

Lived Experiences of Sexual Minorities in their Achievement of Leadership and Psychosocial Well-being in Organizational Settings

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Declaração de Integridade

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Dedicatória

Dedico a todas as pessoas que já tiveram suas identidades questionadas, discriminadas e apagadas.

“You may encounter many defeats, but you must not be defeated. In fact, it may be necessary to encounter the defeats, so you can know who you are, what you can rise from, how you can still come out of it.” – Maya Angelou.

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Abstract

The lack of studies on LGBTQIA+ people in leadership positions constitute an investigative gap, which seems contradictory given that 7-15% of the population identifies with part of this community. The present study aimed to describe and explore the narratives of sexual minorities in leadership positions in Brazil and Portugal, comparing the two contexts and analyzing the psychological implications and the well-being of this notably underrepresented population. To achieve that, a qualitative study was developed through an electronic interview, from which we obtained 45 participations, where it was possible to identify 11 regular themes (LGBTQIA+ negativity, Health Impacts, LGBTQIA+ Identity, Impact of LGBTQIA+ identity on leadership, Intersectionality, Organizational Climate, Professional development, Personal characteristics, Social support, Coping strategies and Inspirational leadership), LGBTQIA+ negativity emerged as the most frequently mentioned theme. Results show that people still use avoidance mechanisms or counterfeit their LGBTQIA+ identity at work, while there are people who choose to have their LGBTQIA+ identity visible and use this as a tool to break heterosexist patterns, promoting equality and respect in the organizational environment through a Queer Leadership. It was possible to analyze the practices of leaders through the lens of Queer Theory, and we were able to observe that sexual minorities in Portugal and Brazil are united not only by language, but also by similar experiences marked by discrimination and challenges, generating a major psychological impact. Despite these difficulties, these leaders tend to use their personal principles, showing characteristics of authentic leadership.

Keywords

Queer Leadership;sexual minorities;LGBTQIA+;Cross-cultural;psychological impact

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Lista de Acrónimos

CEO	Chief Executive Officer
COREQ	Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research
IBGE	Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other gender and sexual identities
NGO	Non-governmental organization

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Resumo alargado

A falta de estudos sobre pessoas LGBTQIA+ em cargos de liderança constitui uma lacuna investigativa (Shanaev et al., 2022), o que parece contraditório dado que 7-15% da população se identifica com parte desta comunidade (IPSOS, 2023). Assim, verifica-se um fenómeno de “gay glass ceiling”, que verifica que minorias sexuais usualmente estão mais representadas em funções laborais mais básicas e sub-representadas em cargos de gestão de topo (Aksoy et al., 2019). Apesar da crença de que a identidade sexual e de género seriam irrelevantes para entender os desafios de liderança, esta afirmação mostra-se infundada em um mundo onde a LGBTfobia e o heterossexismo são reais (Baker & Greene, 2007).

O presente estudo teve como objetivo descrever e explorar as narrativas de minorias sexuais em posições de liderança no Brasil e em Portugal, comparando os dois contextos e analisando as implicações psicológicas e o bem-estar desta população notavelmente sub-representada.

Para isso, foi desenvolvido um estudo qualitativo e através de uma entrevista eletrônica, da qual obteve-se 45 participações de 24 portugueses (53.3%) e 21 brasileiros (46.7%), 23 mulheres (51.1%), 21 homens (46.7%) e 1 não-binário (2.2%), destes 6 indivíduos se autoidentificaram como transgénero (13.3%) nomeadamente 1 homem e 5 mulheres. A maioria dos participantes era solteiro (31,1%), tinha mestrado ou pós-graduação (48,9%), morava em uma cidade grande (64,4%) e tinha um nível socioeconómico médio (37,8%). A maioria dos participantes declarou que estavam empregados (42,2%), ocupavam cargo de gerente (44,4%), não trabalhavam por turnos (81,8%), trabalhavam em instituições privadas (68,9%) e trabalhavam no setor terciário (77,3%), e a maioria das empresas tinha entre 11 e 250 trabalhadores (31,1%) ou mais de 501 pessoas (31,1%).

Através das transcrições diretas importadas da entrevista eletrônica, foi possível realizar análise temática para identificar através destes, padrões repetidos de significado nas seguintes etapas: familiarização com os dados, criação de códigos iniciais, procura de temas, revisão de temas, definição e nomeação de temas e produção do relatório, com o apoio do software MAXQDA (ver. 24), IBM SPSS Statistics (ver. 29) e Microsoft Excel 365.

Logo, foi possível identificar 11 temas regulares (Negatividade LGBTQIA+, Impacto na saúde, Identidade LGBTQIA+, Impacto da identidade LGBTQIA+ na liderança, Interseccionalidade, Clima Organizacional, Desenvolvimento profissional, Características Pessoais, Apoio Social, Estratégias de Coping e Liderança Inspiradora).

Acreditamos que este estudo pode encorajar outros indivíduos LGBTQIA+ a adotarem uma identidade positiva e afirmativa, uma vez que, segundo Riggie e Rostosky (2011), estas ajudam a enraizar um senso de identidade e pertencimento, atuando como um fator de proteção contra

discriminação e estigmatização em contextos heteronormativos (Salvati et al., 2023), sugerindo também a implementação de uma atitude positiva por parte das organizações em relação à comunidade LGBTQIA+, possibilitando a autoexpressão de sua identidade, visando reduzir o estigma internalizado e aumentando a autoeficácia de seus líderes (Salvati et al., 2023), o que poderia, portanto, aumentar as receitas do negócio, aumentar o bem-estar psicológico de seus trabalhadores e reduzir a desinformação sobre este tema.

Os resultados mostram que as pessoas ainda utilizam mecanismos de evitamento ou falsificação de sua identidade sexual no trabalho, ao passo que há pessoas que optam por ter sua identidade sexual visível e utilizam isso como ferramenta para quebrar padrões heterossexistas, promovendo igualdade e respeito no ambiente organizacional por meio de uma abordagem de Liderança Queer. Ainda, ambos os grupos têm oportunidades de serem Ativistas Queer em seus ambientes organizacionais, quando optam por tornar visível sua identidade LGBTQIA+, com foco na transformação de estruturas culturais historicamente opressivas e na descentralização do poder (Renn, 2007), uma vez que há maior abertura à visibilidade e respeito dentro das organizações.

Foi possível analisar as práticas dos líderes pelas lentes da Teoria Queer, e pudemos observar que as minorias sexuais em Portugal e no Brasil estão unidas não apenas pela língua, mas também por experiências semelhantes marcadas por discriminações e desafios, gerando um grande impacto psicológico. Apesar dessas dificuldades, esses líderes tendem a utilizar seus princípios pessoais, apresentando características de liderança autêntica.

Introduction

This dissertation was carried out within the scope of the Master's degree in Clinical and Health Psychology, this being a partial requirement for obtaining a master's degree, which is divided into two parts.

The first part, “Chapter 1”, involves the scientific study produced to fill an investigative gap regarding studies of sexual minorities in leadership positions, aiming to understand the psychosocial well-being of these individuals, comparing the Portuguese and Brazilian populations through a qualitative analysis.

The term “sexual minorities” includes, in this study, individuals who identify themselves as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and other Sexual Orientations and Gender Identities (LGBTQIA+), although this term usually also includes gender minorities in general (e.g. women). Despite this, people who are on other fringes of intersectionality were included, that is, gender minorities (e.g., women), ethnic-racial minorities (e.g. black people and immigrants), and age minorities (e.g., individuals older than 50 years).

The second part corresponds to the Theoretical Annexes, which involve the theoretical rationale used to support the development of the study. These annexes include a theoretical presentation of Queer Theory, Social Identity Theory, Social Categorization Theory, LGBTQIA+ Identity Theories, Minority Stress Theory, Authentic Leadership, Queer Leadership and Intersectionality. This part also includes a general discussion that involves a final reflection by the student about the study, the theoretical annexes, and the skills acquired during this academic year.

Chapter 1 - Lived Experiences of Sexual Minorities in their Achievement of Leadership and Psychosocial Well-being in Organizational Settings

This chapter is based on the following scientific activities carried out during the 2023/2024 academic year:

Della Torre, R. R. & Pereira, H. (in press). Lived Experiences of Sexual Minorities in their Achievement of Leadership and Psychosocial Well-being in Organizational Settings. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*. DOI: 10.1057/s41599-024-03504-5.

Della Torre, R. R., & Pereira, H. (2024). Experiências de liderança de minorias sexuais e bem-estar psicossocial em organizações. In H. Pereira, G. Esgalhado, M. Cruz, & P. Silva (Eds.), *3^{as} Conferências Internacionais em Psicologia Clínica e da Saúde da Universidade da Beira Interior – Saúde Mental e Saúde Global: Respostas e Compromissos da Psicologia Clínica e da Saúde - Resumos* (3^a ed., p. 35). Universidade da Beira Interior.¹

Della Torre, R. R. & Pereira, H. (2024, May 17). *Experiências de Liderança de Minorias Sexuais e Bem-Estar Psicossocial em Organizações* [Paper presentation]. 3^{as} Conferências Internacionais em Psicologia Clínica e da Saúde da Universidade da Beira Interior. <https://3ci-pcs.ubi.pt/>¹

Della Torre, R. R. & Pereira, H. (2024, May 20). *Experiências de Liderança de Minorias Sexuais e Bem-Estar Psicossocial em Organizações* [Paper presentation]. 1^o Seminário Internacional – Interdisciplinar a Visibilidade LGBTQI+. <https://lgbtqi.ubi.pt/>

Della Torre, R. R. & Pereira, H. (2024, May 20). Experiências de Liderança de Minorias Sexuais e Bem-Estar Psicossocial em Organizações. In H. Pereira (Eds.), *1^o Seminário Internacional – Interdisciplinar a Visibilidade LGBTQI+* (p. 19). Universidade da Beira Interior

This study also competed for participation in the “Espaço Jovem” at the XIII Ibero-American Congress of Psychology and the VI Congress of the Order of Portuguese Psychologists in 2024.

¹ This paper presentation received the “Honorable Mention” award from the event’s Scientific Committee.

1. Introduction

Although 7% to 15% of the population across 30 countries identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community (IPSOS, 2023), the visibility of leaders from this community is notably underrepresented (Shanaev et al., 2022), as demonstrated by the phenomenon of the “gay glass ceiling”, which shows that sexual minorities are usually more represented in basic positions and functions but are underrepresented in top management positions (Aksoy et al., 2019; Frank, 2006). Thus, despite the belief that sexual and gender identity are irrelevant to understanding leadership challenges, this statement proves to be unfounded in a world where LGBTphobia, heterosexism (Baker & Greene, 2007), and heteronormativity exist, as it reveals an ideological structure that rejects, defames, and stigmatizes any behavior, identity or community that does not follow a heteronormativity pattern (e.g., heterosexual and cisgender persons) (Herek, 1990), forcing LGBTQIA+ people to navigate through these circumstances in their socioprofessional trajectories.

Social identity theory and the categorization process postulate concepts necessary to understand individual and group processes in various contexts, such as work and how people distinguish themselves from another group, based on various demographic categories; therefore, sexual minorities are seen as the “outgroup” since they generally violate dominant heteronormative standards. Despite this, they can generate efforts for their social categorizations to improve their self-concept and that of the members of their group (Herek, 1990; Melton & Cunningham, 2014), for example, through reaching top career and leadership positions. Thus, the importance of studying leadership processes in LGBTQIA+ people arises since leadership identity comes from our personal narratives that allow the definition of leadership styles (George et al., 2007), as well as the interaction between personality, career, LGBTQIA+ identity (Boatwright et al., 1996), and gender identity.

In contrast to general stress, which anyone can face, minority stress involves stressful situations based on prejudice and stigma against, for example, sexual minorities such as LGBTQIA+ people (Frost & Meyer, 2023). Given that LGBTQIA+ people are exposed to excessive stress because they are targets of stigmatization by the dominant heterosexist culture, which tends not to represent these people, they often witness external and objective stressful situations (chronic and acute), shaped by expectations of stressful events, states of vigilance, internalization of negative social attitudes (Meyer, 2003), economic difficulties, discrimination, turbulent interpersonal relationships (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001) and fewer occupational opportunities (Smith et al., 2020), which can lead to negative physical and/or psychosocial impacts, impoverishing quality of life in general and quality of life at work in particular (Mendes & Pereira, 2021), activating mechanisms of survival and even leading these people to change their behaviors to fit into heteronormative principles (Melton & Cunningham, 2014).

Therefore, many individuals choose not to reveal their sexual orientation and/or gender identity, aiming to reduce stressful events and negative consequences (Meyer, 2003; Wax et al., 2018) that can put them at risk of safety, such as harassment, verbal aggression, occupational and social exclusion, fear, pressure to hide LGBTQIA+ identity and dismissal, which are the most reported by LGBTQIA+ people in work contexts (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023). Despite these consequences of coming out, Driscoll et al. (1996) found that lesbian women who exhibited their sexual orientation seemed more satisfied and mitigated the impact of homophobia in the workplace, a finding also confirmed by Law et al. (2011), who demonstrated that disclosure of the LGBTQIA+ identity had a positive relationship with job satisfaction and affective commitment and a negative relation with job anxiety. However, the decision to come out also depends on the organizational climate and the perception that individuals will not be discriminated against or suffer sanctions, enabling LGBTQIA+ individuals to be authentic of their identity and reveal their LGBTQIA+ identity at work (Wax et al., 2018). Therefore, it is clear that the decision to come out depends on several internal and external variables, given that sexual minorities have fewer opportunities to express their LGBTQIA+ identity at work as they go against heteronormative standards (Melton & Cunningham, 2014).

