



# Queering Family Violence: Introduction to Queer Family Violence Studies

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It is commonplace for an introduction to any family violence research article to start by quoting statistics and highlighting the prevalence of abuse in the family in various contexts. However, this is not as possible with violence against queer family members: the numbers are barely there for any country, yet alone the world. There are several reasons for such a difference. First, up until very recently, there has been simply no reliable statistics on the incidents of abuse of family members who identify other than heterosexual. In other words, sexual identity in family violence cases would not be (and has not been) a characteristic of official data collection in any country. Second, while there is more and more awareness about hate crime against LGBTQI+ people, this type of violence is often viewed as a separate from family violence issue. Third, the differential treatment of LGBTQI+ people is connected to the still prevailing unintelligibility of the notion of the family as automatically inclusive of queer people in various roles. There is a lack of both theoretical and practical comprehension, that each and every person behind an abbreviation is someone's child, sibling, partner, and kin and, therefore, is in danger of family abuse as much as any heterosexual person. This special issue deals with all these problems.

*Queering Family Violence* is inspired by the project funded by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NOSHS). It has brought together the studies of violence against LGBTQI+ people within the family and explored various ways to improve the well-being of victims in different cultural and political contexts. In this special issue, our focus is on those families where queerness is part of the picture:

whether it is a same-sex family, a family with queer children, or a heterosexual family where one of the parents comes out as gay, lesbian, trans, bi, and/or queer. Authors of the issue also consider dating violence as a specific challenge faced by LGBTQI+ people forming intimate relationships in a heteronormative world. By using such an inclusive broad perspective, we intended to add a new reflection to the studies of violence while bringing in the queer aspect of people's relationships.

During three *Queering Family Violence* workshops conducted in 2020–2023, seventeen articles reporting new and unique research into queer family violence developed into this special issue. In this Introduction, we outline the main theoretical and methodological breakthroughs that we have achieved during the project discussions and offer further perspectives on inclusive queer and family violence studies. First, we explore how research in family violence has been exclusive of queer experiences and what difference it makes when such experiences are part of family violence analyses. Then we examine how the inclusion of queer narratives of family violence provides a better understanding of the nature of violence perpetrated in the family and prevention strategies for the improvement of social well-being. In the final part of our introductory article, we outline the main challenges in queering family violence research and explore some strategies to deal with them.

## Queering Family Violence: Including Queerness in Family Violence Narratives

Family is the first institution to which human beings are born in and belong to. Concerns over the family as a safe space providing the best conditions for nurturing, raising children and the well-being of family members have been henceforth studied for a very long time (Muravyeva et al., 2020). Such concerns grounded the state's interventions in family affairs subjecting it to policing and legal regulation

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(Becker & Murphy, 1988; Stephens, 2023; Butterby & Donovan, 2023). This uncovered a tension between the family as an autonomous institution and the state as an outside intruder.

But what is the family? Basic and complex definitions of the family have changed over centuries. The most general definition reads “two or more people who are committed to each other and who share intimacy, resources, decision-making responsibilities, and values” (Olson et al., 2000, p. 5–6). This definition is inclusive and allows for diversity in the family structure, family values, and cultures (Asay et al., 2013). This inclusive definition, however, raises several questions. Families are essentially about solidarities, which are created through intimate relationships, legal ties (such as marriage), and blood ties such as those of parent and child. Queer research, however, has pointed out numerous times that not only understanding of the family might differ in the queer communities, but the principles of safety and solidarity often do not apply to queer members of heteronormative families. Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore in her book *Dangerous Families* puts it this way,

As survivors, we face families who magnify the horrors of the outside world instead of protecting us – dangerous families who betray and scar us instead of nurturing our trust and safety (Sycamore, 2011, p. 2).

In a nutshell, Sycamore pinpoints the main issue researchers and practitioners face: an idyllic family falls apart as internal solidarity, as well as promises of trust and safety, are abused by violence against family members. This is particularly accentuated for queer survivors who end up in the middle of violence due to their queerness rather than anything else (Lu, 2023; Robles et al., 2023).

The conceptualization of family violence in contemporary scholarship builds on three main areas of study: child abuse, intimate partner violence (IPV), and elder abuse. The initial conceptualizations were developed in the studies of battered children in the 1960s and then battered women a decade later (Asay et al., 2013). In the 1970s, feminists began drawing widespread attention to the issue of domestic violence (DV) and the plight of battered women. These early studies posited that domestic abuse (DA) stemmed from gender inequality within patriarchal structures (Walker, 1977). The research argued that individual men, within a societal framework that condoned and even promoted violence, used it as a means to assert dominance over their wives and female partners (Pleck, 1988). Feminist studies consistently highlighted two key traits of batterers: their gender (male) and adherence to traditional gender role stereotypes. By challenging the distinction between public and private spheres, women’s movements brought what was previously seen as a private family issue into public discourse. Awareness campaigns emerged alongside efforts to secure funding, train healthcare and law

enforcement professionals, and enact new legislation aimed at safeguarding victims and holding perpetrators accountable (Hoefl, 2016; Donovan et al., 2023; Lusby et al., 2023).

