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Lesbian Women’s Experience of Intimate Partner Abuse: A Phenomenological Inquiry

by

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Abstract
Evidence based Irish research examining the experience of female same sex intimate partner abuse (IPA) is nascent. Previous research, policy, and practice concerning IPA has tended to focus on heterosexual women who are victimised by male partners, family members, or other men. This exploratory study was designed to uncover the non-heterosexual female experience of IPA with a female partner. The study is the first qualitative exploration of female same sex IPA to be conducted in Ireland. Situated within an interpretive phenomenological perspective, the research draws on qualitative data generated by semi-structured, in-depth interviews with nine women who self-identified as having experienced intimate partner abuse in a previous same sex relationship. Emerging research findings indicate participants experienced diverse forms of abusive behaviour from their female partners, including emotional, physical, identity, sexual, financial, and post-separation abuse. Findings generated from the research process will be used to make recommendations in terms of developing good practice.

Keywords
intimate partner abuse, lesbian, interpretative phenomenological analysis, Ireland

Introduction
Intimate partner abuse (IPA) is a phenomenon that pervades societies worldwide. Since the 1960s, IPA in heterosexual relationships has been the focus of scholarship throughout the Western world. Extensive research and practice generated primarily by feminist scholars and

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researchers has focussed on male perpetrators of violence in heterosexual relationships. The issue of IPA in lesbian relationships has a relatively recent history, and remains significantly under researched. While the international research community have made inroads to understand same sex IPA most notably in Australia, Canada, the UK and the US, the Irish research evidence base examining this issue is nascent.

Like their Western counterparts, during the 1970s, Irish women’s groups coalesced to agitate for legal reforms in areas of domestic and sexual violence. Anti-rape and anti-violence concerns acted as a major mobilising force for Irish women of the period. Traditionally conceptualised as domestic violence, the phenomenon was framed in a heterosexual paradigm where such terms as battered women, battered wives and the battered women’s movement framed the social problem. Consequently, IPA research, policy, and practice in

6 Women’s organisations included, the National Commission on the Status of Women, the Irish Women’s Liberation Movement (IWLM), Irish Women United (IWU), Women’s Aid and the Rape Crisis Centre.
8 Intimate partner abuse is the chosen operational definition for the current thesis as it allows for a more inclusive investigation of the varied forms of abuse that can be experienced including online abuse, and further, moves the analysis away from more traditional research approaches that would have utilised the term domestic violence within a heterosexual relationship context.
Ireland has developed with a primary focus on heterosexual women victimised by male partners, family members, or other men. Although other women experiencing abuse in their relationships were not specifically excluded, and even though lesbian women were active participants in the advancement of domestic and sexual violence services in Ireland, the domestic violence services were, and continue to be, targeted almost exclusively at heterosexual women. Lesbian women are one group who continue to be marginalised in the provision of domestic violence services in Ireland.

There is a dearth of knowledge pertaining to the lesbian experience of IPA and this group of women’s engagement with formal supports. An unpublished report conducted in 2013 provides some insight into the level of services used by lesbian and bisexual women experiencing IPA. Using an on-line survey instrument, Miner contacted domestic violence (39), and sexual violence services (18), and LGBT (14) organisations across the Republic of Ireland to assess lesbian and bisexual women’s engagement with services over a three-year period. The number of women engaged with an individual programme due to IPA from a female partner was minimal – less than two per year. However, a different picture emerged across Dublin-based services. One refuge provided services to 11 lesbian and bisexual women in

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11 Women’s Aid is a leading national organisation that has been active in Ireland to stop domestic violence against women since 1974. Despite over forty years of providing services and supports in the domestic violence sector, Women’s Aid does not include the female same sex experience of domestic violence in their training and awareness modules, ‘we don’t cover the female same sex experience in our training’. Email from the training manager at Women’s Aid, to Lynne Cahill, (August 3rd, 2016) (on file with author).

2012. The report found evidence of a preference for Helpline type support, with one Helpline service receiving approximately 140 calls relating to same sex IPA from women in 2011.\(^\text{13}\) Similarly, the LGBT Helpline, a national support service, found callers experience of violence included incidents of IPA alongside disclosures of homophobic and transphobic abuse.\(^\text{14}\) The support and information sought by callers in response to a violent experience included the opportunity to discuss the impact of the abuse, to consider personal safety measures and to get information on IPA services.\(^\text{15}\) The most frequently sought information was in relation to LGBT-friendly counsellors and psychotherapists. Regarding sexual violence, all Rape Crisis Centres (RCC) provided services to lesbian and bisexual women, however, only one RCC supported a lesbian woman who had experienced sexual violence from a female partner.\(^\text{16}\) A preference for counselling and therapy type support by LGBT people is well established in the literature on same sex IPA.\(^\text{17}\)

The present research is intended as a first step toward an understanding of the experience of intimate partner abuse for women in same sex relationships. The overall aim of this qualitative study is to develop a theoretical body of knowledge to explain the participants experience of IPA and their help seeking strategies in response to abusive behaviour. However, the focus of this paper discusses a preliminary finding to emerge from the accounts of participants, namely, the finding that lesbian women are experiencing diverse forms of abusive behaviours including emotional, physical, financial, identity, sexual and post-separation abuse.

