

Symbolic violence in undergraduate LGBT students' experiences

Violência simbólica na experiência de estudantes universitários LGBT

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Abstract

Since childhood, symbolic violence has been a process experienced by LGBT people facing the sanctions of hegemonic heteronormativity. University is a space of possibility and change for many people, with a particular expectation: of greater openness to moral plurality and, thus, diversity. This article investigates experiences of symbolic violence, and the contours of the *habitus* lived by LGBT university students, by using unstructured interviews with 16 students, analyzed from the theoretical framework of Bourdieu. Symbolic violence was present in all their lives, showing itself in different environments and institutions, including the university academic life, but mostly on their family and school life. Facing impositions of the heterosexual *habitus*, individuals develop resources, with the acquisition of social capital, such as LGBT militancy, standing out. However, the university needs to concretize specific actions to face violence and respect diversity, considering its role as an institution socially responsible for the education of citizens on top of professionals. This is a challenge already present in the definition of the ethical-political university agenda, that becomes even more complex in times of struggle for the very maintenance of the democratic system in the Brazilian State.

Keywords: Gender-based Violence; LGBT; Universities; Education, Higher.

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Resumo

Desde a infância, a violência simbólica é um processo vivenciado por pessoas LGBT diante das sanções da heteronormatividade hegemônica. A universidade se constitui como espaço de possibilidade e mudança para muitas pessoas, com uma expectativa em particular: a de maior abertura à pluralidade moral e, portanto, à diversidade. Este artigo investiga as experiências de violência simbólica e os contornos do habitus vividos por universitários LGBT, por meio de entrevistas não estruturadas com 16 estudantes analisadas a partir do arcabouço teórico de Bourdieu. A violência simbólica se mostrou presente na vida de todos, se manifestando em diversos ambientes e instituições, inclusive na vida acadêmica universitária, mas principalmente na vida familiar e escolar. Diante das imposições do habitus heterossexual, os indivíduos desenvolvem diversos recursos, com destaque para a aquisição de capital social, como a militância LGBT. No entanto, a universidade precisa concretizar ações específicas de enfrentamento às violências e de respeito à diversidade, considerando seu papel como instituição socialmente responsável pela educação de cidadãos para além de profissionais. Esse é um desafio já presente na definição da agenda ético-política universitária, que se torna ainda mais complexo em tempos de luta pela própria manutenção do sistema democrático no Estado brasileiro.

Palavras-chave: Violência de Gênero; LGBT; Diversidade; Universidades; Educação Superior.

Resumen

Desde la infancia, la violencia simbólica es un proceso vivido por las personas LGBT ante las sanciones de la heteronormatividad hegemónica. La universidad se constituye como espacio de posibilidad y cambio para muchos, con una expectativa en particular: la de mayor apertura a la pluralidad moral y, por lo tanto, a la diversidad. Han sido investigadas las experiencias de violencia simbólica y los contornos del habitus vividos por universitarios LGBT. Han sido realizadas entrevistas no estructuradas con 16 estudiantes, analizadas a partir del marco teórico de Bourdieu. La violencia simbólica se mostró presente en la vida de todos. Ocurre en diversos ambientes e instituciones, con primacía en la familia y en la escuela, pero también en la vida académica universitaria. Ante las imposiciones del habitus heterosexual, los individuos desarrollan recursos, entre los cuales hay que destacar la adquisición de capital social, como la militancia LGBT. Pero la universidad, como institución socialmente responsable por la educación de ciudadanos más allá de profesionales, necesita concretar acciones específicas de enfrentamiento a las violencias y de respeto a la diversidad. Un desafío ya presente en la definición de la agenda ético-política universitaria, aún más complejo en tiempos de lucha por el propio mantenimiento del sistema democrático en el Estado brasileño.

Palabras clave: Violencia de Género; LGBT; Universidades, Educación Superior.

Introduction

Despite the prominence of studies on urban violence (traffic or domestic) in national and international academic literature, there are still gaps regarding violence among sexual minorities in its contours, forms of presentation, subjects, and subjection. Natividade and Oliveira (2013) argue that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Transvestite (LGBT)¹ present objective and subjective positions that imply discrimination and feelings of inferiority, characterized by exclusions, deprivations, and unequal treatment compared to heterosexuals.