In the 1990s, the feminist approach to battering was fiercely challenged by a perspective on DV that focused on individual personalities and pathologies, not gender, as the primary factor in violent relationships. This perspective found some of its basis in an early broad-based survey of families, the Conflict Tactics Scale (Gelles & Straus, 1988), which discovered that violence was used as often by women as it was by men and suggested that most violence between intimates was “mutual.” Critics of feminist approaches were also quick to suggest that lesbian partner violence undermined the idea that women were always victims and that feminists were compelled to respond to women’s use of violence (Lamb, 1999). Thorough critiques of the Conflict Tactics Scale (DeKeseredy, 2000; Stark, 2007) say, among other things, that the scale does not account for the context of the violence and whether it was used in self-defense, that it measures only discreet incidents, and that it does not ask about the level of severity. These convincing critiques do not, however, erase the reality that not all perpetrators are men and not all victims are women, a point that is necessarily highlighted when LGBTQI+ IPV is included in the discussion.

Starting from the early 2000s, there has been a widespread critique of the heteronormative nature of research into family violence (Ristock, 2002). As an alternative to heteronormative approaches understood as a focus on heterosexual family violence, scholars have brought forward research on queer families, mainly in the form of same sex IPV studies (Workman & Dune, 2019). However, although it created a much needed and important new focus, it also delineated a separate field of study. The research tends to follow three main areas (child abuse, IPV, and elder abuse, mentioned above) adopted for queer families without interconnecting them into a whole picture of how queer people experience violence across the life-span when they could face violence as children in a heterosexual family, as an intimate partner in a chosen (queer) family, and as an older adult in an institutionalized setting or both in a heterosexual and/or queer family. In other words, there is a strong potential in the field of family violence studies to connect and unite along two currently separated themes: the sexuality of family members and the entirety of subjects’ lifespan. Such holistic inclusion of these two interconnected themes has not yet occurred in the field, however.

One solution to this issue is to queer family violence. Emerging out of identity politics and LGBTQI+ emancipatory movements, queer theory deconstructs the notion of core sexual identities which structure one’s expression of sexuality and gender. Queer theorists such as Judith Butler (1990, 1993, 2004) argue that both sex and gender are power

mechanisms enacted to maintain heterosexual hegemony. Such analyses disrupt the earlier feminist claim that gender is a social construction imposed upon a biological given sex. In queer theory, the binary male and female is not a foundation for the expression of this “natural” division in gender. Rather, it is the gender that helps to establish a sedimented construction to uphold heteronormativity.

Ever since the conception of post-structuralist critical approaches to the analysis of sexualities united under the umbrella of queer theory, they have been subject to much debate. One way queer analyses are understood is as an expansion of the range of subjects under study by including broader definitions of these subjects. In other words, queer notion allows scholars to incorporate an almost infinite number of sexualized and gendered identities as legitimate subjects of analysis, as well as to recognize that boundaries between these identities are changeable, blurred, and generally questionable (Lahti, 2023; Riggs et al., 2023). Another way queer theory is conceived, though, can be referred to as the process of critical queering, which is a set of methodological orientations that can be used regardless of the nature of the subjects under inquiry. In this interpretation, queering works differently from the first analytic approach described above, which focuses on expansion, inclusion, and broadening. Nonetheless, as this special issue shows, these interpretations of queer theory, one that expands inquiries and one that focuses on inquiries using a queer orientation, are not mutually exclusive.

As we apply “queering” to the studies of family violence, the tension between two methodological strategies in queer research emerges. The first strategy—we call it expansive queering—aims at exploring uncharted territories by proliferating topics, subjects, and disciplines which queer theory covers. The second strategy—critical queering—deepens and strengthens the analysis of power relations that permeate our societies and reinforce existent inequalities and exploitation. Ultimately, this introduction interrogates the conceptual usefulness of the term “queer” in the studies of domestic and family violence, IPV, and dating violence.

Expansive queering originated as a logical attempt at the inclusion of “queer” into any field of inquiry. One of the main points of queer research has always been a radical departure from essentialist interpretations of sexualized and gendered identities by demonstrating their historical, social, and political situatedness and specificity (Halperin, 2012; Plummer, 2002; Seidman, 2013). Understood as an argument for the social construction of sexualities, this branch of queer research builds on anti-essentialist critique to question assumptions about social positions and implied practices of LGBTQI+ people. Similarly, rejecting essentialism in the studies of family violence allows us to question women’s position as always victims of violence, as well as the one-way direction of such violence along the gender lines among

heterosexual couples. In this vein, anti-essentialism in queer research makes it possible to view sexualized and gendered subjects as variously positioned with respect to violence: not only as victims but also as perpetrators of violence, allowing their inclusion into research or to question the dichotomy of victimhood/perpetration in general.

Violence in the family is a multidisciplinary field that benefits especially well from conceptualizing queerness as an umbrella term for a variety of ever-thriving sexualized and gendered identities. From the point of view of law and criminology, two of the main disciplines responsible for in-depth analysis of root causes and dynamics of violence in the family, as well as prevention and intervention strategies, queering would allow to include “the Queer community, which is to say the LGBTQ (lesbians, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer) population” (Buist & Lenning, 2016, p. 1). Even though this move may appear as merely an addition of new subjects, it also makes an important difference in the legal discourse. Historically, heterosexual subjects have been assumed to be natural within the law. Henceforth, the very fact of inclusion of queerness questions this status quo and denaturalizes the heteronormativity of the legal discourse (Fabris et al., 2022, p. 271). Certainly, this move may look very different in various historical and social contexts by appearing radical in some places and trivial in others, especially considering the arguments of intersectionality theory (Kondakov & Shtorn, 2021; Robinson, 2024; Soldatic et al., 2023).