\(^{13}\) Representing 2\% of the total number of calls.
\(^{14}\) Violence, including homophobic and transphobic bullying and abuse represents 4 per cent of support calls. LGBT Helpline (2015). Annual Report
\(^{15}\) LGBT Helpline (2015). Annual Report
\(^{16}\) Minzer, 'Intimate Partner Violence: Services in Ireland for Lesbian & Bisexual Women'.
\(^{17}\) Donovan and Hester, Domestic Violence and Sexuality. What’s Love Got to Do with It; Catherine Donovan, Rebecca Barnes, and Catherine Nixon. 'The Coral Project: Exploring Abusive Behaviours in Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual And/Or Transgender Relationships'. Interim Report (University of Sunderland and University of Leicester. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, September 2014).
Following this introduction section, section two will look at the existing literature examining lesbian intimate partner abuse. Section three provides a description of the methodology, and section four presents the emergent findings. Section five concludes this paper.

**Intimate part abuse in lesbian relationships: What does the literature say?**

In comparison to a large body of literature examining heterosexual women’s experience of IPA from male partners, the study of IPA occurring in same sex relationships has been described as limited, with a significant lack of scholarly inquiries assessing IPA within LGBT populations. Having said that, there is a growing body of literature that recognises the female same sex experience of intimate partner abuse. Research concerned with lesbian IPA began to gain traction from the mid-to-late 1980s. There is no statistical agreement regarding the prevalence of IPA in lesbian relationships. Some estimates indicate that lesbian IPA is comparable to the rates of heterosexual IPA. Previous studies have found the victimisation rate at between 9.6% and 73.4%, and the perpetration rate between 17% and 75%. However, empirical reviews estimate a range of between 20% and 50%.

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variability of these percentages may be due to the lack of a standard definition of IPA across studies, different sampling, and methodological characteristics, an over reliance on convenience samples, and the measure of time periods to which the violence corresponds (e.g., over the lifetime, in the past 12 months, and 6 months).  

Key findings from the literature indicate non-heterosexual women are experiencing diverse forms of abuse from female partners including physical, emotional, sexual, identity, financial and post-separation abuse. Lesbian women are not disclosing the experience of IPA because of fear of adding further stigma to an already marginalised community, fear of a homophobic reaction, a lack of trust in formal support services, and a perception they will not be believed or their claims taken seriously. Unlike traditional models of power found in heterosexual abusive relationships, more complex configurations of power have been found in female same sex relationships. For example, Janice Ristock’s interviews with one-hundred and two women


found that, “In their accounts, power is not something that resides fully in one person (the abuser) but is instead relational”. 27 Like the heterosexual experience of intimate partner abuse, first relationships create opportunity for abuse, differences occur with access and availability of appropriate support services. 28 Non-heterosexual people tend not to report to mainstream support services, instead opting for more informal/privatised sources of support. 29 Findings from the first UK national study comparing love and violence in same sex and heterosexual relationships sheds some light on the reasons for the use of informal rather than formal support options. The study found that the dominant approach to understanding IPA is based on a heterosexual model, whereby the violence is understood as being perpetrated by a physically bigger and stronger male partner against a smaller and weaker female. The authors argue the impact of this understanding results in victims of same sex IPA not recognising their experiences as such, and thus, not reporting to police and other formal supports for help. 30 In addition, respondents reported that the police were perceived to be an unsafe or an unreliable source of help due to a lack of awareness about same sex IPA. The study also found evidence of a respondent perception that they would receive an unsympathetic response because of heterosexism. 31 In a similar vein, an unpublished Irish report indicates heteronormative assumptions prevent non-heterosexual women from accessing support. 32 There is also evidence in the Irish research context that LGBT individuals have been assumed heterosexual in the health services sector. 33 Overall,

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30 Donovan and Hester, ‘Seeking Help from the Enemy’.
31 Ibid.
33 Maria Gibbons et al., ‘Recognising LGB Sexual Identities in Health Services: The Experience of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual People with Health Services in North West Ireland’ (Dublin: Equality Authority, 2008); Edward McCann and Danika Sharek, ‘Survey
studies have established that dominant heteronormative understandings of IPA impacts upon recognition of behaviour as abusive in same sex relationships.\textsuperscript{34}

Section three begins with a description of the methodology including the inclusion criteria, sampling procedures, recruitment, and data analysis.

