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"I Just Thought Maybe This Is [the] Way of Doing Things": Exploring Lesbian-, Gay-, and Bisexual-Specific Intimate Partner Violence in Norway

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Objective: Intimate partner violence (IPV) in lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) relationships seems to be at least as high as in heterosexual relationships. However, there are uncertainties regarding how IPV is more specifically experienced in LGB relationships. We explore how LGB individuals exposed to IPV make sense of the potentially more specific ways in which IPV is enacted and experienced in LGB relationships. ***Method:*** We conducted 26 in-depth interviews with LGB individuals (aged between 19 and 70) in Norway who had experienced IPV. We used a (reflexive) thematic analysis to discern the specific themes that captured how our participants related to IPV. ***Results:*** We first illustrate the four types of IPV that our participants talked about: psychological, physical, sexual, and economical. We then present the three main themes that we generated based on the participants' interviews, exploring the more specific ways in which IPV may be experienced in LGB relationships: (a) being dominated, (b) invalidation of sexual orientation, and (c) jealousy-based vulnerability. ***Conclusions:*** These findings underscore the prominent role that sexual orientation plays in IPV experiences. Being an LGB individual may generate specific IPV experiences among this group in Norway. The potentially distinct ways in which IPV is enacted and experienced in LGB relationships are important to consider, not only to make the IPV problem among this group visible but also to tailor the psychosocial interventions to the specific needs of this group.

Keywords: intimate partner violence; lesbian-, gay-, and bisexual-specific intimate partner violence; thematic analysis; minority stress; sexual orientation-related intimate partner violence

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Intimate partner violence (IPV), defined as "any behavior within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, or sexual harm to those in the relationship," is a global challenge with severe health consequences, including detrimental effects on morbidity, chronic pain, suicidal ideation, and deteriorating mental health (World Health Organization, 2013). Meta-analyses have indicated that 30% of women worldwide have experienced at least one type of IPV in their relationship (Bott et al., 2019). The prevalence of IPV experienced by women in the general Norwegian population is 23% (Dale et al., 2023), which is lower than that in other Nordic countries, such as Denmark (32%), Finland (28%), and Sweden (28%), but similar to the European Union average of 22% (Gracia & Merlo, 2016).

IPV has been understood as a phenomenon within heterosexual relationships as a result of traditional gender roles between male perpetrators endorsing traditional masculinity to legitimize the use of violence toward female victims (Donovan & Hester, 2014). The rates of IPV among same-sex couples are reportedly similar to those among heterosexual couples (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015; Greenwood et al., 2002; Matte & Lafontaine, 2011). However, there is reason to believe that IPV plays out differently in same-sex relations compared to heterosexual (Donovan & Hester, 2014). To further investigate the psychosocial processes that may lead to IPV among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, we explore how IPV is experienced among LGB individuals.[1]

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[1] The authors are aware that the use of LGB for some readers can be perceived as trans-excluding. This is not the intention of the authors, who support the inclusion of trans people in the LGBTQ+ community. The use of LGB in this article is solely for the purpose of signifying that the number of trans people who participated in this study was too few to deduct any meaningful conclusions around trans-specific experiences of IPV.

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Being LGB Individuals in Norway

Over the past 4 decades, Norway has witnessed an increasing acceptance of LGB individuals, as manifested both in attitudes and legislature (Eggebø et al., 2019). Despite improvements, Norwegian LGB individuals still live under poorer conditions, are more vulnerable to mental health difficulties, and face other psychosocial challenges to a larger degree compared to heterosexual individuals (Anderssen et al., 2021; Anderssen & Malterud, 2013). Mental health challenges are especially prevalent among the more vulnerable LGB individuals. For instance, LGB individuals with migrant backgrounds do report more psychosocial challenges, especially related to double stigma and discrimination caused by heterosexism and racism (Eggebø et al., 2020; Ummak et al., 2022). Furthermore, young LGB people are more exposed to bullying than their heterosexual peers; "gay" is, for example, one of the most commonly used derogatory terms in Norwegian schools (Slaatten et al., 2015). LGB youth in Norway do also report more challenges in adapting to adult life than their heterosexual peers, especially related to work (Engvik, 2022). The estimates of IPV in the Norwegian LGB population remain unknown, but there is reason to believe that it is prevalent due to the greater burden of mental health difficulties and livelihood challenges (Fjær et al., 2013; Hesselberg, 2011). Especially since the LGB population is exposed to more violence and discrimination than the general population (Fladmoe et al., 2019; Roland & Auestad, 2009), psychosocial challenges are more extensive among LGB people than among the general public (Anderssen et al., 2021).

LGB-Specific IPV

The prevalence of IPV among same-sex couples seems to mirror the rates among heterosexuals (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015; Greenwood et al., 2002; Matte & Lafontaine, 2011). In a Canadian study that included 218 LGB people, 76.2% of the women and 70.7% of the men reported having perpetrated psychological aggression toward their partner in the last year, while 14.2% of the women and 12% of the men reported having committed physical acts toward their partner (Matte & Lafontaine, 2011). Not only were the rates of IPV among same-sex couples the same as in heterosexuals, but the researchers also did not find any gender differences (Matte & Lafontaine, 2011). Psychological violence, such as name-calling, humiliation, threatening to leave the relationship, and yelling, is the most prevalent form of IPV among LGB people (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015).