The problems of the LGBT population comprise an emerging issue, reflecting the gradual gain of space in public and political life and the scientific field (Natividade; Oliveira, 2013). Notably, it is a relevant theme in the social sciences since it sheds light on the social configurations that construct meanings and discourses regarding the situations experienced by this group in the struggles for visibility and guaranteed rights (Warner, 2000).

The exclusions experienced by the LGBT population relate to the disruption in social expectations stemming from heteronormativity, an important concept in sexuality discussions in gender studies and queer studies. It refers to how social institutions and forms of behavior reinforce and/or produce the belief that heterosexuality is the normal parameter for people. Thus, anything outside heterosexuality deviates from normality (Blankenau et al., 2022; Mayo, 2018).

The term heteronormativity, found in studies on the discrimination suffered by LGBT people, has an important historical trajectory that must be understood. The naturalization of the normality of heterosexuality and the abnormality of homosexuals has a long tradition of critical analysis of society, especially the studies by Michel Foucault since the 1970s. Foucault (XXXX) argues that heterosexuality is built on the mechanisms of knowledge that exclude, repress, and reject homosexuality. It enables

the operations of the sexuality device that, in effect, are built on the hierarchical distribution of power. Thus, it establishes the “subordinate other”, the homosexual.

Adrienne Rich (1980) critically analyzes the institutionalization of dichotomies associated with good and bad, right and wrong. She structures a certain model based on masculine exploitation (and control over the feminine) by conceptualizing compulsory heterosexuality and the exclusion of the existence of lesbian women, either by condemning them as aberrations or by their systematic invisibilization in all spaces and manifestations of legitimacy, such as family, school, work, etc.

Patricia Murphy Robinson (1984) analyzed the historical construction of patriarchy and how the intersection of sex and gender systems resulted in the hierarchies of power sustained by assigned gender roles. Their operations occur through the normalization of heterosexuality in social relations and economic structures. Meanwhile, Gayle Rubin (1984) argues that the field of sexuality has its dynamics, politics, inequalities, and forms of oppression when compared to other dimensions of the social principles synthesized in her important conceptualization that “[...] sex is always political”² (Rubin, 1984, p. 267). She criticizes the essentialization of sex and argues that the analysis of oppression must consider that sexuality goes far beyond the biological understanding of the elements involved. Rubin (1984) points out that there is a stratification of people in society based on ideological systems that bestow greater value on the parameters of heterosexuality, while those who are different are oppressed.

Warner (1991) and Seidman (1991) were the first to use the term heteronormativity. They considered heterosexuality as the focal point of a normative in their investigations of how people who present other sexualities different from the one mentioned are oppressed. In these authors’ conception, heteronorm is the effect of the logic that implies the constant production of hierarchization, normalization,

¹ The discussion about the acronym for sexual minorities is extensive in the literature, so we adopt the one employed by the National Health Council.

² [...] *sex is always political*.

and exclusion. They differ from previous literature by arguing that the social construction of gay identity reinforces the dominant hetero-homosexual system since one becomes the counterpart. In such an approach, heteronormativity is not just a privilege system of heterosexuality but the capillarization of power relations in which social oppressions relate to the many aspects of heteronormativity, even constructing the norms of sociability (Warner, 1991).

According to Bell (2009), heteronormativity is a set of explicit and implicit devices, assumptions, practices, and beliefs that constantly reaffirm the normality and naturality of heterosexuality as the only right way. The author points out that the term mobilization is polysemic, with approaches ranging from behaviors, beliefs, rituals, and institutions to discussions on differences, functions, and social expectations arising from the binary division of genital organs.

Judith Butler (2003) argues that genders are constituted from the result of performances. In other words, they have no existence in themselves. These realities are constructed based on naturalized contexts. However, they are procedural and contingent. The author discusses the insufficiency of biological aspects of “being a man” and “being a woman”. The author argues that the genders are conformed in the acts continuously reiterated by society, as in assigning names and functions specific to each gender. Thus, society constructs technologies and functions for the body based on these denominations and assignments. Therefore, there is the idea that the socially expected performance is binary (man or woman), with parameters established through coherence and continuity between biological sex and gender and sexual practice and desire. Everything escaping this binarism is outside this matrix’s intelligibility, generating social consequences, often in the form of reprehensions.

