

Intimate partner violence among LGBT+ university students

Violencia de pareja en universitarios de la comunidad LGBT+

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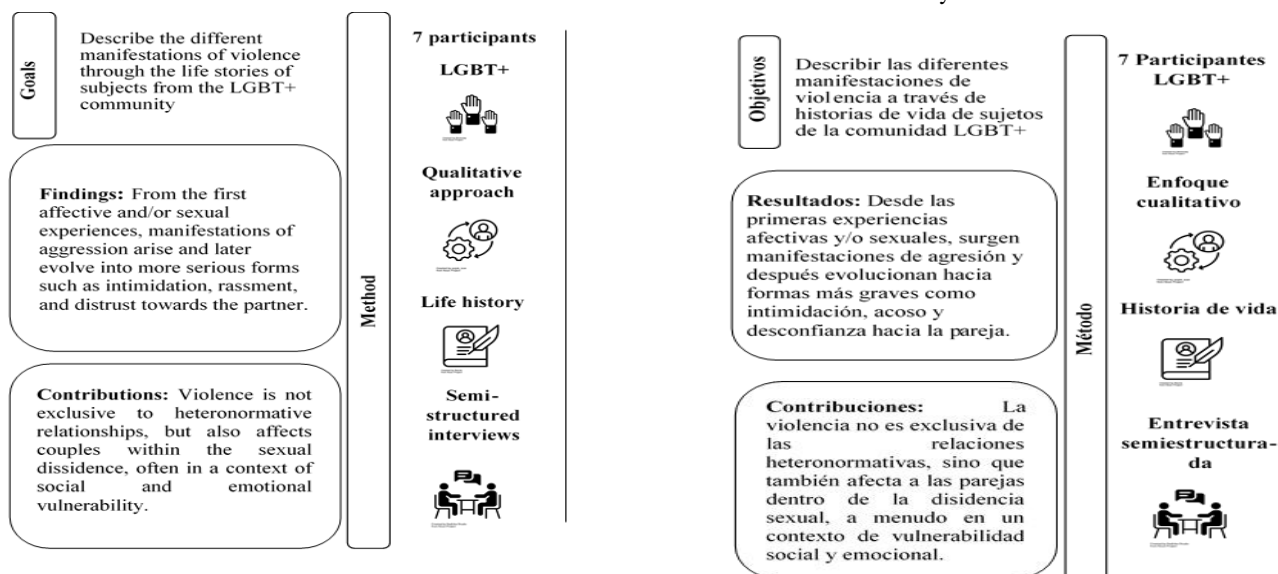


Abstract

The present article describes the different dynamics present in romantic relationships through life stories. Adopting a qualitative approach, it retrieves the experiences of 7 participants belonging to the LGBT+ community regarding their romantic relationships through individually conducted semi-structured interviews. The results reveal that from the early romantic and/or sexual experiences, manifestations of aggression arise and then evolve into more serious forms such as intimidation, harassment, and distrust towards the partner. This suggests that violence is not exclusive to heteronormative relationships but also affects couples within sexual dissidence, often in a context of social and emotional vulnerability.

Resumen

El presente artículo describe las diferentes dinámicas presentes en las relaciones de pareja a través de las historias de vida. Adoptando el enfoque cualitativo, recupera las experiencias de siete participantes pertenecientes de la comunidad LGBT+ en torno a sus relaciones afectivas por medio de entrevistas semiestructuradas individuales. Los resultados revelan que desde las primeras experiencias afectivas y/o sexuales, surgen manifestaciones de agresión y después evolucionan hacia formas más graves como intimidación, acoso y desconfianza hacia la pareja. Esto sugiere que la violencia no es exclusiva de las relaciones heteronormativas, sino que también afecta a las parejas dentro de la disidencia sexual, a menudo en un contexto de vulnerabilidad social y emocional.



Intimate partner violence, LGBT+, Homonormativity

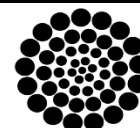
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Introduction

Partner violence is a problem that affects the lives of many people to such an extent that its subtle forms have become normalized. In the field of research, it is a topic of recurrent interest, which allows for the identification of deficiencies and limitations in its approach quite clearly. However, the study of this issue among non-heterosexual populations has not been exhaustively addressed, implying a certain invisibility of the various violent manifestations in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and all other non-identifying individuals (LGBT+) (Rodríguez et al., 2017). In this context, it is important to define the concept of violence to explain its implications in the realm of partnerships, as it constitutes a complex term that has been given different definitions and connotations through multidisciplinary sciences (Cuervo, 2016).