While the prevalence rates are similar, the underlying mechanisms of IPV in same-sex couples arguably differ from IPV in the heterosexual population (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015). Trombetta and Rollè (2023), in a meta-analysis of same-sex IPV, argued that high levels of stress, adult attachment style, and lack of conflict resolution within the couple seem to drive IPV in LGB couples, which mirrors psychological processes that also seem to drive IPV in heterosexual couples (Donovan & Hester, 2014). However, the kind of stress might differ in LGB individuals as high degree of internalized heterosexism, referring to the internalization of homonegative attitudes in society and the stress of belonging to a sexual minority population, seems to be associated with IPV (Murray et al., 2007). More specifically, the few studies conducted on IPV in LGB relationships have indicated that LGB individuals have unique IPV experiences related to the social, cultural, and structural marginalization and inequality of sexual minorities (Donovan & Barnes, 2020; Donovan & Hester, 2008; Ummak et al., 2022). For example, Donovan and Barnes (2020) suggested that LGB individuals, because they live in predominantly heteronormative societies, are at risk of experiencing a unique type of violence described as "identity abuse." Such abuse may take the form of undermining a partner's sense of self-identity as an LGB; threats to disclose the partner's sexual orientation and gender identity to friends, families, or employers; and isolating the partner from local LGB scenes or events (see also Cleghorn et al., 2024; DiStefano, 2009; Ummak et al., 2024). Furthermore, Donovan and Hester (2008) found that being young and having their first same-sex relationship makes LGB individuals particularly vulnerable to experiencing violence (i.e., lack of knowledge about same-sex relationships, lack of embeddedness in LGB communities and/or friendship networks, and lack of resources from which one can seek help and support). Similarly, Cleghorn et al. (2024) demonstrated that the level of outness and lack of experience in an LGB relationship create vulnerabilities to experiencing controlling tactics by partners. For example, an experienced partner can control and dominate their partner by imposing certain relationship practices as a part of being "authentically queer" to a newly out or inexperienced LGB person (Donovan & Hester, 2014).

Furthermore, IPV among same-sex couples seems to be related to certain kinds of heterosexist control toward the partner, including threatening the partner with revealing sexual orientation to family, friends, or employers (Badenes-Ribera et al., 2015). This kind of IPV might reinforce internalized heterosexism by telling the partner that they deserve IPV because they are an LGB individual and by questioning whether the partner is a "real" member of the LGB population (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005). Finally, masculinity traits such as suppression of vulnerability and aggressiveness, but not dominance, seem to be associated with perpetrating physical IPV in same-sex couples (Trombetta & Rollè, 2023). Overall, IPV among gay and bisexual men is legitimized by the perpetrator and normalized and accepted by the victim as part of manliness (Oliffe et al., 2014; Stanley et al., 2006). Thus, Trombetta and Rollè (2023) concluded that the relation between gender roles and IPV among LGB individuals is conflicting and still unanswered.

To conclude, the literature indicates that factors such as high levels of distress and couple dissatisfaction play a role in IPV in both same-sex and heterosexual couples. However, the kind of stress might be different, especially the role of internalized heterosexism. Furthermore, the role of traditional gender roles and whether this plays a role in the psychological processes that lead to IPV among LGB individuals needs to be further investigated. The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to explore how IPV is experienced by LGB individuals. More specifically, we addressed the following research questions:

1. What kind of IPV do LGB individuals experience?
2. How do LGB individuals describe their experiences with IPV?
3. How do gender roles influence IPV among LGB individuals?
4. How do LGB experiences of IPV differ from those of heterosexual individuals?

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Method

Participants

We recruited 26 participants, which is within the acceptable range for most purposes in qualitative research (e.g., Kvale & Brinkman, 2009), especially considering the difficulty of recruiting from a vulnerable minority group in a small country like Norway. Our participants for this study came from a convenience sample of 285 LGB individuals who were recruited for a larger project on various forms of discrimination and violence experienced by LGB individuals in Norway. After 285 LGB individuals completed a scale on the violence experiences, the participants were asked if they would like to elaborate more on their violence experiences with a semistructured interview. Our participants came from individuals who gave consent and left their email addresses to be interviewed with us. All of our participants, therefore, met the criteria, consented to participate, and completed the interview. All identified themselves as cis and LGB, except for Bahar, who identified themselves as trans–lesbian; Lene, who identified as cis–pansexual; Gro, who identified as nonbinary–lesbian; and Brita, who identified as fluid–bisexual. The mean age of our participants was 36.61 years ($SD = 13.57$; range = 19–70 years). All had been in at least one romantic relationship in which they had experienced IPV (Table 1).

Data Collection and Analysis

The first author and an assistant conducted semistructured interviews with all participants. The interview guide included questions on gender identity and sexual orientation, experiences related to being a sexual minority, experiences of violence in intimate relationships, violence experiences related to sexual orientation, and perception of psychosocial support systems. The first author felt that the necessary rapport (Willig, 2013) and the comfortable, safe space in an interview where participants can speak freely and openly were established with the participants. As a strategy to increase this rapport, interviews were conducted in English (18 participants) or Norwegian (eight participants; by the assistant), depending on the preference of the participants. Doing semistructured interviews allowed us to be flexible with the time frame, with each interview lasting, depending on the interest, experiences, and willingness of our participants to share with us, between 30 and 90 min. Each participant was compensated with a gift card worth 500 Norwegian Krone. The interviewees were anonymized in line with the Norwegian Center for Research Data's ethical standards, which approved this study. Throughout this article, we have used culturally appropriate pseudonyms for our participants.