Other approaches resort to the concept of a certain “heterosexual matrix” in contemporary Western societies, which equates gender, sex, and desire, brought together through institutional, socio-spatial practices and assumptions. The assumption of the normal tied to the

heterosexual matrix passes through the conception that the heterosexual couple is the parameter for society. This vision comprises relationships based on the romantic, sexual, (potentially) reproductive, monogamous, and lifelong union of two subjects of opposite sexes, ritualized through a religious or civil ceremony and supported by numerous institutions (government, religion, family, etc.) and practices (showing affection, having children, celebrating birthdays, etc.).

As a result of these elements, the normalization of heterosexuality was analyzed by feminist and queer theorists who study “compulsory heterosexuality”, a term coined by Michael Warner (2000). This aspect of heterosexuality refers to the various devices prescribing certain identities, practices, and institutions and the mechanisms prohibiting others. In this theoretical perspective, heterosexuality is the only legitimate and naturalized possibility for expressing sexual identity and behavior. Thus, everything different is considered deviant, aberrant, pathological, perverse, immoral, and/or criminal (Warner, 2000).

The various damages afflicting LGBT people when faced with heterosexual people occur within the family, on the streets, and in relationships with strangers, even resulting in deaths (Mendes; Silva, 2020). Transvestites, transsexuals, and transgender people are among the most vulnerable to street violence, given their greater exposure and social prejudice. Meanwhile, lesbians are at greater risk of violent acts perpetrated at home by family members, with physical assaults and the so-called “corrective rape” (Carrara; Vianna, 2006).

Despite the seriousness of this violence, there is a veiled, almost hidden character, which would be part of a “moral plot of silence”, even in schools and universities (Natividade; Oliveira, 2013). An example of this silence that reveals indifference or even negligence can be observed in the number of filed cases of reported violence, which hinders the very dimensioning of the problem (Carrara; Vianna, 2006).

According to Bourdieu (1996, 2007), hegemonic social groups coerce others, seeking the reproduction of their social position and the

cohesion that maintains society through a certain *modus operandi*, based on the economics of symbolic exchanges and the social positions of who can give and who needs to receive. Groups reproduce socially learned responses through the experiences of what is considered morally correct/incorrect. The habitus is thus constituted. It “functions as the gears of the field in such a way as to maintain the social reproduction of beliefs [and moral values], through the legitimate embodiment of every agent and the social position they occupy in the structure in which they are embedded” (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 24).

Symbolic violence operates in this process, which “is the violence that extorts submissions that are not even perceived as such, relying on collective expectations, on socially embedded beliefs” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 23). Violence which “is exercised with the tacit complicity of those who suffer it and, frequently, of those who exercise it, insofar as both are unconscious of exercising or suffering it” (Bourdieu, 1997, p. 22). These are mechanisms that render naturalized representations or dominant ideas of individuals in a given social network. These mechanisms impose the “acceptance” of rules and sanctions for transgressions. They hinder the analysis of linguistic practices and legal or moral rules. Thus, symbolic violence is manifested by the agents and institutions that move them and enforce the exercise of authority. For these reasons, such violence can be examined based on the compliance of those dominated (Vasconcelos, 2002).

On the gender topic, symbolic violence uses unequal and veiled social relations between genders. In these relations, individuals “submit to norms that define what the body should be, not only in its perceptible configuration but also in its attitude, its presentation, etc.” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 25).

It is worth noting that we found no Brazilian studies addressing symbolic violence among LGBT undergraduates. Furthermore, we found few studies in the international scientific literature (Blankenau et al., 2022; Martínez-Guzmán; Íñiguez-Rueda, 2017; Mayo, 2018). Thus, this study aims to investigate the habitus outlines and the

symbolic violence *experiences* faced by LGBT undergraduate students. Furthermore, it seeks to give visibility and enable the understanding of the theme, particularly in the higher education context.

Methodological route

This study performed a thematic analysis, following the approach of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clark (2013), to identify themes and patterns of meaning in the information set in light of the research question. The authors argue that thematic analysis is unique in its flexibility compared to other qualitative methods. It allows information analysis without prescribing data collection methods, theoretical positions, and epistemological or ontological frameworks.