In Brazil, there has been an evolution regarding the rights of sexual minorities (Malta et al., 2023), such as the creation of the National Council to Combat Discrimination in 2001 (Mello et al., 2012) and Law n° 7.716, which clarifies the penalties to be applied to the practice of discrimination based on sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Despite being a secular estate, there are numerous barriers that hinder social progress, created by social conservatives and political leaders, some of whom are openly hostile to sexual minorities (Malta et al., 2023), as well as some religious leaders who propagate speeches about the pathologization of LGBTQIA+ identities (Keske & Marchini, 2019). It is expected that due to this hostile climate, LGBTQIA+ Brazilians will find themselves mostly in basic and entry-level positions (54%), while only 13% will hold management or C-level positions (Diversidade23, 2020), in line with the expected gay glass ceiling effect. Furthermore, Brazil continues to be the country with the most records of murders against LGBTQIA+ people in the world (Gastaldi et al., 2022).

Regarding legal advances in the European Union and in Portugal in particular, there has been an increase in anti-discrimination policies and changes to the labor code (Comissão para a cidadania e igualdade de género, n.d.), with inclusion in the Charter of Rights Fundamentals of the EU postulate Article 21 – stating nondiscrimination, anti-discrimination policies (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, n.d.). Although in Portugal there are educational projects for organizations about the LGBTQIA+ community, such as ADIM, this study found that sexual minorities hear rumors about the LGBTQIA+ identity of other workers, feel that they must hide their identity at work, and end up "returning" to the closet when they start working, with only 28% of participants claiming to have their LGBTQIA+ identity visible in all contexts (Pichardo Galán et al., 2019). A report collected in 2019 showed that 40% of LGBTQIA+ respondents stated that they felt discriminated against in at least one of their everyday contexts, with 20% being

discriminated against in the workplace in Portugal (ILGA Portugal, 2020). Portugal, despite being in 11th place in the analysis of the “Equality and nondiscrimination” indicator at the European level (ILGA-Europe, 2022), there is still evidence of the underrepresentation of LGBTQIA+ leaders (Lourenço et al., 2021; Shanaev et al., 2022; Aksoy et al., 2019). We believe that this happens due to leadership roles that are stereotypically associated with masculine social roles, as if it were necessary to have heteronormative characteristics typically associated with men to occupy such positions (Fasoli & Hegarty, 2020), derived from systemic patriarchal beliefs that justify male privilege (Catalano & Griffin, 2016).

Another reason that seems to keep LGBTQIA+ people away from leadership positions (or, at least, from being visible in these positions) is the status beliefs that sexual minorities have, which can influence how they perceive their work capabilities (Childers, 2000) and self-internalize sexual stigma (Salvati et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2022), as well as the accumulation of the idea of pathologizing LGBTQIA+ identities (Herek, 1990; Meyer, 2007) and the systematic exclusion of discourses and expressions of the LGBTQIA+ community (Meyer, 2007).

Regarding possible external reasons that can lead to the exclusion of sexual minorities from top positions, the main reason is related to the heterosexist ideological system that privileges heterosexuality and oppresses others (Herek, 1990; Meyer, 2007). Brodmann et al. (2021) found that leaders who have higher levels of power tend to feel insecure about being involved in pro-LGBTQIA+ policies, as it could displease elements that are against this implementation (e.g., local religious communities). Thus, heteronormativity acts as a forced norm of conformity, caring the assumption that heterosexuality is the reference (Rumens et al., 2019) through binary beliefs (Meyer, 2007) and normative behavioral attitudes, generating a stigmatizing cultural context that disavows social membership and pathologizes sexual minorities through prejudice and sexist ideologies that prohibit non heterosexual identities or behaviors (Habarth, 2015).

Therefore, LGBTQIA+ employees are perceived as violators of heteronormative systemic contexts, especially when they aspire to occupy leadership positions, due to the existence of some degree of inherent visibility (Wang et al., 2022). A study by Morton (2017) revealed that gay leaders were considered less competent than heterosexual leaders and that participants who had higher sexual prejudice scores evaluated homosexual leaders more negatively.

Although lesbian leaders are less visible than gay men are, due to their intersectional identities (Fasoli & Hegarty, 2020), sexual minorities, who are also part of racial or ethnic minority groups, end up facing and suffering the harm of racism and/or xenophobia in addition to LGBTphobia (Baker & Greene, 2007). For example, Aksoy et al. (2019) found that gay men who were racial minorities had significantly less access to reaching top career positions. Furthermore, it is important to study cases of people who find themselves on the fringes of intersectionality to consider the particularities of the experiences of various types of people (e.g., LGBTQIA+ people

from ethnic and racial minorities), as they challenge and break the categories of identity socially constructed in their subjectivities (Gamboa et al., 2021).

Pellegrini et al. (2020) found that LGBTQIA+ prejudice was negatively correlated with leadership effectiveness and that heterosexual leaders were considered more effective based on a stereotypical description of participants as “feminine” or “masculine”. Shanaev et al. (2022) also found discrimination among recruiters based on the disclosure of participants’ LGBTQIA+ identity who were as qualified as heterosexuals, regardless of whether the recruiter believed this was the reason. Regarding LGBTQIA+ employees themselves, Savalti et al. (2023) reported that internalized sexual self-stigma had a negative and significant impact on the perception of self-efficacy.

While some people believe that sexual orientation and gender identity do not and should not interfere in labor relations and leadership policies and practices, authentic leadership comes from the life history of leaders and their personal experiences so that they can impact the world (George et al., 2007). The affirmation of real identity brings awareness and practice of individual values and principles, despite the risks and consequences, since many leaders report that their motivation to reach the top of their careers is related to the need to overcome difficult situations in their lives (George et al., 2007), such as episodes of prejudice, violence, illness, and other adverse experiences. Thus, according to Meyer (2007), queue theory helps to understand how hegemony privileges and acts through gender categories, taught in various social structures, perpetuates the permanence of certain groups in power, mainly heterosexuals, cisgender men and those whose gender identity/expression conforms to social and cultural expectations (Catalano & Griffin, 2016).

In this study, we will use the concept of queer leadership, considering the active role of leaders who have made their LGBTQIA+ identities visible (Renn, 2007) and apply practices that challenge heteronormativity in organizational spaces (Pryor, 2019), using it with the purpose of creating more liberating, diversity-inclusive and socially just environments (Meyer, 2007) by challenging the status quo (Fine, 2017; Riggle & Rostosky, 2011).

The current literature shows that Portuguese and Brazilian LGBTQIA+ workers have greater levels of burnout, depressive and anxiety symptoms and lower levels of work engagement, occupational self-efficacy, and work-related quality of life than normative populations (Pereira et al., 2021). Additionally, these workers suffer from marginalization (Fassinger et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2020; Savalti et al., 2023) and have higher rates of suicide ideation and attempts, mood disorders, substance use (Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015; Meyer, 2007), and anxiety situations such as fear of rejection and isolation, difficulties in establishing work partnerships, and job loss are also commonly reported (Pichardo Galán et al., 2019), all of which are influenced by the discriminatory social conditions they experience (Meyer, 2003).

Since disclosing an LGBTQIA+ identity may have a direct impact on the self, people who are not publicly out of the closet tend to constantly consider the possibility that their identity will be discussed, causing stress (Fassinger et al., 2010) and leading to decreased self-confidence related to task effectiveness (Barreto et al., 2006), the use of avoidance or counterfeiting strategies (Woods, 1992) and constant vigilance (Boatwright et al., 1996; Ragins, 2008) aiming to protect themselves. However, studies show that exposing individuals' LGBTQIA+ identity can lead to a series of benefits, such as a feeling of freedom or relief (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023), greater psychological adjustment (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001), and tension and prejudice reduction, depending on the organizational context (Baker & Greene, 2007).

Despite these obstacles, companies are more valued when there are LGBTQIA+ executives on their teams, as well as when they have higher levels of the financial index (ROA) compared to companies without LGBTQIA+ executives (Lourenço et al., 2021). We posit that this results from the contributions that sexual minorities have to offer to organizations, as they tend to have different perceptions, challenging conventional wisdom, having a greater understanding of other minorities, having higher levels of creativity and greater innovation, obtaining favorable reputations, being able to maintain more qualified employees in companies, and improving team performance and group cohesion by expanding the inclusion of their employees (Fassinger et al., 2010; Lourenço et al., 2021). In contrast, Brodmann et al. (2021) found that powerful CEOs with lower levels of inclusion of sexual minorities had higher market returns.

Considering that research on sexual minorities in leadership positions in Portugal and Brazil, as well as their individual experiences and impact on psychological well-being, is scarce and still very superficial, we developed the present study, which was initially conceived in Portugal but was later circulated in Brazil, as these two countries have the same language, are culturally similar, are active members of the Portuguese-speaking world (Pereira et al., 2021) and are increasingly closer to each other, thanks to globalization and mass immigration. Thus, this study aimed to describe and explore the narratives of individuals who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ by analyzing the development of identity and leadership processes in organizational contexts, considering the implications for health and psychological well-being, and aiming to fill some gaps in this unexplored topic.

This qualitative study, which we consider crucial, is natural since most studies focus on evaluating the effects of policies to support LGBTQIA+ people rather than their representation in top careers (Shanaev et al., 2022). Due to this research gap, sexual and gender minority leaders may have little understanding of how their sexual orientation and/or gender identity can influence their subordinates (Wang et al., 2022) and society.

2. Methods

We used content analysis to explore and describe the narratives of individuals who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ in relation to their organizational leadership processes and understand how they negotiate their identities and practices in the work environment, also analyzing implications for psychological well-being.

For this study, the ethical principles of anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent were guaranteed, as well as COREQ criteria and precepts (Tong et al., 2007), such as the use of a pilot study, identification of the researchers' credentials, clarification of the study objectives, methodological guidance, dissemination and collection of data via the internet, collection of sociodemographic data, discussion about data saturation, presence of two coders who are the authors of this article, use of data analysis software data, and creation of themes derived from the data, among other criteria. When doubts arose regarding the established categories, the team met to discuss how to reach a consensus on resolving these doubts.

2.1. Participants

The convenience sampling included people who (a) self-identified as LGBTQIA+; (b) had access to the internet; (c) were over 18 years of age; (d) were or had been in a leadership position in an organization; and (e) resided in Portugal or Brazil. And yet there were also exclusion criteria: (a) people who had worked in leadership positions for less than 3 months and (b) people who did not identify as LGBTQIA+ and therefore, out of a total of 54 responses, 9 individuals had to be excluded.

The convenience sampling included 45 valid participants, ranging from 21 to 63 years ($\mu_{\text{age}} = 39.42$; $SD = 10.32$), 24 from Portugal (53.3%) and 21 from Brazil (46.7%). Regarding gender identity, the sample comprised 23 women (51.1%), 21 men (46.7%), 1 nonbinary (2.2%), 6 trans individuals (13.3%), 1 man and 5 women. The majority said that they were gay (31.1%) or polysexual (bisexual and pansexual), followed by lesbian (24.4%) and heterosexual (13.3%).

Most participants were single and not in a relationship (31.1%), had a master's or postgraduate degree (48.9%), lived in a large city (64.4%) and had an average socioeconomic level (37.8%). Most participants stated that they were employed (42.2%), held managerial positions (44.4%), had tenure-track contracts (40.9%), did not work by shifts (81.8%), worked in private institutions (68.9%), and worked in the tertiary sector (77.3%), and most companies had between 11 and 250 workers (31.1%) or more than 501 people (31.1%).

Finally, participants mentioned working 39 hours ($\mu_{\text{workload}} = 39.47$; $SD = 19.73$), with an average duration of experience of 6 years ($\mu_{\text{experience}} = 6.89$; $SD = 8.56$), and the participants' average satisfaction with their performance in the context of their organization was quite positive

($\mu_{\text{satisfaction}} = 7.63$; $SD = 2.11$; range of 1 to 10). The complete descriptions of sociodemographic characteristics by country are found in Table 1.

Regarding the leadership positions occupied by the participants, categorical analysis of the responses to an open question was carried out, and categories were created that described different positions considering their similarities. The following seven categories were found: executive director, community leader, political/legal leader, manager, healthcare leader and artistic leader. The “Executive Director” category represents owners of organizations, CEOs, general directors, and presidents who represent individuals at the top of the company's operational hierarchy. In the “community leader” category, we considered individuals who work and have worked in NGOs and companies focused on activities relevant to the LGBTQIA+ community, while “political and legal leaders” were participants who worked in the political area or as legal specialists. The “professor/researcher” category concerned positions linked to education and science. “Artistic leaders”, on the other hand, represented people who occupied positions linked to artistic expressions such as theater and other arts. The “healthcare leaders”, included participants who worked as physical and mental health caregivers. Finally, “manager” positions included participants who were managers, coordinators, supervisors, and analysts, among others, who were not specified or did not fit into the other categories.

Table 1 Sociodemographic variables by country ($n = 45$, $\mu_{\text{age}} = 39.42$; $SD = 10.32$; $\mu_{\text{workload}} = 39.47$; $SD = 19.73$; $\mu_{\text{experience}} = 6.89$; $SD = 8.56$; $\mu_{\text{satisfaction}} = 7.63$; $SD = 2.11$).