Methodology

Inclusion criteria

The study population belong to a historically marginalised group.\textsuperscript{35} In addition to being part of a sexual minority, participants were recruited based on having a previous experience of intimate partner abuse. There would be a certain degree of vulnerability associated with those experiences. Therefore, the study’s inclusion and exclusion criteria were designed to minimise additional harm. Only adult women who were no longer involved in an abusive relationship were recruited for interview. Like previous same sex IPA research, the criteria for inclusion was based on a woman being at a minimum of six months to one year removed from an abusive relationship.\textsuperscript{36}

Sampling

Women were eligible to participate in the study if they were over 18 years of age, identified as lesbian, bisexual or queer, and had experience of intimate partner abuse with a female in a previous same


sex relationship. Due to the highly sensitive nature of the study, the researcher felt it would be inappropriate to ask participants to suggest others for interview. Intimate partner abuse is a sensitive topic primarily because of the potential threat it poses to the women who agree to share their experiences with the researcher, in that, the topic has the potential to arouse emotional responses.\textsuperscript{37} For this reason, the primary focus during interviews was on the participant and their unique experience of IPA. Participants were not asked if they knew of other women with a similar experience as this would create a distraction, and pull the narrative away from their personal experience. Although snowball sampling has proven popular with sensitive research concerning hard- to- reach populations, this was not the case in the Irish research context.\textsuperscript{38} Like previous Irish research, the current study found that snowball sampling was not an option.\textsuperscript{39} One participant had never disclosed the abuse occurring in her relationship with anyone, apart from the researcher, and most women were not aware of others in the same position as themselves.

Recruitment
A multipronged recruitment strategy was used to promote the study and increase the potential to access a hard-to-reach population. This approach included a) a Service Providers' Forum with key stakeholders from the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) community, front line workers from the Domestic and Sexual Violence support services, and those from counselling and therapy type professional services; b) Community venues sampling was utilised, involving convenience and purposive sampling within LGBT community organisations; c) a promotional research poster was designed and

\textsuperscript{37} K.V. Cowles, 'Issues in Qualitative Research on Sensitive Topics', Western Journal of Nursing Research 10, no. 2 (1988): 163–79.


\textsuperscript{39} Susan A. Miner, 'The Intersectionality of Silences: Party-Impeding Cultural Norms Impacting on Lesbian Partnerships' (A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, National University of Ireland, Dublin, 2003). Susan Miner's (2003) unpublished doctoral thesis is the only research in Ireland to exclusively examine the phenomenon of lesbian IPA. Miner's study is predominantly quantitative.
advertised within LGBT, domestic and sexual violence services, and within office spaces providing counselling and therapy type support options. The poster was also advertised on LGBT social media platforms and within LGBT print media. Finally, d) permission was granted by the main administrator of an online Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) social networking club to email over one-thousand of their members.

Following an expression of interest to engage with the study, typically via email, participants were sent an information pack outlining specifically what participation entailed. At the initial point of contact, the researcher established if the study’s ethical criteria were met, firstly, that the potential participant was over 18 years of age, and secondly, they were no longer involved in an abusive relationship. If the study’s ethical criteria was met, and women indicated that they wanted to proceed after reading the information leaflet, attempts were then made to negotiate a convenient time to meet for interview.

**Recruitment limitations**

There are problems inherent with this style of recruitment. The most serious weakness being the limitations on the generalisability of findings. The current study’s recruitment strategy targeted organisations that provide services to the LGBT community. Consequently, participants may differ in significant ways from individuals who do not participate, in that they may be better integrated into an LGBT community. This would imply the sample may be more “out” about their sexual orientation than non-participants.

Having said that, the recruitment strategy employed can be viewed as a

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40 Sampling in the community has a long history in LGBT research, as researchers used contacts in the community to access a population that was otherwise impossible to locate. One of the strongest critiques of community venues sampling is that researchers using this approach can only reach individuals who are engaged with the LGBT community, overlooking individuals who are not ‘out’ in their communities.

41 Following the initial email correspondence, the researcher arranged a follow up call. During this call, the researcher explained the ethical parameters of the study in that, participants must be 18 years old and that they should be removed from the abusive relationship for a period of six months.

response to overcoming the problems associated with sampling concealed populations.43

Data collection
Research on a sensitive topic that examines the experiences of people is more likely to be undertaken by qualitative methodologies.44 The primary concern of the current study is to give voice to women who have experienced intimate partner abuse from a female partner. Therefore, the core research method employed was the in-depth, semi-structured interview. In-depth interviews have the potential to yield rich, detailed information pertaining to an experience.45 Evidence-based Irish research on female same sex IPA could be described as embryonic.46 Qualitative research methods are particularly well-suited to investigate voices and perspectives of unstudied groups, while further enabling the participants to speak using their own terms of reference and to explore the contexts, complexities, and trajectories of their experiences.47

An interpretive phenomenological perspective was chosen as the framework for this research. This approach to qualitative data is concerned with a detailed analysis of human lived experience. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is an approach to qualitative research informed by debates and concepts from three key areas of the philosophy of knowledge, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography.48 Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to the