Ocampo and Amar (2011) explain violence as follows:

"[...] refers to the concept of force, and corresponds to verbs such as 'to violate', 'to force'. In all cases, the use of force refers to the concept of power [...]. Violent behavior, understood as the use of force to resolve interpersonal conflicts, becomes possible in a context of power imbalance, whether permanent or momentary (p. 115)."

On the one hand, Claude (1981, cited in Blair, 2009) suggests that:

"Violence in the strictest sense, the only measurable and indisputable violence, is physical violence. It is direct, bodily attack against individuals [...]. What defines it is the material use of force, the deliberate roughness committed to the detriment of someone (p.12)."

Martínez (2016) points out that violence is an action that causes harm to physical, psychological, sexual, and even patrimonial integrity towards the dominated person, and the repetition and frequency of such behavior by the actor exercising it is crucial. Similarly, in the context of a couple, it implies an act of power exerted through actions or omissions that harm and exert control over the person with whom one has some kind of relationship, whether affective and/or sexual (López et al., 2013).

Given that violence is contextual and can have a certain degree of subjectivity, there are no universal agreements in its conceptualization; however, as it is a complex and multi-causal issue, there is a consensus that its approach should be multidisciplinary (Ocampo and Amar, 2011).

Moreover, the complexity of the issue becomes more notable when it occurs within vulnerable groups, such as the LGBT+ community—individuals who have assumed a gender identity different from heterosexual. Therefore, this group is known as sexual dissidents. Rubino (2019) refers to them as "those expressions of sexuality that question the heteronormative regime and the heterosexual matrix. But also those normative manifestations of non-heterosexual sexuality, that is, homonormativity" (p. 62). In other words, these are groups that resist heteronormative political and social structures, their struggle being constant for visibility and social existence in the face of issues like violence.

It is pertinent to note that in Chiapas, Mexico, where this work is conducted, there prevails a context with stereotypes that promote the silence of certain groups incompatible with the heteronormativity of a patriarchal society. That is, a system where a hierarchy led by men is established in labor, religious, political, economic, cultural, and social contexts, which leads to violence against women due to the gender inequality that exists (González and Rodríguez, 2020).

Moreover, patriarchal culture spreads and promotes all those values that foster segregation based on one's sex. While society supports this system through educational and institutional agents to perpetuate and normalize it. Even from the moment an individual is in the mother's womb, it is done through the distinction and assignment of colors, toys, activities, education, among others, that occur within the family, and later society accepts and continues these actions (Fernández, 2020). Therefore, patriarchal concepts obscure, confuse, diminish, and trivialize the reality of oppression mechanisms.

Some works by Suárez and Del Rio (2022) point out that trans women suffer violence and that such violent manifestations have been naturalized in strict adherence to a hegemonic model of masculinity.

Robinson (2013), through case stories of homosexual couples, describes the challenges and vicissitudes that gay men have to overcome to maintain an emotional relationship, including expressions of violence. On the other hand, Carratalá (2016) accounted for cases of violence in same-sex couples in Spain, through the content analysis of information published in various Spanish newspapers regarding the topic.

In Mexico, notable work has been carried out by Ronzón, Yedra, and González (2017), who, based on focus groups conducted with eight gay men, six lesbian women, and one bisexual woman, reported that parental rejection upon coming out, witnessing violence between parents, or experiencing abuse at a young age are factors that predispose individuals to engage in the same dynamics of violence with their partners. Additionally, they have difficulties distinguishing violence outside the context of the heterosexual family, which makes it difficult to recognize and confront violence.

Meanwhile, Rodríguez et al. (2017), in a systematic review conducted among the Mexican population between 2002 and 2012, highlight that physical and psychological violence is common among lesbian couples, while in gay couples, sexual abuse is prevalent. The tension arising from the misunderstanding of their sexual preference and dominant family stereotypes leads those experiencing partner violence to often justify these acts or ignore manifestations that clearly violate their personal integrity. In this regard, when discussing partner violence, gender roles are relevant in the coexistence between women and men, facilitating the identification of abuse in the relationship from a heteronormative perspective (Martínez et al., 2021).