In queer IPV scholarship of this kind, queer theory straightforwardly resolves the problem of exclusion of “queers” from studies of family violence which has historically been focused on heterosexual families (Bermea et al., 2019; Øverlien, 2023). Many studies of various forms of family violence that aim at inclusivity follow expansive queering by conceptualizing which groups of people they regard as queer: from gay and lesbian couples to bisexual partners, trans\* people, indigenous nonbinary subjects, and so on broadening both the definition of queerness and their studies’ subject matter (Ovesen, 2023; Ristock, 2011; Shtorn, 2023). In other words, it is an expansion of previously heterosexual discipline to queer territories which, as in the example of counselling of IPV victims and offenders (Hancock et al., 2014), is devised as potentially helpful to the LGBTQI+ people by the very fact of paying attention to their experiences (Hrynyk et al., 2023). The usefulness of queer approaches has been long anticipated (Wiegman & Wilson, 2015) directly opposing its more critical branch – critical queering.

However, expansive queering does not just provide a simple inclusion of LGBTQI+ subjects in the field under inquiry, but by doing so it destabilizes sexual categories and suggests that boundaries of sexual identities are blurred and unknown. It highlights that fluid sexualized or gendered

subjects may still experience violence, which risks remaining unrecognized or unregistered. For example, expansive queering is particularly useful to study girls who do not identify as lesbian or bisexual but have sex with more than one gender and thus may be more vulnerable to DV relative to girls who do identify as lesbian or bisexual, especially in foster care homes (Bermea et al., 2018) and other similar sexual or gender-fluid categories of people. Arguably, queer theory is uniquely construed as an intellectual endeavor to pursue issues of the fluidity of gender and sexuality, changing and ambiguous social positions vis-à-vis systems of gender and sexual oppression (Lahti, 2023; Ovesen, 2023; Stephens, 2023). Research involving transgender individuals may especially benefit from such queer approach because it acknowledges the possibility of gender expression beyond the binary, as well as distinctive forms of violence that this could entail (Panter & Dwyer, 2023; Shtorn, 2023; Yerke & DeFeo, 2016).

This expansive queering, however, can be sometimes understood as being at odds with queer theory as a critical enterprise. It is clear that any definition produces not only the inclusion of what is defined but also the exclusion of someone falling outside that definition (Seidman, 1994). It has always been the role of queering to avoid strictures of narrowly defined identities precisely because of the work of exclusion which any definition does:

Queer world-making is the opening and creation of spaces without a map, the invention and proliferation of ideas without an unchanging and predetermined goal, and the expansion of individual freedom and collective possibilities without the constraints of suffocating identities and restrictive membership (Yep, 2003, p. 35).

Indeed, as Lee Edelman argued in one of queer theory's major works, "queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one" (2004, p. 17). Hence, what we witness is a tension between this theoretical rejection of identity categories and the expansive tendency of some queer approaches to create new identities through narrowing down definitions of sexualities and genders.

Identity categories are crucial for the studies of family violence, however. Not only are they important for the law to devise a suitable protection, but for the counselling and social work professionals to be able to provide intervention and support for the survivors. The effect of the multiplication of identity categories taken as a critical tool helps to question established identities – such as "a lesbian woman" or "a gay man" – and through this questioning creates the conditions to define newer identity categories by specifying a variety of differences between sexual practices within more conventional groupings, as well as by association. As a result, the space of marginalization

and more generally of non-heterosexuality is filled in with many subjects claiming representation in law, social inclusion, difference, political projects of the future, etc. (Floyd, 2009).

Queering here is used to disrupt and decenter. As Nikki Sullivan (2003) pointed out using "queering is an activity that intends 'to frustrate, to counteract, to delegitimize'" (p. iv), so what appears natural or normal is in fact not so; what appears eternal is temporary; what appears stable is fluid (Browne & Nash, 2010). Looking at family violence as the subject in question, it means that what is considered normal is beneficial for the status quo but is violent to anyone who is not included in the definition of the norm. For example, heteronormativity – the norm that sustains the natural status of heterosexuality – defines bodies which do not conform to it (LGBTQI+ subjects) as potential targets of discrimination, hate crime, and exclusion (Duggan, 2003; Kondakov, 2022; Warner, 1993). Heteronormativity rests on the assumption of the gender binary that there are mutually exclusive categories of men and women who are necessarily sexually attracted to each other by nature and thus form a natural family. In order to define and reproduce this idea, gender-nonconforming and non-heterosexual individuals must be understood as unnatural, deviant, and abnormal and by extension not able to form a family. The recognition of such deviancy sustains and defines the norm (Seidman, 1994). Critical queering here interrupts the reproduction of heteronormativity by suggesting that men and women are not mutually exclusive categories; that non-heterosexual identities are valuable and worthy beyond sustaining the normalcy of heterosexuality; that heterosexuality is itself ambiguous; and that families can be formed in multiple ways.