We used a (reflexive) thematic analysis, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), to interpret the data and generate themes at a latent level. We adopted a constructionist position as we acknowledged the "researcher's role in knowledge production" in performing a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 594). This position requires us to ontologically consider the possibility of multiple socially constructed realities, coupled with an epistemological dependence: participants and we, as researchers, mutually construct meanings (Willig, 2013). Thus, the analysis we present here is not to be construed as a reflection of an objective reality but instead as an input that opens up the discussion on how our participants subjectively related to and narrated their IPV experiences as prompted by our questions. Throughout the research process, to enhance rigor, in addition to epistemological reflexivity, "where researchers are required to ask questions of their methodological decision making and are encouraged to think about epistemological decisions regarding the research and its findings" (Dowling, 2008, p. 748), we discussed how our positionality (some authors identify as queer; all authors are allies of the LGBTQ+ community, with research competence on IPV in queer relationships) might inform the study and provide insights for analyzing the data (Willig, 2013).

Following Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019), we analyzed the data in a stepwise procedure. All coauthors participated in the analysis, each coding at least six interviews. After verbatim transcription, we reached a familiarization with the data by reading and rereading the interviews. In our coding, we used an inductive approach, which means that the themes we presented here were not based on a preconceived codebook. However, "researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This implies that the development of themes involved interpretative work by us. To illustrate, without an understanding of how internalized heterosexism might function, the themes presented here might not make sense in terms of the nuanced differences in experiencing IPV in queer versus hetero relations. We gathered each coauthor' codes from each interview in a codebook, which constituted the base for our analytical discussions. We held several meetings (a) to discuss and refine the codes from the initial phase, taking also into consideration linguistic variation across the interviews; (b) to generate and refine themes based on the codes, going back and forth to the data; and (c) to consider our positionality or reflexivity (i.e., our ethnic immigrant background, gender identity

Table 1
Participant Characteristics

Name	Age	City	Gender identity	Sexual orientation
Gunhild	43	Oslo	Cis	Lesbian
Ingvild	53	Kristiansand	Cis	Lesbian
Cecilie	19	Tromsø	Cis	Lesbian
Bahar	26	Oslo	Trans	Lesbian
Astri	43	Lindesnes	Cis	Lesbian
Maya	25	Oslo	Cis	Lesbian
Gro	32	Tromsø	Nonbinary	Lesbian
Anne	39	Fredrikstad	Cis	Lesbian
Aleksandra	26	Oslo	Cis	Lesbian
Andrea	31	Oslo	Cis	Gay
Torben	49	Oslo	Cis	Gay
Erik	70	Bergen	Cis	Gay
Jens	31	Porsgrunn	Cis	Gay
Hans	27	Oslo	Cis	Gay
Thomas	38	Oslo	Cis	Gay
Turid	20	Oslo	Cis	Bisexual woman
Elisabeth	24	Tønsberg	Cis	Bisexual woman
Esma	30	Oslo	Cis	Bisexual woman
Bergit	27	Oslo	Cis	Bisexual woman
Silje	47	Stavanger	Cis	Bisexual woman
Bjørn	55	Oslo	Cis	Bisexual man
Tor	43	Drammen	Cis	Bisexual man
Reinert	41	Oslo	Cis	Bisexual man
Peter	64	Trondheim	Cis	Bisexual man
Brita	22	Oslo	Fluid	Bisexual
Lene	27	Vestfold	Cis	Pansexual

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and sexual orientation, and academic and epistemological considerations) until we reached a consensus on the common themes. For instance, we discussed at length whether or not the themes we came up with could be LGB-specific or more widespread. Given the mixture of gender identity and sexual orientation within the analysis team, we had fruitful discussions to make sense of what our participants had shared with us. We had an explicit aim in our discussions, using our varied personal and research backgrounds as an advantage, to challenge assumptions and potential biases to further enhance rigor and trustworthiness of our analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Willig, 2013).

Results

Our analysis led us to conceptualize our participants' experiences around (a) four types of violence: psychological, physical, sexual, and economical and (b) three overarching themes: being dominated, invalidation of sexual orientation, and jealousy-based vulnerability.

Experiencing IPV

Psychological violence, the way our participants make sense of it, is the most predominant type of abuse in our data. Our participants' reports of such abuse are aligned with the literature on IPV (e.g., Dank et al., 2014; Ummak et al., 2021, 2023) and involve forms such as jealousy, possessiveness, isolating, restricting, monitoring, and controlling the partner's activities and social contacts. For example, Jens (cis–gay, 31) experienced this when their partner would tell them "what [they] can do, what [they] can't do, who [they] can meet, who [they] can't meet, what [they] can wear, what [they] can't wear." Several participants also underlined denigration as a form of psychological violence—"like, you don't deserve me, you're ugly, you're fat" (Gunhild, cis–lesbian; 43), which are verbal attacks intended to humiliate the partner, such as calling names, criticizing, degrading in front of other people, saying the partner is ugly and worthless, and saying that someone else would be a better partner.