		Portugal	Brazil	n	%
Gender Identity	Woman	9	9	18	40
	Trans woman	2	3	5	11.1
	Man	12	8	20	44.4
	Trans man	0	1	1	2.2
	Non-binary	1	0	1	2.2
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	4	2	6	13.3
	Bisexual/ Pansexual	6	8	14	31.1
	Gay	10	4	14	31.1
	Lesbian	4	7	11	24.4
Marital Status	Single without a relationship	5	9	14	31.1
	Single in a relationship	7	4	11	24.4
	Stable union with a person of the same gender	4	3	7	15.6
	Stable union with a person of different gender	1	0	1	2.2

	Married to a person of the same gender	6	2	8	17.8
	Married to a person of a different gender	1	0	1	2.2
	Divorced from a person of the same gender	0	1	1	2.2
	Divorced from a person of a different gender	0	1	1	2.2
Academic qualifications	High School	1	1	2	4.4
	Graduate degree	8	8	16	35.6
	Bachelor's degree	0	1	1	2.2
	Master's degree	13	9	22	48.9
	Doctorate	2	2	4	8.9
Professional status	Student	2	0	2	4.4
	Worker/Student	2	2	4	8.9
	Employee	13	6	19	42.2
	Self-employed worker	7	10	17	37.8
	Retired	0	1	1	2.2
	Unemployed	0	2	2	4.4
Residence	A small rural environment	2	1	3	6.7
	A small city	8	5	13	28.9
	A big city	14	15	29	64.4
Socioeconomic status	Low	1	0	1	2.2
	Low-mid	3	7	10	22.2
	Average	9	8	17	37.8
	Medium-High	10	4	14	31.1
	High	1	2	3	6.7
Leadership position	Executive Director	6	7	13	28.9
	Community Leader	2	0	2	4.4
	Political/Legal Leader	1	1	2	4.4
	Healthcare Leader	2	0	2	4.4
	Artistic Leader	1	1	2	4.4
	Professor/Researcher	2	2	4	8.9
	Manager	10	10	20	44.4

Employment Relationship	Fixed-term contract	3	1	4	9.1
	Tenure-track	10	8	18	40.9
	Services provision	1	5	6	13.6
	Not applicable	7	7	14	31.8
	Other	2	0	2	4.5
Work shifts	Yes	8	0	8	18.2
	No	16	20	36	81.8
Nature of the Organization	Private	14	17	31	68.9
	Public	9	2	11	24.4
	Other	1	2	3	6.7
Sector	Primary	0	1	1	2.2
	Secondary	2	2	4	8.9
	Tertiary	19	15	34	77.3
	Other	3	2	5	11.1
Number of workers	Up to 10 people	5	7	12	26.7
	From 11 to 250 people	6	8	14	31.1
	From 251 to 500 people	3	0	3	6.7
	More than 501 people	9	5	14	31.1
	Not applicable	1	1	2	4.4

2.2. Instruments

Before participating in the study, participants read an introduction about the study, its objectives, and participation criteria and provided informed consent. Afterwards, they responded to our survey, which was divided into two sections: the first part referred to the sociodemographic questionnaire, and the second part was the electronic interview.

The sociodemographic questionnaire collected information about age, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status, academic qualifications, residence status, socioeconomic status, professional status, leadership role, length of experience in that role, employment relationship, shift work, weekly working hours, nature of the organization (private, public or other), sector of activity, size of the company and, finally, there was a Likert-type question about the level of current satisfaction with their performance in the context of the organization (1 = “completely dissatisfied”; 10 = “completely satisfied”).

In the electronic interview (table 2), there were 8 groups of questions, consisting of a series of questions divided by themes: professional career, organizational climate, affirmative identity and respect as central topics, difficulties, problem-solving strategies, impact on well-being, intersectionality, and extraprofessional demands. Before the presentation of the questions there was a guidance that they could express themselves freely and without inhibitions.

It was decided to conduct an electronic interview for two main reasons: (1) to attract as many participants as possible, and through electronic interviews there would be no need to schedule face-to-face interviews, and also (2) so that participants could feel more comfortable describing their experiences, since during the dissemination there were several participants who showed fear in exposing their experiences and later their identity and answers being revealed in the workplace.

Table 2 *Questions formulated in the interview guide*

Question group 1	Tell us a little about yourself and how you arrived at this leadership/coordination/top of your career position, in your context or organization, as an LGBTQIA+ person? What importance do you attribute to these experiences and how were they influenced by your identities (professional vs sexual or gender)? How do they fit into your leadership philosophy?
Question group 2	How do you describe the organizational climate in your context? Overall, is it competitive, inclusive, collaborative, or not at all? And, more specifically, in relation to the organizational climate towards LGBTQIA+ people? What is your role in managing this climate (for example, policies to eliminate sexual discrimination in the organization)?
Question group 3	Regarding your leadership/coordination or top of your career, as an LGBTQIA+ person, do you consider that this identity is visible and respected within the organization? Have you ever directly felt any type of discrimination? Are there other LGBTQIA+ people or employees in the organization who see you as a role model or inspiration? What kind of challenges or problems are there (if any) in your organization arising from this visibility?
Question group 4	When dealing with possible difficulties in the leadership/coordination process of your organization as an LGBTQIA+ person, what types of strategies or resources did you use to resolve any resistance based on homophobia or transphobia? What type of support did you seek? What do you consider having been essential in resolving these barriers?
Question group 5	No matter how motivated you are to perform a certain leadership or coordination role, it is natural for feelings of frustration or difficulties to occur, which, in turn, may create some type of impact on your physical and psychological well-being. What is it like (or was it) in your case, as an LGBTQIA+ person? Where did you find the strength to deal with these difficulties and create a safer leadership space? How were you able to convert some of these barriers into personal growth, resilience, or activism?

Question group 6	As an LGBTQIA+ person in a leadership context, you may have to deal with issues of intersectionality. For example, being LGBTQIA+ and a woman, or a younger or older person, who has some type of physical disability or a minority race/ethnicity, or who has a certain type of academic training, etc. If this scenario applies to your case, how do you consider that this intersectionality interferes (or not) with the exercise of your leadership/coordination?
Question group 7	If your leadership role involves some type of extra-professional demands (workaholism, media coverage or social exposure, etc.), what impact does this have on the various spheres of your personal life? (For example, relationships/family, leisure activities, well-being, physical and mental health, etc.)
Question group 8	Is there anything else on this topic you would like to add?

2.3. Procedures

The data were collected from September 26 to November 24, 2023. Participants were invited to participate through mailing lists, publications and messages disseminated on social networks, including groups focused on LGBTQIA+ people and companies that serve this audience. Approximately 300 direct contacts were established to request participation in the interviews (messages and emails), from which it was possible to obtain 54 participants, corresponding to a response rate of 20%, which is expected for this type of collection (Menon & Muraleedharan, 2020).

The invitation sent contained a description of the research and a link hosted on the Microsoft Forms platform, with the title “Sexual Minority Leadership Experiences and Psychosocial Well-Being in Organizations.” All participants were informed that the responses collected would be anonymous, confidential, voluntary, and intended for data processing for future publications. Furthermore, the participants agreed to an informed consent before providing their personal responses.

2.4. Data analysis

The data were composed of direct transcriptions imported from the information provided by interviews, and thematic analysis was used to identify repeated patterns of meaning that constitute similar ideas (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This analysis consisted of the following steps: familiarization with the data, creation of initial codes, search for themes, review of themes, definition and naming of themes and production of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). During this process, the Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research (COREQ) criteria (Tong et al., 2007) were considered reliability criteria to guarantee credibility, reliability, confirmability and transferability.

In this study, an inductive approach, also known as the bottom-up approach, was chosen. This choice is aligned with the objective of exploring in depth the leadership experiences of LGBTQIA+ people who participated, thus allowing a focus on the subjective experiences reported without imposing a preexisting frame of reference. Regarding the level of identification of themes, the study followed a predominantly semantic approach, with a codebook being created to facilitate the interpretation of data in a more consistent and reliable way, as well as better identification and categorization of themes. These categories allowed the comparison and contrast of responses between participants, the identification of patterns, and differences. For the present study, we chose to use the codebook due to its ability to combine the reliability of coding with more reflective elements of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach proved to be advantageous, as it allowed data analysis to be relatively objective and at the same time involved a certain controlled subjectivity. Throughout the presentation of the results, supporting quotes from different participants are also provided as a way of adding transparency to the findings and interpretations of the data. We also used MAXQDA software, version 24; IBM SPSS Statistics software, version 29, with the aim of assisting in the statistical analysis; and Microsoft Excel 365 software, which had all the data collected.

3. Results

There were 11 themes that appeared regularly. Topics that were mentioned fewer than 5 times were excluded from our analysis. After an in-depth analysis of the data obtained, we carried out a comparative analysis between the subthemes of participants comparing Portugal and Brazil (see Table 3). To illustrate the subthemes found, we took excerpts directly from the online interviews together with the identification of sexual orientation, gender identity, age, and nationality, and fictitious names were assigned to the participants.

Table 3 *Key Themes Identified by country (frequencies)*

Theme	Subcategory	Portugal	Brazil
LGBTQIA+ negativity	Absence of negativity	33	25
	Modern negativity	16	41
Health Impacts		25	25
LGBTQIA+ Identity	Out of the closet	29	26
	In the closet	18	16
	Activism	5	7
Impact of LGBTQIA+ identity on leadership	Organizational engagement of LGBTQIA+ Identity	4	12

	Organizational disengagement of LGBTQIA+ Identity	5	8
Intersectionality	Gender	11	20
	Age	5	4
	Race/Ethnicity	2	9
Organizational Climate	Friendly climate	24	25
	Hostile climate	11	14
Professional development	Promotion	6	4
	Labor Transition	2	4
	Professional Breakup	1	8
	Corporate Communication	25	12
Personal Characteristics	Emotional intelligence	20	20
	Professionalism	19	9
Social Support	Social support	15	16
	Lack of Support	8	4
Coping Strategies	Focused on emotion	13	3
	Focused on the problem	8	3
	Other answers	3	6
Inspirational leadership	Represents a Role model	9	9

3.1. LGBTQIA+ negativity

As expected, the most cited topic was LGBTQIA+ negativity, which encompasses discrimination, as well as other minority groups. LGBTQIA+ individuals experience more barriers, violence, and marginalization than cisgender and heterosexual individuals, which can directly affect their ability to maintain a good rhythm of work activities (Allan et al., 2015).

The theme “LGBTQIA+ negativity” was explored by participants in two different forms: modern negativity, which involves different forms of discrimination and micro aggressions in the form of cover discrimination (e.g., jokes), overt discrimination (e.g., verbal violence) (Morrison & Morrison, 2002), structural forms of discrimination present in heterosexism, and the absence of

discrimination. While overt discrimination and covert discrimination were reported to be directly experienced by the individual or witnessed, heterosexism was described as eminent and structurally implanted within society or organizational culture.

3.1.1. Modern negativity

Modern negativity toward the LGBTQIA+ community refers to negative affect, cognitions, and behaviors aimed at people perceived as LGBTQIA+ (Morrison & Morrison, 2011). According to the findings of Beatriz & Pereira (2023), one of the methods of modern negativity is expected to occur in an overt way, including homophobic and transphobic comments mentioned directly to them or other discriminatory acts based on sexual and/or gender identity, according to the findings of Beatriz & Pereira (2023).

“I have already felt discrimination, due to issues of age, gender, and sexual orientation. It’s always a challenge to maintain your identity...” – (Camila, 40 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

Other forms of modern discrimination englobes covered forms of discrimination (García-Berbén et al., 2022). As in the studies by Beatriz and Pereira (2023), this type of LGBTQIA+ negativity occurs in the form of jokes, gossip, and exclusion, which occur in the workplace in a covered or subtle way or even in the absence of LGBTQIA+ individuals, as if their aggressors knew the consequences of their discourses and actions toward sexual minorities and chose convenient moments in the workplace, away from these individuals, to express their prejudices:

“Problems of discrimination tend to occur in the absence of people who are out of the closet, like me, during work conversations and can occur in the presence of young professionals who are not yet out of the closet, who may feel excluded or offended.” – (José, 41 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Health Leader).

“Although my identity is fully visible, it isn’t respected in my workplace. Discrimination occurs in a covered way, manifesting itself through subtle jokes and comments, even if they aren’t directed directly at me, but predominate in the office environment.” – (Felipe, 35 years old, man, Brazilian, gay, Manager).

This participant, in addition to citing that she does not feel discriminated against in the workplace, acknowledges that this may be a sporadic circumstance due to her passability, but does not exclude this from happening in her workplace:

“I don’t feel discrimination from my colleagues, superiors, or subordinates, but I see it as a result of passing² and from the work I have already done. Prejudice, when it occurs, comes in a covered way.” – (Amanda, 32 years old, trans woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

Other participants cited the presence of a heterosexist culture in some workplaces, considering that this type of discrimination occurs in a more structured way and involves members and practices that contemplate patriarchal and heteronormative values and norms (Cabral & Pinto, 2023).

“The more characteristics considered worse for society one holds, the harder it is, like my example: being a woman, a lesbian and an immigrant.” – (Manuela, 45 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

This participant still demonstrates his dissatisfaction with the way the current LGBTQIA+ community acts against heterosexist standards, citing that there are still rights and public policies to be achieved to achieve equity:

“... the current LGBTQIA+ community thinks that everything is done and that they no longer need to fight for the human rights of LGBTQIA+ people, but everything is not done. What is done needs constant policing, because adverse forces have always been moving against the human rights of this and other communities, called minorities.” – (Miguel, 55 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Community Leader).

Some participants preferred to simply mention that they are not respected in the workplace. This may occur out of fear that your report could be exposed in some way and end up suffering from sanctions, or even as a strategy to avoid remembering potentially stressful events:

“My identity is visible, but it is not respected.” – (Pedro, 35 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Manager).

However, this participant tried to justify that verbal violence came from illiteracy and ignorance on the part of its practitioners, which can be a way of mitigating the negative effects of discriminatory speeches through rationalization, as this excerpt demonstrates.

“Although the work climate is potentially more inclusive, there are more discriminatory speeches than behaviors, but I believe this is an indicator of a lack of knowledge on the subject.” – (Eduardo, 43 years old, man, Portuguese, bisexual, Professor/Researcher).

²: “We describe 'passing' as 'visual conformity with affirmed gender'” (To et al., 2020, p.3).

3.1.2. Absence of Negativity

Although the previous topics demonstrated that LGBTIQIA+ participants experienced several situations of modern LGBTQIA+ negativity, discrimination and disrespect, some participants stated that their identity was respected in the workplace.

Those participants mentioned that they had never heard negative comments in the workplace:

“I have never had any problems regarding my sexuality in relation to my work or even in relation to my professional positioning.” – (Gustavo, 32 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Executive Director).

However, it is necessary to highlight that this is the only LGBTQIA+ in her organization, demonstrating the underrepresentation that still exists in Brazilian organizations:

“There are no other LGBTQIA+ people in my workplace, but I am respected, I have never heard any discriminatory comments.” – (Yasmin, 43 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

Despite numerous European studies and research (e.g., ILGA Portugal, 2019 and Pichardo Galán et al., 2019), this participant reports that, in his opinion, the advancement of human rights in Europe has reached a point where LGBTphobia no longer exists:

“In Europe and in other countries, I know, discrimination no longer exists. Since the last 10 years, no one has suffered from this anymore.” – (Gabriel, 57 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Executive Director).

