's relationships runs the risk of being ignored or overlooked because the dominant public story is that domestic violence and abuse is a heterosexual problem involving men as perpetrators of primarily physical violence against female partners (Donovan and Hester, 2014). To address this we supplement this more traditional feminist focus by drawing on feminist intersectional accounts of identity to acknowledge that a range of

social positions shape how power is deployed (see Crenshaw, 1991; McCall, 2014; Parry and O'Neal, 2015; Renzetti, 1992 for a more detailed discussion). By including non-human animals in our discussions we also extend previous intersectional accounts (see Cudworth, 2014).

While using interdisciplinary, international research, we are located in Australia and draw upon Australian examples throughout. However, we believe that Australia, the US and the UK in particular share similarities in terms of the manifestation of both DVA and animal abuse and in orientations toward policy in both areas. As such, this piece promises broader relevance. To set in context the information we present about the relationship between DVA, LGBT people and animal abuse, we now outline the scope of animal/human relationships in domestic contexts, before then briefly summarising existing research on the relationship between animal abuse and DVA.

The scope of domestic animal-human relationships

To understand the scope of the area of inquiry, we need to understand the extent of companion animal guardianship and the depth of connection many humans feel towards their animal companions. This understanding may help service providers to avoid, even unwittingly, denying or marginalising the experiences of victims/survivors of DVA who live with companion animals (Flynn, 2000).

Across the world, millions of people elect to live with companion animals, even if many are abandoned or relinquished to shelters (Nowicki, 2011). In the UK, it is estimated that 13 million (46% of all) households include companion animals, with the companion animal population standing at approximately 65 million (PFMA, n.d.). Figures are similar in Australia, where approximately 36% of households include a dog, and 23% include a cat; significantly cats have a marginal status in Australia, being

variously seen as ‘pests’ or companions, a binary that may explain the lower reported rates of cats as companion animals (Signal and Taylor, 2006). These figures hold similar for the US as well, with 40% of households including a dog, and 33% including a cat (Australian Companion Animal Council, n.d.). Elsewhere, we argue that the high rates of households that include animals indicate the extent to which, for many people, companion animals are considered family members rather than simply pets (Fraser and Taylor, in press).

There is, however, limited documentation of the rates of animal companions in LGBT households. Carrington (1999) reports that dogs and cats are included in as many as half of all lesbian and gay families, across age, gender and ethnicity, but are most likely to appear in wealthier families. Similarly, Bowman (2013) from the San Diego *LGBT Weekly* cited 2007 U.S. data indicating that 71% of LGBT adults live with companion animals, compared to 63% of heterosexual/cisgender adults. In Australia, one of the few sources of data about gay men and animal companions is the *HIV Futures* survey, which has been conducted biennially since 1997. In the latest report (Grierson et al., 2013), 1058 people completed the survey, of whom 83% were gay men. In terms of animal companions, 49% of the sample reported living with an animal companion. Further data about trans and gender diverse people appear in an Australian survey conducted by Riggs, Power and von Doussa (2015a), who found that of their 160 participants, 41% indicated living with a companion animal. In this study, those who lived with companion animals were more likely to be either male or gender diverse, than female.

Research into the relationships humans have with their animal companions consistently demonstrates that animal companions offer many humans comfort and a deep emotional connection that can be experienced as equally important to any love

shared with humans (Irvine, 2008, 2013; Risley-Curtiss et al., 2006). Research suggests, for example, that companion animals may show empathy and unconditional positive regard for their human companions (Risley-Curtiss et al., 2011). Animal companions often support humans to be more active and sociable and often soothe their human companions when they are anxious (Fraser and Taylor, in press; Horowitz, 2010; Irvine, 2013). They may lower their human companions' blood pressure when they are angry, and provide support generally and in times of difficulty (Fraser and Taylor, in press). Unfortunately, however, these findings are not always taken seriously, in spite of the growth of human-animal studies (Risley-Curtiss et al., 2011). Instead, a deep affection for animals may be pathologised and/or ridiculed as a maladaptive behaviour (Fraser and Taylor, in press; Serpell, 1996).