Though not mentioned as much as psychological violence, our participants reported having experienced various forms of physical violence, such as "throwing something, hitting, pushing, cutting [the partner's] arm with broken glass, and bending [the partner] over [the] bed" (Erik, cis–gay; 70). Threats of physical violence were also evident, as Erik stated: "He said he should kill me and … he would throw me out of the window—we lived on the sixth or seventh floor." Violent acts or threats were reportedly also directed at objects and pets valued by the person as a way of exerting power and control over the partner, as commented by Torben (cis–gay, 49): "He hurt my dog. He broke his leg. He filled his stomach with shampoo and cold, ice-cold water."

Similarly to the existing research (Breiding et al., 2015), our participants conveyed different ways they were exposed to sexual violence, such as *unwanted sexual contact*, *sexual coercion*, *attempted rape*, *and completed rape*, as illustrated in Gro's (nonbinary–lesbian, 32) words: "Then you would be threatened in one way or another … to do sexual stuff, you would not be comfortable with."

Several of our participants also reported having experienced economic violence and elaborated on this with a high degree of awareness. For instance, Anne (cis–lesbian, 39) experienced economic abuse by her partner, who "prevented sleep during the night and hiding things such as a case, phone, wallet, and even shoes" and tried to stop her from going to work. Such acts aim to sabotage the partner's ability to obtain and maintain employment and economic resources (e.g., Adams et al., 2008; Postmus et al., 2016). Anne uttered that

> [They] had an account together for, to pay electricity, phones, car, all these things [they] had in common, and their partner would also close the account. So, [Anne] was not able to pay for the electricity and buy food. And things like that.

which reduced Anne's access to economic resources and made her feel financially insecure.

Experiencing LGB-Specific IPV

The three overarching themes we developed in our analysis, being dominated, invalidation of sexual orientation, and jealousy-based vulnerability, should illustrate potentially more specific ways in which the LGB population may experience and make sense of IPV.

Being Dominated

Most of our participants reported having been dominated by their partners in various ways. The reported types of IPV (see the Experiencing IPV section) involve the use of force, especially in relation to physical and sexual violence, such as rape, which might be a common experience in queer as well as heterosexual relationships. However, being dominated by the partner here refers, as our participants construed, arguably to more LGB-specific ways of experiencing IPV. Such an IPV experience of our participants was not a result of the direct use of force by their partners but rather occurred due to power differentials—hence, their positioning against their partners, especially in terms of age and life experience as queers. Most of our participants reported having done (stupid) stuff, taken risks, and performed sexual acts they otherwise would not have done. For instance, Jens (cis–gay, 31), who was 16 years old at the time of their first relationship, reported, "I did give consent because I didn't feel like I could say no. … And being 16, inexperienced. … Not [having] the self-esteem, the confidence to say sorry, but actually, I'm not going to do this."

Similarly, Andrea (cis–gay, 31), 17 years old at the time, narrated,

> My sort of first sexual experience was indeed with a person who was 7 years older than me. And, of course, I ended up doing things that would be just plain stupid. … My first kiss came after my first oral sex act with the same person, so I just thought maybe this is [the] way of doing things.

Lack of experience, especially exacerbated due to the age difference, put Andrea in a position where they were dominated by the more experienced partner who showed the *proper way of being queer* (e.g., Donovan & Hester, 2014). Such power differential may lead to diminished autonomy on the part of the inexperienced partner. Living up to the expectations of the older partner may, therefore, entail taking risks that they would not take on their own, or which, as further exemplified by Cecilie (cis–lesbian, 19), could result in performing sexual acts they are not ready for:

> I was 16, so I wasn't really ready for it … she'd been out of the closet for a while … we were on our way to having sex, I'd obviously never had

> sex with a woman before, and I'd never been educated. So, it's pretty, it's pretty scary, honestly. And I remember telling her this and warning her like, I need to take it slower. We need to slow down. I, like, I'm not comfortable with you touching me below the panty line. And I'm not comfortable with touching you below the panty line. But I remember that was, that was never … good enough.

Cecilie illustrated a very potent and relevant point for many LGB individuals who are not experienced or have recently come out. Although being somehow dominated into a sexual activity might also be widespread in heterosexual relationships (e.g., Chiroro et al., 2004; Toates et al., 2017), Cecilie's account provides a common example of how being queer in heteronormative societies and going through the process of coming out may put one in a vulnerable position where one can be easily dominated. Cecilie portrayed themselves as a novice in need of "education," who went along with the pressure exerted by the older partner.

> Then it would again come up with the sexuality. Is it because she was a girl? Like if it was a man, would I have done it? Again, as if it was an attack on her and her gender. … I thought that I had to do more because I had to prove that I wasn't something like a "victim"?

Arguably, turning the issue (Cecilie not being ready for sexual performance) into a matter of sexuality, the partner, being the more experienced one in the relationship, created a type of domination over Cecilie. Even the slightest power differential might be enough for a novice to unwillingly perform sexual activities as one does not know how to be a proper queer and end up being dominated to prove themselves and avoid victimhood.

