



INSTITUTO UNIVERSITÁRIO EGAS MONIZ

MESTRADO EM PSICOLOGIA FORENSE E CRIMINAL

Outness, Internalized Homophobia and Intimate Partner Violence in Same Gender Couples

Trabalho submetido por
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para a obtenção do grau de Mestre em Psicologia Forense e Criminal

Trabalho orientado por
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“O desejo é maior que o medo!”

Resumo

Este estudo teve como objectivo estudar a violência entre parceiros íntimos em relações do mesmo sexo. Deste modo, pretendeu-se verificar a presença de violência, os níveis de *outness* e homofobia internalizada e explorar como é que a homofobia internalizada e o *outness* se correlacionam com a violência entre parceiros.

Neste sentido, foi divulgado um protocolo *online* com um questionário sociodemográfico, a Escala de Homofobia Internalizada, o Inventário de *Outness*, e um instrumento que avalia violência entre parceiros, tanto na agressão como na vitimização (Escala de Táticas de Conflito 2). Após aplicados critérios de inclusão e exclusão, foi obtida uma amostra de 48 indivíduos homossexuais e bissexuais, de homens, mulheres e género não-binário.

Os resultados indicaram a existência de violência mútua nestas relações. Também foi possível verificar que maiores níveis de *outness* estão positivamente correlacionados com homofobia internalizada em relação a outros, maiores níveis de *outness* estão positivamente correlacionados com agressão de coerção sexual, e, por fim, que maiores níveis de homofobia internalizada em relação a outros estão negativamente correlacionados com vitimização na negociação com um parceiro. Resultados também demonstraram diferenças entre sexos a níveis de *outness* e agressão de coerção sexual, sendo que homens possuíam *scores* mais elevados em ambas variáveis. Alguns dos resultados contradizem literatura existente sobre o tema, realçando a complexidade do tema e a necessidade de maior exploração do tema (McKenry et al, 2006; Pierre & Senn, 2010).

Para futuros estudos, recomenda-se uma amostra com maior número de participantes e representante da população LGBT+, bem como uso de instrumentos adequados às características e experiências desta população.

Palavras-chave: Violência entre Parceiros Íntimos; Violência Doméstica; Outness; Homofobia Internalizada; Homossexualidade; Bissexualidade; LGBT+

Abstract

This study's aim was to study intimate partner violence in same gender relationships. Because of this, this study aimed to verify the prevalence of violence, the levels of outness and internalized homophobia and to explore how internalized homophobia and outness correlate with intimate partner violence.

In this sense, a protocol was shared online, with a sociodemographic questionnaire, along with the Internalized Homophobia Scale, the Outness Inventory and an instrument which assesses intimate partner violence, in aggression and victimization alike (Conflict Tactics Scale 2). After inclusion and exclusion criteria was applied, a sample of 48 homosexual and bisexual, male, female and non-binary gender individuals was obtained.

Results indicate the existence of mutual violence in these relationships. It was also possible to verify that higher levels of outness are positively correlated with internalized homophobia regarding others, higher levels of outness are positively correlated with sexual coercion aggression and, lastly, that higher levels of internalized homophobia regarding others are negatively correlated with victimization in negotiation with a partner. Results also showed differences between genders in terms of outness and sexual coercion (aggression), in the sense that men scored higher in both variables. Some of the results contradict existing literature on the topic, highlighting the complexity of the topic and the necessity of further exploration of this topic (McKenry et al, 2006; Pierre & Senn, 2010).

For future studies, it's recommended that a sample with more individuals that is also more representative of the LGBT+ population, as well as the usage of appropriate instruments that match the characteristics and experiences of this population.

Keywords: Intimate Partner Violence, Domestic Violence; Outness; Internalized Homophobia; Homosexuality; Bisexuality; LGBT+

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List of Abbreviations

IPV – Intimate partner violence

LGBT+ – Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (community or individuals)

Introduction

Intimate partner violence is a prevalent issue that affects a significant portion of romantic couples all over the world. It can occur in couples of romantic or sexual partners, regardless of their marital status, and it's a social issue which has always existed in the history of mankind, spanning across the most diverse cultures and people of all ages (from teenagers to the elderly) and, perhaps most relevant to this study, of all genders as well (Catalano, 2012).

Intimate partner violence has also been proved to leave lasting impacts on the victims, with long-term consequences that can leave both physical and mental scars on people, if not worse and more fatal consequences. Physical injuries can be life threatening and, even when they are not, types of violence such as psychological aggression can sometimes lead to long-term damage that may lead to a decline in physical and mental health alike (Alejo, 2014).

Even though the majority reported cases of intimate partner violence (IPV) consist of cases among the heterosexual population, often with the man as the offender and the woman as his victim (Cezario et al 2015; Richards, 2020), this phenomenon can affect the lesbian, gay and bisexual population in similar, if not equal, prevalence and types of intimate partner violence compared to their heterosexual counterparts (Alejo, 2014).

In terms of worldwide prevalence, a study by the author Breiding et al. (2013), conducted in the United States of America, verified that around a third of American men belonging to a sexual identity minority and around half of American women belonging to a sexual identity minority reported being victims of psychological or physical violence inside their romantic or sexual relationships. In this same study, the authors reported that over 50% of gay men and almost 75% of lesbian women had reported being victims of psychological IPV and estimated that around 4.1 millions of people in the LGBT+ community had experienced some form of intimate partner violence in the United States alone.

Although most studies seem to focus on the North American population, studies on intimate partner violence on same gender couples from other countries with different cultures also exist, with very similar results. Some notable studies include research on the Chinese population (Yu et al, 2013), south African population (Eaton et al, 2013) and the British population (Guasp, 2012), which all reported high levels of intimate partner violence among homosexual and bisexual minorities.

Regarding Portugal, there is also information that points to very similar results. There are some scientific studies on Portuguese same gender couples that seem to indicate similar levels of prevalence of IPV in their relationships, as well as point to the lack of research in this population, and a lack of suitable resources to deal with these cases as well (Costa et al, 2011; Santos, 2012; Topa, 2010), which also seems to be another aspect that is prevalent in the scientific research in this topic. Studies centering around intimate partner violence exclusively in the gay, lesbian and bisexual population seem to have risen in numbers compared to the past, as societies in general become more aware of the existence of LGBT+ individuals and LGBT+ issues.

After all, historically, homosexual and bisexual people have faced persecution and stigma over their sexual orientation and sexual and romantic attraction to people of the same gender across many homophobic societies, for many centuries. The views and theories on homosexuality have always been tied to different cultures, with some more accepting than others. But, overall, homosexuality has always been, historically, seen in a negative light, especially with the introduction of religion, as many organized religions across the globe have generally deemed homosexuality as “bad” or “a sin.” From beliefs that same gender attraction is the result of immaturity, birth defects, disease, a side-effect of sexual abuse or deep trauma or even the work of the devil, homosexual and bisexual people have always been scrutinized by societies until humanitarian organizations and gay activists started to push for equal rights, and for homosexuality and bisexuality to be considered as harmless and natural variations of human sexual orientations and identities that should not be punished or seen as inferior or a disease (Drescher, 2010).

Even the removal of homosexuality as a psychological disorder from the DSM has only occurred as early in history in human history as 1973 (Rubinstein, 1995), and there are still countries in the world that have only in more recent years started to take measures to decriminalize homosexuality after decades upon decades of considering it a crime (in some countries even legally punishable by death), making the acceptance of the LGBT+ community a relatively new concept that is still evolving with time (Han & O’Mahoney, 2014).