In other words, there is a power configuration that justifies violence. Its primary aim is to legitimize an unquestionable status of sexualized and gendered categories arranged in a hierarchical order. The family is at the very center of sustaining and reproducing such hierarchies which legitimize violence perpetrated against queer family members. Queering the family interrupts the smooth reproduction of the status quo and, as such, produces change. Thus, another element of critical queering is its orientation towards a different better future (Butler, 1990; Halberstam, 2005; Muñoz, 2009). It is reasonable to suggest that once a system which ensures victimization of the marginalized and the excluded is exposed, its functioning is troubled to the point of potentially being totally dismantled. Moreover, Michel Foucault whose works influenced queer theory, suggested that power only functions until it remains unseen (Foucault, 1978, p. 86). Therefore, exposing the workings of power also undermines them. In queer utopian thinking, a better world can be built on the remnants of the previous vicious one where the marginalized are not subjected to unreasonable violence anymore (Copson & Boukli, 2020).

Until this moment and despite apparent antagonism, there is actually very little difference between expansive queering and critical queering's arguments. It can be said that expansive queering as a critical method uses various queer identities to disrupt new domains of the reproduction of power in the family only to find out where injustice happens and to suggest a better future by taking power relations outside of violence. If anything, the expansive queer approach is more specific as opposed to more abstract critical queering. Applying both approaches to queer family violence, including its criminology, intervention, prevention, and advocacy, scholars and practitioners alike highlight the potential of fundamentally changing the system towards more equity. As Shelton put it:

to queer something is to interrogate its underlying assumptions and create space for the expression of sexual difference. Queering domestic violence advocacy, then, involves deconstructing existing assumptions and practices among advocates, recognizing places where normative beliefs about gender and sexuality limit the effectiveness of advocacy efforts across difference, and making room for bodies that have been previously marginalized, regulated, or erased (Shelton, 2018, pp. 1277–1278).

This special issue is tasked with cultivating such a space, while the issue also builds from and extends the many notable past efforts toward queering family violence thus far.

### **Family Violence and LGBTQI+ People: Between Heteronormative Concepts and Queer Experiences**

Once queering is applied to family violence, it shifts the focus from the binary to the plurality of power relations and different approaches to examining violence, not just as an exercise of power but also as an instrument of the powerless. For example, it takes the centrality of family form away from heterosexual coupledness by suggesting other forms of intimate relationships where violence is a real danger (Gümüş, 2023; Katsuba, 2023; Riggs et al., 2023). While feminist approaches to IPV do not argue that gender in and of itself causes or exacerbates violence but rather that the social construction of gender in a system of patriarchy supports men's violence against women (Hoeft, 2016), it often reads as if it is a male privilege to perpetrate violence. Thus, early research in battered men, including gay men, relied on psychiatric explanations of abuse, and focused on individual pathology in the batterer and certain traits in the victim (Island & Letellier, 1991). Later research has not supported this idea (Donovan & Hester, 2014). In the same way,

violence in lesbian relationships was framed as abnormal and often became overlooked (Miller et al., 2001).

Following the feminist approach, IPV can then be understood as a result of internalized patriarchy that plays itself out regardless of the sexual identity of the partners. Many people assume that lesbian and gay couples mimic traditional gender roles, with one in the couple playing the "man" and the other playing the "woman," but while this may seem apparent on the surface of some lesbian and gay relationships, it is not the norm (Hoeft, 2016; Kondakov, 2023). Such an approach despite its feminist critical potential becomes harmful not only to LGBTQI+ individuals but to women as well. Working from a paradigm that equates being a victim with being female, social workers, therapists, law enforcement agencies, and shelter workers may fail to identify victims by looking only for traditionally feminine characteristics, such as passivity, emotionality, caretaking behavior, dependency, and in perpetrators for traditionally masculine characteristics, such as independence, rationality, and aggressiveness. In such cases, service providers and others try to force lesbian and gay couples into a heteronormative structure by categorizing individuals by their masculine or feminine traits (Little, 2020; Butterby & Donovan, 2023).

Lesbian women and gay men often do not see themselves in the picture of DV that has been created by society and public discourses (Andreevskikh, 2023). They struggle to name what they experience as "abuse" (Davis & Glass, 2011; Øverlien, 2023). Lesbians may also resist that label out of loyalty to feminist movements (Sanger & Lynch, 2018). Gay men may have a hard time seeing themselves as victims if they identify with dominant male social positions (Øverlien, 2023). If a person does not identify as being victimized and does not describe their experience of violence as abuse, then service providers and others will not respond with the resources and knowledge developed to protect victims and stop abuse.

This rift between feminist theorizations of violence and queer approaches highlights the problematic nature of an assumption that power imbalance and gender inequality necessarily lead to violence. Violence is one means of exerting power over another, but it is not the only way in which power is expressed. The focus on physical violence, at the expense of other tactics of coercion and control, poses several difficulties in understanding and addressing family violence, especially in queer cases. While plenty of physical violence is happening in queer families and in relation to queer family members, other forms of violence such as emotional abuse and economic abuse might persist (Gümüş, 2023; Riggs et al., 2023). Violence is also enacted in relationships in multiple ways and not necessarily indicate a pattern of abuse. The understanding of power becomes problematic if it is interpreted as a process necessarily leading to violence. One's capacity for influencing a situation or person

is a function of multiple factors, perhaps gender, sexual orientation, race, or economic position, but also information and expertise that coalesce at any particular moment (Lahti, 2023). Power also does not necessarily lead to coercion and coercive control, an essential component of abuse (Cannon et al., 2015).