Hence, differences in age and experience may create a certain form of domination where the older partner "patronizes" the younger (e.g., Cleghorn et al., 2024; Ristock, 2003), which—as Andrea (cis–gay, 31) put it, relating to age differences in the queer community and relationships—is quite common:

> Older gay men can sometimes take younger one as a possession, and just because they're inexperienced, they feel like they have the right to sort of, you know, be some sort of chaperone and introduce them into the realm of sex and pleasure because they know more. … Older gay men kind of can patronize the younger ones … teach them things the way they like, uh. … This is something I can say, OK, maybe [turns] into some sort of violence which is motivated by, 'hey, young gay man, I'm the old guy, and I know more about sex than you, and I want to teach you. And now I'm going to show you. And if you don't understand, you will understand later. I feel this is very common, more common than one may think of, to be honest.

Such patronization and domination of the young inexperienced LGB persons may perhaps indicate the unintended development of an implicit norm or culture comprising a painful rite of passage whereby the younger generation are "educated" into the proper ways of being queer by the older and more experienced partners. Several of our gay participants emphasized how the older partners used anal sex to dominate the younger ones. For instance, Hans (cis–gay, 27) explained that being a novice and lacking experience made it difficult to communicate to the partner the experience of being "the receiving part … of anal sex and where it has hurt." Similarly, Andrea (cis–gay, 31) explained in detail,

> Anal sex can be sort of dominating, sort of "best type of sex." It can be performed in a way that, you know, creates some sort of domination mechanism … anal sex is painful. I feel that there is some sort of threshold that is accepted among gay men … when it comes to anal sex, there is some sort of the understanding that, if it hurts, it's kind of funny … just shut up and wait, because now it's going to get better.

This account illustrates how some established myths within the gay or queer community (e.g., the best type of sex) may be used by the older and more experienced partner to dominate the younger and inexperienced partner (e.g., Gaspar et al., 2021). Andrea (cis–gay, 31), contrasting heterosexual and gay relationships, portrayed socialization in the gay community as a dominance mechanism in which one is expected to endure a certain level of pain as one performs the expected activities (in this case, anal sex). Accordingly, the young one is patronized ("if it hurts, it is kind of funny") and dominated to the degree that one's own experience of pain is regulated by the older and more experienced partner, who comfortingly assures that the pain will go away.

The power differential between the older, more experienced, and established LGB person and the younger, inexperienced, and insecure partner relates not only to sexual activities but also to all other ways of being queer. According to Cecilie (cis–lesbian, 19), such a power differential creates "this whole need to prove yourself." Cecilie continued,

> Especially if one is more newly come out and more of what I would call a baby gay versus someone who is more experienced and has been out of the closet for quite a long time. … They have to constantly prove themselves and be like "I really am gay. I really am gay, accept me,"

The power differential between Cecilie and their partner (out as a queer longer and, hence, being more comfortable or secure with their sexuality) seemed to create a vulnerable situation in which Cecilie constantly needed to prove their sexuality, to live up to the expectations of the older partner. The particular choice of words by Cecilie, "baby gay," illustrates well the vulnerability likely to be felt by the younger insecure partners in such relationships.

The above quotations are aligned with the research that demonstrates that a lack of experience in an LGB relationship creates vulnerabilities to experiencing controlling tactics by the more experienced partners (e.g., Cleghorn et al., 2024). For example, one way to control and dominate the inexperienced partner is by imposing certain relationship practices as a part of being authentically queer to a newly out or inexperienced LGB person (Donovan & Hester, 2014).

Invalidation of Sexual Orientation

One very specific way that several of our lesbian and bisexual participants reported having experienced IPV relates to being exposed to their partner's attempts at invalidating their sexual orientation. Such invalidation attempts may take several forms. One invalidation attempt is directed at how one presents oneself, either through outer looks or behaviors. Astri (cis–lesbian, 43) described how they would get invalidating comments such as "You are too beautiful to be a lesbian," whereas Ingvild (cis–lesbian, 53) would be commanded, "You are not allowed to wear that. … You look [too] lesbian." Maya (cis–lesbian, 25), who narrated that they would normally not care much about gender norms, would often hear that "I do not look particularly lesbian. … What a waste," with the result that they would "feel that [she] has to look more lesbian to be accepted as such." Thus, having a more "feminine expression" was used against them as an invalidation tactic. Cecilie's (cis–lesbian,

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19) account, a lesbian whose interaction with men and women was questioned severely by their partner, illustrated such invalidation tactics:

> I'm pretty soft as a person, so when I would meet people, I'm very overly, kind of, very like, hello, hello, hello. And if I was like that with men, she would automatically accuse me of flirting afterward. It would be "You were flirting with him," "Why were you flirting with him?". "Are you going to, are you like, are you going to go back to men if we break up?"

Accusations by the partner were arguably aimed at creating doubt regarding the sexual orientation of Cecile (cis–lesbian, 19). Their personal demeanor in interactions with other people, especially with men, was used against them to invalidate their sexual orientation. Additionally,

> there was a lot of pressure there in the start, and a lot of things were said specifically regarding how much of a lesbian I am … because I'm a very feminine presenting lesbian. There was a lot of [questioning], like, "Are you sure you're not bisexual?" "Are you sure you're not into men?". … And then also like, yeah, "But girls aren't going to like you like that," "You should keep dating me because girls aren't going to like you," and "You're so feminine," and "You're not going to attract anyone." Like that's not what's attractive in a lesbian, the feminine look.