This participant mentioned something that ends up becoming a common practice in large companies: sectors focused on diversity and inclusion practices, which seem to end up perpetuating respect in the workplace.

“Being part of a diversity and inclusion consulting ecosystem, I feel like my identity is respected and appreciated within the organization.” – (Larissa, 30 years old, woman, Brazilian, bisexual, Manager).

3.2. Health Impacts

The topic of “health impacts” was explored by participants regarding physical health and mental health. This finding was expected, as most research shows that due to minority stress, LGBTQIA+ individuals are more likely to develop health problems stemming from poor health habits, substance use, and emotional disorders (Teaster et al., 2016).

People who self-identify as LGBTQIA+ are more likely to experience suffering and mental disorders due to social minority stress (Meyer, 2003). The impact on mental health was frequently mentioned. In addition, many people seek psychological support to address psychological symptoms such as anxiety, fear, stress, pressure, exhaustion, depression, workaholism, burnout and eating disorders, which impact their mental health and professional performance.

“I have been receiving psychological support since I founded the company and for a period, I had psychiatric support to deal with the stress and pressure of having to work double time.” – (Júlia, 33 years old, woman, Brazilian, bisexual, Executive Director).

Portuguese people scored slightly above average in terms of workaholics; they also end up having reduced sleep and free time, as well as greater work and family conflicts, which can contribute to the worsening of other psychological symptoms due to the amount of time focused on work (Mónico & Margaça, 2021), which is in line with the report of this participant:

“I’m a workaholic, without a doubt. Since then, my depression and anxiety grew exponentially, especially during my nervous breakdown... From then on, it was 6 months in which I spent in survival mode and ended up having a nervous breakdown, which led me to request a medical leave for a while.” – (Isadora, 30 years old, woman, Portuguese, pansexual, Manager).

This participant mentioned how rumors about her LGBTQIA+ identity in the workplace precipitated depression symptoms, which directly affected her emotional state and facilitated extensive damage on a psychological and physical level:

“I started having symptoms of depression again, with that came a lack of motivation to take care of myself and do better for myself, even related to leisure activities and physical well-being. This resulted in the development of binge eating, I gained almost 50 kilos, and this led to numerous health problems.” – (Isadora, 30 years old, woman, Portuguese, pansexual, Manager).

The impact on mental health, mainly stress, depression and anxiety, was so intense in this participant that she cited not only emotional issues but also the physical somatization of symptoms (e.g., which can be a result of chronic exposure to discrimination) (Briggs et al., 2018).

“I was very ill, I had to endure persistent diarrhea and back pain for several years, accompanied by weeks of almost no sleep and a deep sense of fear.” – (Sophia, 50 years old, woman, Portuguese, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

3.3. LGBTQIA+ Identity

In terms of participants' identity, participants who were out of the closet, those who were in the closet, and those who actively acted in the LGBTQIA+ rights movement in the workplace appeared

in three different ways. The choice of coming out or staying in the closet depends on internal psychological factors, contextual factors of the organizations, and how they negotiate their identity in different contexts (Melton & Cunningham, 2014), as well as the perceived support and expected consequences (Ragins, 2008).

Although a majority of participants related that they chose to make their gender or sexual identity clear in the work environment and that some even became activists, it was expected that some individuals would choose to leave their LGBTQIA+ identity invisible.

3.3.1. Out of the closet

Most participants stated that they used self-affirmation of their identity, ranging from punctual exposure in the workplace to exposure in media related to top leadership positions.

“As I’m the founder of the company, I inherently occupy a leadership role, and that is why I have never had any problems about my sexuality. I believe that this has encouraged greater visibility of the company in the LGBTQIA+ community, attracting a more diverse group of employees.” – (Júlia, 33 years old, woman, Brazilian, bisexual, Executive Director).

However, despite understanding the benefits and need for exposure and visibility as LGBTQIA+ in influential positions, there were participants who complained about the lack of privacy and how exposure in the media affected them.

“Social and mediatic exposure affected all spheres of my life, made my intimate relationships difficult, got my family away from me and disrupted my physical and mental health. I paid a high price, but I don’t regret it, it was worth every gray hair.” – (Sophia, 50 years old, woman, Portuguese, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

“The absence of anonymity is what bothers me most, as well as the excessively high expectations that others place on me, taking me out of the space of human normality.” – (David, 63 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Professor/Researcher).

Furthermore, there was a participant who reported that despite the need for LGBTQIA+ leaders to be exposed in society, she would value her company being recognized for its results and not just for having a leader from the LGBTQIA+ community:

“Being an entrepreneur, implies that I have social exposure, the biggest impact for me is being able to maintain my privacy. I understand the need to take a stand and raise the flag of diversity, but I want my company to be known for the excellent work that we do and not necessarily because it is founded and led by a lesbian woman.” – (Mônica, 38 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Executive Director).

As the literature shows, committing to the workplace can have several benefits (e.g., Driscoll et al, 1996; Law et al., 2011; Beatriz & Pereira, 2023; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001; Baker & Greene, 2007). This participant also mentioned how committing is an act to inspire and contribute to the LGBTQIA+ community:

“It’s a door that we open, not everyone can understand, but I usually say that assuming and supporting who you are is the best way to contribute to the transformation of society.” – (Camila, 40 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

This participant, despite having mentioned that he was "outed" through television, which results in interpersonal conflicts, ended up encountering greater consequences after this incident, which helped him to form new friendships with LGBTQIA+ allies:

“At first it was complicated, my family didn’t know about my sexual orientation and this information appeared on television screens... A negative impact emerged within my community, where LGBTQIA+ people stopped talking to me in that environment, however from allegedly heterosexual people, with whom I had little or no relationship, they started to greet me and include me in their conversations, because according to them, they liked my attitude when I appeared on TV, in other words, I gained new friends.” – (Miguel, 55 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Community Leader).

3.3.2. In the closet

However, it was expected that some participants would choose not to make their sexual and/or gender identity clear in the workplace. Unlike stigmas related to visible attributes, those who choose to keep their potentially stigmatized characteristics secret make this decision considering social interaction and analyzing the risks and benefits of the impact in the interpersonal environment, such as fear of rejection (Ragins, 2008). This participant chose to hide his LGBTQIA+ identity due to his interaction with his clients:

“We serve some Arab clients, for example, which makes it very difficult for me to express myself as LGBTQIA+, meaning I have to hide my opinion on different subjects at different times.” – (Mateus, 31 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Manager).

It was expected that some participants would mention using avoidance and/or counterfeiting strategies, following what was proposed by Chrobot-Mason et al. (2001) as resistance to responding or participating in conversations that may involve the individual's personal topics or changing the focus of the conversation to avoid revealing their sexuality, while the second is also an avoidance strategy but is performed through the false construction of a heterosexual identity, as the following participant reported:

“By being “invisible”, that is, not declaring myself bisexual, I maintained as much discretion as possible regarding my sexuality, since the organizational climate for an LGBTQIA+ person was totally embarrassing.” – (Bruno, 54 years old, man, Brazilian, bisexual, Manager).

At another point, this same participant adds:

“I tried not to show my bisexual identity, I acted as if I were straight, as far as possible.” – (Bruno, 54 years old, man, Brazilian, bisexual, Manager).

At another point, this participant also mentioned that his company has a clear heterosexist structure, so it is understandable that this individual analyzed the benefits and advantages of choosing to remain invisible, given that in Brazil, the culture is much more extremist in regard to LGBTphobia:

“Whenever I was in leadership positions in companies, I always chose to leave my LGBTQIA+ identity invisibly, the environment of the organizations I worked for had a heterosexist culture.” – (Bruno, 54 years old, man, Brazilian, bisexual, Manager).

There were also participants who decided to hide their LGBTQIA+ identity since they believe that the work environment is not a place to discuss private matters such as romantic relationships.

“I don't know about other LGBTQIA+ people because no one shows this side in a professional context, everyone likes what they like, but they don't show it at work. I've never felt discrimination, but I also haven't mentioned to anyone that I'm part of the community and I don't know any colleagues who have.” – (Valentina, 28 years old, woman, Portuguese, bisexual, Manager).

3.3.3. Activism

Most LGBTQIA+ identity theories postulate developmental processes that allude to intrapsychic processes in self-identifying with a gender category and/or sexual orientation (Renn, 2007). In the theme “LGBTQIA+ identity”, activism processes were also included, given that, as proposed by Renn (2007), queer activism is inseparable from LGBTQIA+ identity since it involves individuals who fight against heteronormative culture and commit to fighting for social change in different environments.

In this study, reports suggest how people engage to make a difference in their varied contexts, from small changes in coexistence to political changes in conventional forms (political and social) and even in artistic forms, as this participant demonstrates:

“We tried to make a collaborative project, but it turned out that only the same leaders continued working: the block's board of directors, the creator, and another companion. As previously described, from 2017 onwards we began to actively fight against sexual discrimination and

diversity, inside and outside Carnival.” – (Laura, 43 years old, woman, Brazilian, pansexual, Artistic Leader).

Some participants mentioned carrying out work in the LGBTQIA+ community through the creation of companies aimed at this audience and of pro-diversity organizational policies and practices, as well as participation in pro-LGBTQIA+ and anti-discrimination parades and protests.

“... I was a co-founder of the LGBTQIA+ Pride March in a large city, and at the time I was the most experienced LGBTQIA+ activist living in the city, so I was given some internal protagonism...” – (Miguel, 55 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Political Leader).

3.4. Impact of LGBTQIA+ identity on leadership

Embracing a queer leadership identity depends on the importance of individual attributes to sexuality and/or gender identity, while also developing an authentic leadership identity (Boatwright et al., 1996) and choosing how individuals negotiate their social world (Wax et al., 2018); thus, they choose to integrate their LGBTQIA+ identity into organizational environments. Given that stressful situations can have a great psychological impact on individuals, the choice to integrate their personal stories and narratives can be a painful process, so it was expected that some individuals would choose to disengage from their LGBTQIA+ identity.

3.4.1. Organizational engagement of LGBTQIA+ Identity

The results indicate that most participants consider that there is an impact and engagement of their LGBTQIA+ identity in their organizational roles, even if, at times, it is not so impactful in the work carried out but rather present in everyday life despite the imminent difficulties provoked by prejudice.

These participants demonstrated how difficulties and prejudices served as motivation to achieve leadership roles and impact the world and described the process of authentic leadership in studies by George et al. (2007), as demonstrated by these participants:

“I got here because of long-term activism. Being LGBTQIA+ was, in this context, not only a source of insecurity and discrimination, but also one of the reasons I ended up where I am. Being visible as a lesbian was a positive aspect of achieving a political leadership position. It took many years to sow and care and then benefit from some of the social and political changes achieved.” – (Sophia, 50 years old, woman, Portuguese, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

“After 15 years working for other companies, I decided to open my own business. My identity is integrated into my leadership when taking affirmative actions towards this population.” – (Mônica, 38 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Executive Director).

It is evident that these participants, in line with the findings of Griffin (1992), explained that despite the discrimination they suffered due to their sexuality, they found good reasons to fight for pro-LGBTQIA+ social changes through empowerment.

3.4.2. Organizational disengagement of LGBTQIA+ Identity

On the other hand, some participants stated that they did not believe in an association or influence between their LGBTQIA+ identity and their leadership identity. Despite personal choice, this phenomenon is called "liberal homophobia", in which cisgender and heterosexual individuals can talk about their families and partners, and LGBTQIA+ people may end up reducing LGBTQIA+ identity to their private gender, which creates inequality in relation to cisgender and heterosexual persons (Pichardo Galán et al., 2019). This does not mean that these participants are not living authentically and truthfully, as there is no obligation to always be fully exposed (Boske, 2022).

"I reached this position thanks to my work, the fact of being gay has never harmed or benefited me in any way." – (Martim, 56 years old, man, Brazilian, gay, Executive Director).

"I don't think my sexual orientation has influenced how I work in any way." – (Valentina, 28 years old, woman, Portuguese, bisexual, Manager).

Similar statements were found in other studies, since the insistence on the idea that LGBTQIA+ identity has no relation to being a good professional may be a protective and defensive response to the social stigma associated with these sexual minorities (Griffin, 1992) and can lead to excessive efforts to prove themselves to be careful professionals who operate their positions effectively, despite their sexuality, which goes against heteronormative standards.

3.5. Intersectionality

Intersectionality concerns individuals who are part of multiple identities that move along lines of marginalization and may involve race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and disability, among others, which affect the experiences of these individuals (Marshall et al., 2022). Therefore, it was expected that we would find reports of the experiences of people who place themselves on this fringe of intersectionality, from gender, ethnicity to race, and even age.

3.5.1. Gender

The most common subcategory was related to gender; there were participants who reported having witnessed or suffered from discriminatory acts related to gender, such as comments, harassment, violence, and intimidation, which manifested openly within the work environment against women.

“As a lesbian, in addition to homophobia, I face prejudice for being a woman. Many managers, mostly straight white men, make a point of making their opinion of me clear: a particularly limited person.” – (Camila, 40 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

This participant mentioned that the area of work in which she works is predominantly male, which was expected given that in 2023, 41% in the area of IT, science and mathematics involved women enrolled in Portugal (Pordata, 2023), but despite this, the demand for female employees is low (Gonçalves, 2024).

“Being in a dominantly male area (IT), being a woman had its challenges, for example, in some companies’ men didn’t see me as a leader just because I was a woman.” – (Valentina, 28 years old, woman, Portuguese, bisexual, Manager).

3.5.2. Age

Older people face social challenges arising from the stigma associated with aging (Pereira et al., 2024) related to the cognitive, physical, and emotional changes that occur (Teaster et al., 2016). We found that participants with several years of experience reported having experienced cases of agism.

“Despite adopting a jovial stance, people like me are seen as old-fashioned, outdated, and uninteresting. Age isn’t only in movement, but in society it is also a problem. We all suffer from ageism.” – (Miguel, 55 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Community Leader).

This participant reported something that has been observed in other bibliographies: the marginalization of elderly workers that occurs through the dismissal of workers who had become old (Numhauser-Henning, 2021).