In this special issue, authors address the plural nature of power, control, violence, and abuse using various frameworks and approaches mainly focused on intersectionality and critical queer theory. The issue has five sections, each of which explores a different set of elements and modes of queering violence in the family and intimate relationships. The articles offer groundbreaking research in different contexts and aspects of queer family violence: the special issue covers a vast geography, as well as a broad scope of topics – IPV, youth same-sex couple violence, interconnections of race and violence, dating violence, and so on.

### Section 1. Intersections and Assemblages in Queer Family Violence

Four authors in this section conceptualize violence in queer relationships using intersectional and assemblage theories to highlight the violent entanglements of the multiple elements (bodies, actions, things, affects, discourses, and ideas) that come together in such relationships (Lahti, 2023). For many people, DV is just one form of violence that they have experienced. When we consider contexts of racism including the colonization of indigenous peoples, we can see how LGBTQI+ people of color experience the combined effects of discrimination, oppression, and social control that affect their relationships. As Lola Butler (1999) writes,

to experience the difficulties associated with developing and maintaining a relationship compounded by an environment that devalues you because of your multiple ascribed statuses is a double burden that over time injures your psyche. Over time an injured psyche may seek to injure others. Such is the situation with African American lesbians experiencing partner abuse (p. 203).

Butler is not offering excuses for same-sex partner violence. Rather she is pointing to the way people's lives are shaped differently by the effects of racism, sexism, classism, and homophobia. There is a need to consider the impact of differing contexts while still holding people accountable for engaging in abusive behavior.

As Robinson (2024) points out it is not that most scholars in the field of queer IPV studies are intentionally hostile to engaging race and racism. The problem appears to stem primarily from cultural and unconscious biases. He further introduces five factors accounting for such a situation. First, scholars may assume that people partner with someone of

the same race, thus race does not matter in the relationship. Second, scholars hold a “colorblind” perspective of their subject. A third and related factor is that many research teams include no person of color. Fourth, to the extent that scholars of queer IPV think of interracial couples, they may have a romanticized view of such relationships. That is, they may assume that white people who partner with a person of color are not racist or are antiracist. As Robinson is focused on examination of emotional abuse through the prism of race and racism, the final factor he outlines is the vagueness of the concept of “emotional abuse” to the point that the mainstream literature on queer IPV often imagines intimate queer relationships and violence within those relationships as if they have nothing to do with race and racism.

At the same time, racism does not work in the same way in different contexts. As Soldatic et al. in their article on indigenous queer people's experiences of family violence in Australia (2023) insist that while a common experience of their study subjects was that of racism in the form of micro-aggressions, discrimination and explicit verbal and physical abuse within non-Indigenous LGBTQI+ communities, their violent behavior within families and communities cannot be separated from broader structural violence caused by intergenerational trauma arising from punitive historic and contemporary colonial-settler policies and processes. However, calls for intersectional approaches often end in applying an additive model where abuse against LGBTQI+ people is simply added to the current understanding of DV; alternatively, it is considered an approach that falsely compartmentalizes experiences of abuse into separate special cases while keeping white heterosexual women's experiences as the norm at the forefront. Authors in this special issue challenge both usages of intersectionality to move beyond addressing family violence and other types of intimate violence within binary frameworks of good and bad, victim and perpetrator. These binaries are highly racialized and unhelpful not only when understanding the dynamics of violence but also in assessing prevention and intervention strategies.

De-binarization works very well with the assemblage approaches to bodies, actions, things, affects, discourses, and ideas in IPV. Lahti (2023) uses the assemblage approach to challenge the dualistic thinking that often separates interpersonal and sociocultural explanations of violence. Her analysis shows that the interpersonal and sociocultural aspects of abuse are inextricably intertwined and jointly contribute to vulnerabilities and patterns of violence in abusive assemblages. Many of the participants in her research on LGBTQI+ experiences in Finland and England had been subjected to some form of (gender-related) violence in previous relationships or in their childhood families. Encounters with injurious conditions such as violence limit and constrain bodily capacities as obvious from interview data can make a person vulnerable to violence in future relationships.

Moreover, IPV in trans people's relationships may be amplified by the digital violence and hate speech they encounter online, which is fueled by the current transphobic public discussion, which then in turn amplifies and prolongs the effects of intimate partner violence.

Intersectionalities may very well go beyond human bodies in family violence as Riggs et al. in their article on the role of animals in buffering against cisgenderism (2023) highlight. Focusing on more subtle forms of violence in the context of trans young people who live in a diversity of family forms, Riggs et al. expose microaggressions and marginalization which are typically shaped by cisgenderism – the ideology that delegitimizes people's own understandings of their bodies. Analyzing the buffers within the family that serve to mitigate or at least counteract marginalization and/or violence both within and from outside of the family, they explore the role of animals as such buffers. Animals are often perceived by their human companions as offering non-judgmental care, but to trans people, it has been suggested that animals are perceived as offering unique benefits. These include buffering against microaggressions, engendering personal hardiness, helping with the development of coping strategies, and serving as a reminder that there is more to life than the beliefs and actions of other humans. Therefore, harming animal companions constitute a very particular form of violence for a queer, especially a trans person. At the same time, animals provided much-needed counter to human biases allowing to mitigate trauma even in contexts that might be considered supportive.