Such attempts by the partner might be construed as their misguided intention to keep the relationship going. However, these attempts were clearly experienced by Cecilie as a form of psychological abuse amounting to invalidation. Met by the partner's constant battering, "No, you're not. You're not," the likely result in this, and arguably similar cases, is illustrated by the following words:

> That I wasn't good enough in my sexuality. … Like it was as if I wasn't allowed to have my own sexuality in that relationship because she was more masculine presenting than I was. … And I had to prove myself as if it wasn't enough for me to just come out and I had to prove it, I had to constantly prove I was gay.

The partner's attempts seem to have led to the experience of insecurity and invalidation in Cecilie's sexual orientation. Such invalidation attempts seem to be entangled with a certain lack of trust, which, as the partners construe, relates to their sexuality rather than to any individual characteristics of our participants. Ideas of being "real" and "authentic" members of their sexual minority have hence been used by the partner for rationalizing the abuse. For instance, Gro (nonbinary–lesbian, 32), explained:

> She would trick me into using toys which are in the penis shape. And then when I started to enjoy it, she would put it out and punish me, because … that was the proof that I was not really a lesbian… that I was bisexual. … So, she would use that as a reason to tell me that oh, but you are really not a lesbian, you are lying to me all this time. … She said, "because you're not a real lesbian, you can't really have friends that are male either, because then you would find out that you are bisexual and then you would suddenly just have sex with them." It doesn't make sense when you say it, but when you're in this kind of relationship, it's sort of, you just accept what the other person says is the truth. So, she used that a lot, invalidating my sexual orientation.

In Gro's account, the partner attempted to create doubt about Gro's trustworthiness and relate this doubt to their sexual orientation. Hence, such control, dictating even who one should be friends with, or the use of degrading comments about sexuality are experienced as invalidation tactics, as also illustrated by Elisabeth (cis–bisexual woman, 24):

> I had a partner that wasn't comfortable with me, and he was very scared that I would cheat on him, and he thought that, that was kind of like a slutty thing to be attracted to more than one gender … he was never, like, violent in any other forms than like, the, the verbal kind of aggression.

Trust seems to be an issue, especially for bisexuals, as reported by several of our bisexual participants, with the result of being exposed to invalidation attempts.

> I have experienced … discussions where bisexuality or my bisexuality has been brought up in a negative way or as something that … makes me, ehm … like, less trustable in the relationship because of the threat of me being able to date a man. … I understood it like, it was something that was maybe not seen as a valid identity. It was seen as in some sort of insecurity and you don't know that you're actually straight or you don't know that you're actually gay. So, either it was mocked, or it was like, sort of put up as a threat to the relationship. (Esma, cis–bisexual woman; 30)

Jealousy-Based Vulnerability

Most of our participants construed and constructed the LGB relationships and community as permeated by a high degree of jealousy, which seems to create certain types of relationship vulnerabilities experienced to a larger degree by the LGB population. Most participants agreed that not only is there a lot of jealousy but also that it is more common than in straight relationships. As illustrated by Astri (cis–lesbian, 43), "Whether there is as much jealousy in queer relationships as in straight? I think not. I think there is much, much more!"

According to some participants, this might be related to the fact that there is so much "focus on the sexual" within the community (Tor, cis–bisexual man; 43). Sexual activity is portrayed as so common that this might take the form of "cut right to the chase … sex before getting to know someone," especially for gay men, as Maya (cis–lesbian, 25) put it, or "experimenting," as Tor (cis–bisexual man, 43) explained:

> It is more like experimenting. … There is a lot of flirting and checking up. Statistically speaking there are [LGB] people who are together for a long time … but they are not many, if you compare them to heterosexuals. … It seems like there is more promiscuity … it is what you often see and hear about, and that can create insecurity.

Contrasting heterosexuals and the LGB population, Tor experienced that the way LGB people lead their lives, including extensive experimentation and flirting, may create a more promiscuous community or culture. The link Tor created between such a widespread practice or culture, underlined by the utterance of "you often see and hear about," and the insecurity felt by LGB persons seems to be related to how jealousy becomes a shared experience, creating a specific vulnerability for IPV in LGB relationships. Several of our participants emphasized precisely this point, as illustrated by Anne (cis–lesbian, 39):

> If you're straight, you have this girlfriend, your husband doesn't look at her as a threat. But my experience is that [in] the gay community, in the lesbian community … that your partner is worrying about all the other

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> gay girls because. … It's a lot of a single persons in the gay community. And of course, everybody's looking for someone to love.

Given the idea of widespread "promiscuity" or expectations within the community about flirting or the practice of "directly to sex" before getting to know someone, the fact that there are many single people in the community seems to create worry and insecurity in the relationships, nurturing the increased possibility of jealousy. Contrasting LGB and heterosexual relationships, Anne claimed that this might even turn into seeing friends as a threat to the relationship. The idea of "everybody is looking for someone to love" speculatively means that the limited number of potential partners might create a competition for finding and retaining a partner in the LGB community. Being insecure and jealous might then be warranted: "There is some kind of pervasive jealousy going on. And that, when some people see that someone has a successful relationship and they don't have it, they will actively work to sabotage it" (Bjørn, cis–bisexual man; 55).