46 The dearth of knowledge surrounding female same sex IPA is described by the author as embryonic following a comprehensive review of the literature examining the female same sex experience of intimate partner violence.
study of experience, especially in terms of things that matter to us. Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation with a focus on the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole e.g. to understand any part you must look at the whole, to understand the whole you must look at the parts. Ideography is concerned with the particular rather than attempting to make claims at a population level. A phenomenological analysis is committed to understanding how a phenomenon (event, process, or relationship) has been understood from the perspective of an individual in a particular context. Essentially, it is concerned with how individuals experience, describe, interpret, and understand a phenomenon under investigation.\textsuperscript{49}

Data analysis

Key to an interpretative phenomenological analysis is the provision of both a descriptive account of how participants make sense of their experiences and an account of the researcher's interpretation. The analysis is a “joint product of the participant and the analyst”.\textsuperscript{50} To achieve a joint production of data, the researcher explored the transcripts using three distinct processes with different focuses, i.e. descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual exploratory commenting. Descriptive comments describe the content of what the participants has said. Linguistic comments focus upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant, for example tone, degree of fluency (articulate or hesitant), laughter, sadness pauses, and repetition. Finally, conceptual commenting represents a move away from the claims of the participant toward an overarching understanding of the issues being discussed. This type of commenting is more difficult for the analyst. You can draw on your own experiences, understandings and perceptions, and/or professional knowledge to interpret the participant’s data.\textsuperscript{51}


\textsuperscript{50} Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method, and Research, 80.

\textsuperscript{51} Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Theory, Method, and Research.
Overall, the conduct of analysis involves five distinct phases to bring an interview to completion. This typically involves initial note taking, exploratory commenting, developing emergent themes, a search for connections across themes, and finally the creation of superordinate themes. Emergent themes identified are utilised to create a superordinate theme from the participant’s data. Superordinate themes are developed by the process of abstraction or subsumption. Abstraction is where the analyst puts like with like and develops a new name for a cluster of emergent themes. Subsumption follows the same process as abstraction but the emergent theme itself acquires a superordinate status. It is crucial that the researcher captures what was important for the participants in the telling of their experience and the themes should reflect both the participant’s words and the researcher’s interpretation. Essentially, themes should capture the participant’s understanding of their experience.

Having outlined the methodological approach applied to the research, this paper now moves on to describe the emergent findings from the study. Research examining IPA has tended to be over-reliant on quantitative methodological approaches that lack detailed and contextual information necessary to understand the complexity of the phenomenon. At the present time, little is known about the personal experience of lesbian intimate partner abuse. This study provides an in-depth insight into the experience of lesbian IPA for nine women. The shame and embarrassment associated with being a survivor of IPA coupled with being a part of a historically marginalised group creates challenges with access to LGBT samples. Regardless of the size of the sample, it is the voices of survivors of lesbian women that are crucial to

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
expanding knowledge of this phenomenon. The findings of the present study are drawn from the voices of nine survivors of lesbian partner abuse. In recognition of the small sample size, it is not claimed that these accounts are representative of all women who have experienced intimate partner abuse from another female. Notwithstanding this limitation, the study’s emergent findings are in accord with the findings of previous research as will be demonstrated in the discussion section of the paper.

Preliminary findings

Profile of participants

Nine women took part in the study, ranging in age from 31 – 64 years. Eight participants were Irish, one woman was originally from the UK. Five participants were living in a rural location, one in a city and the remaining three lived in suburban areas. Most women stated they were employed, one unemployed and another retired. Five participants completed a third level degree, two out of the five completed a postgraduate degree including a Masters and a PhD, and four completed their leaving certificate. In terms of relationship status, four were single and not dating, two were in a monogamous relationship, and three indicated they were single and dating. Two participants were biological parents, one woman had a dependent child. Women ‘came out’ about their sexual orientation between the ages of 17 – 48 years. Women experienced their first same sex relationship between the ages 17 – 34 years. For two participants, the abuse occurred in a first same sex relationship. The duration of relationships ranged from six months to twenty-six years. Four women indicated that they had experienced abuse in more than one same sex relationship. Seven women identified

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57 The profiles presented represent information that the participants volunteered during their interview.
58 The average age was 49.5 years.
59 The Leaving Certificate Examinations, which is commonly referred to as the Leaving Cert is the final examination in the Irish secondary school system.
60 The average age was 25.5 years.
61 The average age was 23.8 years.
as lesbian, with two identifying as queer. The women who identified as queer used the terms lesbian and queer interchangeably. Within the following accounts, each participant was given a pseudonym to protect their identities.