Now, from a sexual dissident perspective, the complexity is greater because emotional and/or sexual coexistence leads to a transformation in the binary gender grouping (masculine and feminine), threatening its heterosexual structure (González et al., 2018). Furthermore, the prevailing mode in the collective consciousness is guilt; for example, for the LGBT+ community, assuming their own gender role and sexual orientation implies a crisis that results in guilt, leading to silence and the permissiveness of control, which is also exerted through violence, over those who defy the mandates of the social regime.

Thus, the violence present in heterosexual couples is not different from that in sexual dissidence; they may even be victims of sexual assault, which includes rape, attempted rape, and any type of sexual contact without the person's consent, even if the touching is over clothing. In the case of the perpetrator, they often resort to manipulation, threats, imposition, or pressure to deceive their victim and achieve their objectives (Safe House Center, 2023).

Likewise, sexual harassment and harassment are frequent acts in a relationship. From a sociological perspective, it is about demonstrating the power that exists in gender; that is, the perpetrator of sexual aggression holds a superior position over their victim, and their purpose is to show the subordinate that they have power over their body and sexuality, aiming for dominance over the individual. Behaviors that constitute sexual harassment include coercive advances, unwanted kisses and/or hugs, propositions of a sexual nature, offensive and sexually suggestive messages or calls, suggestive jokes, the presentation of pornographic material, the use of social media for sexual purposes, among others. On the other hand, sexual harassment does not necessarily require a hierarchical relationship and is carried out with the aim of intimidating, degrading, or offending the person's integrity. It includes actions such as unwanted approaches or touching, questions and/or comments about clothing, body, or lifestyle, as well as sexual orientation, and non-verbal behaviors such as exposure to pornography or sexual gestures (Quintero, 2020).

Both sexual harassment and sexual assault have emotional impacts; however, addressing them within sexual dissidence involves bringing visibility to these actions, as this population has been socially rejected and, therefore, is largely subject to sexualization.

This overlooks the fact that it is part of sexual violence, which hinders its detection in the emotional or sexual relationships of sexual dissidents. Therefore, the objective of this work is to describe the different manifestations of violence through life stories of individuals from the LGBT+ community, which will allow for the visibility and understanding of this issue.

Methodology

The work was conducted within the qualitative paradigm, using a life history approach, a narrative tool that contributes to recounting the participant's autobiography, evoking and representing memories of life events, and allowing exploration of the phenomena that occur around them, understanding them within the participant's contextual framework (Arias & Covinos, 2021).

Participants

This research involved six students and one graduate from the University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas, all members of the LGBT+ community aged 19 and above who reported having maintained or currently maintaining an affective relationship that they consider to be conflictive. They are:

- Benjamín: 21 years old, identifies as gay. Currently single, but mentions having had previous relationships with individuals he does not initially label as violent.

- Brenda: 20 years old, identifies as bisexual. Currently in a long-distance relationship, which she describes as complicated and potentially violent.

- Jennifer: 21 years old, identifies as lesbian. She is in a lesbian relationship that she does not consider to be violent. However, she mentioned having extremely tumultuous and violent heterosexual and lesbian relationships before her current partner.

- Mylos: 22 years old, identifies as trans and homosexual. He states that he has not had stable relationships so far, only occasional encounters with men for sexual purposes.

- Joss: 20 years old, identifies as bisexual. Currently in a non-violent lesbian relationship, but mentioned having had a previous lesbian relationship that was at most violent.

- Elisabeth: 21 years old, identifies as bisexual. Currently single, but has had lesbian relationships that she considers to have been violent.

- Isamara: 21 years old, identifies as bisexual. Currently single, but mentioned having been in a violent lesbian relationship.

Data Collection

For data collection, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted. A question guide was used to establish a dialogue route with the participants, without following a specific order. Among the topics addressed were the details of their romantic relationship, everyday experiences, conflict episodes, communication mechanisms, and relationship roles, to name the most relevant ones. The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission, and later transcribed into digital format for analysis.

Procedure

The study was scientifically and ethically endorsed by the Research Committee of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Sciences and Arts of Chiapas. With the collected information, a textual analysis was carried out using an ascending strategy, meaning without assuming categories a priori. Relevant fragments from each interview were cited to identify the main ideas and anything of interest for the research objective. Subsequently, codes were assigned to the marked quotations and grouped according to the thematic content. These groups were useful for determining the analysis categories, the organizational structure of the relevant data, and thus, textual quotations were defined, which will be compared with available material and with the background of the study.