However, as mentioned previously, despite the increase in interest in the LGBT+ community and homosexual and bisexual individuals, there is still a lack of research on the topic, as well as a lack of resources to deal with these specific cases when they do occur and are reported, or when the individuals involved seek help (Alejo, 2014; McKenry et al, 2006).

Intimate Partner Violence in Same Gender Couples: Typology of Violence

Intimate partner violence, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), can be defined as various types of perpetrated violence, such as physical violence, sexual violence, psychological aggression (which includes coercion and humiliation) and stalking. When these acts are perpetrated by spouses, lovers, girlfriends/boyfriends or merely sex partners, the violence can be defined as intimate partner violence (CDC – Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2015).

Scientific research shows that, regarding the types of violence prevalent in homosexual or bisexual intimate partners in couples of the same gender, such as couples of two men or two women, these are extremely similar to the types which are present in their heterosexual counterparts: such as the type and prevalence of physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence seem to occur in similar or even equal ways (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003).

There is, however, a unique type of violence in gay couples that isn't as prevalent in heterosexual relationships. While heterosexual relationships where intimate partner violence occurs often have the man as the sole aggressor and the woman as solely his victim, or at least, that's the record available of most reported cases between heterosexual couples (Cezario et al, 2015; Richards, 2020), the same cannot be said for couples of the same gender.

In couples where both partners are men or both partners are women, a phenomenon of IPV where the violence can occur mutually (with mutual violence from both sides, as a partner can simultaneously be both the aggressor and the victim) can exist (and even has a tendency to exist) in several of these cases (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Pepper & Sand, 2015).

A study by Stephenson and Finneran (2013), while focused on bisexual and homosexual men only, suggests that stereotypes and gender role conflict, in the sense that same gender relationships don't have defined gender roles in the same way that heterosexual couples do, might be minority stressors that are specific to those who have same gender partners. The same study reports that the lack of defined traditional roles may cause tension and may cause individuals to seek dominance over their partner to establish said roles, and so, may also contribute to intimate partner violence.

When trying to explain unique causes or links intimate partner violence on same gender couples in scientific literature, two variables seem to stand out in scientific research as of particular interest to intimate partner violence experiences: outness and internalized homophobia.

Outness can be defined as the level of comfort that an individual has in publicly assuming their homosexuality, feeling comfortable with their sexuality and being "out" to their family, friends, peers and strangers (Pierre & Senn, 2010), while internalized homophobia can be defined as a homosexual person's negative and internalized feelings regarding their sexuality or just homosexuality in their peers, such as feeling shame over being attracted to the same gender or hating homosexuality or bisexuality in general (Rostosky et al, 2007).

Research Regarding Outness

A study by Morris et al., in 2001, found that higher levels of outness influence better self-esteem, lower levels of stress, and more positive emotional states, which can potentially lead to reduced levels of intimate partner violence, due to reduced levels of stress and reduced propensity for conflict or violent behavior in the relationship.

Another study about outness, this time by Pierre and Senn in 2010, found that there is a positive relation between outness and help seeking in IPV victims. In this sense, the levels of outness can change IPV experiences in homosexual people.

In terms of associations with violence, a study by Bartholomew et al. in 2008 found that gay men who reported being more out to their social networks was positively associated with forms of partner abuse, but not associated with perpetration of violence, leading the researchers to believe that outness may influence victimization but, according to their findings, it may not influence perpetration after all.

Regarding the lesbian population, a study on lesbian women by Balik and Bilgin in 2019 found that the level of outness was positively related to being perpetrators and victims of both psychological and sexual violence, as well as also being positively correlated with victimization and perpetration of physical violence. This study also found that lesbians with higher levels of outness reported more perpetration and victimization of all types of intimate partner violence, which contradicts results and hypothesis from previously mentioned studies.

From the existing literature on the subject, it's safe to conclude that research on the topic of outness is still very conflicting and, as such, further research may be relevant to the scientific community, in order to try to understand these mixed and uncertain results. However, it's also important to acknowledge that these results, however uncertain or conflicting, seem to indicate that this variable is still linked to victimization and perpetration of intimate partner violence in same gender couples in one form or another and, as such, can be considered relevant to it (Pierre & Senn, 2010).

Research Regarding Internalized Homophobia

A study by Balsam in 2001 theorized that homosexuals with higher levels of internalized homophobia can become more likely to become abusers, by perceiving their intimate partners of the same sex negatively, due to feeling shame, guilt, discomfort or even other negative feelings regarding their homosexuality. This study also theorized that, for similar reasons, homosexuals could also victimize themselves and perceive the aggressions of their partners as “deserved”, like some sort of punishment that is justifiable by the shame and negative feelings they feel regarding their homosexuality.

However, a later study by Balsam and Szymanski in 2005 found that internalized homophobia does influence victimization as mentioned previously, but it may not affect the likelihood of a person becoming an abuser or perpetrating aggression against their partner.

Another study, this time by Bartholomew et al. in 2008, found that internalized homophobia in gay men was associated with perpetration of physical and psychological partner abuse, suggesting that internalized homophobia may influence violence perpetration over a partner but not victimization, which is a result opposite to the results of the previously mentioned study.

A study on men who have sex with men, by Miltz et al. in 2019, showed different evidence, by finding that markers of internalized homophobia were strongly associated with types of intimate partner violence perpetration (including physical, emotional and psychological), as well as also being associated with victimization for physical and sexual intimate partner violence. In this sense, this study found evidence for a link between internalized homophobia and both perpetration and victimization.

As for internalized homophobia in lesbian women, a study by Balik and Bilgin in 2019 found a positive correlation between internalized homophobia in lesbians and both victimization during intimate partner violence and the perpetration of sexual violence.

In general, results on internalized homophobia research also show some contradicting results, but they all seem to indicate that it is linked to intimate partner violence in same gender couples, in a way that it affects IPV experiences and may even be a predictor for IPV in same gender relationships (Balsam, 2001).

The Relevance of this Study for the LGBT+ Community

Despite all the existent evidence for intimate partner violence between couples of the same gender, certain cultural and societal ideas regarding gender may pose as a difficulty in assessing cases of violence gay couples. There are still prevalent public beliefs such as stereotypes and stigma, in many (if not almost all) societies that tend to propagate traditional gender roles (often portrayed in media and other cultural influences) where women are often portrayed as as frail and weak, while simultaneously portraying men as strong, powerful and dominant, and reinforcing the idea that only men can be abusers or aggressors, while only women can be victims. Specifically, there's the inaccurate idea that women are always victims of men, and men are always offenders who abuse women (Alejo, 2014).

A study by Seelau and Seelau (2005) found that, in a study which included depictions of intimate partner violence between a man and a woman, between two women and two men, participants tended to rate female victims as suffering from more abuse compared to their male victim counterparts. They also expressed more desire to protect female victims compared to male victims, and they rated female offenders as less capable of harming their victims when compared to their male offender counterparts. Participants also tended to rate violence as being more serious when the depictions they witness were of male offenders perpetrating violence on female victims, compared to all other depictions which involved male victims.

Not only do these ideals and beliefs make it more difficult for male victims (not only the heterosexual ones, but bisexual and homosexual ones as well) to come forward with their experiences, report their cases to authority figures and seek help, but they also make it difficult for female offenders (heterosexual, bisexual and homosexual as well) to be recognized as true perpetrators of intimate partner violence who should be treated as such, rather than being treated as either victims, as a joke or as being incapable of committing offenses. In this sense, these stereotypes heavily affect the experiences and perceptions of bisexual and homosexual men and women who are either victims or offenders of intimate partner violence regarding a partner of the same gender (Alejo, 2014).