“We are living in a society that focuses on the new, the modern. This creates a generation gap, and we can see this within the corporate world. Someone who has been with the company for 20 years is replaced by someone who has just arrived, as if creativity were only available to younger people.” – (Camila, 40 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

However, it is important to highlight that there were also younger participants who reported that their credibility was not recognized in the workplace by older workers.

“My age interferes a lot, I’m young and even younger than those who obey my orders.” – (Arthur, 23 years old, man, Brazilian, pansexual, Manager).

3.5.3. Race/Ethnicity

In regard to racism and xenophobia, which affect people who belong to racial/ethnic minorities, these people are mostly placed on the sidelines of those who have social power, even more so when they also belong to sexual minorities.

In Europe, racism has grown, and even though the number of immigrants has increased, such attitudes prove to be unfounded and irrational through stereotypical perceptions and artifices of experiences of those who are not white or European (Gaber, 2020).

“Intersectionality does interfere. I am a woman, a mother, a white person, but born in Angola and raised in the interior of Portugal.” – (Sophia, 50 years old, woman, Portuguese, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

Despite Brazil being a country made up mostly of black and brown individuals, they are still underrepresented in leadership positions. As if the delayed abolition of slavery and the underrepresentation were not enough, cases of racism grew by 64% in 2022 (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública, 2023).

“I have suffered various forms of discrimination and violence from my boss, but mostly because I’m a black person and not because of my sexuality, once she is also from the LGBTQIA+ community.” – (Elisa, 26 years old, woman, Brazilian, bisexual, Manager).

3.6. Organizational climate

The organizational climate is an important predictor of the hiring, retention, promotion, and experience of LGBTQIA+ people (Fassinger et al., 2010; Childers, 2000), as well as job satisfaction (Allan et al., 2015). As expected, two antagonistic subcategories emerged regarding the organizational climate: friendly and hostile climates.

3.6.1. Friendly climate

A friendly organizational climate was mostly described as a collaborative, inclusive, rewarding place where they could coexist as a group. The presence of more LGBTQIA+ individuals seems to have a positive effect on their perception in the workplace, promoting a collaborative and safe environment (Higa et al., 2014), which is confirmed by this participant:

“Given the nature of the organization, there are many queer elements in our group, which is perhaps why there is little or no discrimination in relation to sexual orientation and/or gender identity. In this way, I have always felt properly integrated and safe in this space, so I can’t identify challenges.” – (Alex, 24 years old, nonbinary, Portuguese, pansexual, Artistic Leader).

Another factor that seems to help promote a friendly environment at work is clear policies on discrimination, mobbing, and harassment (Higa et al., 2014).

“The climate is inclusive and collaborative. The company has very clear policies about any type of discrimination.” – (Martim, 56 years old, man, Brazilian, gay, Executive Director).

3.6.2. Hostile climate

The subcategory referring to a hostile organizational climate was also expected, as current literature demonstrates that sexual minorities face additional stress in the workplace, which can include workplace discrimination, lack of job support, and social exclusion that can directly affect the satisfaction and results expected in their positions (Allan et al., 2015).

A recent study carried out by Pichardo Galán et al. (2019) revealed that in some European countries, the climate is still frequently considered hostile, characterized by the presence of insults, mobbing, and dismissal, as well as modern methods of LGBTQIA+ negativity. This participant demonstrated his dissatisfaction with the measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, which is in line with the research findings of Haworth et al. (2023) about the lack of support for the LGBTQIA+ community during the COVID-19 pandemic:

“The climate is mediocre, there is a lack of serious and firm intentions in the comprehensive protection of the neediest LGBTQIA+ people. The example of COVID clearly illustrates this precariousness, since support was scarce, punctual, and insufficient. There are no reception structures capable of adequately meeting the needs and no psychological support to deal with the social group accordingly.” – (Miguel, 55 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Community Leader).

This participant, despite not generalizing all of her working relationships as hostile, makes it clear that the rule is that a working climate is unfavorable:

“I don’t consider the climate to be a very collaborative in general, it really depends on the people you talk to and work with, but I believe that because my job is 100% remote this affects the collaboration a lot.” – (Elisa, 26 years old, woman, Brazilian, bisexual, Manager).

This participant also reported that competition is not absent within the LGBTQIA+ community itself, where it is assumed that there would be a union:

“The climate is quite competitive, LGBTQIA+ leaders have a small professional space, which means they end up competing with each other, sometimes for survival.” – (Leonardo, 40 years old, man, Brazilian, bisexual, Executive Director).

3.7. Professional development

The professional development of LGBTQIA+ people can be complex due to their sexual minority status (Gedro, 2009). Thus, four types of professional career development were identified in the interviews, namely, transition, promotion, professional break and corporate communication,

which varied according to career progression, organizational communication skills and work experience.

3.7.1. Promotion

In the topic of promotion, participants reported that they managed to reach their leadership positions through prolonged experience in companies and exceptional results derived from their professionalism.

“Since I started at the company in an operational role, my numbers were twice as high as other employees, which is why I gained recognition and promotions. Then they placed me in a leadership position of the team, and almost a year later, I received an invitation to carry out a selection process to become an account manager, then I passed in all the interviews and took the position.” – (Carolina, 42 years old, trans woman, Brazilian, heterosexual, Manager).

3.7.2. Labor Transition

Another topic explored was labor transition, which included the need to change positions held or start a new career. The reasons adjacent to labor transition were diverse, as there were participants who changed sectors to be able to explore their maximum potential, while others decided that they were looking for another aspiration for their lives and others had their employment contracts cut by the organization:

“After the gender transition I was unemployed and realized that I needed to migrate to get a job. I started studying the dynamics of the rights of LGBTQIA+ people in Brazil and decided to work in this area. Over time I moved up positions until I reached where I am now.” – (Amanda, 32 years old, trans woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

“Within the same company, I ended up changing projects and then everything became easier after they saw my potential.” – (Isadora, 30 years old, woman, Portuguese, pansexual, Manager).

3.7.3. Professional Breakup

Another subcategory mentioned was the professional termination and dismissal of participants, where the disorders varied between being initiated by the company or the employee, generally motivated by discrimination, harassment and retaliation. Although absurd, participants reported that when they were victims of discrimination and reported it, they ended up being fired.

“The harassment that men commit against women can put our careers at risk. In my case, when I didn't give in to the harassment, I was retaliated, which made me choose to leave the company.” – (Manuela, 45 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

“...when I tried to report it to the company ombudsman, I was retaliated against and fired.” – (Victor, 29 years old, man, Brazilian, pansexual, Artistic Leader).

3.7.4. Corporate Communication

We know that in the context of human communication, heteronormativity can generate conflicts in communication (Eguchi, 2006), such as the grammatical gender present in the Portuguese language, which divides personal characteristics in a binary way. As a subcategory of the theme "professional development", we incorporated corporate communication methods that were cited by participants as methods of resolving work problems and seeking rights, visibility, and respect.

Although communication does not completely cease hostility and resolve conflicts, most problem-solving processes involve communication between at least two interlocutors who, if coordinated in balance, can share the same ultimate goal (Eisenkopf, 2018). These Portuguese participants cited knowledge of current readings as a means of educating and ending discriminatory situations:

"If there are suspicions of discrimination, what I have done is confront the individuals, making it very clear that discriminatory attitudes are illegal and that, as far as it depends on me, they will be duly reported and punished." – (José, 41 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Health Leader).

"My role has been to trigger discussion and conversations about discrimination, whenever there is an opportunity, making it clear what Portuguese legislation is and what role public institutions play in promoting inclusion." – (José, 41 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Health Leader).

This participant, on the other hand, demonstrated resilience in the face of discrimination, using open discourse and promoting queer practices and policies:

"Agribusiness companies are extremely competitive and very sexist. To overcome this, I promote open dialogues regarding diversity and seek to implement policies that combat prejudice through leadership training." – (Tiago, 34 years old, man, Brazilian, gay, Professor/Researcher).

Communication aimed at visibility focuses on promoting discourses about inclusion and sexual and gender diversity. This participant uses the art of Carnival to raise awareness about heterosexual allies being able to participate in the LGBTQIA+ fight, even though it may go against more polarized discourses, especially in Brazil's context:

"The only time they tried to create problems for us was when a group of radfems questioned us about the straight cis man member. We were a block for diversity, and we saw this case as an opportunity to dialogue and be seen outside our bubble." – (Laura, 43 years old, woman, Brazilian, pansexual, Artistic Leader).

3.8. Personal Characteristics

Currently, professional life is characterized by high competition and situations that require high levels of engagement at work; therefore, effective leadership is also based on personal characteristics such as personality traits, the ability to deal with stressors, tolerance, and empathy (Dåderman et al., 2022).

3.8.1. Emotional intelligence

According to Boske (2022), the concept of emotional intelligence changes between authors; for example, it is linked to the ability to evaluate emotional differences, identify one's own emotions, express empathy, and regulate emotions. Thus, we were able to identify such definitions through the participants' contributions, who cited their personal characteristics as empathetic, sensitive, self-confident, and self-demanding as necessary to address difficulties and remain focused on their goals.

These participants also focused on remaining confident during difficult times and dealing with situations with respect and empathy.

"...I followed with trust, respect, cordiality and empathy." – (Laura, 43 years old, woman, Brazilian, pansexual, Artistic Leader).

"I consider that I have been using education, respect, tolerance, diplomacy together with cordiality and friendliness. I have also had strength, courage, and determination throughout my life, in particular since 2011." – (Gabriela, trans woman, Portuguese, heterosexual, Executive Director).

These participants cited the need to understand and be sensitive to situations that go against the rights of the LGBTIQ+ community, probably aiming for education without coercion, through their personal values:

"My role was always positive. As I am part of the community, I was always sensitive to possible behavior and did my best to "educate" my subordinates accordingly." – (Isadora, 30 years old, woman, Portuguese, pansexual, Manager).

"...this shaped my outlook towards a critical sense that is not very understanding of behaviors that don't represent the best of the LGBTIQ+ community." – (Leonardo, 40 years old, man, Brazilian, bisexual, Executive Director).

3.8.2. Professionalism

In regard to this subcategory, we included self-descriptions that refer to the idea of responsibility, assertiveness, dedication, determination, perfectionism, and individual professional skills,

among others, which individuals possess and use to be able to achieve their positions with professionalism and leadership and obtain the expected results at work.

“Many consider my way of working boring and perfectionist, so I end up being seen as the “boring” boss, but of course I like my workplace to be organized, clean and efficient.” – (Arthur, 23 years old, man, Brazilian, pansexual, Manager).

This participant also reported the need to break heterosexist standards, seeking relevance and power through their own empowerment:

“I arrived at this position because I didn’t accept the pattern of family poverty and the pattern of inertia of the imposed culture, also because of the sacrifice I made reconciling work and studies, seeking information, good reading and inclusion in groups of people who could help and guide me towards an overall democratic vision, and also, because of my professional stance that demanded more attitude and qualifications from me, compared to other standardized young people.” – (Rafael, 52 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Manager).

3.9. Social Support

Social support mitigates the effects of discrimination, stigma, shame, and psychological symptoms and promotes coping and resilience skills (Cabral & Pinto, 2023). As it is an extremely important topic in terms of combating discrimination, venting emotions, and in everyday life in general, this topic was frequently mentioned, as was the lack of support in a few situations.

3.9.1. Social support

The majority of participants reported that they felt support from their main social groups, namely, family, the LGBTQIA+ community, and the work environment, which made them feel that they belonged to a community and that they could be authentic and honest about their opinions, as well as feel buffered by the negative impacts of discrimination.

“I found strength in my peers, but most of all in my husband. Being able to get home and discuss all aspects with him without filters helped me a lot...” – (Miguel, 55 years old, man, Portuguese, gay, Community Leader).

A different way of finding social support was cited by this participant, in line with studies by Pereira et al. (2024), who mention how faith provided her with comfort and good interpersonal relationships.

“Spiritual balance has helped a lot in difficult times, as has my family, especially my mother and my friends.” – (Gabriela, trans woman, Portuguese, heterosexual, Executive Director).

3.9.2. Lack of Support

Some participants also reported a lack of support from institutions, their employees, friends, and family regarding both economic and emotional issues, which, in some cases, even led to isolation to avoid further discriminatory and embarrassing situations.

“I like the atmosphere at my agency, once I choose to work alone, due to multiple bad experiences in the corporate market.” – (Victor, 29 years old, man, Brazilian, pansexual, Executive Director).

Pereira et al. (2024) stated that psychological symptoms can directly impact the social skills of individuals, as participants reported the appearance of depressive and anxiety symptoms, and she had her relationship with her friends cut off, which is apprehensive, given that studies show that isolation can lead to self-harmful behaviors (Garcia et al., 2020):

“My interpersonal relationships suffered a lot, especially with people I considered very close, who worked with me and who ended up stopping talking to me completely.” – (Isadora, 30 years old, Portuguese woman, pansexual, Manager).

3.10. Coping Strategies

Participants were asked to explore how they overcame difficult situations in the work environment. We used the theoretical model of Carver et al. (1989), who proposed two main ways to cope: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, and a secondary way called “other responses”, which are considered dysfunctional.

3.10.1. Emotion-focused

Emotion-focused coping was the most commonly used strategy by our participants. This coping method encompasses the search for emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, and resort to religion, which aims to manage the emotions of suffering rather than dealing with the stressor itself (Carver et al., 1989). Acceptance and positive reinterpretation are the most commonly used coping methods by our participants.

The acceptance method refers to accepting the reality of a stressful situation through a primary evaluation of the real event and secondary acceptance refers to the acceptance of an absence of active coping strategies (Carver et al., 1989), which is clearly described by this participant:

“Not all spaces fit us, we need self-knowledge to understand what is worth our presence and what is not. We need to understand our own limitations, just as it is important to understand the limitations of others.” – (Camila, 40 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Manager).

Positive reinterpretation, according to Carver et al. (1989), is an emotional strategy that aims to interpret a stressful situation in a more positive way and intrinsically leads a person to take other coping actions:

“I transformed all these ‘weaknesses’ into strengths, identity, fight, and unity.” – (Sophia, 50 years old, woman, Portuguese, lesbian, Political/Legal Leader).