The research was developed with LGBT undergraduate students at a federal university in the South of Brazil. The research project was approved by a Human Research Ethics Committee (CAAE 34999514.4.0000.0118). Sixteen college students were interviewed. Nine of them identified themselves as members of the LGBT movement. The adoption of this criterion of self-identification and inclusion of both groups did not aim to compare between groups. It aimed to ensure that the perspectives raised were broad and beyond the experience of the LGBT social movements. Therefore, it included other relevant ethical-political positions.

The snowball technique (Bernard, 1995) selected the participants. This technique enables collecting data from a certain social network based on the contacts among the participants. At the time, several groups focused on human rights, especially in the ethnic-racial and feminist agendas, since it is a public Higher Education Institution that has been discussing these issues for decades, with relevant research and university extensions related to them. Understanding that the specificity of the LGBT theme is fundamental to the research, the snowballing began with the president of the oldest LGBT collective at the university, which also included students from several educational centers. This initial interlocutor was asked to indicate other people, who were contacted with the research

proposal. Those who agreed to participate provided new referrals. This procedure was repeated until a representative number of people identified with the gender identities and sexual orientations comprising the LGBT group were reached, and

until the new reports no longer added relevant singular information, thus reaching sufficiency in the data collected.

Table 1 presents the main information regarding the research participants.

Chart 1 - Description of the participants' characteristics

Participants	Gender identity	Age	Militancy	Program	Monthly family income in MW*
Interviewee 1	Lesbian Woman	28	Yes	Medicine	3 to 5 MW
Interviewee 2	Gay Man	25	Yes	Law	3 MW
Interviewee 3	Gay Man	27	Yes	Medicine	Above 8 MW
Interviewee 4	Gay Man	23	Yes	Social Work	1 to 2 MW
Interviewee 5	Lesbian Woman	34	Yes	Pedagogy	3 to 5 MW
Interviewee 6	Transsexual Woman	25	Yes	Language	3 to 5 MW
Interviewee 7	Bisexual Woman	25	Yes	History	2 MW
Interviewee 8	Gay Man	26	Yes	Performing Arts	2 MW
Interviewee 9	Bisexual Woman	28	Yes	Medicine	Less than 1 MW
Interviewee 10	Gay Man	27	No	Dentistry	Above 8 MW
Interviewee 11	Gay Man	23	No	Medicine	Above 8 MW
Interviewee 12	Gay Man	28	No	Physics	1 MW
Interviewee 13	Bisexual Woman	22	No	Social Sciences	Above 8 MW
Interviewee 14	Lesbian Woman	19	No	Psychology	Above 8 MW
Interviewee 15	Lesbian Woman	21	No	Social Sciences	Above 8 MW
Interviewee 16	Bisexual Woman	22	No	Business Management	Above 8 MW

*Minimum wage

We used the unstructured interview because it is a methodological approach that allows the interviewee to conduct the dialogue with the interviewer. It broadens the possibilities of explanations and meanings based on a trigger question related to the interviewee's question (Mattos, 2005). The trigger question: "Do you think that people assuming or knowing about your non-heterosexual sexual orientation and/or gender identity has triggered any kind of subjective or objective harm in your life story?"

According to the information the interviewee gradually brought to the interview, the researchers delved deeper into points referring to the experiences related to the theme, both regarding personal life and university life. Thus, they stimulated the deepening of the narrative to capture details, with no intention of reaching a consensus, but rather the meanings constructed there. It is worth noting that each interview was

considered a social construction. Therefore, each interview was born in the dynamics of collectively and historically elaborated and constructed social relations and the interviewer-interviewee interaction (Spink, 2010).

The interviews were recorded on a digital recorder and transcribed in full, with an average duration of 40 minutes. The transcriptions were read in full, and after appropriating their contents, the most significant and relevant to the research object were selected. Emergent categories could be perceived based on the articulation of these contents among the different narratives. The analysis of these categories employed the concept of symbolic violence, derived from Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1996, 2004, 2007).

Given some differences in the data obtained between militant and non-militant interviewees, we chose to perform a partially separate analysis. We did not aim to compare the experiences but to

preserve the singularities and the different ways of mobilizing resources, which allows for a better understanding of the reality experienced by them.

Results and Discussion

Symbolic violence against LGBT people at the university was revealed through everyday elements among non-activist students. The “[...] *little everyday things*” (interview 12, gay man), such as greetings and forms of treatment that ridicule LGBT people. The constant experience of devaluing LGBT identities on a continuum from jokes to using terms like “abnormalities”, “freaks”, and “nonsense” was marked as limiting and constraining, which progressively teaches LGBT people not to reveal themselves as such. The interviewees point out that the family is central to discrimination, representing the core of moral conservatism in experiences correlated to those faced in the university environment.