## Section 2. Family Histories – Narratives of Family Violence

Family stands at the intersection of various social statuses (race, class, gender, sexual orientation), different forms of perpetrated violence (physical, sexual, economic, and emotional) and various types of relational violence (IPV, violence against children, violence against parents and violence against other siblings). Moreover, understanding family in a heterosexual context and LGBTQI+ context differ due to the long-term rejection of queer people by their natural families. There is an inherent assumption that the institution of family is required for the maintenance of social order and that the family is the original site of supportive social reproduction. However, family is also a place of policing that often turns oppressive and violent. In their article on gender-policing of trans, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary people in U.S. families, Stephens (2023) introduces the concept of “ghost policing.” This means that although the police are not present, their presence is felt in the ways that familial dynamics seek to control and regulate “normative” gender enforcement. Following this argument, Stephens challenges the “bad parents narrative,” which often constructs virtually

all parents who do not show particular kinds of affirming and accepting attitudes toward their trans, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary children as bad parents.

Stephens' idea of the family as a “ghost policing” site which is rooted in policing clothes/appearance, gestures/mannerisms, and femininity to regulate “normative” gender enforcement allows a more complex understanding of structural racism and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Being an LGBTQI+ youth amplifies other stresses and adds to traumatic experiences in adulthood. Robles et al. (2023) explore how ACEs influence the perpetration of IPV in adult sexual minority Latino men. The authors focus on how ACEs create resilience and buffer factors in adult victimization offering another approach to mitigating trauma, similarly and in addition to Riggs et al. (2023). Based on the sample of 95 Latino same-sex male couples who completed a survey in 2018 and 2019, the authors examine relationship functioning as a source of resilience, buffering against the developmental correspondence of ACEs and IPV victimization in adult relationships among predominately Latino sexual minority men. Their findings suggest that this resilience is interpersonal, which implies that partners in relationships with higher levels of relationship functioning may be more inclined to consider the consequences of their actions. In other words, Robles et al. did not find any significant connections between ACEs and various forms of IPV; they only observed statistically significant connections between partner ACEs and the number of IPV forms when the other partner reported no ACEs. Hence, in building a path to family resilience people who have experienced ACEs may be more likely to have successful, non-violent relationships if they acquire skills to engage partners in ways that enhance relationship functioning.

ACEs, however, have an immediate impact on relationships among young adults as Øverlien (2023) shows in her article on youth IPV. While Scandinavian countries, including Norway where the research is situated, are considered gay-friendly as in regard to laws and policies, as well as attitudes towards LGBTQI+ people, queer children and young adults continue to experience high levels of bullying, microaggressions, and homophobic abuse in schools, community places and in families. Øverlien looks at what barriers and enablers have a bearing on the process of help-seeking for such youth. She applies a narrative analysis to the story of Philip, a 21-year-old gay man, who defines his sexual experiences with his former boyfriend as sexual IPV. The analysis identifies several barriers to understanding Philip's sexual experiences as abuse: his prior exposure to severe homophobic bullying and being forced to return to the closet because his partner had not yet come out as well as influential cultural meta-narratives regarding IPV and gender. All these barriers contribute to queer young adults not seeking help for IPV, which further leads to trauma and victimization.

One of the most interesting discussions that Øverlien focuses on is the status of the victim in relation to masculinity. She underlines that Philip (and many young men) got caught in the feminist representations of IPV that dominate intervention narratives, and which prevented him from thinking of himself as a victim. Philip does not conform to traditional female gender roles, such as being weak and “whining;” his ex-partner Jimmy, on the other hand, was not the typical offender as he was not big, strong, bad, or predatory. Uncovered factors feature in other research highlighting the barriers in accessing services and seeking help (Workman & Dune, 2019).

### Section 3. Media Stories on LGBTQI+ Violence

Media and digital platforms play a crucial role in communication, translation and representation of social norms, expectations, and attitudes. As in Philip’s story above, who learned not just stereotypes about IPV from media but also positive models, media, as an institution, can inform and dictate social scripts and expectations. Media therefore can serve as a form of social control, especially in locations where media itself is under control. As Andreevskikh notes for Russia in her article on discourses on non-heteronormative masculinities and IPV (2023) in societies generally not supportive of LGBTQI+ rights, the process of coming out and adopting this or that identity label invariably gets complicated by what scholars refer to as a double-edged sword of visibility when the visibility of a non-heteronormative person in public discourses, on the one hand, provides them with a political and social agency; on the other – makes them a target of political backlash and, potentially, a victim of crime. Media narratives and digital platforms serve as both a space for positive representation of queerness and an outlet for circulating hate. Following her analysis of five media texts containing confessional narratives of non-heteronormative male survivors of IPV and DV published in 2019 and 2020, Andreevskikh explores the discursive strategies of victimization and shows that non-heteronormative masculinities are framed in the analyzed texts as simultaneously suffering from outdated patriarchal stereotypes about masculinity but also transgressing them. The texts reveal a tendency to counterbalance narratives of victimhood with empowering messages about the narrators’ experience of survival and ability to escape abusive situations. In the context of an authoritarian regime, oppressive state and total control over media coupled with an attempt to discipline women via the normalization of DV (Muravyeva, 2014), these confessional texts serve as channels for public debate on the availability of violence as a tool of discipline in the family.