Results

In this section, the issues and instances of abuse in romantic relationships are described, such as the initial signs of intimidation and harassment; the exertion of power towards the partner from a patriarchal perspective, such as requesting nudes or engaging in non-consensual sexting, as well as touching intimate parts without the partner's consent. Additionally, expressions of mistrust are addressed, including various control exercises over the partner, such as jealousy, demanding evidence of what their partner does when they are not together, and insisting on passwords for their social media and phone, exploring their origins and effects.

It is worth mentioning that the signs of intimidation and harassment may go unnoticed due to the lack of education or information on the subject from a non-heteronormative paradigm, making it difficult to be seen: [...] he asked me: “help” and I asked him: “What happened?”, it was about 8:00 in the morning and well: “I'm super fart” (drunk) -the other person answers-, Oh, poor guy! I think he wants me to ask for an Uber or something and I asked him: “Where are you, who are you with?” and he asks me “culeando” (sexual act) [...]. He sent me a video where he is getting sucked! (surprised and annoyed) (Benjamín).

In this case, they were still getting to know each other; however, the partner who was courting him, suddenly and for no apparent reason, stops communicating. Weeks later, he contacts again to send the message with sexual and unpleasant content for him, which is evident sexual harassment, often through sexting, which is known as receiving or sending videos or nude or semi-nude sexual images either with friends or partner, which are regularly through mobile devices, which are more frequent among adolescents in order to flirt, excite, show interest. In addition, research reveals that sexting is more frequent among the LGBTQ+ community in various digital applications (Foody et al., 2021).

However, this was not a consensual act, since Benjamin at no time requested this type of message, which leads us to question that this type of intimidation does not discriminate against sexual orientation, as in the following case: [...] I didn't know this man at all, but he came to me, because he had already found out where I lived [...] I said it was a bit risky, it was a good thing nothing happened to me, but I already knew where he lived, and I saw the opportunity to talk to me and I said, “Ah! Well, one day I got up the courage [...], you know, the man lives a block away, so it just happened, I went to where he works by chance and I talked to him and then I went to his house and that's when it happened (the sexual act) (Mylos).

For Mylos, this event was not perceived as sexual harassment, however, it is questionable whether the fact that he had watched her and after the sexual act, continued to approach her, even called her and, according to her statements, made her uncomfortable, could be considered harassment, not to mention that he was 36 years older than her. In this regard, Carmona (2021) takes up:

For Retana (2016), sexual harassment in public places is an individual aggression within a collective sociocultural context demarcated by patriarchal logic. This form of violence naturalized and legitimized for the benefit of men, who through the power granted control and subjectively value women's bodies, also have the power to lash out against non-binary corporeality. Sexual harassment is a form of gender violence that evidences the gender imbalance in public spaces, granting privileges and flexibilities mainly to men who comply with hegemonic masculinity (p. 12).

The LGBTQ+ population is vulnerable to public sexual harassment, which leads to the objectification of their bodies, especially if they are trans people, which is evidence of the gender-based violence that exists. In addition, the lack of knowledge of what can be considered sexual harassment can be confusing for those who experience it:

[...] and as time went by, that kind of affection started to be more than something more than sexual, because one time he hugged me from the front, [...] and he started to touch my breasts. I swear I felt horrible! Because out of nowhere he would come and look at me with a face like, “You're making me crave it! and I would lose myself! [...], there were several times when he unbuttoned my bra and I was like: ”Hey, don't fuck with me! You're doing something I don't want and I don't like it! (Elisabeth).

Elisabeth, who had been a couple for a month, felt uncomfortable and panicked after her first affective and sexual experiences. She even felt objectified as in a heterosexual couple, in this case, the man is the one who socially gives the initiative to perform sexual acts. In fact, in women there is also an act very similar to that of men, which includes acting in a derogatory way or undervaluing the same sex (Goicochea, 2017). Likewise, harassment can range from touching intimate parts such as breasts and/or genitals or the authoritarian request to send nude photos:

[...] for example there was a man (man) who treated me super nice [...]. and I do not know, suddenly he asked me for nude and I said no! and from there he started to treat me super bad and once I uploaded a photo and he told me what ugly shoes and I do not know what, and I how, what? (Benjamín).