**Types of abuse experienced by the participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall abuse experienced by</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe physical</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-separation</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Items to categorise the different abuse types were informed from previous same sex IPA research.82

Findings from the research suggest that participants experienced diverse forms of abuse that include emotional, physical, sexual, financial, identity, and post separation abuse. As can be seen from Table 1, emotional abuse was stated as the dominant abuse type experienced by the nine participants. This form of abuse was typically described as a precursor to experiences of physical violence, although in some cases, the abuse was reported to begin with a physical assault.

As Table 2 illustrates, undermining value as a partner, undermining physical appearance, being put down/humiliated, being screamed, and shouted at, being blamed for your partners abusive behaviour, and threats to physically harm exemplify the nature of the most common forms of emotionally abusive tactics experienced by participants.

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82 Items to categorise the multiple forms of abuse identified in the current study were primarily informed by the COHEAR (Comparing Heterosexual and Same Sex Abuse in Relationship) Power and Control Wheel developed Donovan and Hester. Domestic Violence and Sexuality: What's Love Got to Do with It; Items to categorise the experience of sexual abuse where informed by Risstock, L., ‘Exploring Dynamics of Abusive Lesbian Relationships: Preliminary Analysis of a Multisite, Qualitative Study’. 
Table II Main types of emotional abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional abuse experienced by participants</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>undermining value as a partner</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being put down/humiliated</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shouting &amp; screaming</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blamed for partners abusive behaviour</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>name calling</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undermining physical appearance</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>being told what to do</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threats to physically harm</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exploiting vulnerabilities</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>playing mind games</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>using children</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disruption of eating patterns</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>disruption of sleeping patterns</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>threats to kill</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>silent treatment</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made to feel bad</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>infidelity to punish</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>partner threatening suicide</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>undermining participants family</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>bullied by partner's family</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>threats to jeopardise participants business</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>threat of HIV infection</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undermining her profession</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blamed by partner for not having children</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rearranging home furniture</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For most participants, verbal abuse such as name calling and the constant undermining of their physical appearance were described as posing the greatest challenge to their sense of self. Women spoke of the long-lasting effects of this type of abuse and the pervasive impact it had upon their lives, as Saoirse explains:

"It's funny the physical abuse I've got over, now I have scars and all that but it's more, like even now what I deal with is the, is the emotional abuse she called do you know. It was just such, such a horr [sic]...a disgusting level"  

The main types of financial abuse reported by participants included partners creating debt and partners expecting the participants to financially support them in all facets of their lives. Two participants spoke of their partners having no financial income over the duration of their relationships. Participants also reported having money and property stolen, and credit cards and bank accounts used without their permission. Two women spoke of losing their homes and were still entangled in legal processes to try extricate themselves from previous lives with an abusive partner. Table 3 provides an overview of the main types of financial abuse identified by the participants.
Table III Main types of financial abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of financial abuse</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>expected to pay for nights out etc</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>creating debt</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>full financial dependency</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>participant paying all household bills</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>refusing to take paid employment</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unauthorised use of credit card</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theft of money</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>theft of property</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>withholding financial support</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>refusing to go to work</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lack of financial resources used to control</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Identity abuse is defined as threatening to out or outing sexuality, birth gender, gender identity or HIV status. Undermining their sense of self as a lesbian, gay, bisexual man, or women, controlling what she/he looks like, clothes she/he wears, threatening to, or withdrawing medication, hormones, refusing money for gender transition.\(^{63}\)

Table IV Main types of identity abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of identity abuse</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>forced to conceal lesbian identity</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>outing sexuality</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undermining her sexual identity</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4 illustrates the predominant forms of identity abuse reported by participants. In the current study, identity abuse manifested in relationships where contested identities existed between the couple, with the abusive partner controlling the appearance of the participant. This form of abuse was reported where the abusive partner identified as ‘butch’ and understood the relationship as having a butch/femme dynamic.\(^{64}\) However, the participant did not see herself as a femme and further, did not identify with any label to describe her sexuality-

\(^{63}\) Donovan and Hester, Domestic Violence, and Sexuality: What’s Love Got to Do with It.

\(^{64}\) During the 1950s and 1960s, the term butch/femme was popularised among lesbians to describe their relationships. During this period, butch/femme not only described masculine/feminine lesbian couples but also commonly referred to some lesbians’ choices to adopt traditional masculine or feminine gender roles. See Jodi O’Brien, Encyclopedia of Gender and Society, vol. Volume 2 (UK: SAGE publications, Inc., 2009).
identity. In such cases, women described being pressured into wearing feminine attire and not being allowed to dress in clothes of their own choosing. The following quotes from Caoimhe’s interview confirms this finding,

Caoimhe: she’d been in the army and she was real eh butch, she wanted me to dress and look a certain way
LC: Ok would you see yourself in that butch/femme role?
Caoimhe: No, you see I don’t, I don’t identify as anything like that [ok] She was trying to make me something I’m not”

Another example of identity abuse, Eabha described being forced “back into the closet”. This participant expressed the view that she had been very much a part and connected to the LGBT community prior to this relationship. As a consequence of Eabha’s partner not being ‘out’, she stated she was forced to conceal both her and her partner’s sexual identity, refrain from taking career developing employment in the LGBT community, and remove herself from all LGBT community events and activities.