3.10.2. Problem-focused

Problem-focused coping refers to a coping process; as the name suggests, this process is centered on the problem or stressful event, and different techniques can be used, such as planning, direct action, seeking assistance, excluding other activities, and forcing individuals to wait before acting (Carver et al., 1989).

The technique most commonly used by our participants was the planning technique, which refers to thinking about how they will be able to deal with the stressor through an action plan, steps to take and how to deal with the problem (Carver et al., 1989).

“I dealt with the frustrations by trying to remain calm, asking for opinions from several people and then creating a plan with next steps to resolve the situation” – (Valentina, 28 years old, woman, Portuguese, bisexual, Manager).

3.11. Inspirational leadership

The presence of role models in organizations can create a comfortable and welcoming environment for LGBTQIA+ people (Ferguson & Seery, 2022) so that they can be inspired and find the courage to follow their professional paths. In this category, participants reported how they believed they could inspire other LGBTQIA+ people in their contexts or even at the national level.

3.11.1. Represents a Role Model

One topic we looked at was participants feeling that they were role models or inspirations for their subordinates or the LGBTQIA+ community. Despite being aware of their ability to serve as role models, some reported a level of responsibility and constant self-awareness that, for example, they would help break prejudice and heterosexism.

“Being responsible for a team is a very difficult task because you become an example for people, and this can end up inhibiting you from being the way you are.” – (Luísa, 25 years old, woman, Portuguese, lesbian, Manager).

“As I am a publicly outed person and because we have collaborators from this community, I believe they see my experience as an inspiration.” – (Mônica, 38 years old, woman, Brazilian, lesbian, Executive Director).

4. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to analyze the narratives of the personal experiences of sexual minorities who occupy leadership positions in Portugal and Brazil, to compare the two contextual realities and to analyze their impact on their psychological well-being. We also aimed to fill the current research gap on this topic, promote the creation of positive practices and policies for sexual minorities and demonstrate how leaders can be seen as positive and inspiring role models.

Currently, in Portugal and Brazil, there is significant progress in legislation that protects minorities in organizations against discrimination based on sex, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity, with penalties of imprisonment and fines. However, despite legal and legislative advances in both Portuguese-speaking countries toward egalitarian practices in the workplace, this study makes clear that LGBTQIA+ people continue to suffer discriminatory, vexatious, and violent acts, showing that not even leaders are exempt from this violence.

It was expected that themes relating to LGBTQIA+ negativity would be mentioned more often by Brazilian participants since the cultural climate toward LGBTQIA+ people is more conflictive, as it is a country marked by ambivalence and violence (Gastaldi et al., 2022). We believe that this might be one of the reasons why Brazilian participants reported more often choosing to stay in the closet and using less cooperative communication. Despite the discriminatory experiences reported, the majority considered the organizational climate to be more friendly than hostile. We assume that social support may have buffered the damage produced by discrimination and that medium-sized and large companies have an increased number of employees, which may demonstrate that discriminatory experiences are more punctual than collaborative and inclusive relationships. Furthermore, a portion of Brazilian interviewees who reported being in a hostile environment also mentioned professional disruption or job transition more often, usually related to experiencing modern LGBTQIA+ negativity with greater recurrence.

Regarding the personal characteristics of the sample, we found that Portuguese participants described themselves as individuals involved in understanding diverse opinions, considering their own values, and being more able to balance their individuality and that of others. Additionally, they described themselves more often as professional individuals, focused on achieving objectives and capable of dealing with other opinions, aiming for greater business goods. This fact may be related to being more open to receiving other opinions, using techniques focused on problem solving, and even accepting discriminatory opinions as merely adverse to theirs, allowing these “differences” not to interfere with their position. This hypothesis is in line with the coping strategies used, focused on emotion and problem solving, demonstrating that they have a slightly larger repertoire in regard to dealing with problems directly and dealing with cognitive conceptualizations about the problem. Additionally, Brazilian participants described themselves as capable of self-evaluating emotions, as well as being empathetic and capable of managing their own emotions. Although all participants aligned with the concept of emotional

intelligence proposed by Boske (2022), Brazilian participants demonstrated more characteristics of introspection, focused on their personal emotional world, and ended up using distraction coping strategies, even though these strategies are considered “less useful” (Carver et al., 1989).

The results also demonstrated that Brazilian participants experienced more situations of intersectionality in regard to gender and race. We believe that this may be related to the higher rates of crimes against women in Brazil, considering that it has a more hostile and dangerous environment for women, as shown by the fact that in 2022, 73.685 cases of violence against women were registered in Brazil (Agência Gov, 2023), while in Portugal, 30.389 cases were registered (Comissão para a cidadania e igualdade de género, n.d.), not to mention unreported cases. Furthermore, data from “Panorama Mulheres 2023” show that only 17% of company presidency positions are held by women (Lopes, 2023), while in Portugal, 26.9% of decision-making leadership positions (partners, managers, and executive directors) are held by women (Estudos do Tecido Empresarial, 2023).

Regarding racial and/or ethnic intersectionality, Brazilian participants reported this topic more often, even though both countries have laws that punish racial discrimination with prison sentences and fines, with Brazil being a nonbailable and imprescriptible crime (Item XLII of Article 5 of the 1988 Federal Constitution). This fact may arise from the distant and structural cultural history of slavery (Coelho et al., 2023), resulting from the late extinction of slavery in 1888. Another reason may be that the Brazilian population is more racially diverse, comprising approximately 55% of black and brown people according to data from IBGE (2023), with a greater possibility of racial diversity in companies. Therefore, we can assume that there is an underrepresentation of people of races and ethnicities in Portugal other than white and Portuguese nationals in leadership positions since studies by Ramos et al. (2020) show that more than 30% of Portuguese participants believe that there is a natural superiority of certain ethnic-racial groups, making it necessary to produce more scientific content on ethnic-racial issues in the current Portuguese context.

Intersectionality regarding age was also expected since career progression usually takes a few years to achieve. Although our participants were able to achieve management and leadership positions, it was reported that younger and older participants had to deal with comments and opinions about their abilities derived from their age, were not taken seriously or had their opinions invalidated. Even though the older participants had to deal with agism, most of them mentioned that they managed to put queer policy and practice into action, which, according to Pryor (2021), are the result of the organizational phenomenon of LGBTQIA+ inclusive policies such as anti-discrimination laws, the implementation of LGBTQIA+ groups at work and educational training to better understand sexual minorities (Beatriz & Pereira, 2023), as reported by both community and political leaders who have greater visibility, as well as managers responsible for diversity sections and executive directors.

It was also expected that the subcategory “absence of negativity” would be most cited by Portuguese participants due to its high rank position in the “Equality and nondiscrimination” indicator (ILGA-Europe, 2022). Thus, these participants also considered that the climate was more friendly than hostile but reported more frequently opting to stay in the closet, while they reported the same amount as Brazilians being out of the closet. It seems that both groups have opportunities to be Queer Activists in their organizational environments when they choose to make their LGBTQIA+ identity visible, focusing on transforming historically oppressive cultural structures and decentralizing power (Renn, 2007) since there is greater openness to visibility and respect within organizations.

We also expected that some participants would choose to keep their LGBTQIA+ identity hidden, using counterfeiting and avoidance techniques (Ragins, 2008; Woods, 1992; Chrobot-Mason et al., 2001). Portuguese participants mentioned opting to stay in the closet more often, despite being in an apparently more respectful and less conflicting culture. Some believe that the work environment is not the appropriate place to address personal matters; however, we believe that this choice may originate from the avoidance of the effects of direct discrimination and may go unnoticed. However, according to Ragins (2008), this choice can lead to having to address assumptions, as well as being involuntarily outed by third parties. Thus, these individuals are more likely to be on constant alert (Boatwright et al., 1996; Ragins, 2008) and have accumulated stress (Fassinger et al., 2010) compared to those who choose to come out of the closet.

Regarding the impact of LGBTQIA+ identity on leadership, Brazilian participants more often mentioned engagement and disengagement of the LGBTQIA+ identity in the workplace. This may be due to the extremism present in the Brazilian political context, where despite being marginalized, the Brazilian LGBTQIA+ population has continued actively fighting and seeking visibility for the community in this hostile context, using Queering Leadership strategies to center LGBTQIA+ experiences in their leadership practices, expanding efforts to rupture structural heterosexist culture institutions (Pryor, 2021) and opposing LGBTphobic acts, empowering LGBTQIA+ individuals and mobilizing the community (Gamboa et al., 2021).

Due to the potentially hostile climate in Brazil, it was expected that participants from this country would more frequently mention negative health consequences. Nevertheless, both Brazilian and Portuguese participants mentioned negative health impacts with the same frequency, focusing on psychological and somatization symptoms. This can be attributed to the adverse experiences that this minority group experiences since stigma increases emotional, cognitive, and interpersonal dysregulation (Frost & Meyer, 2023), which can be precipitated by experiences of discrimination (Meyer, 2003), demonstrating the transversality of prejudice against minorities’ sexual relations in many different cultural contexts.

Overall, we were able to gain deep insights and contribute to the current investigative gap, as well as trigger clues of interest for future scientific work and serve as information for policy makers in

the areas of work, occupational health, social and educational equality. This study contributes to the possible minimization of discrimination in work-related contexts, offers a positive model for the LGBTQIA+ community of professional leadership experiences, allows future public and private projects to operate in the areas of health, politics, and organizational resources from a reliable source of information, and provides an example of good practices for the inclusion and facilitation of leadership positions for sexual minorities.

We believe that this study may encourage other LGBTQIA+ individuals to adopt a positive, affirmative and self-conforming identity, since according to Riggle and Rostosky (2011), these help to root a sense of self and belonging, acting as a protective factor against discrimination and stigmatization in heteronormative contexts (Salvati et al., 2023), also suggesting the implementation of a positive attitude on the part of organizations toward the LGBTQIA+ community, enabling self-expression of their identity, aiming to reduce internalized sexual stigma and increasing the self-efficacy of its leaders (Salvati et al., 2023), which could therefore increase business revenues, increase the psychological well-being of its workers and reduce misinformation on this topic.

Despite its strengths, this study is not without limitations, including the data collection method, which was online via electronic interviews, and did not allow new clarifications to be obtained. Additionally, this was a convenience sampling method, with no possibility of probabilistic or generalizable sampling, due to the characteristics of having a similar personality profile and being willing to participate in a qualitative study, involving a lack of access to other perspectives and experiences. Despite obtaining a large number of participants, another limitation refers to the electronic interview, which does not allow for clarification to the participants and a deeper understanding of participants who are less represented in this study (e.g. trans people). Furthermore, in the future, it is recommended that studies focus on clinical interviews with these participants, who are the least represented in leadership positions in the entire LGBTQIA+ community. Finally, the cross-sectional nature of this study, which was composed of insufficient longitudinal data to analyze the evolution of the participants, limited our results.

5. Conclusion

Despite the social changes that began in the 1950s through the Stonewall riots in the United States and, more recently, legal changes in Portugal and Brazil aiming to protect people who belong to sexual minorities and other fringes of intersectionality, there is still regularity and prevalence of discrimination, prejudice and stigma against sexual minorities (Frost & Meyer, 2023), forcing the continuation of the fight for rights, combined with visibility and the attempt to break persistent heterosexist patterns.

The literature review carried out, although initial, may provide a meeting of fundamental aspects of the pillars of queer theory, applied to queer leadership, and the queer policies that surround

this theory in a practical and in-depth way, filling the current investigative gap and providing a basis for future studies in sexuality, organizational, social, and educational disciplines.

Sexual minorities who are leaders are more vulnerable to stigma, tension, stress, low self-esteem (Meyer, 2003; Pereira et al., 2011; Barreto et al., 2006; Fassinger et al., 2010), psychological symptoms and suicidal ideation (Meyer, 2007; Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015), even if they choose to keep their LGBTQIA+ identity a secret (Waldo, 1999), and experience difficulties in being authentic leaders since they are not living under mainstream discourse and internal norms (Fine, 2017). Therefore, the minority stress theory is useful for understanding and improving the well-being of sexual, gender, and racial minority populations (Frost & Meyer, 2023).

It is concluded that Portuguese and Brazilian sexual minority leaders are united not only by language but also by similar experiences, sharing an organizational climate that is more positive than negative, but both reporting discrimination, which has a negative impact on mental health. According to our participants, the LGBTQIA+ identity is more respected and visible than disrespected and invisible, they also report a large support network, both at family and social levels, and the majority report having an active role in the development of queer policies and practices in the work environment, being considered positive role models for other members of the community.

Regarding the main differences, we found that in Portugal, there is a greater absence of perceived discrimination and heterosexism, as our participants self-describe themselves as professional individuals who use more coping techniques focused on problems and emotions and who use communication to seek greater LGBTQIA+ visibility. For the findings from Brazil, we found that Brazilian participants self-described themselves as people who use emotional intelligence, as well as other coping techniques aimed at disengagement, but on the other hand, they sought to solve problems at work through active communication. Furthermore, Brazilians cited changes in their professional careers more often, reporting greater transition and separation from work.

Therefore, due to the inherent difficulties and prejudices that these individuals suffer, they continue to seek their rights, inclusion, professional development and social justice. Despite their choices to come out of the closet or not, seek visibility or remain invisible, whether they choose to include their sexuality in their leadership practice, we can say that the majority of participants demonstrate that they use a narrative that is faithful to their principles and can be described as an authentic leader (George et al., 2007), since these individuals choose the best way to manage their identities, intrapsychic processes and leadership practices, aiming not only to protect their identities but also to work in a professional manner, whether or not they attribute their identity characteristics.

Thus, this research provides a structured basis so that it is possible to continue research into queer leadership and its impact on mental and physical health, requiring further exploration into more

specific psychosymptomatology in these individuals, as well as, if necessary, the implementation of more studies on ethnic-racial minorities, mainly in Portugal.