Criticism, in the previous case, starts from the denial of sending nudes, in any case both demanding this type of content and criticizing their appearance, are manifestations of violence that are usually ignored since the person who violates, perceives their partner as a belonging. Even Rodríguez et al. (2018) state that women are the ones who feel more pressure to have sex and agree for fear of being abandoned by their partner. In addition, they are vulnerable to blackmail, threats, imposition and even sexual and digital violence. Therefore, social networks are currently a double-edged sword, as they are a risk for the LGBT population to be victims of these violent manifestations (Rodríguez et al., 2018). This compares to:

And suddenly he started asking me for (nude) photos [...]. "It's okay if you don't want to give me pictures, I'll see who I ask, who will give them to me" [...]. I don't want to! I'm too scared [...], but you see how you are! Then you don't love me. [...] We were watching a movie and one of the parts of the movie, there are some girls showing their breasts, naked like this. And she looked at it and turned to me with a face like this: "When will you and I (that is, when would you have sex)? [...] She was so insistent about the photos that I ended up agreeing. Everything and as long as she wouldn't let me. And the worst of all was that [...], the photos went out of her phone to a whatsapp group! of I don't know what group, and half the room of half the group found out about that photo! (Elisabeth).

For the participant, the meaning of sharing naked pictures to her partner, represented more than sharing her intimacy; possibly, the duties that one has to have an affectionate partner and at the same time, to comply with them in order not to disappoint her girlfriend and keep her by her side, even if the way to achieve it was the least correct for her, also, the blackmail used by her partner is another type of violence.

In addition, sexting involves risks such as reputation, feeling disrespected and becoming cyber-victims. For men from a heterosexual perspective, it is normative and can even gain popularity by sharing it with their peers, although this act is also included in the lesbian population, since in the end Elisabeth ended up being teased when her female partner shared her intimacy, which is an act of violence between

LGBTQ+ couples (Foody et al., 2021). Also, touching without consent in chance encounters was identified as recurrent:

All of a sudden this girl comes up to me and starts dancing with me. But suddenly this girl kind of starts touching me and I was like: Oh! (gesture of surprise), I was dizzy and I said: no, no, no! she started touching me and everything [...]. Suddenly the girl started to put her hands (in her blouse) and I said: No, don't make it up! At that point I took her hands off and went to the bathroom (Brenda).

The discomfort, shame, fear, surprise or what can generate the experiences of harassment to bisexual women, as is the case of Brenda, denotes the confrontation to what she can expect from a sexual or affective encounter with a female partner, since for her concept of bisexual partner, it is completely different from what it means to have a heterosexual partner.

Therefore, sexual dissidence is placed as a vulnerable and invisibilized group before the physical or verbal behaviors of people who possibly are not of sexual dissidence and their only purpose is to transgress their integrity in a sexual way thus harassing their victim (Cortazar, 2019).

In addition, the fact that it is their peer, fosters distrust during courtship and hinders their identification of sexual harassment from its inception which generates the normalization or minimization of these actions due to their little information.

On the other hand, the concern or insecurity that a person may feel when he/she is in a relationship may be due to various factors, which are often for solid reasons that the partner is not trustworthy, however, when this is not the case, it can be threatening to distrust the partner:

[...] because it was like "who is he with? (her ex-partner), once he even asked me for pictures; who was he with and I told him; 'I'm not going to send you pictures, I can't send you pictures', I told him, 'because where is the trust? I don't distrust you, I don't ask you who you are with', and he told me; 'no but you and your friends and I don't know what's going on...'" (Isamara).

Apparently, for Isamara there were no reasons for her partner to doubt her, however, for the other person, it was the opposite, since she considered men and women as a threat to the relationship, unlike what may occur in a heterosexual couple. Therefore, instability and tensions in power relationships in the couple, cause one of the parties to feel subordinate, opening the doors to manipulation and control so that violence can occur (Rondan et al., 2022).