Perhaps this is the reason as to why research, such as studies from Pattavina et al. (2007) and from Brown and Groscup (2009) have found that scenarios of intimate partner violence among gay couples are more likely to be seen as less serious and with less need for any sort of intervention to help the individuals involved, compared to their heterosexual counterparts with the typical male abuser and his female victim.

In addition to their struggle being perceived as less real or less valid as heterosexuals who find themselves in the same situation, LGBT+ people also report feeling a disconnect from the LGBT+ community's support upon reporting that they're victims of their LGBT+ partners (Pierre & Senn, 2010).

On top of a this, gay or bisexual men who are victims of men and lesbian or bisexual women who are victims of women also often report being shunned by their own LGBT+ peers, as the homophobic stereotype of “abusive homosexuality” is still very prevalent in society and LGBT+ people can often feel like reporting cases of intimate partner violence in same sex couples may contribute to those homophobic ideas (Oswald et al, 2010).

A study by Santos (2012) theorized that the antagonism and shunning the LGBT+ community and LGBT+ associations often perform on LGBT+ victims and offenders of intimate partner violence (when the relationship is one of two people of the same gender) may not be due to malice or ignorance, but rather due to fear of receiving negative backlash from society. Because, due to their historical struggles to have equal rights and see their identities be respect by society, they don’t wish to be portrayed as a community where abuse and violence exists, fearing they may feed into homophobic stereotypes and stigmas, they choose to ignore these cases, which may often result in the bisexual or homosexual individuals who experience intimate partner violence to feel even more isolated, with a weaker sense of community, and even lead to these individuals feeling more negative feelings regarding their own sexual orientation.

Homosexual people who suffer IPV from their partners have also reported that they feel like many figures of authority, healthcare and mental health professionals don’t fully understand their struggles, often proving to be ignorant to specific LGBT+ issues in ways that negatively affect how intimate partner violence cases between people of the same gender are handled, and that, because of it, they feel a lack of resources to seek help for their cases (Pierre & Senn, 2010).

Santos (2012) also points at a lack of knowledge about LGBT+ intimate partner violence, not just in authority figures and health professionals, but in LGBT+ individuals themselves. In this same study, Santos (2012) reports that participants (mostly bi and lesbian women) had, in general, very few knowledge about projects and resources that focused on providing help to LGBT+ people, claiming that information about these resources and even about this type of intimate partner violence is simply not as widespread as the amount of information and resources to their heterosexual counterparts.

Studies like McKenry et al. (2006) also indicate that the lack of knowledge on LGBT+ issues and dynamics may be one of the biggest obstacles to the prevention and reducing of intimate partner violence among same gender couples. These are only some of the unique difficulties that gay men and lesbian women may face when suffering from intimate partner violence in their relationships with partners of the same gender, that may influence the reporting of cases (Kuehnle & Sullivan, 2003), help seeking and the effectiveness of therapy (McKenry et al, 2006).

In this sense, gathering information and investing on scientific research regarding the complex and still relatively unexplored phenomenon that is intimate partner violence in same gender couples becomes relevant to better understand it, and to provide the necessary resources (which include educating law and authority figures, as well as mental health and healthcare professionals) to minimize the negative effects and prevalence of this social issue and its negative impacts on LGBT+ people worldwide (McKenry et al, 2006).

Intimate partner violence in same gender couples in its entirety can be an extremely complex phenomenon that is influenced by many variables unique to the homosexual or bisexual experience, causing a few differences when compared to the heterosexual counterparts (Alejo, 2014) and, as such, this study chooses to focus on two specific variables previously mentioned (outness and internalized homophobia) and their relation to other aspects of intimate partner violence in same gender couples.

Aims of this Study

The main objective of this study is to explore intimate partner violence in same gender relationships, and to analyze if outness and internalized homophobia, as exclusive variables of homosexuality and bisexuality, are correlated with the experiences of intimate partner violence in same gender couples.

Considering the context of same sex intimate partner violence in cases of gay men, lesbian women and bisexual men and women, the aims of this study are:

- a) To verify the levels of outness and internalized homophobia in gay men, lesbian women, and bisexual men and women;
- b) To verify the prevalence of IPV in homosexuals and bisexuals in same gender relationships;
- c) To verify differences in outness, internalized homophobia and IPV between genders and sexuality.
- d) To verify how these variables (outness and internalized homophobia) correlate with each other, and with the various forms of violence (physical violence, psychological violence, sexual coercion, mutual violence, etc) and the aggressor-victim relationship.
- e) To verify the presence of mutual violence in same gender relationships.

This study hopes to provide a better understanding of intimate partner violence inside same sex couples, not only to bring awareness to the issue (to both society at large and even the LGBT+ community and LGBT+ associations, so that they may become more attentive to this social issue) but to provide vital information regarding this phenomenon as well, as more information could potentially help medical and mental health professionals and authority figures to create better approaches to these cases, and thus, helping in the prevention of intimate partner violence and recovery of the LGBT+ population that suffers from this type of violence.

Methodology

Participants

This study has a sample of 48 LGBT+ individuals. Out of 48 individuals, 19 identified as male (39.6%), 21 identified as female (48.8%) and 8 identified as non-binary or another gender (16.7%), as seen in table 1. While the sample provided a relatively good male to female ratio, the LGBT+ individuals identifying as non-binary or some other genders were few when compared to their male and female counterparts.

Table 1
Gender in the Sample

	<i>n</i>	%
Male	19	39.6
Female	21	48.8
Non-binary or another	8	16.7

Of the sample, 21 individuals reported being bisexual, meaning they are attracted to all genders (43.8%), while 27 reported being homosexual (gay men or lesbian women), meaning that they are attracted to the same gender (56.3%), as seen in table 2. All the participants experienced same gender attraction.

Table 2
Sexual Orientation in the Sample

	<i>n</i>	%
Bisexual	21	43.8
Homosexual (gay or lesbian)	27	56.3
Total	48	100

In terms of age, 42 people were aged between 18 years old and 30 years old (87.5%), and only 6 individuals reported being over 31 years old (12.5%), so the sample did not differ too much in age. For nationality, 18 individuals reported being Portuguese (37.5%), 6 from another country in Europe (12.5%), 17 from the United States of America (35.4%), and only 7 individuals reported being from another country outside of Europe, making this sample relatively diverse in terms of nationality and ethnicity. 13 individuals (27.1%) had only completed their studies up until high school or less, while 35 individuals (72.9%) reported higher levels of education such as college, university, masters, etc. Of the 48 individuals, 27 individuals (56.3%) reported being employed with either a full-time or part-time job, while 21 individuals (43.8%) reported being unemployed or still just students.

Finally, 25 individuals (52.1%) reported being in a romantic or sexual relationship with someone of the same gender at the time they were answering the questionnaire, while 23 individuals (47.9%) reported that, while not currently in one, they had been in a romantic or sexual relationship with someone of the same gender in the past. For individuals who reported that they were not currently in a relationship with someone of the same gender, they were asked to answer about a previous relationship with someone of the same gender.

In terms of violence and abuse, as seen in table 3, 18 individuals (37.5) reported that they had, in the past or the present, had a sexual or romantic partner of the same gender who had been abusive towards them and 30 individuals (62.5%) reported that they never experienced any form of violence or abuse from a partner of the same gender. In addition to this information, only 2 individuals (4.2%) reported to have been abusive towards their sexual or romantic partner of the same gender at least once (in the past or the present), and 46 individuals (95.8%) reported that they had never been abusive towards a partner of the same gender. Based on this initial self-report alone, it could be considered that there was little prevalence of intimate partner violence or, at least, people did not self-report high levels of intimate partner violence in this sample.