Only a small number of studies have specifically focused on the role of animal companions in the lives of LGBT populations. Putney's (2014) interview study with 12 older lesbians suggests that animal companions offer the possibility for non-judgemental relationships. Putney suggests that this was particularly salient for some of her participants who had grown up during a time when lesbianism was socially unacceptable, and who still feared disclosure of their sexual orientation to other humans. Some of Putney's participants who were socially isolated due to illness reported that animal companions reduced their sense of loneliness.

Similarly, Kailey (2010) writes about the importance of animal companions to some trans people, particularly during their gender transition. Findings from *HIV Futures Seven* (Grierson et al., 2013) also suggest that for many HIV positive gay men, companion animals are a significant source of support. Animal companions were the second highest group in terms of social support, with 63% of the 1058 participants indicating that they received a lot of support from their companion animal. Siegel and

colleagues (1999) also emphasise the important role that animal companions can play in the lives of HIV positive gay and bisexual men. Their survey of 1872 gay and bisexual men (36% of whom were HIV positive) found that those who lived with an animal companion and were HIV positive reported lower levels of depression than did those who were HIV positive and did not live with a companion animal. This difference was particularly true for men who did not have many close friends. This theme of animal companions supplementing human relationships is one that we will explore in more detail below, specifically with regard to the relationship between experiences of DVA and animal abuse.

‘The Link’ between animal abuse and DVA

The last two decades have seen a growing interest in links between DVA and animal abuse (Ascione et al, 1997; Ascione, 1998; Flynn, 2012; Gullone, 2012, 2013). Despite the lack of recognition accorded to animal/human relationships in many sectors (Taylor and Signal, 2006), the idea of a link between human and animal directed violence has captured public attention. Particularly popular is the idea of a graduation thesis; that is, those who are cruel to animals in childhood will go on to be cruel to humans in adulthood (see Gullone, 2012, 2013; Merz-Perez, Heide and Silverman, 2001). However, this is often misrepresented as a simple, clear-cut and causal relationship, overlooking many of the conceptual and methodological problems associated with research in this area. This assumption of causality also deflects attention away from much needed debates about the structural similarities between violence perpetrated against animals and other marginalised groups (Taylor and Signal 2008).

As summarised above, companion animals are often considered family members, something that can result in positive and caring relationships between animals and

humans. Yet this closeness with (other) family members can leave them vulnerable to DVA (see Kreinert et al., 2012). 'The Link' is a term coined to show how closely connected human and animal abuse may be (see Hodges, 2008). As the National Link Coalition notes: 'When animals are abused, people are at risk. When people are abused, animals are at risk' (2014: np). The link between human violence towards other humans, and human violence towards animals, is a well-substantiated phenomenon (e.g., Allen et al, 2006; Becker and French, 2004; Gullone, 2012; Merz-Perez et al., 2001).

In the context of families, research demonstrates a clear link between animal abuse and other forms of family abuse (e.g. Gullone, 2012). In particular, incidents of animal cruelty occur more frequently in families where DVA is also occurring (e.g. DeGue and DiLillo, 2009; Faver and Strand, 2003). Acts of animal cruelty in the home may thus be indicative of family violence, including violence perpetrated against elders or between siblings. Gullone (2013: 254) argues that, '...almost without exception, the perpetrators of animal cruelty crimes are the same individuals who engage in other aggressive or antisocial behaviour including partner and child abuse, and bullying'.

Research also suggests that animal abuse, when it coexists with DVA, may indicate more extreme forms of violence. For example, Simmons and Lehmann's (2007) interview study with 1283 heterosexual women leaving violent homes concluded that when men perpetrated violence against both their female partners and companion animals, they tended to use a greater range and severity of aggressive violence and controlling behaviours than was the case where animal abuse did not occur. Examples of DVA in homes where a companion animal is present include threats to harm or kill companion animals or to give them away (National Link Coalition, 2014). Those who seek to abuse power may also enact verbal, physical and in some cases sexual violence and abuse across species divides (Adams, 1990).

Despite these findings, animal cruelty continues to be seen as less important than violence perpetrated against human beings (Faver and Strand, 2003). At both a conceptual and practical level this is highly problematic. Conceptually, acknowledging the link between DVA and animal abuse allows us to refine and further explore theories of power, interconnected oppression and abuse (Allen et al., 2006; Faver and Strand, 2003), and thus develop more effective ways to combat it. Practically, recognising that companion animals matter to those in violent relationships allows us to develop additional measures to help support those who live with animal companions to ensure both their own safety and that of their animal companions.