The perception of such an environment permeated by competition and "pervasive jealousy" might then lead to vulnerabilities in LGB relationships, resulting in an increased likelihood of IPV.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore how LGB individuals experience IPV that is specifically related to their sexual orientation. Our analysis showed that participants had all experienced various forms of violence—physical, sexual, economic, or psychological. Our analysis also illustrated specific ways in which the LGB population experiences and makes sense of IPV, namely, as being dominated based on the lack of experience in queer relationships, invalidation of sexual orientation, and jealousy-based vulnerability rooted in heterosexist norms.

We found that age and life experiences may generate unique and significant power imbalances for LGB individuals. Most of our participants had experienced sexual abuse as a result of being young and inexperienced in their relationships. Studies on LGB-specific IPV experiences are scarce, especially in the Norwegian context (Norsk Skyggerapport til Istanbulkonvensjonen, 2020). Nevertheless, a few studies have documented that LGB individuals who are in their first same-sex and bisexual relationships and dating a more experienced partner (i.e., a partner who has already experienced intimate relationships as LGB), as well as those who have an age gap (i.e., being young compared to your partner) and therefore lack maturity in the relationship, more often result in being controlled and dominated by their partner (Cleghorn et al., 2024; Donovan & Hester, 2014; Ristock, 2003). It is important to note that the power imbalances based on age differences also occur in heterosexual relationships, but the dynamics may play out in slightly different ways in LGB relationships. Several factors might increase the risk of experiencing IPV for an LGB individual who is less experienced or who has recently come out. These include not knowing what to expect from an LGB relationship (Donovan & Hester, 2014), lacking boundaries due to the excitement associated with the newly discovered sexuality (Cleghorn et al., 2024), and the need to conform and perform an LGB self-identity (Donovan & Hester, 2014). Although heterosexual individuals might also experience dominance tactics when young and inexperienced, there is a much larger degree of available and accessible heterosexual relationship role models in the media, culture, and society that they can compare to, identify with, or rely on. As such, we would argue that the lack of healthy LGB representation is a factor that increases vulnerability to experiencing and perpetrating IPV for this population.

Furthermore, as our analysis indicated, one specific way our LGB participants experienced IPV was through being dominated to perform certain sexual activities. Thus, an older partner can exert power on a younger and less experienced partner by imposing certain sexual relationship practices and referring to these as "normal" and "self-evident" in LGB relationships. This could stem from the hypersexualization of LGB people in the dominant heterosexist narratives, which can be seen as an internalization of stereotypes. Such a power imbalance is particularly relevant among gay and bisexual men. Donovan and Barnes (2020) referred to this power imbalance as "experiential power," where a more experienced (i.e., confident in being an LGB individual or having an established LGB identity) partner subordinates a less experienced partner with superior knowledge and experience about being acceptable or eligible as a member of the LGBT+ community. Moreover, stating discomfort with practicing receptive anal sex and not being taken seriously by the partners practicing insertive anal sex illustrates the domination of younger ones. Our analysis corroborates existing research, demonstrating that during sexual positing (i.e., active [tops] vs. passive [bottoms]), passives can be perceived to have lesser power in sexual relationships between gay and bisexual men (Hall et al., 2020; Kubicek et al., 2015). As such, LGB relationships are not exempt from the effects of patriarchy and misogyny that situates a "passive" partner as less powerful.

Our participants, especially LB individuals, had experienced various invalidation attempts by their partners due to their sexual orientation. While within heterosexual relationships, sexual orientation is largely taken for granted and, hence, might not constitute a possible target for invalidation, LGB persons continuously face such a threat (Bornstein et al., 2006; DeCapua, 2017; Klesse, 2011). What is unique to same-sex and bisexual individuals is the "undermining of a partner's sense of self as a lesbian and bisexual woman or man and controlling what they look like, what clothes they wear, what hairstyle they have" (Donovan & Barnes, 2020, p. 116). This was described as "identity abuse" by Donovan and Barnes (2020), where mostly the more experienced partners exploit a less-established, newly out partner. The authors also suggested that identity abuse stems from a heteronormative society and culture with certain assumptions and stereotypes about LGB individuals. Thus, the lack of queer role models in a heteronormative society might create an increased need for belonging and affirmation to the LGBTQ+ community, which, in turn, may make the younger people vulnerable when they start exploring a sexual minority identity.

Our analysis adds to the existing research, acknowledging and corroborating that, in addition to heteronormativity, bisexual individuals are exposed to binegativism both from within and outside of the LGBTQ community (Pennasilico & Amodeo, 2019). This may result in unique experiences of violence for bisexual individuals, such as denial of bisexuality as a valid sexual orientation (Bostwick & Hequembourg, 2014), as also reported by bisexual participants in our research. That is to say, the marginalized positions of bisexual individuals might be used in intimate relationships by abusive partners to invalidate their sexual orientation.

Our analysis emphasized jealousy as a provoking factor for abuse and, hence, potentially creating vulnerabilities (i.e., feeling

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insecure) in LGB relationships and communities. Studies outside Norway have indicated a strong perception that promiscuity is widespread among LGB individuals (Boysen et al., 2011; Cleghorn et al., 2024; DiStefano, 2009). From a minority-stress model perspective, it should perhaps not be surprising that LGB individuals might internalize the perceptions or stereotypes that are constructed and shared not only in heterosexual communities but also within their communities. Thus, perceptions or stereotypes about LGB sexuality might influence and potentially feed into IPV experiences of LGB individuals.