Table 3
Reports of Violence in the Sample

	<i>N</i>	%
Was a victim of an abusive partner	18	37.5
Was never a victim of an abusive partner	30	62.5
Was abusive towards a partner	2	4.2
Was never abusive towards a partner	46	95.8

Instruments

Sociodemographic questionnaire

To collect sociodemographic data about the sample, a sociodemographic questionnaire was created. This questionnaire included questions about a person's gender between the options of male, female or non-binary (table 1), sexual orientation between the options of homosexual or bisexual (table 2), their age, their nationality, their level of education and their employment status. Additionally, individuals were asked if they were currently (at the time of answering the questionnaire) in a sexual or romantic relationship with a partner of the same gender or if they had been involved in one in the past. Individuals were also asked if they had ever been abusive towards a sexual or romantic partner of the same gender, and they were also asked if they had ever suffered abuse from a sexual or romantic partner of the same gender (table 3).

Outness Inventory

The Outness Inventory was developed by Mohr and Fassinger (2000), with the purpose of evaluating how “out” or open a homosexual or bisexual individual is about their sexual orientation. It evaluates how comfortable an individual is with their sexuality when they are around their family, when presenting themselves to the rest of the world, and according to their own religion.

It consists of an 11 items scale, to which participants can choose their level of comfort with their sexuality regarding that specific person or group. The level of comfort ranges from 1 (“this person definitely does not know about my sexual orientation status”) to 7 (“this person definitely knows about my sexual status and we openly talk about it”).

When it came to scoring, participants scored the same number as the number of the answer they picked (if a participant chose the first choice, they’d be scored with “1”, if they chose the fifth choice, they’d be scored with “5”, and so on). In addition, it’s also possible to score a 0, if the person or group described in the item does not exist, is deceased or is not present in the participant’s life (making that item non-applicable). As such, the highest possible outness score is of 77, which indicates very high comfort with one’s sexuality.

Internal consistency for this study was evaluated through Cronbach’s alpha analysis, with overall good results for the three factors of this instrument: out to family ($\alpha = .779$), out to the world ($\alpha = .788$) and out to religion ($\alpha = .998$).

Internalized Homophobia Scale

The Internalized Homophobia Scale was developed by Ross and Rosser (1996), designed to measure the level of internalized homophobia an individual possesses. It evaluates the negative feelings (such as shame, lack of acceptance or discomfort) a homosexual or bisexual person may feel regarding homosexuality.

It’s divided into two factors: an internal factor, regarding internalized homophobia about one’s sexuality, and external factor, regarding how internalized homophobia makes the individual perceive the homosexuality around them in a negative light.

This scale is composed by 27 items, and participants were required to indicate their level of agreement with the statements presented on each one. The statements presented were mainly negative towards homosexuality, with some of the items being flipped (the statements were positive instead, so the scoring for those items was reversed). Participants could answer with levels of agreement ranging from 1 (“I strongly agree”) to 7 (“I strongly disagree”).

Score was determined by the number of the answer (for example, if the participant chose the first answer, then they'd be scored with "1" for that item. If they chose the fifth answer, they'd be scored with "5" for that item, and so on). As such, the highest possible score of internalized homophobia is of 189, being the most extreme possible level of internalized homophobia and of having negative feelings regarding attraction to the same gender.

Internal consistency for this study was evaluated through Cronbach's alpha analysis, with mediocre results for the internal factor ($\alpha = .679$), but very poor results for the external factor ($\alpha = .342$) of this instrument. homosexuality or *Conflict Tactics Scale 2*

The Conflict Tactics Scale 2 (CTS2) was developed by Straus et al (1996) as an instrument that assesses conflict and violence in intimate partner relationships. It assesses acts of both victimization and aggression regarding the participant's intimate relationship with their partner. It consists of five factors: "Negotiation" (regarding arguments and disagreements with a partner), "Psychological aggression" (such as insults or humiliation), "Physical abuse without injury" (physical abuse that does not leave behind physical marks), "Physical abuse with injury" (physical abuse that leaves behind physical marks) and "Sexual Coercion" (sexual violence, and coercing the partner to perform sexual acts they may not want to act upon or be comfortable with).

For each of these factors, it's evaluated if the participant suffered from them as victim of their partner and if they performed these acts of violence on a partner.

The scale is composed by 78 items, of which 39 items evaluate victimization, and the remaining 39 evaluate aggression.

Participants were asked to rate how often the acts of violence or abuse described in the items would happen in their relationship, from a scale of 0 ("this has never happened") to 6 ("this has happened more than 20 times in the past year"). Additionally, another option is available: 7 ("this has not happened in the past year, but it happened before").

The authors recommend specific midpoints in the CTS2 scoring (if the described situation of violence occurred zero times, one time or two times in the last year, a score of “0” should be given. If the described situation occurred one time but it was before last year, the score of “1” should be given. If the described situation occurred three times in the last year, a score of “4” should be given. If the described situation occurred 4 times last year, a score of “8” should be given. If the described situation occurred five times in the last year, a score of “15” should be given. And if the described situation occurred six times in the last year, a score of “25” should be given), so the highest possible score for violence and abuse is of 1950.

Internal consistency for this study was evaluated through Cronbach’s alpha analysis, with great results for this instrument ($\alpha = .869$).

Additional comments or observations

At the end the end of the questionnaire, participants were given the choice to write comments or constructive criticism about the study and their experience with this study. Participants were also given the choice to comment on the current pandemic situation, if it was relevant to the questionnaire (for example, if the pandemic and the world-wide situation of the spread of the Covid-19 virus had affected their relationships, if applicable, in any way or form).

These last questions were entirely skippable, so only the participants who wanted to leave comments about their situations replied to them. They were also open questions, to which the responses to were anonymous like the rest of the questionnaire, so the participants could freely express whatever opinions they wanted to write down and send them, regarding the study and/or how the pandemic affected their relationships with a person of the same gender.

In the end, to take these responses into consideration, there was a process of selecting which ones were relevant to the study. Responses that were not related to the study, to how the pandemic affected their same gender relationships or to intimate partner violence were deleted, until only relevant comments remained in the database.

Procedure

The present study has been approved by the ethics commission of the University Institute of Egas Moniz, Portugal. The questionnaire, along with all the instruments (the Outness Inventory, the Internalized Homophobia Scale and the Conflict Tactics Scale 2), were applied online via Google Forms, and shared around LGBT+ communities on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Reddit and Twitter. Adding to online LGBT+ communities and groups, they were also shared on some online groups and communities related to intimate partner violence and domestic violence, as well as some other more personal and private groups and circles.

The questionnaire was available to participants for a period of around two to three months, before the data collection period had ended, and the links were deleted and taken down.

Upon clicking the link to fill the questionnaire, participants were met with information regarding the study's aim and instructions explaining what would be asked of them, as well as a statement informing them that the data collection would be fully anonymous and that they could stop and give up on the study at any period in time, without any harm or repercussions. The page would then proceed to the questionnaire if the participant gave their consent to continue. To be able to collect data world-wide and make the questionnaire more accessible to participants of different nationalities, the questionnaire and instruments were also provided in two languages: in Portuguese, and in English.

Participants' responses were collected if they confirmed they were eighteen years old or older, if they consented to filling out the questionnaire and answered to all obligatory questions and sent them. On a later stage of data collection, while creating a database for the study, participants and their data were excluded and deleted if participants answered that their sexual orientation was heterosexual (instead of bisexual or homosexual), or if they answered that they had never been in a sexual or romantic relationship before with someone of the same gender (having never had one of these relationships, neither in the present or in the past). These were the only exclusion criteria for this study.

After the data collection, data was analyzed using IBM SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) version 27.

Results

Prevalence of Outness, Internalized Homophobia and IPV

Descriptive analyses were performed on all three instruments, with their total scores and factor scores.