LGBT people, DVA, and animal violence

Similar to research on animal companions and LGBT people, there is relatively little research on the intersections of LGBT people's relationships, DVA, and animal violence (AV). In this section we first summarise the one study that we are aware of that has focused on lesbian experiences of DVA and AV, before providing a number of other examples that we have extrapolated from research on DVA and LGBT people. Whilst the literature on LGBT people's experiences of DVA is now extensive (see Badenes-Ribera, 2015; Finneran & Stephenson, 2013; McClennan, 2005, for overviews), in this section we focus on a small number of studies that offered us insight into exploring the DVA/AV link in the context of LGBT people's lives, and specifically those that allow us to disaggregate the experiences of lesbians, gay men, and bisexual and trans people.

In terms of the one study that included a question on the link between DV and AV in lesbian relationships, Renzetti (1992) asked her sample of 100 lesbians who had experienced relationship violence to indicate its form and frequency. Renzetti notes that 38% of her participants indicated that their abusers had 'abused pets in the household',

though she does not provide further analysis of these data. Beyond this one study, and in terms of extrapolating from the data on LGBT people and DVA, a key point comes from the repeated emphasis in research in this field on the lack of support from families of origin that many LGBT people experience. For example, Head and Milton (2014) suggest that due to negative stereotypes about, and discrimination towards, bisexual people, many bisexual people do not disclose their sexual orientation to family members. This has implications in the context of DVA, where a felt need to hide bisexuality can mean that an individual who is in a same-sex relationship but who has not disclosed their bisexuality to family members may feel unable to disclose experiences of DVA to family members. Similarly, research by Riggs, von Doussa and Power (2015) suggests that a significant majority of trans and gender diverse people are estranged from their family of origin. Such estrangement can leave trans and gender diverse people without support if DVA occurs. Finally, Letellier (1996) suggests that for HIV positive gay men, families of origin can often be unsupportive or indeed may reject a family member who is HIV positive. This lack of familial support may mean that animal companionship becomes even more important for some, and is also likely to lead to situations where a person may feel unable to leave an abusive relationship if they have nowhere to take their companion animal (i.e. if temporary housing does not permit animals).

In regards to temporary housing (i.e., shelters), participants in Head and Milton's (2014) research suggested that they had not accessed a shelter due to the perception that shelters solely service heterosexual women. Bornstein and colleagues (2006) note that for many trans people, shelters may be perceived as unwelcoming, especially if they require disclosure of trans status or require gender segregation, a practice that fails to recognise the needs of gender diverse people (see Parry and O'Neal, 2015). The

perception (if not reality) that some temporary housing options may be unwelcoming of LGBT people may prevent many LGBT people from accessing these services, thus compounding the problem of many shelters not being able or willing to accommodate companion animals. Also, if crisis centre staff rate violence in LGBT people's relationships as less serious and less likely to worsen over time as compared with violence in heterosexual/cisgender relationships (Brown and Groscup, 2009), then they are less likely to be on the look out for indicators that may suggest the existence of abuse (such as animal abuse being a 'red flag' for abuse between partners; see DeGue and DiLillo, 2009).

Research on LGBT people and DVA also suggests that discrimination plays a significant role in responses to DVA in several ways. Elliot (1996) highlights the ways in which discrimination can play a role in recognising the existence of DVA, complicating potential responses. Trans people, in particular, indicate a fear of reporting DVA due to possible negative responses from police officers (Bornstein et al., 2006). Head and Milton's research further demonstrates that DVA in the context of bisexual relationships can take the form of threats to disclose a partner's bisexuality, particularly when the abusive partner is heterosexual. A similar concern has been raised in regards to trans people – and specifically trans women in relationships with cisgender men – being threatened by disclosure of their trans status (Jauk, 2013). Similarly, Letellier (1996) reports that HIV positive gay men are particularly susceptible to DVA that involves threats from a partner to disclose their HIV positive status to others. These justified fears of discrimination (from police officers, from family members if sexual orientation or HIV status is disclosed) can be compounded in regards to companion animals, when the individuals against whom the violence and abuse is being perpetrated may fear that

discrimination will lead to the loss of the companion animal (such as if a report is made to animal welfare agencies, and the animal is removed).