Among militants, the expressions of symbolic violence were similar to those of non-activists but with an expanded analysis by the interviewees. They consider these elements to be mechanisms for repressing expressions of their sexualities or experiencing manifestations of political delegitimization compared to heterosexuals. It is noteworthy that among bisexuals, there is also a feeling of not belonging in the LGBT environment, where they are pressured to define themselves as heterosexual or homosexual: “*It is very hard for you to talk about violence without having a black eye to show for. People do not give importance, weight to it*” (Interview 7, bisexual woman). “*It is all more complicated because it is not just that violence where the person offends you, it is the look, the way others look at you, by how you walk, by the clothes you wear*” (Interview 3, gay man). “[...] *because I am bi, people pressure me to choose a side: ‘Make up your mind as a straight woman or a lesbian!’*” (Interview 16, bisexual woman).

The *habitus* is a system of “structured and structuring” social structures, which promotes the unified generation of practices and ideologies characteristic of the group of agents (Bourdieu, 1996). Heterosexuality, as a social

norm, relates to the context of symbolic violence against LGBT identity characteristics that imply a mismatch between people and what is required of them. The reproduction elements of this *heterosexual habitus* can be pointed out in the devaluation of LGBT people and their identities and aspirations. They operate through the incorporation of standards originating from heteronormativity, maintained and reinforced with symbolic violence mechanisms.

In Brazilian society, prejudice against LGBT people is still constant. It is followed by social complicity and group sheltering toward these practices, veiled or not (Valadão; Gomes, 2011). This picture relates to the reports and expressions of prejudice in the experience of the undergraduate students who participated in the study. This prejudice materializes into discrimination and violence when these people reveal their gender identity, which is considered incompatible with social expectations. According to the degree of non-conformity, greater or lesser violence is perceived (Carrara; Viana, 2006), even in academic environments.

For the interviewees, the expectation was that the university would be a different environment from family and school. However, in practice, they report that although the symbolic violence perpetrated by the moralistic discourse of family members, classmates, professors, and school teachers takes on other shades, it is not far from the experiences before university entry. Thus, it indicates that the pressure to comply with heteronormativity is ingrained even in an environment where reflection and science are more pronounced.

In high school, I started to realize that I liked women, although I did not... never acted on it because my high school was very discriminatory. Colleagues and teachers made gay jokes, even among my female friends, but mainly by men, even teachers, making jokes. It is no different at the university, but I expected it to be. (Interview 15, lesbian woman)

I was not even aware of what that was, I had not ‘awakened my sexuality’ yet, and that was very abstract because I thought, ‘why are they calling me that?’ (Interview 3, gay man).

Toledo and Teixeira Filho (2013) analyze that families constitute the first space in which norms about sexuality appear in people's lives. Thus, adolescents who already know themselves as LGBT do not assume themselves easily to family members for fear of sanctions, which may be related to the idealization that the interviewees presented, both militant and non-militant. They pointed out that the university was conceived as the place where they could establish affective relationships in safe environments. However, when faced with situations of embarrassment and delegitimization of dissents from heterosexuality, they report increased resentment and low self-esteem: "[...] *when I confirmed that I was gay to my mother, she asked if I wanted to reveal this to the family, and she asked if I did not think about her, about the impression her son was going to make on the family, and that hurt a lot*" (Interview 11, gay man).

[...] She [the mother] questioned me about the friend. When I implied I had a relationship with her, she took away my cell phone and computer, kept me locked up at home for a month, and took me out of school. After that month, she sent me to a more conservative nun's school. (Interview 13, bisexual woman)

I thought I would find acceptance and space at the university to be who I am. But my teachers and even classmates are just like my repressive family. I cannot be whom I am regarding my sexuality and romances. (Interview 15, lesbian woman)

The interviewees' bullying experience in elementary and high school (Lacerda; Pereira; Camino, 2002) was significant. They associate these past experiences with other situations in the university environment, such as discriminating looks and laughter, teasing and humiliation, and even physical aggression in socializing spaces. Thus, there is a continuum between the life phase of experimentation and sexual and personal identity formation of childhood/adolescence (primary socialization) and university life (secondary socialization) due to the symbolic violence in the academic environment. It creates

obstacles for LGBT people to experience university spaces to the fullest. The data analysis evidenced elements of symbolic violence from the context of primary socialization extended to the experience at the university. It includes how sexual diversity content is approached, focusing on discriminatory subtleties or the treatment of sexual diversity as a disease or deviation, which were captured in the teachers' speeches.