Limitations

One limitation relates to the fact that our participants constitute a convenience sample, and their experiences may not be representative of other LGB individuals (e.g., those who are less out, younger, transgender, or not associated with the LGBTQ+ community) as there are expectedly individual, community-wise, and cultural differences across different groups of LGBTQ+. Hence, our knowledge is limited to those who were willing to converse on the subject of IPV. Another limitation is the lack of coverage of how having intersecting identities may influence experiences of IPV. Therefore, our analysis might not reflect the experiences of LGB people with multiple minority identities based on immigration, racial or ethnic, gender, and sexual minority statuses, which altogether might create unique vulnerabilities and experiences of IPV (e.g., Ummak et al., 2022). The exploratory focus of this study underscores the preliminary nature of our observations. Replicating these exploratory findings is imperative to provide a comprehensive understanding of IPV in queer relationships and also to increase awareness in queer communities about the nuanced and specific ways IPV may be experienced. For instance, there seemed to be confusion about what may or may not constitute violence among our participants. Additionally, most participants struggled to articulate LGB-specific violence to begin with. They made sense of it when they were provided examples from the literature and then began to share their experiences. Consequently, as we underlined in the Method section, the reported themes should be construed as a coconstruction between our participants and us researchers.

Furthermore, conducting the interviews in either of the two languages (English or Norwegian) might create a challenge for interpretation, a challenge of equivalence. Language, indeed, plays an important role in communicating and constructing our understanding of phenomena (Pennebaker et al., 2003). First, we allowed our participants to choose language as we considered it would increase their likelihood of speaking more comfortably. Second, doing a latent level analysis demands us to look beyond the actual language use (semantic analysis) and rather interpret the intended meanings and try to get a hold of what our participants presumably want to convey, "the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualizations behind the words that are used" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). Hence, we discussed at length how to interpret each interview so that our coding would be consistent across the interviews, despite the language differences. Although our interpretations might be influenced by the language used in the interview, our awareness of reflexivity and the discussions we held should suffice to ensure that we reached the necessary level of consistency or equivalence across the interviews, accordingly increasing rigor. Third, the fact that two of the coauthors are fluent in both Norwegian and English helped our analysis in that our interpretations across the interviews became more consistent and, hence, possibly reduced the challenge of equivalence.

Future Research Directions

We suggest that research be undertaken with broader samples of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities to expand on the findings of the present study and investigate unique vulnerabilities for IPV among queer populations particularly in countries where LGBTQ+ rights are not guaranteed by law. There is a growing backlash against LGBTQ+ communities. While our purpose was to make visible, and thereby avoidable, the possible violence against vulnerable individuals within the queer community, we believe that there is a need for further research, preferably community-based action research, so that the queer community can and should become a stronger and more inclusive community where especially the young and inexperienced (as our analysis suggests) queer individuals can avoid IPV.

In addition, given that the standardized instruments to assess IPV in LGB relationships were initially based on IPV in heterosexual relationships, that is, the Conflict Tactics Scale–Revised (Straus et al., 1996), and may fail to capture IPV experiences unique to LGB people (e.g., Balsam & Szymanski, 2005), we urge that IPV scales should be reviewed and broadened to comprise sexual-orientation-related violence experiences. For a nuanced understanding of IPV among LGB people, it seems highly imperative to develop a scale specifically tailored to gauge IPV among LGB people.

Clinical Implications

Recognizing and addressing minority stress are crucial when working with LGBTQ+ survivors of IPV in mental health practices. LGBTQ+ individuals who experience IPV or IPV-related mental health consequences, such as trauma, depression, and anxiety, often face additional barriers and stressors related to their sexual identities (Meyer, 2003). Along with trauma-informed approaches, mental health practitioners should strive to provide culturally competent and affirming care to LGBTQ+ survivors of IPV (Levenson et al., 2023; Pachankis et al., 2023). Affirmative mental health practices create a nonjudgmental environment, use inclusive language, respect the survivor's self-identified gender and sexual orientation, and acknowledge and validate the survivor's experiences of minority stress and discrimination (Levenson et al., 2023; Pachankis et al., 2023).

Mental health professionals working with LGBTQ+ individuals need to understand how intersecting identities, such as gender and sexual minority, may create unique vulnerabilities for IPV. For example, some LGBTQ+ individuals might seek psychological counseling for the consequences of IPV, such as depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress disorder, while others might seek support to confirm their suspicions about their partners or their relationships (Ovesen, 2021). Therefore, mental health professionals should be competent in recognizing sexual-orientation-related IPV experiences to help this group effectively. Furthermore, mental health professionals might benefit from exploring LGBTQ+ individuals' experiences in queer communities and how they perceive norms and expectations regarding sexuality, intimacy, and romantic engagements. These professionals can also provide

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information about local LGBTQ+ groups that can help clients gain more knowledge about the queer community and how they can negotiate challenges and fulfill their wishes and aims (Dickey & Puckett, 2022).

Furthermore, to advocate and strive for social justice, mental health professionals need to acknowledge and be informed about how heteronormativity might shape and inform certain power inequalities among sexual orientations. Not doing so might increase the health disparities related to IPV experiences across all sexual orientations. Social justice-based therapies may be especially beneficial to minoritized groups such as the queer community (Lewis & Bradley, 1999).

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