Whilst for all victims/survivors of DVA with close companion animal relationships there may be some commonalities, such as fear of perpetrators' actions if they stay or leave; concerns about being separated from animal companions; shame and potential discrimination and stigma for being a DVA victim; and the distress that can result from losing one's home and community if forced to flee (for more on this see, e.g. Becker and French, 2004; Renzetti and Miley, 2014), this brief summary of some of the literature on LGBT people and DVA suggests the importance of recognising the specific needs of LGBT populations in regards to the relationship between AV and DV. Specifically, policy makers and practitioners need to recognise what Austin et al (2008) describe as relationship barriers to help seeking (such as the threat of outing), structural and institutional barriers and legal and justice system barriers (such as legal discrimination and anti-homosexual, bi or trans beliefs). In the following section we draw on a critical animal studies approach to suggest some ways forward in terms of both research and practice relating to LGBT people, DVA, and animal abuse.

Ways forward: A critical animal studies approach

In highlighting above the meanings of companion animals for LGBT people and links between animal abuse and DVA in LGBT people's relationships specifically, we believe it is important to advocate for a research agenda specific to these populations. Many avenues for future research are possible, including but not limited to: what does it mean to recognise that many LGBT people experience companion animals as family members? What kinds of LGBT communities are formed and sustained through a shared love of companion animals? How can these companion animal-oriented communities assist

individuals to rebuild their lives after DVA? What kinds of roles can companion animals play with LGBT victims/survivors of DVA trying to recover from past experiences of violence? How can the recognition of oppression in animal lives help us understand LGBT people's experiences of oppression? Answering these questions will likely require novel research methods in order to avoid the power/knowledge nexus complicit in many traditional approaches to investigating intersecting oppressions, though it is beyond the scope of the current paper to examine this in detail (for more debate see, for example, Hamilton and Taylor, 2012).

While there are many ways to progress knowledge about LGBT people and companion animal connections, we want to take the opportunity to highlight Critical Animal Studies (CAS) as a particularly useful conceptual tool to further the aims of an LGBT-focused research agenda in the field of DVA and animal abuse. CAS draws on ecofeminist work (e.g., Plumwood, 1993) to highlight the role that dualistic, positivist, and post-Enlightenment paradigms play in creating and maintaining the oppression of vulnerable groups by marginalising and silencing them. Making use of theories of intersectionality, CAS scholars point to the similarities between the oppression of women, animals, ethnic minorities, disabled individuals and other marginalised groups (see, Taylor and Twine, 2014). Moreover, CAS is an explicitly scholar-activist framework that aims to understand systemically linked oppressions and end them. As Loyd-Paige explains:

All social inequalities are linked. Comprehensive systemic change will happen only if we are aware of these connections and work to bring an end to all inequalities – not just our favourites or the ones that most directly affect our part of the universe. No one is on the sidelines: by our actions or inactions, by our

caring or our indifference, we are either part of the problem or part of the solution (2010: 2).

Importantly for our argument, CAS scholars are openly critical of the role of capitalism (and more broadly neoliberalism) in maintaining oppression against humans and animals. As such, there is a structural focus to the field because it is an approach that centralises and problematises power. Because this resonates with feminist thinking, we believe it a useful way to frame investigations into LGBT people's relationships with companion animals and the interlinking of DVA and animal abuse. This is especially the case if a CAS approach is combined with theories of intersectionality. In its mainstream form, intersectionality has been argued to be obstinately humanist, but CAS scholars are increasingly successful in using it as a way of analysing animal oppression (Taylor and Twine 2014; Twine 2010). For example, Adams (1990) details both the gendered and racialised politics of meat eating and attendant animal suffering while Cudworth marries the idea of anthropocentrism with that of patriarchy to detail her concept of 'anthroparchy' – 'a complex social system of natured domination, in terms of the networks of institutions, processes and practices that can be evidenced in human treatment of domesticated non-human animals' (2011: 56).

Uncovering and exploring the mechanics of policing categories such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, and tying them to the use of human–animal distinctions, is a focus of CAS scholars. In practical terms it involves not just seeing how oppression based on sexuality, gender, race, class, age and ability in humans intersects, but also how animals are oppressed through social hierarchies that extend beyond the human/animal divide. In so doing, deeper questions can be asked about taken for granted expressions of power, control and domination.