For the militants, the locus of homophobia that represents the family also places them in a dilemma when faced with the desire to come out and maintain relationships with family members who exclude them. There is a big rupture of expectations when they face correlated situations at the university. The university follows up on what was experienced in the family environment, demanding secrecy regarding their gender identity and sexuality. Establishing social ties is fundamental in the development of social capital, understood by Bourdieu (1996) as "the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual knowledge or recognition" (p. 43). It reinforces the importance of having an inclusive university environment that allows the construction of these ties among everyone.

Regarding the construction of sexual and gender identities in the school context and taking the social capital concept mentioned above as a starting point, Britzman (1996) advocates the sexual capital concept, understood as a political economy of sexualities. A series of necessary relations between heterosexuality and homosexuality on the one hand and the unbalanced and subordinate differences between the signs of use value and exchange value on the other. The knowledge that organizes and disorganizes sexual capital and the conflicting representations of sexuality may tell us something about how sexual identities become normalized and criminalized. Similarly, these different and conflicting discourses will also indicate the contradictory social practices and behaviors that make intelligible and unintelligible concepts such as affection, desire, and eroticism.

When exploring the sexual capital issue, Britzman (1996) seeks something more transgressive than analyzing how heterosexuality is normalized and made available in the educational context, aiming to understand:

on the one hand, those forms of sexuality that are valued and exchanged for social acceptance and social competence, pleasure, and power; and on the other hand, those forms that have no exchange value and yet promise pleasure, even when the price for it is social discouragement and ostracism. (p. 76)

Therefore, this sexual capital is recognized through an excessive display of heterosexuality. By submitting to these gendered and sexual representations, the interviewees show evidence of “wearing” the habitus, even if temporarily. Moreover, in doing so, they contribute to its reproduction, as perceived by themselves. A conflict arises from the mismatch between two desires: being who one is (freedom and pleasure) and getting rid of gender policing (freedom and belonging) by meeting the expectation or being like the majority. It is a context of reasserting symbolic strategies and processes to maintain and regulate the relationships between social structure and agency (Bourdieu, 1996, 2007): *“My mother even questioned me when I was 18: ‘when are you going to bring a girl over to the house?’ I remember turning all red, and I felt that as violence because it was a demand for something that is not mine”* (Interview 12, gay man). *“The teacher who talked about sexual differentiation taught that intersex is what is called transvestite”* (Interview 3, gay man). *“The professors of medical psychology and medical psychiatry talk about homosexuality, lesbianism”* (Interview 9, bisexual woman).

On the other hand, militants portrayed experiences of symbolic violence in public spaces more intensely than non-militants. They have a clearer perception of the difficulties of moving freely in these spaces with characteristics that provoke discrimination from heterosexual people because there is a series of more or less evident homophobic manifestations that put them in

a permanent state of alert. Thus, it leads them to wonder why such violence does not occur with heterosexuals. Another difference in the perception of the two groups relates to the militants’ more frequent reports of euphemized symbolic violence. It means they are more aware of the violence veiled by the use of terms like “I just do not like it”, “I respect it, but I do not accept it”, or even of discourses that try to diminish the weight of gender discrimination by deliberately comparing it to others, such as ethnic-racial, aesthetic-corporal, and economic discrimination: *“No, I am not wrong. I am showing my affection. Straight people do it all the time. Why do I have no right? I have been reprimanded in grad school when I was with my partner”* (Interview 3, gay man). *“I do not know, it makes you want to kill yourself all the time because it is really bad that you cannot exist, that you cannot just be and be in a place. Not as a child, not as a teenager, not as an adult”* (Interview 6, transgender woman).