In addition, the act of demanding evidence of what your partner does during your activities can be considered as invasion of your privacy which implies; power and control towards your partner. On the other hand, failure to comply can lead to jealousy and infidelity:

[...] he was already annoyed that I was so inquisitive, he told me; “you see a lot of butts to everything, you see many legs to the cat” [...], it was that in a video call on his birthday that I dialed him [...], and he comes out shirtless and in the dark! he comes out to the street to answer me sweaty [...], and he told me; “ah no, this is that my friends are there” me; “and why don't you have a shirt on? and your friends are there and it's your birthday“ and he said: ‘oh, because I was taking a bath’ and I said, ‘who takes a bath when they have a visitor! and I told him; ‘look, you know what? Tell me the truth!’ [...], and then he started to apply the law of ice, that is, when I talked to him like that he said; “oh, I'm very busy, goodbye” and hung up on me (Benjamín).

Infidelity is accepted and normalized behavior among heterosexual and homosexual men, due to the culture of confirming their virility. Therefore, male couple relationships may encourage more free sexuality than to exclusivity due to the conceptualization of the male sexual role unlike heterosexual or lesbian couples who are inclined to sexual exclusivity (Calderón, Flores and Rivera et al., 2018).

Benjamin was certain that his partner was unfaithful, unlike the case of Isamara, which represented betrayal for the participant and, subsequently, a minimization of the attempts to clarify the situation, in turn, dealing with the law of ice, i.e., diminishing communication as a couple. This can be represented by the following case:

And she well at that time we became girlfriends, only the charm didn't last long. [...] I could have spent the whole day and if I had sent her good morning, she would answer me until the evening (Elisabeth).

Long distance relationships make the visibility of a violent relationship difficult, however, this does not mean that its existence is doubted, since among the main characteristics of online dating violence is the use of intimidation and control in order to harass, threaten, humiliate and insult that are the product of jealousy manifested by one of them (Gonzalez et al., 2020).

Evidently, ignoring the messages is not an immediate act when the first approaches are made; rather, whoever plays the dominating role perceives his or her partner as a belonging and therefore, gives these spaces to manifest power, which leads to a possible manifestation of violence. In Brenda's case, she had a long-distance relationship, which made it difficult for the couple to communicate, however, she recognizes that until now she does not question this type of actions because she does not want her partner to distance himself more than he already is.

On the other hand, distrust is often a trigger to end or maintain a relationship:

“About two weeks after (formalizing as girlfriends) very strange things started to happen [...], he started blocking me on WhatsApp. For a week, after several unjustified blocks on WhatsApp, I got a message from a girl saying: “hey, you're Hannah's girlfriend, right? And I tell her: “yes, why?” and she says: “I want you to stay away from her! [...], she has a boyfriend and the truth is that for her you are just a toy and she is just playing with you”. The next day, a guy spoke to me and said: “I wanted to ask you to stay away from her because she is my girlfriend and I don't want to have problems with you, I don't want to go to other extremes” (Elisabeth).

Despite the warnings of her friends and those involved in the emotional triangle, Elisabeth continued with the relationship, because of the significant role it represented for her, as it usually happens in a heteronormative couple. In addition, within an LGBT relationship homophobia can exist, even Goicochea (2017) explains:

Internalized homophobia is due “to the lack of positive external opinions or attitudes towards homosexuality or transsexuality, the person may feel homophobia or transphobia, that is, rejection or shame about their own sexual orientation or gender identity and about those who feel the same way” (p. 107).

People of sexual dissidence are a vulnerable population because socially they receive rejection and discrimination and therefore, even their partner, who is in the process of acceptance or exploration, may take advantage of these situations of sexual-affective relationship to mistreat their partner. While in Isamara's case, it denotes distrust on the part of her partner:

In fact, he took me to the other side of the bleachers and there we were talking. [...] I could see in her face that she didn't like them (her friends who were with her at the time) [...]. On some other occasions I asked her why, why she was being mean to them, why she was behaving like that. And she told me: “No, it's because I don't trust them and they are after you” (Isamara).

For Isamara's partner, mistrust arose from the role played by friends in her life, since with them, they began to form a bond of friendship, representing a threat to the couple; she was no longer the only one who received their attention and signs of affection, in other words, she saw Isamara as their property. Even Alanez and Jarro (2022) add in this regard:

Within the patriarchal model of society, people adopt gender roles that modify their behavior patterns and the way they relate to each other. In this system of domination, roles involving the materialization of the male gender are constantly related to power and authority. As a consequence, there is a majority approval of male roles and a recurrent assignment of privileges to males (p. 85).