For the Outness Inventory, the mean for the total score was of 35.104 (SD = 13.178), with a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 68. Since the highest possible score for the outness inventory is of 77, so outness in the sample can be considered just above average, with the mean obtained (of around 35 points on the scale) being around the middle point of the scale.

Regarding the Outness Inventory's factors, the mean for the "Out to Family" factor was of 16.896 (SD = 7.209), with a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 28. The mean for the "Out to World" factor was of 16.771 (SD = 8.393), with a minimum of 1 and a maximum of 35. The mean for the "Out to Religion" was of 1.437 (SD = 3.408), with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 14.

For the Internalized homophobia scale, the mean for the total score was of 122.083 (SD = 13.733), with the minimum being of 78 and the maximum 150. The highest possible score in this scale is of 189, so internalized homophobia levels, while not extreme, were still relatively high for the sample.

Regarding the "Internal" and "External" factors, the mean for the "Internal" factor was of 98.687 (SD = 13.530), with a minimum of 52 and a maximum of 118, while the mean for the "External" factor was of 23.396 (SD = 13.530), with a minimum of 8 and a maximum of 37.

For the Conflict Tactics Scale 2, the mean for the total scores of "Aggression" was 69.333 (SD = 49.133), with a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 180. The mean for the total scores of "Victimization" was 64 (SD = 49.310), with a minimum of 0 and maximum of 173. Having used the midpoints recommended by the authors, the highest possible score for the scale was of 1950, which when divided by aggression and victimization, gives a total of 975 points for victimization, and 975 points for aggression.

Considering these numbers, the presence of both aggression and victimization in the sample was extremely low, but still existing. Under “Aggression”, the mean for the “Negotiation” factor was of 62.208 (SD = 43.219) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 125. The mean for the “Psychological aggression” factor was of 3.771 (SD = 10,902) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 63.

The mean for the “Physical aggression without injury” factor was of 0.750 (SD = 4.359) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 30.

The mean for the “Sexual coercion” factor was of 2.271 (SD = 6.973) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 25. The mean for the “Physical aggression with injury” factor was of 0.333 (SD = 2.167) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 15. Under “Victimization”, the mean for “Negotiation” factor was of 49.042 (SD = 40.126) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 125.

The mean for the “Psychological aggression” factor was of 7.042 (SD = 15,667) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 81.

The mean for “Physical aggression without injury” factor was of 2.479 (SD = 7.691) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 30. The mean for the “Sexual coercion” factor was of 4,604 (SD = 10.728) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 46.

The mean for the “Physical aggression with injury” factor was of 0.833 (SD = 4.168) with minimum of 0 and maximum of 25.

Sexuality and Gender

Due to the heavy focus on the LGBT+ community in this study, the variables of sexuality and gender were considered of extreme relevancy and analyzed in detail.

For sexuality, the sample was composed of bisexual and homosexual individuals. As such, independent samples T-test analyses were performed to compare means between this variable and instrument scores.

No significant differences between homosexual or bisexual individuals were found in regards to any of the instruments, except for the total scores of the Internalized Homophobia Scale [$t(46) = .936$; ($p = .033$)] (table 4). Bisexual individuals ($n = 21$) showed a mean score of 124.190 (SD = 17.110), while homosexual individuals ($n = 27$) showed a mean score of 120.444 (SD = 10.456), indicating that homosexuals suffered from less internalized homophobia and negative feelings regarding homosexuality compared to bisexuals.

Table 4

Independent Sample Tests between Sexuality and Internalized Homophobia Total Scores

	Z	Sig.	T	Df
Internalized Homophobia Total Scores	4.856	.033	.936	46

As for gender, the sample was composed of people who identified as male ($n = 19$), female ($n = 21$) or another non-binary gender ($n = 8$). As such, an ANOVA one-way analysis was performed to compare means between this variable and instrument scores.

Significant differences between groups were found in the Outness Inventory, both in the total scores of outness ($p = .006$) and the “Out to World” factor scores ($p = .016$). Significant differences were also found in the “Sexual Coercion (aggressor)” factor of the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 instrument ($p = .032$), as seen in table 5.

Table 5

ANOVA One-Way between Instrument Scores and Gender

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	Z	Sig.
Out to World	559.290	2	279.645	4.574	.016
Outness Total Score	1672.715	2	836.357	5.799	.006
CTS2 Sexual Coercion (aggressor)	322.933	2	161.466	3.702	.032

Notes: $p = 0.05^$; $p = 0.01^{**}$*

As seen in table 6, for the “Out to World” factor, males showed a mean score of 20.474 (SD = 9.383), females showed a mean score of 13.048 (SD = 6.312) and non-binary individuals showed a mean score of 17.750 (SD = 7.265). For the Outness Inventory total scores, males showed a mean score of 41.158 (SD = 14.123), females showed a mean score of 28.523 (SD = 9.432) and non-binary individuals showed a mean score of 38 (SD = 12.649). These results show that, when it comes to outness and feeling comfortable with one’s sexuality in public, males seem, in general, to show higher levels of comfort (being more openly “out”) in comparison to their female be, in general, the gender that feels the least amount of comfort, being the least “out” among the other genders.

For the “Sexual coercion (aggressor)” factor of the Conflict Tactics Scale 2, males showed a mean score of 5.474 (SD = 10,399), females showed a mean score of .238 (SD = .889) and non-binary individuals had a mean of 0 (SD = 0). These results indicate that males were the gender shown to perform more acts of sexual coercion on their partners of the same gender (being the aggressors), followed by females, while non-binary individuals did not report ever performing sexual coercion on a partner of the same gender (scoring 0).

Table 6
Descriptive Analysis between Instrument Scores and Gender

		<i>n</i>	$\bar{x}$	Sd
Out to World	Male	19	20.474	9.383
	Female	21	13.048	6.312
	Non-binary	8	16.770	7.265
Outness Total Score	Male	19	41.158	14.123
	Female	21	28.524	9.432
	Non-binary	8	38	12.649
CTS2 Sexual Coercion (aggressor)	Male	19	5.474	10.399
	Female	21	.238	.889
	Non-binary	8	0	0

Correlations between Outness, Internalized Homophobia and IPV

To verify correlations between levels of outness, internalized homophobia and intimate partner violence (victimization and aggression alike), Pearson correlations were performed on the total scores of all instruments and instrument factors.

As seen in table 7, significant positive correlations were found between the “Out to world” factor and the “Sexual Coercion (aggressor)” factor of the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 ($r = .454$; $p = .001$), and between the “Out to the world” factor of the Outness Inventory and the “External” factor of the Internalized Homophobia Scale ($r = .344$; $p = .017$). Significant positive correlations were also found between the Outness Inventory total score and the and non-binary counterparts. Females also seem to “Sexual Coercion (aggressor)” factor of the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 ($r = .390$; $p = .006$).

Significant negative correlations were found between the “External” factor of the Internalized Homophobia Scale and the “Negotiation (victim)” factor of the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 ($r = -.341$; $p = .018$).

These results indicate that higher levels of outness and comfort with being “open” regarding one’s homosexuality or bisexuality to the rest of the world, lead to higher levels of internalized “external” homophobia (negative feelings regarding homosexuality and homosexual or bisexual peers).

Results also indicate that being more “out” to the world, as well as being more “out” in general, leads to performing more acts of sexual coercion on a partner (as the aggressor).

Finally, results indicate that higher “external” internalized homophobia was negatively correlated with higher victimization during negotiations with a partner (such as being forced to submit to a partner’s whims), meaning that higher levels of this type of internalized homophobia led to lower levels of victimization during these acts of conflict, and vice-versa.