Looking at the same location, Shtorn (2023) digests the uses of DV rhetoric in a mediated criminal case involving a transgender victim in Russia – the murder of a transwoman

Anzhela Likina. She was stabbed in February 2016 by the male partner of her ex-wife Gulnara. The murderer built his defense, arguing that he tried to protect Gulnara from being hurt by Anzhela, who was a domestic abuser. In another twist, Anzhela’s mother and sister accused Gulnara of being violent towards their children. Shtorn’s analysis uncovers hidden agendas behind these accusations. He examines the dehumanizing narratives of media outlets that exhibited a complete lack of understanding of the stories, struggles, and experiences of the trans community. Anzhela’s story reveals all the complexities and potential misuse of the very idea of DV as a tool of vengeance or an argument of defense of a perpetrator that somehow makes DV a justification for further violence. Following Andreevskikh’s conclusions, Shtorn also highlights how outdated patriarchal stereotypes about masculinity and femininity provided a framework for justification of using violence as a tool of discipline, in this case, towards a transwoman who dared to be visible.

Queer people often treat digital platforms not just as sites of oppression, but as relatively safe spaces for visibility, especially in contexts where public visibility is either not possible or dangerous. Gümüş’s article on violence in LGBTQI+ relationships in Turkey (2023) examines how digital dating considered to be relatively safe by many queer people transforms into violence in the context of public non-recognition of their status. Based on 50 semi-structured interviews, the study explores various forms and types of anti-queer violence highlighting the abuse of dating apps by both vigilantes and opportunists. In the situation of public invisibility and inequality, many forms of violence go unprosecuted due to the unwillingness of the victims to expose their queer status to the authorities. Gümüş insists that in Turkey the root cause of the violence against LGBTQI+ people is the government’s unwillingness to ensure the equality of citizens before the law. Therefore, going to the police because of an assault committed by a date secured via a matchmaking app is not an option. She also stresses that coping strategies in this situation rather involve avoidance, escapism, medicalization and, in some cases, acceptance of violence. In other words, while coping strategies varied according to the interviewees, the marginalization of LGBTQI+ individuals by healthcare and law enforcement personnel resulted in their internalizing the status of the victim.

### Section 4. Barriers to Access to Services and Justice

Gümüş’s article highlights perhaps the most significant impact of a larger context of homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, and heterosexism on creating barriers to accessing support. For example, it can be very difficult for LGBTQI+ persons to tell family members, co-workers, or neighbors what is happening if they are in an abusive



relationship because of the fear that the violence will be interpreted as a common sign of “filthiness” of their sexual or gender identity. Several studies have reported on the many barriers LGBTQI+ people experience when accessing services, such as perceived or actual homophobia, transphobia, and racism (Donovan et al., 2023). These studies comment on the inability of most services to fully respond to same-sex IPV because of mainstream heterosexual approaches and assumptions (Butterby & Donovan, 2023). For example, a gay or bisexual man presenting at a hospital with physical injuries is less likely to be asked about DV than a woman in a similar situation (Donovan et al., 2023).

In Butterby and Donovan’s article (2023), they explore how police responses regarding queer IPV are underpinned by the public story of DA, and how this negatively impacts the responses provided to queer people victimized by DV. They find that the procedural response to DA results in everybody being treated in the same way, yet “the same” is not neutral because the standard has been based on cis-heterosexual women’s victimization by cis-heterosexual men. The authors recommend that police training be reformed to raise police awareness about the experiences of LGBTQI+ people: for example, about specific sensitivities of evidence gathering from their neighbors risking outing the victims or perpetrators. In addition, the study suggests that the public story of DA should be revised to include alternative versions, which certainly requires a commitment of policymakers to implement changes.

The same challenges can be found in other locations. Lusby et al. (2023) note for Australia that another significant challenge in achieving equitable policy recognition for LGBTQI+ people experiencing family violence is the limited availability of government resources to develop safe, accessible, and affirming care. Although the government claim that there is a lack of sufficient data from the LGBTQI+ communities to create relevant policies, the authors examined this argument as shaped by political and ideological imperatives. Throughout the article, they discuss how evidence is (ab)used and produced by various actors, including scholars, non-governmental organizations (NGO’s), state agencies and so on, and further challenge the public story of family violence with its focus on heteronormative narratives, which creates barriers for sufficient data production and interpretation. The authors conclude that there is enough evidence to support better investment in service inclusivity, comprising relevant infrastructure and training to support the expansion of existing family violence services so that they can then be welcoming and responsive to more of the LGBTQI+ population than they are now.

The public story of DA and family violence has a wide range of ramifications for the queer community. Donovan et al. (2023) in their article addressing queer visibility in local services demonstrate that the narrow understanding

of family abuse influences LGBTQI+ people in two ways. First, it is a barrier to seeking support if victimization takes place. Second, family violence NGOs and council service practitioners do not know how to respond to LGBTQI+ people coming to them. Consequently, Donovan et al. argue that the queer participants in their study are prevented from connecting with relevant services and thus seek help from informal sources. Moreover, such barriers are also connected with queer people not occupying an active position in civil life, that is, not being active citizens.