6. References

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Theoretical Annexes

1. Introduction

Through research in Social Psychology, it has been possible to prove the existence of homophobia, heterosexism and how LGBTQIA+ individuals are marginalized, as well as the negative impact on their lives (Clarke et al., 2010), even though current legislation supposedly guarantees equal, inclusive rights that protect LGBTQIA+ individuals. The results of psychology studies on the LGBTQIA+ community are extremely important to criticize the heteronormativity of psychology, understand the experiences and psychological processes of these people and end up offering practices to change the current heterosexist society that causes harm to the lives of many groups of people (Clarice et al., 2010).

Clarke et al. (2010) developed a series of studies examining how homophobia and heterosexism operate in today's society through quantitative and qualitative methods. It is essential to continue this work to challenge the social marginalization of these people, combat inappropriate pathologization, and conversion techniques, develop models of affirmative practices, and provide quality services in the domain of clinical psychology and counseling. Therefore, studies on the LGBTQIA+ community are extremely important to combat prejudices and stigmas associated with sexual minorities.

2. Queer Theory

Queer Theory is a fundamental instrument for studies that question dominant roles, the discourse, and the support of dominant structures, especially those that oppress those who do not follow their rules of supposed normality (Grzanka, 2019). Influenced by theorist Michel Foucault, who theorized how power operates through the production/possession (something straight people possess) and repression (power being used to marginalize individuals and groups) of sexuality and sexual categories (Clarke et al., 2010). In other words, power is everywhere in society. It is not possible to discard power and oppression, given that freedom cannot operate outside of power (Minton, 1997), therefore the Queer objective it is fighting against power and not necessarily seeking freedom from power (Clarke et al., 2010).

Queer Theory grew and consolidated through social movements and university activities, through courses, books, magazines, conferences, and studies, focusing on transgression, radicalism, inclusion, and difference, with intersectional work (Giffney, 2009; Grzanka, 2019) despite this, this theory continues to be one of the most misunderstood and even maligned in social research (Grzanka, 2019). In 1980, HIV and AIDS emerged, but the creation of groups such as ACT UP and Queer Nation was possible to contribute to Queer understanding and practices in negotiating supposedly unsolvable social problems (e.g. the lack of research and the stigma present in individuals with HIV and AIDS). This made it possible for queer culture act directly against LGBTphobia and heteronormative stigma.

In the early 90s, Stein and Plummer carried out studies on non-heterosexual sexualities in the area of sociology, these authors created “distinctive signs” of Queer theory, namely: conceptualization of sexuality that sees sexual power at different levels of social life which is reinforced by binary boundaries; problematization of sexual and gender categories, which are uncertain; “anti-simulationist policy”, which rejects civil rights strategies; and willingness to conduct Queer rereadings of ostensibly heteronormative texts (Grzanka, 2019).

One of the ways to oppose LGBTQIA+ stigma was through the appropriation of the word “Queer”, which represented a form of LGBTphobic insult, which was reappropriated by the LGBTQIA+ community and resignified as a liberating, positive and empowering term (Grzanka, 2019; Meyer, 2007). Currently, the term “Queer” has different definitions (Grzanka, 2019), but Giffney (2009) postulates it as resistance to identity categories, marking the dissimilarity of the rigidity of imposed categories and immutable categories, challenging hegemonies, exclusions, norms, and assumptions, and can also be defined as everything that is at odds with the normal, legitimate and dominant.

Therefore, Queer Theory works as an analytical tool to deconstruct hostile discourses, developed by heteronormative individuals, that surround LGBTQIA+ identities, enabling the construction of meanings of their labels by the members of this community themselves (Giffney, 2009).

Meyer (2007) postulates that Queer Theory explains the function of heteronormative gender roles and how these roles can be harmful, given that the notions of masculinity and femininity are taught to children, contributing to the preservation of hegemony heteronormative that are reproduced through various social structures, such as schools, families, religious institutions, community and communication channels (Meyer, 2007) segregating people through categories of gender, race and sexual orientation. For example, external expressions of identity such as clothes, jewelry, hair, and how we walk are how gender roles are created and maintained (Meyer, 2007; Clarke et al., 2010), thus creating the concept of “performativity” by Butler, signaling that the concept of gender is not under conscious control, given that the entire society is organized around the belief that there are only two genders (Clarke et al., 2010).

Despite this, Queer Theory also explores aspects of identity, non-heteronormative experiences, questions assumptions about relationships and gender, deconstructs rigid binary categories (of genders, sexual orientation and organizational), and also offers a lens through which praxis can be transformed to explore new understandings about the world, creating more liberating, inclusive, diverse and socially fair environments (Meyer, 2007). Thus, Queer Theory became an epistemological extension, opposing heteronormativity, going against a system that privileges heterosexuality and oppresses those who do not follow heteronormativity, exemplifying the contradictions that line up within the concepts and how the meanings of labels overflow the terms when they try to count them (Giffney, 2009).

3. Social Identity Theory

This theory was based on a series of studies on social categorization, ethnocentrism, and intergroup relations (Hogg, 2000) by Henri Tajfel (Goethals, 2003). Social Identity Theory focuses on how people think about themselves and others as members of groups in social situations (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012), in which people sometimes see and act individually and other times see themselves as and act as members of a group, called the “intergroup-interpersonal continuum” (Tajfel, 1978, as cited in Brown, 2020). This postulates that self-esteem reflects personal identity, based on individual achievements, and social identity, based on the groups one belongs to and the value one attributes to these groups (Goethals, 2003).

Groups can be seen as privileged or devalued in society; therefore, how group members define themselves becomes important to the self (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). Therefore, the self and the evaluation of identity are determined according to the groups to which they belong (Hogg & Abrams, 2003), and thus, people emphasize the qualities of their group, since their identity has cognitive, evaluative, and affective consequences for the self (Brown, 2020).

As social identities represent and classify who we are and postulate how we should think, feel and act, people demonstrate strong opportunities to establish or manage the superiority of their group over others, given the focus on differences in status between groups (Hogg & Abrams, 2003). Thus, when there is an opportunity to change the status quo of their groups, members of disadvantaged groups will take this opportunity (Ellemers et al., 1993) through social competition (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012), while members of high-status groups are likely to be motivated to perpetuate the status quo (Hogg & Abrams, 2003). Some current examples of social competition in the LGBTQIA+ community revolve around past struggles and the search for rights to civil marriage, adoption (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012), such as the Stonewall Rebellion.

3.1. Social Categorization Theory

Self-categorization Theory focuses on how social categorizations can be made at different levels of inclusion or abstraction, where the same person can be involved in various categories based on distinct criteria (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). This theory proposed by Turner in 1985, states that the self is cognitively represented in categories defined at various levels of abstraction, which can range from exclusive self-categorization of personal identity (e.g. name) to inclusive self-categorization of broad social identities (e.g. nationality) (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012), emphasizing the propensity to see people in groups, setting attributes that define the ideal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of members of these groups (Goethals, 2003).

Social categorization occurs through the separation or grouping of individuals into groups, serving as a psychological, common, and functional process, that allows providing responses to social situations and organizing socially relevant information (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). When individuals are categorized in the same group, it is assumed that they share central characteristics

that define these groups, distinguishing themselves from those who do not have these characteristics (Tajfel, 1978, as cited in Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

The formation of self-categories arises from the human tendency to define oneself and a given self-category to the extent that the members of this category are perceived as smaller than the difference between its members, or that they may be salient in a particular context (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012). This theory postulates that the ability to incorporate social categories increases as differences between members of their group become smaller, while differences between this person and members of other groups stand out in a given context (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012).

A study by Devine (1989, as cited in Goethals, 2003) demonstrated the extent to which people automatically and unconsciously categorize and employ stereotypical thoughts towards them. This author demonstrated that even if people do not believe in the stereotypes attributed to their group, these stereotypes affect their perceptions (Goethals, 2003) and that we use cognitive shortcuts (schemas) to judge others (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990, as cited in Goethals, 2003).

3.2. LGBTQIA+ Identity

When someone discovers or admits to having a minority identity, these individuals become aware of the costs and benefits of carrying this identity, such as a Jew, a black person, a homosexual and or an immigrant (Castañeda, 1999).

However, unlike ethnic-racial identities that have always been clearly present, the LGBTQIA+ identity may not contain modeling or prior experience and learning (Castañeda, 1999). Therefore, when individuals identify with one of the “labels” of the LGBTQIA+ community, this is the result of a slow construction process, which involves congruence and acceptance of non-heteronormativity (Pereira et al., 2008). It often takes years for people to be sure of their identity given that psychological processes have their particular rhythms and in the context of sexuality, there is greater subjectivity (Pereira et al., 2008). For example, in Sedgwick's studies, she conceptualizes the “closet” as a process of continually leaving, returning, negotiating strategically, and knowing and being in a non-heteronormative way, and not just the notion that it is something that someone it is either inside or outside (Grzanka, 2019).

LGBTQIA+ identity theories are used to understand how people come to have identities that are recognized based on their gender identity and/or sexual orientation (Renn, 2007). For example, D'Augelli's Sexual Orientation Identity Development Model (1994) suggests that LGBTQIA+ identities are formed through dynamic processes such as social exchanges experienced in different contexts mediated by the sociopolitical context to which they belong. Through six stages of identity development, which are: (1) exiting heterosexual identity, (2) developing a personal lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status, (3) developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual identity social identity, (4) becoming a lesbian-gay-bisexual identity offspring, (5) developing a lesbian-gay-bisexual identity status and (6) entering a lesbian-gay-bisexual community (D'Augelli, 1994).

The first stage of this model involves the personal and social recognition that your sexual orientation does not correspond to heterosexuality, leaving this “pre-conceived label” by communicating this information to others. To reach the second stage, the individual needs to develop socio-affective stability to be able to effectively group thoughts, feelings and desires, which helps to generate strength and mobilize the individual for action. The third stage involves the creation of a relational network that knows about the individual's LGBTQIA+ identity, is willing to provide social support to the individual and that discusses the individual's identity in an affirmative manner (D’Augelli, 1994).

The fourth stage postulates that there is generally a disruption in the parental relationship when the individual comes out, and therefore in this stage, it is necessary for there to be a reintegration into the family of origin together with an affirmative supportive stance from family members. The fifth stage refers to the need to understand the psychological complexities of non-heterosexual relationships, given that in heterosexist culture there are several stigmatizing opinions and the invisibility of LGBTQIA+ experiences, and therefore there is a lack of cultural scripts applicable to the LGBTQIA+ community, however, the emergence of personal, couples and community norms that promote the deconstruction of heterosexist rules is also seen. The sixth stage involves the development of commitments to political and social action in conjunction with identity processes since identity development involves confrontation with current sociopolitical barriers and thus, the individual becomes capable of empowering themselves as an LGBTQIA+ individual through awareness of the history of oppression, committing themselves to resisting it (D’Augelli, 1994).

Renn (2007) developed a more specific model of how LGBTQIA+ identities operate as leaders within the student system. This model begins with encouraging involvement in the student system, where students form a group of LGBTQIA+ students and become leaders of this group. Afterwards, there is an increase in involvement, initially as a member and then as a leader or activist, which promotes increased knowledge and education about students' LGBTQIA+ identity. Despite this, not all students decide to explore leadership, social justice issues, and activism, opting to get involved in purely academic experiences and professional aspirations (Renn, 2007).

For Renn (2007), the beginning of this model begins with the circumstances that guide participants to join queer student organizations, which can be motivated by internal development and/or external events, such as the desire to explore identity and deal with an incident of LGBTphobia, respectively. When starting their participation in LGBTQIA+ groups, students often had not yet completed the coming out, and sought membership and validation through active participation in these groups, supporting the coming out process, contributing to greater involvement in assuming leadership, and using their visibility. at university and beyond (Renn, 2007).

Renn (2007) also creates the concept of “Involvement-Identification Cycle”, which refers to an increase in leadership involvement that promotes an increase in public identification of this leader as LGBTQIA+, which, therefore, further increases leadership development, like in a cycle. For example, one transgender participant described gaining visibility through his leadership position in an LGBTQIA+ group, which therefore led to him engaging in additional leadership projects outside of the university environment, perpetuating the “Involvement-Identification” cycle (Renn, 2007).

4. Minority Stress Theory

The Minority Stress Theory postulates that individuals belonging to minority groups, in comparison to the dominant culture, are subject to conflict with social structures that normally do not reflect those who make up minorities, which compromise health due to society's information being incongruous with the minority person's experience of the world (Meyer, 2003).

The minority stress process occurs on a continuum, at one end are distal stresses, referring to objective events and conditions, and at the other, proximal personal processes, referring to subjective events that depend on individual perceptions and evaluations. In this continuum there are external and objective stressful events and conditions (chronic and acute), expectations of these events that generate states of vigilance about expectations, and the internalization of negative societal attitudes (Meyer, 2003), such as feeling marginalized, misunderstood and excluded from society (Castañeda, 1999).

Therefore, distal stresses are objective, as it is independent of personal identification with the attributed minority status (Diamond, 2000, as cited in Meyer, 2003). While proximal stresses are related to self-identification of one's minority identity, in the case of the LGBTQIA+ community, hiding one's sexual orientation can be considered proximal stress due to the stressful internal psychological processes generated in these individuals (Meyer, 2003).

Identities vary in social and personal meanings, depending on what they are associated with and the subjective stress they entail. In the case of sexual minorities (specifically LGBTQIA+), minority identity is linked to a variety of stress processes, which can lead to states of vigilance in the face of interactions with other people, due to expectations of rejection, concealment of identity due to fear of data and or internalization of the associated stigma (Meyer, 2003). Thus, when these people have experiences that reinforce their minority status - such as discrimination, prejudice and heterosexism - minority stress is evoked, generating psychological suffering (Waldo, 1999).

The Minority Stress Theory was developed from Dohrenwend's stress model, as it described the stress process in the context of strengths and vulnerabilities in the environment and within the individual. Therefore, this model highlights how coping strategies impact mental health, considering environmental circumstances such as gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity,

which can be perceived as positive or negative, also considering socioeconomic level (Meyer, 2003).