Table 7

Pearson correlations between instrument scores

	2	3	4	5
1.Out to World	.817**	.344*	.454**	.077
2.Outness Total	--	.276	.390**	.086
Score				
3.Internalized		-	.215	-.341*
Homophobia				
(external)				
4.CTS2 Sexual			-	-.007
Coercion (aggressor)				
5.CTS2 Negotiation				-
(victim)				

Notes: $p = 0.05^$; $p = 0.01^{**}$*

Mutual Violence

To analyze mutual violence in the sample, correlations among the Conflict Tactics Scale 2’s factors were performed. Specifically, Pearson correlations between the scores of victimization and aggression factors.

As seen in table 8, significant positive correlations were found between “Negotiation (aggressor)” and “Negotiation (victim)” ($r = .801$; $p < .01$), between “Negotiation (aggression)” and “Physical aggression with injury (victim)” ($r = .288$; $p = .047$), and between “Negotiation (aggression)” and victimization total scores ($r = .772$; $p < .01$).

Significant positive correlations were found between “Negotiation (victim)” and aggression total scores ($r = .768$; $p < .01$). Significant positive correlations were found between “Psychological aggression (aggressor)” and “Psychological aggression (victim)” ($r = .743$; $p < .01$) and between “Psychological aggression (aggressor)” and victimization total scores ($r = .460$; $p = .001$).

Significant positive correlations were found between “Psychological aggression (victim)” and aggression total scores ($r = .385$; $p = .007$). Significant positive correlations were found between “Physical aggression without injury (aggressor)” and “Physical aggression without injury (victim)” ($r = .593$; $p < .01$), between “Physical aggression without injury (aggressor)” and “Physical aggression with injury (victim)” ($r = .492$; $p < .01$) and between “Physical aggression without injury (aggressor)” and total victimization scores ($r = .335$; $p = .020$).

Significant positive correlations were found between “Physical aggression without injury (victim)” and “Physical aggression with injury (aggressor)” ($r = .524$; $p < .01$). Significant positive correlations were found between “Sexual coercion (aggressor)” and “Sexual coercion (victim)” ($r = .481$; $p = .001$). Significant positive correlations were found between “Physical aggression with injury (victim)” and total aggression scores ($r = .317$; $p = .028$). Significant positive correlations were found between “Physical aggression with injury (aggressor)” and total victimization scores ($r = .307$; $p = .034$). Finally, significant positive correlations were found between aggression total scores and victimization total scores ($r = .841$; $p < .01$).

Since significant positive correlations were found between several victimization and aggression factors, these results indicated that, in general, when there are higher levels of perpetrating violence against a partner of the same gender, there are also higher levels of suffering from violence from a partner of the same gender, in mutual intimate partner violence.

Table 8

Pearson correlations between CTS2 scores

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.Negotiation (victim)	.078	.186	.075	-.130	.838**	.801**	.179	.187	.191	-.007	.768**
2.Psychological aggression (victim)	--	.021	.212	.645**	.556**	.231	.743**	.146	.165	-.031	.385**
3.Physical aggression with injury (victim)		-	.233	-.088	.259	.288**	.035	.499**	.492**	-.066	.317*
4.Physical aggression without injury (victim)			-	.073	.320*	-.025	.092	.524**	.593**	.190	.101
5.Sexual coercion (victim)				-	.321*	.122	.283	-.067	-.030	.481**	.233
6.Victimization Total Scores					-	.772**	.460**	.307*	.335*	.113	.841**
7.Negotiation (aggressor)						-	.258	.184	.181	-.021	.958**
8.Psychological aggression (aggressor)							-	.148	.141	-.105	.453**
9.Physical aggression with injury (aggressor)								-	.987**	-.051	.319*
10.Physical aggression without injury (aggressor)									-	.013	.324*
11.Sexual coercion (aggressor)										-	.099
12.Aggression Total Scores											-

Notes: p = 0.05; p = 0.01***

Reporting Violence

As a last analysis, it was relevant to verify if there were any differences in victimization scores in individuals who reported having been victims of intimate partner violence, compared to those which did not. Similarly, it was also relevant to verify if there were any differences in aggression scores in individuals who reported having been abusive towards their partners, compared to those which did not.

To assess this, independent variable T-test analysis were performed. First between a variable of individuals who either reported having been victims of an abusive partner of the same gender ($n = 18$) or reported that they had never been victims of an abusive partner of the same gender ($n = 30$), and between Conflict Tactics Scale 2 victimization total scores. Results showed that there were no differences between the two groups [$t(46) = .432$; ($p = .230$)].

The aggression assessment followed a similar procedure. Using independent variable T-test analysis again, this time between a variable of individuals who either reported having been abusive towards a partner of the same gender ($n = 2$) or reported that they had never been abusive towards a partner of the same gender ($n = 46$), and between Conflict Tactics Scale 2 aggression total scores. Once again, results showed that there were no differences between the two groups [$t(46) = .223$; ($p = .750$)].

Discussion

The aim of this study was to analyze intimate partner violence in same gender couples, to have a better understanding of how this phenomenon occurs in LGBT+ individuals. In addition to this, the aim of this study was also to explore correlations between two variables which are prevalent in LGBT+ scientific research and which have been explored and linked to same gender intimate partner violence by other authors: levels of “outness”, or how comfortable someone is with their sexuality and how “out” they are to others around them, in terms of being perceived as homosexual or bisexual (Pierre & Senn, 2010), and levels of internalized homophobia, or the amount of negative feelings (such as shame, hatred, among others) one individual may have regarding their own sexuality and how negatively they perceived homosexuality or bisexuality in their LGBT+ peers (Balsam, 2001; Rostosky et al, 2007).

Domestic violence and intimate partner violence in general are some of the most under-reported and under-recorded crimes, making it a topic that still required information and scientific research to be conducted to have a good grasp on the subject (Abbott & Williamson, 1999).

Because of this, gay, bi and lesbian intimate partner violence in couples of the same gender research requires even more scientific research and data collection due to the lack of LGBT+ focused studies compared to their heterosexual counterparts, despite the fact that it is just as prevalent and as much of a social issue as intimate partner violence between heterosexual men and women (Alejo, 2014). Even though society keeps progressing and, as sexual orientation minorities start to become more recognized and respect so does the interest in LGBT+ studies also increase, there is still a long path to thread before the scientific community can fully grasp LGBT+ issues (such as cases of domestic violence and intimate partner violence) and understand them just as well as their heterosexual counterparts (McKenry et al, 2006).

In addition, LGBT+ people have reported in previous research that, when in relationships with another LGBT+ person where they suffer from intimate partner violence, they often feel alienated, ostracized, and excluded from the LGBT+ community (Pierre & Senn, 2010), for feeling like they feed into “abusive homosexuality” stereotypes, as well as other negative homophobic stereotypes that paint gay men, lesbians and bisexuals as predators or abusers (Oswald et al, 2010) fears that do not affect their heterosexual counterparts when reporting these crimes to authority figures, such as fear of homophobic responses like being mistreated or having their experiences be ridiculed or ignored by law agents or courts, as cases of intimate partner violence among two men or two women, when compared to a man assaulting, abusing or battering a woman, have been reported to be more likely to be taken less seriously by the general population (Brown & Groscup, 2009).

Not only that, homosexual and bisexual individuals have also shown concerns over the fact that figures of authority may not have the knowledge or experience necessary to truly help their cases, at least in aspects that differentiate their cases from their heterosexual counterparts (Alejo, 2014; McKenry et al, 2006).