The barriers to help-seeking are not just institutional, they can very well be emotional. Ovesen in her article (2023) examines shame as a salient feature of queerness. Drawing on interviews with lesbian and queer survivors of IPV in Sweden, her study explores their help-seeking processes. Ovesen suggests that shame is related to LGBTQI+ people’s experiences in many ways: apart from negative interpretations, it can be conceptualized “as a fruitful political and theoretical tool to understand violence, alienation, identification but also social transformation.” In a more negative turn, shame is interpreted by the author to isolate queer individuals and disengage them from their social networks. At the very same time, however, shame mobilizes people collectively affected by it to resist isolation and nurture solidarities. Concerning IPV, shame makes LGBTQI+ organizations turn away from victims because this experience damagingly portrays the communities. Hence, Ovesen argues for a more inclusive acknowledgement of IPV among queer people to overcome the negative effects of shamefulness.

## Section 5. Queer Family Violence in Court

LGBTQI+ inclusion within legislation discourse is problematic in many locations. Generally, the law creates inclusions and exclusions through its categorical language. While many countries recognized the human rights of the queer community and explicitly stipulated grounds for protections based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), others, on the contrary, take a firm path to put LGBTQI+ people back in the closet, so to say, lock them up and throw away the key. At the same time, the lack of official recognition and even homophobic legislation does not prevent queer people from protecting their rights. Moreover, in authoritarian regimes, official legislation provides for designated spaces to discuss LGBTQI+ issues. For Russia, Kondakov (2023) analyzes cases of family violence which have gone through the criminal justice system in a country where LGBTQI+ expressions are under severe constraint through the “gay propaganda” law and the most recent Supreme Court’s decision to label the LGBTQI+ movement as an extremist one. His analysis uncovers how criminal courts recognize queer family filiations to resolve cases of IPV within same-sex households.

Based on cases of queer family violence adjudicated in the Russian courts, Kondakov explores what this kind of recognition means for the queer community and wider society. The author highlights that in these cases, the legal discourse indeed embraces queer families by granting them symbolic conditional recognition to run the criminal justice process.

A very similar story emerges in the Chinese context. Lu (2023) explores patterns of DV among Chinese LGBTQI+ people and how the legal system deals with such abuse. The difference with Russia is that China has anti-domestic violence legislation, hence the legal framework for LGBTQI+ individuals to claim their identity and protection. However, cultures of silence prevent them from fully claiming their rights. Looking at 508 criminal decisions extracted from various courts in China, Lu underlines the tendency of courts to ignore LGBTQI+ elements when ruling on these cases. Even though victims' sexual orientation obviously pertains to an important facet of a case, it is rarely directly considered in sentencing. This "institutional erasure," as Lu dubs it, is alleviated by broader cultural norms in China that inform judicial decisions and the legal culture overall. These norms value secrecy around queer sexuality and posit procreation as the most important function of a family considering it a heterosexual affair.

Another example of how non-recognition of LGBTQI+ identities and status lead to the absence of any protection of recourse is dating violence, especially when dating is used by vigilante homophobic groups to perpetrate crimes. Using a Russian dataset, Katsuba (2023) looks at a particular sample of anti-queer dating crimes: arranging a date with LGBTQI+ people by an ideological homophobic group to assault them. In his opinion, dating violence, especially organized with the help of digital platforms, represents a very special form of anti-queer violence as a more developed and collective homophobic abuse. Katsuba frames such types of crime as inherent in authoritarian and oppressive regimes. While these ideological groups have been prosecuted by the formal criminal justice system, their biased motives were not acknowledged in the courtrooms.

## Conclusions: Towards Better Understanding of Family and Violence

While the literature on queer family violence has grown substantially and this special issue adds to its diversity and significance, considerable room for further research remains. One of the most problematic topics currently is not the lack of studies on violence against LGBTQI+ family members or criminological assessment of abuse perpetrated by them but, as this review across media, legislation, policy, and advocacy highlights, it is the lack of available and diverse conceptualizations of queer relationships and practices.

Studies on family violence lack the analysis of queer families, still overlooked in research; similarly, studies on IPV marginalize not just same-sex couples, but any couple with a non-heterosexual component. Heteronormativity continues to persist in research on family violence, including its different forms and types.

The authors of this special issue reveal several important gaps in queering family violence literature. First, there is no comprehensive theoretical framework which would unite critical and expansive research on family violence across genders and sexualities, as well as at the intersection of many other forms of power differentials, including class, race, and ethnicity. Second, the geography of queer family violence has been well-represented in research mostly by Western contexts, even though notable exceptions are published under this special issue's cover. This issue's authors provided research from the geographies which serve as a valuable contrast to the collective West: while in many Western countries, LGBTQI+ subjects entered the legal and policy discourses on a positive standing, other contexts suggest that silences (in the best-case scenario) prevail in the official settings informing misrecognition of the unique challenges faced by the LGBTQI+ people. Hence, third, more research needs to uncover the scope and depth of these challenges and contested terrains, as well as the possibilities of ignorance and misrecognition regardless of the inclusion of queerness into the domain of law.

The fundamental question that the original project and this special issue dealt with – what queering means in terms of family violence or, in other words, how it changes our understanding of violence – remains an issue for further exploration. Queering confronts the power (im)balance as part of the application of violence and destabilizes the norm to the point that it changes what we understand as a norm. Its transformative potential must be further amplified.

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