Identity abuse also involved being outed against your wishes. Aisling described being outed by her ex-partner after the relationship ended, she explained:

you know there were places where I felt comfortable to be out and there were other [sic] that I didn’t, and in any case, it was my decision, my choice as to when and if I told someone, where she would just take that power away from me and just do it you know and just out me

For Aisling, the fear of being outed led her to remove herself from social activity and engagements. Aisling felt “less connected with the lesbian and gay community in Ireland because of that relationship” even though her relationship was over for almost ten years at the time of interview.

The experience of physical abuse was diverse across the nine participants, with eight out of nine women recalling their experience of being physically assaulted. Table 5 illustrates the comprehensive list of physical abuse experienced by participants. The main types of physical abuse identified includes being kicked, punched, pushed, and shoved, being slapped, and having their hair pulled.
Participants described experiencing the violence predominantly in their homes but some participants stated they were physically attacked in public spaces that included their place of work, on public transport (taxi, bus), and at social events. They further asserted that at no point did any person intervene to assist women when they were assaulted in public. As Aoife recalled:

*She punched me in the stomach and said, “Fuck you” [on the bus!]*

*On the bus and that was probably since I was fifteen, seventeen of having an experience of that level of violence.*

For six participants, the physical abuse experienced was categorised as severe. As Table 6 indicates, severe physical abuse encompassed being hit with a weapon, incurring head injuries, black eyes and bruising to the body. Other forms of severe physical abuse identified by interviewee’s included suffocation, strangulation, being beaten and strangled to the point of unconsciousness, being stabbed, and having bones broken.
Table VI Main types of severe physical abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severe physical violence</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>hit with an object/weapon</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>head injuries</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>black eyes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bruising to the body</td>
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<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>scars</td>
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<tr>
<td>strangulation</td>
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<tr>
<td>suffocation</td>
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<tr>
<td>stabbed</td>
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<tr>
<td>attempts to aggravate an asthma attack</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>beaten unconscious</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>strangled unconscious</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>kicked into the vagina</td>
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<tr>
<td>loss of hair</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>broken bones</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>bitten</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two women reported attending their general practitioner (GP) and accident and emergency (A&E) departments on two separate occasions with the injuries they sustained. Other participants stated they remained silent on the nature of their injuries and in one case, the woman described how she was accompanied to the hospital by her abusive partner. Following a violent physical assault, Caoimhe attended an A&E department with broken ribs. She recalled how a nurse encouraged her to report the assault. The following quote describes the scene:

*Then a nurse came into me and asked my friends to wait outside and eh, and the nurse said eh, “Tell us his name, we can help you, you know, you don’t have to deal with this”. And then I was like, “Do I say it’s a woman?” and I thought, “If I say it’s a woman she’s going to judge me”, she’s going to think you know. “Ah it’s only a woman like, she should be able to fight back with a woman”.*

The quote highlights some of the challenges experienced by lesbian women when accessing healthcare supports. The nurse assumed that Caoimhe was heterosexual. This assumption closed off the opportunity for disclosure as Caoimhe was already concerned with receiving an unsympathetic response. In this instance, having to disclose your sexual orientation as well as the experience of IPA proved too large an obstacle for Caoimhe. In addition, the quote draws attention to the dominant
heterosexual model that informs both the nurse and Caoimhe’s understanding of intimate partner abuse.

Participants also recalled how nurses in A&E departments encouraged them to disclose the nature of their injuries. However, Sacirbse chose not to reveal the true nature of her condition,

*There was one particular nurse she did say to me. “If there’s anything you need to tell us, to tell me now” like they were there to help this one particular nurse. But I just kept on saying “no I fell”*

There was evidence of sexual abuse in the women’s accounts, something the participants found extremely difficult to explain and describe. They struggled with a lack of language to explain their experience as the quote by Caoimhe highlights.

*Who is going to believe a woman would rape another woman? I mean how do you explain that?*

This was manifested during the interviews with silences, hesitancy, and participants becoming visibly upset. However, participants did name and recognise this type of abuse as rape. Women reported being repeatedly raped by their female partners, being touched in a manner that caused distress, being hurt during sexual activity, having their requests to stop ignored, and partners re-enacting aspects of a previous sexual abuse history. Table 7 highlights the main types of physical sexual abuse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of sexual abuse (physical)</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>touched causing distress</td>
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<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rape</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>hurt during sexual activity</td>
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<td>yes</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ignoring requests to stop re-enacting previous sexual abuse experience</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Two participants talked about a previous abuse history that included being sexually abused as young children by family members, and