One of the aims of this study was to verify the prevalence of internalized homophobia and outness in a sample of homosexual and bisexual people, as two distinct variables that are unique to people who feel same sex attraction (Pierre & Senn, 2010; Rostosky et al, 2007). Results showed that the population of this study, overall, reported outness levels just above average, and reported high levels of internalized homophobia as well.

Another aim of this study was to verify the prevalence of intimate partner violence among a gay, lesbian, and bisexual population, regarding their relationships with partners of the same gender. Specifically, to verify the presence and prevalence of mutual violence, which is one of the unique aspects of intimate partner violence between same gender couples that differentiates them from their heterosexual counterparts, while also being often prevalent in these types of couples due to both individuals involved being of the same gender, which evokes power struggles and different gender roles specific to two men or two women, compared to their heterosexual counterparts where men typically take the role of the offender, and women of the victim (Balsam & Szymanski, 2005; Edwards & Sylaska, 2013; Pepper & Sand, 2015).

Because intimate partner violence is a social issue that affects couples all over the world, affecting adults of any age, of all genders and ethnicities (Catalano, 2012), there was an attempt to collect data from a diverse population of homosexuals and bisexuals.

Despite existing literature claiming that intimate partner violence among same gender couples all over the world is just as prevalent as it is with their heterosexual counterparts (Alejo, 2014), this study found relatively low prevalence of intimate partner violence among the sample. However, it's important to note that the small sample size. They also often report a lack of LGBT+ specific resources and show concerns and

might have influenced these results and that, with a bigger sample available, different levels of intimate partner violence might have been verified. But despite the low prevalence of violence in the sample, the results found on mutual violence statistical analysis confirmed the existence of mutual violence in some of these gay and lesbian relationships, as was expected to find.

Positive correlations were found between several factors for victims and aggressors alike, such as the "Negotiation" factor positively correlating between aggressor and victim, the "Sexual Coercion" factor correlating between aggressor and victim, the "Psychological aggression" factor correlating between aggressor and victim and "Physical aggression with injury" and "Physical aggression without injury" factors alike both correlating between aggressor and victim.

On top of this fact, certain factors also correlated with each other on aggressor and victim (for example, positive correlations between the "Negotiation (aggression)" factor and the "Physical aggression with injury (victim)" factor), as well as positive correlations between aggression total scores and victimization total scores.

This evidence, even despite the low prevalence of intimate partner violence in the sample, seems to confirm the existence of mutual violence in same gender relationships, supporting the existing literature on the topic regarding its prevalence in same gender intimate partner violence.

Results from analyzing the data from this study also seem to support scientific literature regarding some difficulties and obstacles that homosexual and bisexual people have in reporting their cases of intimate partner violence and recognizing that they are victims and/or aggressors in a relationship.

When statistically comparing differences between groups of the sample who considered themselves victims versus those who didn't, and those who considered themselves to be abusers versus those who didn't, no differences were found between either group despite descriptive analysis of victimization and aggression scores (from the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 instrument) showing that some forms of violence in the relationship were reported, even if relatively low.

This seems to indicate that people who did suffer from intimate partner violence from a partner of the same gender, as well as people who perpetrated violence on a partner of the same gender, could have either felt reluctant to report that they were victims or offenders, or possibly even failed to recognize that there was intimate partner violence in their relationship.

However, it's important to mention that regarding people who reported that they had been violent or abusive towards a partner of the same gender in the past, only 2 participants out of the 48 self-reported as having been abusive in the past, compared to the 18 out of 48 who self-reported as having been victims of a same gender partner from either a past or present relationship.

Existing literature regarding the links between internalized homophobia, outness and how these variables correlate with intimate partner violence created expectations for the results that would be obtained from this sample of LGBT+ individuals in same gender relationships.

Regarding levels of internalized homophobia, previous research showed that the phenomenon can be defined by negative feelings regarding one's sexuality, as well as a homosexual or bisexual individual's negative feelings towards homosexuality as a whole. Feelings such as shame, discomfort and believing negative homophobic stereotypes.

For this reason, Balsam (2001) theorized that higher levels of internalized homophobia may lead to higher victimization and aggression in intimate partner violence in couples of the same gender, as individuals "externalize" those negative feelings towards their homosexual or bisexual partner as aggressors or, instead, victimize themselves by feeling as if they "deserve" to suffer violence as a punishment for being homosexual or bisexual.

Due to this theory, as well as the existence of literature which supports this claim with studies that found higher levels of internalized homophobia to lead to more intimate partner violence in couples of the same gender (Balik & Bilgin, 2019; Bartholomew et al, 2008; Miltz et al, 2019), positive correlations between higher levels of internalized homophobia and more intimate partner violence, both in aggression and victimization alike. Surprisingly, no such results were obtained.

Instead, a significant negative correlation was found between the “External” factor of the Internalized Homophobia Scale and the victimization in negotiation with a partner. These results indicate that if an individual feels less negative perceptions about homosexuality and their LGBT+ peers, that leads to higher victimization and submission to partners during arguments, and vice-versa for more negative perceptions and less levels of victimization.

These results were unexpected and contradict the existing literature. As such, it’s difficult to understand or try to explain why these results were obtained. It’s possible study limitations had some effect on these results, but further research and exploration would be required to confidently affirm why this happened.

In terms of levels of outness, previous research showed that being more “out” to others and feeling more comfortable with your sexuality, is a positive factor which leads to lower levels of minority stress, better self-esteem and feeling more positive feelings regarding same gender attraction, which can potentially diminish risk factors for intimate partner violence and, as such, lower levels of intimate partner violence (Morris et al, 2001).

Because of this, it was expected to find negative correlations between higher levels of outness and both the perpetration of violence and victimization in violent or abusive relationships. Instead, once again, no such results were found in this study.

A significant positive correlation was found between outness and sexual coercion (as an aggressor), meaning that higher levels of outness and comfort in being open about one’s sexuality led to more perpetration of sexual coercion.

Unlike existing literature on internalized homophobia, the existing literature on outness is conflicting and, as such, it's easier to explain this unexpected occurrence. Studies such as the one by Bartholomew et al. (2008) on gay men, and Balik and Bilgin's (2019) on lesbian women showed similar results, where they found positive correlations between outness and intimate partner violence. Specifically, Bartholomew et al. (2008) found correlations between outness and victimization, while Balik and Bilgi (2019) found correlations between outness and perpetration of intimate partner violence, with sexual and psychological violence especially.

A significant positive correlation was found between outness scores and internalized homophobia scores (specifically, the "External" factor of internalized homophobia, which evaluates how a homosexual or bisexual person negatively perceives homosexuality around them, in their LGBT+ peers and in beliefs about homosexuality in general). These results seem to indicate that the more "out" and comfortable with their sexuality a person is, the more negatively they perceive homosexuality in others.

These results are unexpected and seem to be contradictory in nature. However, as mentioned previously to explain higher internalized homophobia scores in bisexuals, it's possible that some bisexual individuals in this sample felt more alienated from the LGBT+ community and, as such, had more negative feelings regarding homosexuality in others and their homosexual peers (Weber-Gilmore et al, 2011), even if they had higher outness scores, leading to these results.

Additional analysis concluded that bisexual individuals seemed to suffer more from internalized homophobia compared to their homosexual peers. Although comparing internalized homophobia between bisexual and homosexuals was originally not an aim of this study, this result can be potentially explained due to a lot of bisexuals often being marginalized from heterosexual and gay communities alike due to negative stigmas about bisexuality, being often made to "pick a side" because of their attraction to all genders, which may cause some form of antagonism towards homosexuality and even encourage them to hide their same gender attraction (Weber-Gilmore et al, 2011).