Of course, even within LGBT couples they can determine gender roles indirectly, by having these acts of control and power, as usually attributed to males from a heterosexual perspective. In addition, the displays of distrust in Isamara's case are more intense and constant when the partner is not next to her, even denoting excessive jealousy, as happens in heteronormative couples:

And I already went out I answered, “we'll talk later because I'm in class” and he told me: “ok and now you answer me” and I; “yes, there I will answer you but later”, and he already sent me a message of: “who are you with?” [...], “not that your friends there are walking around like gum” he told me, and I; “what? well they are my friends, obviously they are going to be with me!” (Isamara).

In the previous case, the participant stated that she was never unfaithful and tried to be as understanding and patient with her as possible, as well as to provide enough evidence for her partner to trust her; however, it was mentally wearing her out, in fact, from the beginning she thought that these were signs of interest in her, until her friends told her that these “signs of affection” were unhealthy. This passage of jealousy is based on the desire to possess her partner but there is a fear of betrayal or abandonment, especially when there is apparently a rival. In fact, she may doubt her partner's sexual orientation because of fear (Calderón, Flores, & Rivera, 2018).

Even her partner was also distrustful of her male friends, an example of that: And I remember one time, it was in a rude way that he told her that because she was so..., I mean, so much time with me, I said: “What are you talking about?” Yes, he is gay [...], at that time I didn't take it badly. But later I realized that it was wrong. On the other hand, and even if he had been straight, I am a lesbian, how can I go around with a man! (Isamara).

Faced with these situations, Calderón, Flores and Rivera (2017) comment: Within the couple relationship, there is a social and psychological phenomenon: jealousy, which arises as an adaptive response to the threat of losing something considered as one's own, this something can be the partner or the relationship itself. It is a feeling that emerges in a person as a result of an excessive eagerness to have something only for oneself, resulting in the protection of the relationship (p. 18).

At this point in the relationship, she was uncomfortable with her partner's frequent mistrust, even with her homosexual friend. This was harmful to Isamara, because it meant that she was alienated from her friends because of her partner's insecurities and domineering role towards her. They can even go so far as to attack a partner's sexual orientation:

He said to me: “You can't be bisexual!” and I said: “Why?” and he said: “You can't cheat on me with a boy!” “But I am bisexual! -He would always ask me every once in a while and say, “Are you a lesbian now? Have you changed your mind? (Joss).

Evidently, imposing the sexual orientation of the partner, brings with it a lack of respect for his or her rights to be a free person; to assume his or her own sexual identity. Also, in these situations, it denotes the insistence to figure a dominating role that is generally exercised by the male gender, but when it comes to non-heteronormative figures, this order is altered, in any case, it is a form of violence towards their partner. Because of this, acts of violence are the result of the desire to control and have power over the partner and is one of the ways to reach aggression (Martínez et al., 2021).

On the other hand, the resulting doubt often leads to acts such as invasion of privacy, as in the following cases:

Yes, yes, because in fact he even checked my tags and Facebook a lot, and he was annoyed by that [...]. He also saw, for example, at what time I connected or the time I disconnected [...]. Once he took it (her cell phone), but I didn't notice. It was when he was dropping me off at the bus stop (to take public transportation) that he told me: “take your phone”. I still don't check anything because my phone asks for a password (Isamara).

From the beginning it was perceived in a romantic way, an interest of the couple, however, these forms of invasion of privacy (such as monitoring their social networks and trying to check their cell phone without their consent), are not different from heterosexual couples. It also involves actions such as:

She had all the passwords to my social networks; my Instagram password, Facebook password, my phone password, I mean, she even had her little fingerprint and well really everything from my emails she had. But she was very clear about Facebook; I want you to give me your Facebook password! And I was like, “Well, I didn't see the problem” (Joss).

Given the cases of Isamara and Joss, it is similar to the results obtained by González et al. (2020):

The exercise of online violence in courtship has been identified as a result of control behaviors, product of feelings of jealousy manifested by one of the members of the dyad towards the other. Among the most frequent behaviors are: asking for and sharing social network passwords, monitoring the partner's activity, calling several times a day, controlling friendships and even pressure to have sex (p.67).

Certainly, these behaviors are not exclusive to heterosexual couples. Words, on the other hand, are an important means of hurting a partner; however, they are often harmful when they come from third parties:

But all of a sudden there at school, they came to talk to me about: “You are Eli, right?” and I: “Yes, why?” “Look, Ana told me that she doesn't want to be with you anymore, that you disgust her, that she is only with you for fun and that she doesn't really care about you” (Elisabeth).