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The challenges with recalling experiences of sexual violence is well established in the literature. Survivors find it difficult to talk about, however, the memories are typically very vivid, and the emotional impact is severe and long lasting. See Girshick, Woman-To-Woman Sexual Violence: Does She Call It Rape?
experiencing rape by a male in their adult lives.66 Their previous abuse history became a part of their abusive experience in their relationship with female partners. Participant’s described their female partners re-enacting aspects of their childhood sexual abuse experience, both verbally and physically. This form of sexual abuse was viewed by participants as the ultimate act of betrayal, as this next quote by Caomhe explains:

“I told her what he’d [childhood abuser] said [pause]. So, when she was with me that night she used the exact same words, and I thought, you know what and I just started bawling uncontrollably”

There was also evidence in their narratives of forms of sexual abuse which could be described as more emotional than physical. This involved sexual coercion, withdrawing sex to punish, being critical of a woman’s body and of her lesbian sexuality, rejecting and humiliating her immediately after intimacy, and ultimately making her feel sexually inadequate. Table 8 draws attention to the main forms of emotional sexual abuse disclosed by participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of sexual abuse (emotional)</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sexual coercion</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>withdrawing sex to punish</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>had to ask for sex</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical of her body</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critical of her lesbian sexuality</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rejecting to humiliate</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>made to feel sexually inadequate</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Post-separation abuse was evident in the women’s accounts. They described being isolated from friends and the LGBT community after the relationship ended. This occurred because abusive partners told others they were the victim in the relationship. Being labelled an abuser resulted in some participants removing themselves from the LGBT community and losing friends in the process.

Other forms of post-separation abuse identified included harassing phone calls and texts, ex-partner’s calling to their homes

---

66 One participant recalled being physically and sexually abused by a male and female family member.
uninvited, stalking, both the participants and their friends being physically assaulted, being outed against their wishes, and having money and property stolen from their homes after the relationship had ended. Table 9 provides an overview of this form of abuse.

### Table IX Post-separation abuse

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main types of post-separation abuse</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Isolating participant from friends and LGBT community</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claiming participant was the abuser</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically assaulted participant</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspiring phone call/texts</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal abuse</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering participants home without permission</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalking</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessing a DV support group</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically threatened current partner</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically assaulted friends</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online abuse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically threats from a new partner</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threats to destroy participants business</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and money stolen from participants home</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Threatened by partners’ family</td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damage to property</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outing participant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women also reported being subject to online abuse. Examples included negative comments being posted on social media via private emails and on participants Facebook homepage. Saoirse recalls:

> she mentioned me on Facebook then, saying that I don’t deserve [daughter] and I’m an embarrassment at all this

Having reviewed one of the emerging findings from the current study, this paper now moves on to the discussion with a specific focus on participants experience of emotional abuse and the significance of a having previous abuse history on participant understanding of IPA.

### Discussion

The current research findings are consistent with data obtained in previous studies, for example, first time relationships creating opportunity for abuse, the experience of multiple forms of abuse including identity abuse, the assumption of heterosexuality in a health care setting, non-disclosure of abuse to a formal authority, a previous
abuse history being used to control and manipulate, and the dominant heterosexual model of IPA influencing participants understanding of their experience. The remainder of the discussion section will highlight aspects of the most frequently reported type of abuse experienced by participants, namely, emotional abuse, and the impact a previous abuse history had on participants understanding of their relationship experience.

**Emotional Abuse**
Consistent with the literature on female same sex IPA, emotional abuse was the most frequent form of abuse reported by participants, and was reported by the nine women in the sample. As previously demonstrated in Table 2, the experience of emotional abuse varied greatly across the sample, but the three main sub-groups identified were verbal abuse, jealousy and possessiveness and isolation. Verbal abuse was reported to include constant name calling, negative comments about their appearance, threats to harm and to kill, constant undermining of physical appearance, capability as a mother and value as a partner, and being put down and humiliated in front of friends.

Four participants spoke about their partners jealous and possessive behaviour which included being isolated from friends and being accused of having an affair, mostly with a friend. Table 10 demonstrates the main types of jealous and possessive behaviour experienced by participants.

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Table X: Jealous and possessive behaviours experienced by participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jealousy &amp; possessiveness</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isolated from friends</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accused of being unfaithful</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitoring mobile phone</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controlling mobility</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monitoring participant</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jealous of relationship with child</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jealous of out status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Women spoke of their partner’s jealousy of their out status, and jealousy around their relationship with their children. Women also reported having their whereabouts monitored and their mobile phones regularly checked. The overall aim of the jealous and possessive behaviours exhibited by abusive partners was to isolate the participants from friends and family support networks. As is well established in the literature, isolation is another key form of emotional abuse.\(^9\) Isolation has been shown to be a significant tactic used by a female abuser to gain and maintain control in a relationship.\(^70\) Table 11 provides an overview of this type of abusive behaviour.