It was also found that, in this study's sample, out of the three gender options (male, female and non-binary), there were significant differences between them: people who identified as male experienced higher levels of outness, while people who identified as female were the group to experience the lowest levels of outness. A study by Balsam and Szymanski (2005) suggests that, when compared to men, women may experience more minority stressors related to their gender in patriarchic societies, and as such, those additional stressors may explain the lower scores in outness, being more uncomfortable with their sexuality and facing more challenges to "come out."

Significant differences between genders were also found in the perpetration of sexual coercion, in the sense that males were the gender to perform more of this type of violence upon their partners, followed by females, and then non-binary individuals (who all scored 0 in this scale, meaning that no one in this group had ever performed this type of violence).

A study by Raghavan and contributors (2019) found that coercion is a form of intimate partner violence that is present in gay (between two men) abusive relationships, typically performed to intimidate or punish the victim. This study even suggested that it's possible that gay and bisexual men in gay relationships may use sexual violence or coercion to control and humiliate their victims, in a way similar to how feminist theories describe how male aggressors perform sexual violence on their female victims. In this sense, a higher score of sexual coercion between men compared to the remaining genders could be explained or, at least, theorized about.

To summarize the discussion, both expected and unexpected results were found with this study. One of the expected results was the presence of mutual intimate partner violence in same gender couples, which is supported by existing scientific research regarding the issue.

As for unexpected results, the outness and internalized homophobia variables did not correlate with intimate partner violence in ways that were predicted.

Higher levels of outness were expected to lead to lower prevalence of intimate partner violence, and vice-versa. However, that result was not observed, but the obtained results of the opposite happening (outness being positively correlated with some type of violence) can still be explained by some existing literature (Bartholomew et al, 2008; Balik & Bilgin, 2019).

Internalized homophobia was also expected to positively correlate with intimate partner violence, as literature indicates that internalized homophobia leads to more violence and negativity, but this specific result was not found. Unlike outness, there isn't literature to support these findings and, as such, further research would need to be conducted to fully understand this anomaly.

Conclusion

In conclusion, and despite study limitations, expected and unexpected results were found with this study. Some of the results were supported by previous research and scientific literature, while others were not. In those cases, results were surprising and difficult to explain, which only highlights just how complex and unique the experiences of intimate partner violence among couples of the same gender can be, and how lacking scientific research still is in this regard, when compared to their heterosexual counterparts.

This study is important as a first step to study said unexpected results, as well as unexplored topics and research relating to this theme, and to add information to the scientific literature that is focused on the LGBT+ community and their experiences.

Since this study also found results which are not supported by existing literature, it's of utmost relevancy and importance to try to recreate this study with future studies, preferably with less limitations, to try to understand the anomalies found and to verify if they persist in other studies. And if they do persist, to try to understand why they happen, and how those results can be relevant to further understand intimate partner violence experiences of LGBT+ individuals.

Another good aspect about this study was the acceptance of feedback from the participants, as they are the key to have a better understanding of their experiences and sense of community inside LGBT+ circles. This study, like many others, strives to gather information that will help to create resources made specifically for LGBT+ people. As such, it's important to work side by side with the people we're trying to build resources for, instead of taking a passive and merely observant stance.

Through their feedback, even if not many individuals chose to answer, I became aware of many other factors at play which I hadn't even considered when planning out this study for the first time. And I also became aware of certain flaws and limitations in my own methods which I hadn't even considered before, and, as a researcher, would have probably never been aware of if the participants didn't bring it to my attention.

Experiences with intimate partner violence are all unique to each person, but after this study, it became clear that homosexual and bisexual people have their own stories to tell, in a society that is often heavily focused on heterosexuals.

The fact that so many LGBT+ individuals, including participants of this study who answered with constructive criticism and feedback, have spoken up about the lack of LGBT+ focused resources and little understanding about their unique experiences (from health professionals, to figures of authority, and even to researchers who try to study them) makes studies like this one extremely relevant in trying to understand and combat this social issue which affects so many lives.

For these reasons, I hope interest in how the LGBT+ population is affected by intimate partner violence continues to exist, and that researchers continue to work with LGBT+ individuals to create more and better resources that can provide better help and understanding about these cases.

Study limitations and future studies

This study faced some limitations that are relevant to the obtained results. First, the sample of 48 individuals can be considered a small sample, especially when taking into consideration that it's too small to accurately represent the entire world-wide population of bisexual and homosexual individuals with romantic or sexual relationship experiences.

Still regarding this sample, while there was a good bisexual to homosexual ratio to analyze (21 bisexuals and 27 homosexuals) and also a good male to female ratio (19 men and 21 women), the non-binary gender of the sample was of only 8 people and, as such, limited when compared to their male and female counterparts.

There is a lack of the non-binary gender representation in scientific studies (even the more recent and progressive ones), so there was also no groundwork in literature to compare and fully explore these themes of outness, internalized homophobia and intimate partner violence and how non-binary people experience them.

For future studies, I recommend bigger samples, and samples that include non-binary people as well, so that more information can be collected on the experiences between people of this gender identity and provide deeper insight on how their differences may differ from their male and female counterparts, as the lack of non-binary individuals in this study did not allow for much exploration that could be accurate and truly representative of this population.

At the end of the questionnaire, participants could also send their feedback about the study if they wanted to, along with a comment about how the current pandemic of Covid-19 had affected their sexual or romantic relationships, if applicable (however, if they chose not to, those sections were entirely skippable).

In the end, only a total of eight participants ended up sending anonymous feedback, and after analyzing relevant answers, a few comments and critiques proved to be relevant and enriching to this study: one participant commented that, due to them being bisexual, the Outness Inventory and the Internalized Homophobia Scale felt too focused on homosexuality, making them feel difficulties when trying to answer as correctly as possible about their bisexuality. In this sense, it's possible that both instruments need some revisions to be more inclusive of bisexuals.

In this sense, I also recommend that future studies pay attention to this aspect of both instruments, should they use them without any changes or, if applicable in the future, updated or revised versions of them.

Another participant also pointed out that, when answering to the Conflict Tactics Scale 2 questions, they felt like it was too focused on more physical violence and that there weren't enough questions about psychological violence, and so, they couldn't fully report their experiences with a psychologically abusive partner. So, this is another instrument aspect to consider for future studies, of adding instruments that are more focused on the types of psychological violence where the Conflict Tactics Scales may lack.

Another type of relevant comment, this time answered by two lesbian participants, indicated that they had both been in past abusive relationships, but not with someone of the same gender. Instead, both participants commented on how they were victims of male partners in the past, before they found out that they were lesbians and accepted their lesbian identity. This study did not focus on relationships between a man and a woman and, as such, there was no information about relationships that LGBT+ people might have had prior to finding out they are homosexual, or in cases of being bisexual with a partner of the opposite gender.

While it was not the focus of this study, it may be relevant to explore and include these issues and experiences in future studies, to have a better understanding of how it may affect LGBT+ experiences in intimate partner violence.

Lastly, there were three comments about how, during the pandemic (which was ongoing at the time of data collection), the intimate relationships of these participants actually improved (the participants reported being happier, feeling like they were in a more loving relationship and feeling closer to their partners) as they were forced to spend more time with their partners and, according to one participant, were forced to support and take care of one another when they became sick.

While not explored in this study since it was not one of the aims, future studies may gain important and relevant information by exploring the effect of isolation in intimate partner violence among same gender couples who live together during pandemic phases.

To summarize, it's mainly recommended that future studies possess sizeable and diverse representative samples, and it's also recommended that they utilize instruments that are adequate to the LGBT+ population and to their unique experiences. It's important to create LGBT+ resources that attend to the unique characteristics and experiences of this population to be able to fully grasp and collect information on intimate partner violence among gay men, lesbians and bisexuals in same gender couples.

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