The impact of words formulated through third parties, promote the distorted perception of violence in lesbian couples, since it is understood that cases such as the above could be expected in a heterosexual couple. Likewise, Alanez and Jarro (2022) comment:

In heteronormativity, women are idealized as weak and males as those who dominate the relationship; therefore, the idealized heterosexual couple traditionally and indirectly influences lesbian couples, since in these the same ordered patterns of behavior are replicated (p. 88).

On the other hand, relationships with marked cultural differences provoke doubts when it comes to receiving criticism:

Then they were criticisms [...], now he was making criticisms about me, about my tastes, for example, I send him there that I am chingando (eating) a quesadilla and he was of: “Oh no! It's pure fat!” (Benjamín).

Therefore, in power relations in the couple relationship, they involve tensions, because there is a battle of domination and submission, giving rise to manipulations and control that in turn, generates any type of violence, in this case verbal (Rondan, 2022).

Therefore LGBT+ couples may find it easier to recognize or identify signs of violence if they have cultural identity in common:

So well, in the morning I wrote him a letter and I texted it to him, like this good morning, I'd like you to know this. And he says, "Oh, God, it's too cloying for me," and can you believe he didn't write me back all day, and I'm like (both surprised and disappointed) [...]. In the six months that we were getting to know each other he treated me well, he treated me nicely and he didn't mind me saying things like that, cheesy things. And he came to answer me until the afternoon and not even an apology (Elisabeth).

The impact of words in a frontal way, represents an important meaning; disturbing and doubtful when they are through messages, as it was in the previous case, whose expectations when giving romantic details, are crumbled by the indifference and rejection of the partner. That is why Alanez and Jarro (2022) point out:

In summary, the causes and aspects that generate violence in a relationship of two women are the authoritative attitudes of the patriarchal system. The type of violence committed within a lesbian dating relationship is psychological rather than physical (p. 97).

It is common that even among lesbian couples patriarchal ideals are reproduced, because they are shaped by their sociocultural, political or economic context. In terms of culture, having an affectionate homosexual relationship contributes to manifestations of violence:

He has a picture with his ex on the Eiffel Tower [...]. The joke is that I saw it and I saw a little arm, that is, you see the ex and then in the photos he sent I saw a very similar little arm and half of a person and I said. I mean, suddenly you get memories of Google photos on your phone and I saw it and I had not realized that, but there were many things too (Benjamin).

Long-distance relationships and especially the cultural difference has an impact on the evaluation of jealousy, even at the moment when he sees a rival, creating the situation that predisposes both parties and is perceived as harmful or threatening (Calderón, Flores, & Rivera, 2018).

Conclusions

The various manifestations of violence in LGBT+ couples are under-addressed, as there is even rejection within the research community towards this group. This rejection is compounded by family rejection or parental lack of knowledge about their child's sexual orientation, resulting in a lack of support for the children. Consequently, if there is violence within their relationship, they may not be able to understand this phenomenon due to the limited information their parents may have and the support they can provide.

Therefore, violence is present in all contexts and does not discriminate based on sexual orientation. Hence, it is recommended to promote research that contributes to highlighting these types of issues and, at the same time, to design strategies to disseminate these topics of partner violence within the LGBT+ community itself. Since it is a vulnerable group, it is opportune for them to take advantage of information that helps them learn about violence, for example through workshops, seminars, courses in places where they have greater contact such as academic institutions, or through dissemination via social media.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest. They have no competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the article reported herein.

Author contribution

Hernandez-Gordillo, Jose Luis: The aim is to shed light on violence towards the LGBTQ+ community as a social issue narrated by the protagonists, giving voice to the vicissitudes experienced in romantic encounters, highlighting the discrimination and rejection they face.

Galdámez-Vázquez, Selene: The goal is to highlight the various manifestations of aggression, violence, and abuse towards the LGBTQ+ community, emphasizing the importance of addressing these issues within the community and creating improvements to prevent and address these problems silenced by heteronormativity.

Article

Availability of data and materials

Being a topic approached from a dissenting perspective, it involved a thorough analysis using inclusive language, as well as finding dissenting individuals who voluntarily agreed to participate in the present study.

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Abbreviations

LGBT+ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and all other non-identifying individuals

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