Environmental circumstances expose unique general and minority stressors, such as being fired from a job and workplace discrimination, respectively. However, stressful factors can also be overlapping, with, for example, an experience of LGBTphobia that can increase the state of hypervigilance and generate expectations of rejection. Furthermore, awareness of one's minority status can lead to personal identification with minority status, which, consequently, increases stress factors related to the perception of oneself. In the more specific case of LGBTQIA+ individuals, minority stress processes are much more proximal, as previously stated, expectations of rejection, concealment, and internalized homophobia. However, it should be noted that minority identity is also an important instrument for modifying the stress process, and can become a source of strength, when associated with affiliation, social support, and coping strategies Meyer, 2003).

In terms of impact on mental health, the literature shows that there is a higher prevalence of mental disorders in LGBTQIA+ individuals (Meyer, 2003), with higher rates of suicide ideation and attempts, mood disorders, substance use (Plöderl & Tremblay, 2015; Meyer, 2007), and marginalization (Fassinger et al., 2010; Smith et al., 2020; Savalti et al., 2023). Studies have found that LGBTQIA+ individuals who experience heterosexism in their workplaces experience higher levels of psychological distress and organic health problems, as well as decreased job satisfaction (Waldo, 1999; Fassinger et al., 2010). More specifically in the LGBTQIA+ community in Portugal and Brazil, the study by Pereira et al., (2021) demonstrates that they presented higher levels of burnout, depressive and anxiety symptoms and lower levels of work involvement, occupational self-efficacy, quality of life-related to work compared to normative populations. However, Kalb et al., (2020) found that LGBTQIA+ individuals who had a deep-rooted social identity and high levels of affectionate intergroup ties functioned as protective factors against high levels of LGBT-negative microaggressions and alcohol consumption, although not significant, social ties and social identity can mitigate the effects of discrimination.

Therefore, it is concluded that LGBTQIA+ individuals who work in places with very present heterosexism and a negative work climate end up experiencing distressing feelings when their minority status is emphasized and stigmatized (Waldo, 1999), but such difficulties seem to be alleviated with social support, integration of social identity and through inclusive policies (Waldo, 1999; Kalb et al., 2020; Lourenço et al., 2021), which end up strengthening sexual minorities and promoting education about gender and sexuality for cisgender heterosexual employees.

5. Leadership

The term “leadership” has been used and conceptualized in different ways over the years (Kezar & Lester, 2011). Traditionally, management was characterized as a mechanistic practice and limited by the work context (Begley, 2003).

Begley (2003) states that it refers to practices that occur beyond the usual context of organizational management. While Kezar and Lester (2011) use it as a strategic position at the apex of an organizational hierarchy, different from the work carried out by managers who are authorities responsible for hiring, budgeting, and decision-making, leaders contribute to structural and practical changes within organizations through the involvement of your team and being in charge of it.

Therefore, the current situation demonstrates the need for an updated description of leadership and management, informed by values, sophisticated and based on knowledge and skills, which recognizes in an integrative way the legitimate needs of individuals, groups, organizations, communities, and cultures, and not just focused on closed organizational perspectives (Begley, 2003).

5.1. Authentic Leadership

Authentic leadership can be a metaphor for effective, genuine, ethically upright, conscious, reflective professionals who act through their values in their work practices, such as dealing with social circumstances in a hopeful, creative, and visionary way, going against the image traditional practices of managers and leaders present in scientific literature (Begley, 2003). Therefore, this does not necessarily require a personality trait or specific characteristic, but rather a commitment to developing your potential through the integration of your life stories and self-awareness derived from your personal experiences, values, and principles, allowing the balance of your internal values, desires, rewards, and recognition from others while keeping your team together (George et al., 2007).

Derived from Hogkinson's 1991 book, Begley (2003) adapts this model to organize the syntax of a person's mind in an onion format, aiming to contribute to the conceptualization of authentic leadership practices, composed from core to shell as follows: self, motivation, understanding, values, attitudes, and action. The self is the central layer of the onion, it refers to the essence of the individual, the biological, existential, and transcendent “I”, which can be described as people's vital energy. Motivations are divided into four bases (personal interest, inclination towards consensus, concern with consequences, and inclination to respond to principles), which together create the basis for understanding the essence and purpose of values, this is the primary reason for the adoption of a certain value, which shapes attitudes and, therefore, actions. The understanding layer resides in the knowledge acquired through personal experiences, training, and reflection and is linked to the basic motivational bases of the previous layer (Begley, 2003).

Derived from beliefs and convictions (George et al., 2007), the next layer represents personal, organizational, and social values, which are extremely important for dealing with leadership situations in organizations and act as a motivating force (Begley, 2003). These are the basis for leadership to be authentic, as they are tested in moments of pressure, where the individual will have to choose whether to translate them into actions to be taken in the work environment (George et al., 2007). Attitudes are the permeable border of personality, which act as a link between the psychological and physical world, influenced by acquired values, which enhance actions, speech, and even body posture (Begley, 2003). The last outer layer is actions, this is how attributions are made about any person's value orientations, which serve as clues to understand the actions and attitudes of others to obtain predictive insights into the values held by these people. Such as politicians, principals, teachers, parents, and children may or may not demonstrate their values through their speech and actions, especially when individuals articulate or postulate certain values when in reality they are committed to divergent values (Begley, 2003).

George et al., (2007) postulate that the beginning of the formation of authentic leadership begins with the personal narrative of their life stories, as this runs through the minds of their leaders continuously, causing the individual to repeat events and social interactions (George et al., 2007). Although authentic leaders consider not only the positive impact of their life experiences and social interactions, but they can also report difficult and negative moments and experiences, such as death of an acquaintance, illness, and discrimination, that motivated them to overcome challenges and led to the discovery of the aptitude and passion to lead (George et al., 2007). The authentic leader also needs to consider that they need to be willing to receive feedback from their subordinates, even if it is negative, as denying limitations can become an obstacle for individuals in higher positions (George et al., 2007).

5.2. Queer Leadership

When using the Queer lens to understand the phenomena of identity and leadership focused on issues of LGBTQIA+ activism, it does not necessarily exclude other forms of leadership, aiming to understand multiple experiences that occur within a Queer leadership framework, mainly of oppression derived from race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion and disability (Pryor, 2021).

Working in a historically heterogeneous system can create barriers for leaders seeking institutional change (Pryor, 2021). Thus, Queer Leadership requires centrality and activism in structural changes to leadership and practices that promote sexual and gender diversity, challenging the status quo (Dilley, 1999). Based on the model of leadership in higher education by Kezar and Lester (2011), Pryor (2021) read this model through a queer lens at the individual, group and organizational level: queer activist; queer leadership; and queer policies and practices, respectively.

“Queer Activists” increase the complexity of the individual phenomenon as they generally use “external channels” to promote change (Kezar & Lester, 2011), and broaden the conception of visible identity, motivation, and individual resilience, transmuting institutions through active combat against harassment and discrimination of members of the LGBTQIA+ community (Pryor, 2021), even if this means placing their positions under sensitivity due to the use of public confrontational strategies (Kezar & Lester, 2011).

In the study by Pryor (2021), participants, considered Queer Activists, reported that at first university workers treated lesbian women with disrespect, but that they insisted on establishing a relationship with these people through sharing and disclosing their LGBTQIA+ identity and current and previous work experiences, while other participants reported their active role in defending egalitarian practices such as access to bathrooms and combating discrimination, all of whom demonstrated the need to visibly challenge their LGBTQIA+ identities. This movement of making your identity visible contains associated risks, such as increased harassment and discrimination in the workplace, however, in these cases, this action apparently alleviated the stigma of third parties and also centralized their queer identities in a way that they used it as leadership strategies that pushes for institutional cultural change, uniting sexual minorities and some cis-heterosexual individuals in the proposed causes (Pryor, 2021).

“Queer Leadership” refers to leaders who center their queer identities in leadership practice and seek to disrupt the heterogeneous culture rooted in institutional leadership and practice (Pryor, 2021). These leaders draw on their core values, which generally include integration and advocacy for LGBTQIA+ rights, and actively commit to educating their colleagues, challenging the status quo of traditionally heterogeneous institutional practices through LGBTQIA+ unity and equity in the values of the organizations they support. belong actively and visibly (Pryor, 2021). These leaders need to demonstrate awareness of power dynamics to be able to prepare themselves to face any struggles for power, since in some cases being a “structural authority” is not enough to help them because they are fighting for, so they need to have normative notions of the institutional practices, aiming to change them towards equity for LGBTQIA+ members of the community. A participant in Pryor's study (2021) reported that it is not enough to have the necessary structures to place physical projects in institutions, such as inclusive bathrooms, involvement is also necessary so that there is adherence to these campus facilities, which can occur with the support from other departments.

“Queer policies and practices” serve to combat previous institutional practices that generally do not create a friendly atmosphere for individuals to disclose their sexuality or that automatically assume cis-heterosexuality, focusing on concerns aimed at improving individuals' success and retention. in institutions (Pryor, 2021). Some examples of queer policies and practices found in Pryor's (2021) study were asking for pronouns in the registration process, advocating for inclusive bathrooms, and recognizing and discussing gender and sexuality. Another method to promote policies and practices is through the creation of groups, which has demonstrated an improvement

in the organizational climate through the welcoming, support, and close collaboration of its members on personal causes and LGBTQIA+ initiatives (Pryor, 2021).

6. Intersectionality

Traditional psychological perspectives see sex and gender as categories of “women” and “men” as uniform groups, ignoring that there are individuals who do not just belong to one sex or gender identity category (Bosson et al., 2019).

Unlike the additive model of identity, which interprets that individual experience is shaped by the sum of the different elements of their identities (e.g. race, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic level) (Clarke et al., 2010), the intersectional approach believes that people belong simultaneously to several categories of class, race, nationality, age, physical ability and sexual orientation (Bosson et al., 2019). Therefore, because people may belong to different social categories they correlate with distinct levels of discrimination and privilege, those who have, simultaneously, more than one disadvantaged category, may deal with unique experiences not shared by other members of their group (Bosson et al., 2019).

Theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw postulated the concept of intersectionality, aiming to understand marginalized individuals in overlapping ways, given that these people present greater vulnerabilities (Clarke et al., 2010), and to comprehend how multiple types of discrimination and oppression interact to shape people's experiences. (e.g. sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and LGBTphobia) (McCall, 2005; Bosson et al., 2019). For example, it is possible to consider how the experiences of Latina women are affected by the relationship between sexism, xenophobia, and classism (Bosson et al., 2019).

7. General Discussion

This master's thesis was carried out within the scope of the Master's Degree in Clinical and Health Psychology, this being a partial requirement for obtaining a Master's degree.

The theme of this dissertation proved to be a great challenge, as it is an innovative topic with little bibliography available that explored queer leadership processes in a more comprehensive way, given that most studies focused on the school and academic environment. Even so, through the integration of different theories and conceptualizations about the identity processes of LGBTQIA+ individuals and authentic leadership processes, it was possible to create inputs for future research that aims to understand the psychosocial well-being of sexual minorities in a cross-cultural way.

Given the greater visibility that sexual minorities have received in recent years (e.g. celebrities, politicians, and intellectuals), the lack of studies on the leadership processes of these individuals demonstrates a current information gap. Thus, this theme allows psychologists and other researchers to have access to relevant information about the experiences of sexual minorities who have managed to overcome the barriers involving prejudice and discrimination, situations that these individuals tend to experience with a certain frequency.

Based on the data obtained from the electronic interviews, it is clear that the majority of participants opted for Queer Leadership, making their LGBTQIA+ identities visible and using their work attributes to promote respect, inclusion, and the well-being of sexual minorities, and in some cases of other minorities, through education policies, offices focused on inclusion and diversity, and even through artistic and political acts.

Through this study, it was possible to ascertain that the implementation of anti-discrimination laws are not sufficient to combat violent and discriminatory acts based on gender identity, sexuality, race, and age. Individuals reported numerous forms of violence in the workplace, ranging from rumors to mobbing and dismissal, which had a negative impact on individuals' health. Therefore, it appears that not even individuals from more advantaged social classes, such as individuals in top career positions, leaders, and executive directors, are exempt from discriminatory experiences in the workplace.

Furthermore, it was possible to understand the methods these individuals choose to use when faced with situations of prejudice and discrimination, which are varied but involve avoidance, active coping, and emotional ventilation, which vary according to previous experiences and coping patterns. They do not appear to remain passive in these situations, dealing with the most convenient way to overcome them, such as reporting, changing jobs, or through active dialogue.

Thus, through the reinterpretation of these experiences and coping strategies to deal directly with the problems that arose, they remained active in the fight against LGBTphobia. Furthermore,

these individuals were able to remain authentic to themselves, even when they chose to disengage from their leadership practices, given that visibility and activism can have different means of being achieved, and always depend on the importance that people place on these topics.

This study was not limited to understanding only perspectives focused on sexuality and gender identity, but also, through the theory of intersectionality, understanding the experiences of people who belong to different social categories (e.g. racial, ethnic, gender, and age minorities). Furthermore, more studies involving ethnic and racial issues are necessary, as there is a research gap involving ethnic minorities in Portugal.

By defining a gap to be investigated, it was possible to frame and substantiate the theoretical context available on the leadership experiences of sexual minorities, and through content analysis, it was possible to analyze, integrate, and critically interpret the data obtained. Specifically, it was possible to obtain accumulated knowledge from scientific literature, develop qualitative assessment methods that respected deontological principles involving the collection, analysis, and dissemination of collected data, and also maintain a high standard of scientific writing and due referencing.

Through this master's thesis, in article format, the student had the opportunity to develop qualitative scientific research skills, an area in which she experienced greater difficulty in understanding the means to analyze the content, interpretation, and discussion about the data. Furthermore, the student had the opportunity to promote skills in handling methods and instruments to obtain data necessary to understand the current investigative gap, as well as training in scientific writing and achieving the objectives proposed at the beginning of the development of this project and updating the measures considered necessary to carry out the successful conduct of the study.

Therefore, this study is important to understand the experiences of LGBTQIA+ individuals in Portugal and Brazil, given that both communities are beginning to connect more and more due to globalization and immigration processes, allowing the development of flexibility for both populations in the face of their diverse individual cultures.

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