Outlining the historical and cultural contingencies of the ‘pure categories’ (Latour, 1993) of human and animal, homosexual and heterosexual, male and female, has allowed CAS scholars to demonstrate the structural and cultural processes that operate to maintain anthropocentrism. CAS scholars have argued that speciesism creates a justification for the oppression and abuse of all marginalised others, human or animal. For example, Spiegel (1988) demonstrates the intersection of various ideologies – including pseudo-scientific neo-Darwinism – that create parallels between nonhuman animals and certain groups of humans (for example to dehumanise African people in order to justify their continued slavery). Such practices depend on binary and dualistic conceptions of the world, such as heterosexual/nonheterosexual and cisgender/transgender to warrant dehumanisation and abuse. These hierarchies make abuse that happens to those with prized identities (male, heterosexual, cisgender humans) more likely to be taken seriously than forms of abuse perpetrated against devalued identities on the other side of the dualisms (that is, those associated with anyone female, non-heterosexual, transgender or animal). Expanding such frameworks in future research agendas that focus on the intersections of LGBT people’s relationships and animal abuse seems to us to offer a potent way to understand the structural, cultural and interpersonal dynamics involved.

In heteronormative and cisnormative societies, the repeated abuse of power, domination and exploitation can be especially difficult to name when it occurs in LGBT people’s relationships. This is often due to a pervasive heterosexism and gender normativity whereby ‘people in ordinary interactions (not motivated by heterosexist prejudice or discriminatory intent) commonly invoke and produce a normative heterosexual world’ (Kitzinger, 2005: 478; see also Jauk, 2013). Another key reason for difficulties in identifying and naming abuse in LGBT people’s relationships is the

relative ease with which abuse can be used as evidence that it is the person's sexuality or gender identity that is dysfunctional, deviant and wrong (The LGBTIQ Domestic Violence Interagency, 2014). Rather than understanding the abuse as problematic, pathological, and/or evidence of structural inequalities writ into practice, the relationship itself may be viewed as the problem, allowing those who seek to marginalise LGBT people to reiterate the naturalness of heterosexuality and gender normativity, in spite of the evidence showing how endemic domestic violence is in heterosexual cisgender relationships.

Thus, we suggest the need to re-orient research into domestic violence away from an assumption that men's violence to women is solely constitutive of gendered violence. Acknowledging this does not mean we are suggesting that Kelly's (1987) continuum of violence is redundant, even if we do accept Ristock's (2005) point that focusing exclusively on gender obscures us from properly understanding violence in LGBT people's lives. We know that male-to-female intimate partner violence is statistically more prevalent (Fraser, 2008; Summers and Hoffman, 2002). At the same time, a refusal to examine how other forms of violence such as LGBT intimate partner violence manifest, including their interweaving with other forms of abuse such as animal abuse, helps to maintain heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions that contribute to significant barriers faced by LGBT people attempting to leave violent relationships (see Donovan et al., 2006; Parry and O'Neal, 2015). As researchers we must not be complicit in this, even unwittingly, by simply researching cisgender women's experiences of animal abuse by their cisgender male partners.

A further and final concern arises from the fact that much violence and abuse perpetrated against both animals and disempowered human others is socially sanctioned or condoned. While Kelly's original concept of a continuum of violence was

linked explicitly to cisgender heterosexual relationships (Kelly, 1987), we believe that when overlaid with a CAS approach, it can be extended to include the examination of other forms of violence that have in common unequal power relations as a root cause. Importantly for our argument in this paper, this also includes violence committed against other species.

Final comments

Domestic violence and abuse in LGBT people's relationships requires careful attention and more extensive research that problematises violence and abuse, rather than LGBT people's gender and sexual identities. More research into the links between DVA and animal abuse in the contexts of LGBT people's relationships is needed. Feminist ideas and those drawn from CAS are relevant but must accommodate some of the specific needs and experiences of LGBT people affected by DVA. At the very least, gender and sexual stereotypes should not dominate policies, service design and practice. Opening up space that recognises potential help-seeking responses in LGBT populations is needed to engage more LGBT people who are experiencing DVA. Sexual and gender differences need to be appreciated if the reproduction of heteronormativity and cisnormativity is to be avoided.

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