Table XI: Isolation tactics used by abusive partner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Isolation</th>
<th>P1</th>
<th>P2</th>
<th>P3</th>
<th>P4</th>
<th>P5</th>
<th>P6</th>
<th>P7</th>
<th>P8</th>
<th>P9</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>claiming victimisation</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isolated from friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>isolated from LGBT community</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>controlling mobility</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>claiming infidelity by participant</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants described how they were isolated from friends and family, made to choose their partner over friends and family, forced to conceal their sexual identity, and forced to disconnect from the LGBT community. Five women spoke of their partners claiming victimisation following the relationship ending. This tactic ensured that the women remained silent on their abusive experiences and in some cases, they removed themselves from the LGBT community for fear of being

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\(^70\) Renzetti, Violent Betrayal.
labelled an abuser. Female abusers claiming victimisation is consistent with a recent UK study.\textsuperscript{71}

\textit{Previous abuse history}

Previous abuse history in the family of origin has proved to be a major risk factor for experiencing IPA in adult life.\textsuperscript{72} Like heterosexual women, studies have found that lesbians with a previous abuse history are at risk of experiencing IPA in their adult lives.\textsuperscript{73} Aoife had experienced multiple forms of abuse in her family home as a young child and as an adult, including physical abuse and rape. Caomhie gave an account of being sexually abused by a male friend of the family as a young adult. During interview, both participants disclosed details of their female partners re-enacting aspects of their previous abuse experience, both verbally and physically. The current study corroborates previous research findings that indicate similar tactics are employed by female perpetrators in same sex relationships.\textsuperscript{74} Participants who had a previous abuse history differed from those in the sample who did not, in terms of how they understood and made sense of the abusive relationship. For example, Aoife described feeling that she deserved the abusive behaviour, “I actually thought I deserved that behaviour”. Whereas, Niamh who never experienced any form of violence prior to her abusive relationship exclaimed,

\begin{quote}
I had strong core all the time... What’s going on here is not ok, that I don’t deserve this, you know that I deserve better, I deserve better”.
\end{quote}

Interestingly, more than half of the women reported their abusive partners had come from a household where there was violence, and they also had knowledge of their partners having an abusive history with both male and female previous partners. This finding is in accord with previous research indicating a lesbian abused by a member of her

\begin{flushright}
\end{flushright}
family or who had witnessed family violence as a child was
significantly more likely to be a victim or a batterer in an intimate adult
relationship. However, the significance of intergenerational violence
as a predictor of becoming a victim or a batterer in adult life is debated
within the literature.

Conclusion
Overall, the present study demonstrates that participants experienced
multiple forms of abuse in their relationships with female partners.
Like the types of abuse found in heterosexual relationships,
participants experienced emotional, physical, sexual, financial, and
post-separation abuse. There was also evidence of abuse specific to the
LGBT population, such as identity abuse (control over appearance,
being forced to conceal your sexual identity, and being outed against
your wishes).

One of the successes of feminism over the past forty years has
been to acknowledge, name and identify violence and abuse against
women by a male partner. An unintended consequence of this activism
and research, has embedded intimate partner abuse firmly within a
heterosexual framework. This dominant approach to understanding
IPA impacts upon those in same sex relationships in terms of
recognising their experience as IPA, and thus, reporting to a formal
authority for assistance. Furthermore, heteronormative assumptions by
professionals create additional barriers for non-heterosexual women
with respect to their ability to one, disclose details of an abusive
relationship, and two, the potential to report an assault.

The same tenacity and energies previously applied to
understanding male violence against women must also be applied to
understanding both the experience of IPA for non-heterosexual women,
and the motivations of the female abuser. The diverse forms of abuse
experienced by the participants suggest the need to develop and
implement training and awareness programmes that take into
consideration the specific dynamics of abuse in lesbian relationships,

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75 Le et al., ‘Lesbians in Currently Aggressive Relationships’.
76 V E Coleman, ‘Violence between Lesbian Couples: A between Groups Comparison’
and in LGBT relationships, in general. Training and awareness is needed amongst professionals and practitioners working in specialist domestic and sexual violence services, counsellors, and therapists. court mandated programmes for domestic violence offenders, and an Garda Síochána.\footnote{An Garda Síochána, more commonly referred to as the Gardai, is the police force of Ireland.} A development of services in this direction, would create a pathway to developing a framework so that we can begin to understand and explain this phenomenon and further, enable the provision of an appropriate service response for those in need.

Acknowledgements
This research is part of a larger PhD study that examines female same sex IPA. The work is supported with a research scholarship from the Irish Research Council (Grant code GOIPG/2016/85). Sincere thanks to Dr Stephanie Holt for her input and feedback, and to the Department of Social Work & Social Policy who funded the initial three years of the research. The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Abbreviations
Accident and emergency: A&E
General practitioner: GP
Intimate partner abuse: IPA
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender: LGBT
Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer: LGBTQ
Rape Crisis Centre: RCC

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