Among the non-militants, one aspect that stood out was the lack of examples and references from LGBT people in their experiential processes, particularly in small towns, where self-reports of stereotyping and ridicule were mentioned a lot. In these places, there seems to be an increased sense of constant surveillance of daily activities and personal relationships, as if it were a more blatant and intimate surveillance of the habitus. Thus, we perceive strategies of oppression that manifest themselves as unfeasibility, “a stigmatization that only appears in a declared form when the movement claims visibility” (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 123). Again, the university is referred to as a space of broken hopes, in that non-militants also report that they hoped to be able to live their “non-heterosexuality” more peacefully: *“In Florianópolis I started to naturalize being gay, that there were more people like me, and that I did not have to be a ‘crazy queer’ to be gay. I saw gay men living and working normally. It is a shame that at university I cannot be who I always am”* (Interview 10, gay man).

Furthermore, symbolic violence is significant in secondary socialization spaces, such as the professional socialization that occurs to

a large extent in universities. The curricula of undergraduate courses impose frames and reinforce symbolic violence regarding LGBT identities to the extent that the contents prescribed by the so-called “formal” curriculum are based on an assumed heterosexual and masculinist biological normality. Moreover, the hidden curriculum - which comprises the influences of all the social relations involved in the teaching-learning process (Finkler; Negreiros, 2018) - actively participates in university education through implicit and explicit manifestations of prejudice and/or ignorance about sexual diversity that circulate formally and informally. The interviewees interpreted the very silence about sexual diversity in the university environment as a manifestation of symbolic violence:

In my undergraduate program, specifically, there are two sides to it. I imagine 90% of students are fine with this, but the professors are the exact opposite. In some classes where this issue is brought up, I sometimes feel embarrassed because professors sometimes make statements that show their conservatism and unpreparedness to deal with the topic. (Interview 11, gay man)

This point is particularly important because it is precisely in the course of university life that many LGBT people have the best chance of achieving social visibility. However, the university, with the power to legitimize and perpetuate the social order (Bourdieu, 1998), by disregarding the non-binarity of gender identities and silencing sexual diversity, operates the heterosexual habitus, reaffirming heteronormativity, as pointed out by the research participants.

Therefore, the non-militants reported great importance to friendships with heterosexual people who do not discriminate against them, to the extent that they represent security by the feeling of belonging and a certain disruption with the punitive mechanism of which they constantly fear to be victims. These bonds were developed in adulthood, often by moving to another city, seeking a space where they could openly express their sexual orientation, away from family

surveillance. Thus, such affections are valued as reinforcement in confronting the coercive impositions of heteronormativity.

[...] by going out and making friends like this straight friend of mine, even if she does not face the same difficulties and pressures I do, just because she perceives homosexuals as something normal, it already makes me feel safe, by realizing that there are other people who think like me, and in my circle of friends they are all very similar to me. (Interview 12, gay man)

On the other hand, for the militants, the importance of the university as a space to meet other people of LGBT identities was alluded to as even more important for providing relationships and building previously unfeasible friendships. Thus, the possibility of exchanging experiences with people with similar life trajectories stood out, for whom militancy emerged as an emblematic, but not exclusive, space. Such relationships significantly increase self-esteem, perhaps due to the perception that they are no longer alone. “In university, I did more of this process of going from shame to pride” (Interview 3, gay man).

Having this contact and seeing that so many people can exist gives you the strength to know that you are not alone and you are not the only one. And that there are examples to look up to [...] I learned from others the power to be the protagonist, to be able to fight back against all the oppressions you suffer. (Interview 7, bisexual woman)

In militancy, the interviewees learned several strategies to assert their gender identity and learn how to exist in various social spaces. Therefore, the militant group was defined as a support network that allows for real material, cultural, and symbolic exchanges, especially when violence is manifested against any of its members. Thus, the interviewees point out that the possibility of discussing with a group of people who accept them as non-heterosexual or who also have an LGBT identity is a key resource for their autonomy and authenticity.

The constant presence of LGBT people in the venues can also be understood as one of the constituents of social capital. Similarly, the possibility of LGBT couples attending public environments was considered fundamental in deconstructing the patterns constructed by symbolic violence. The relationships established by interviewees in groups where the inclusion of LGBT identities was possible reinforced the possibilities of belonging, acceptance, authenticity, conviviality, and safety in public spaces. Moreover, the experience of relationships with LGBT people has a sense of deconstructing the discourse on non-binary gender and sexual orientation as wrong, pernicious, or perverse. No less important in this context is the role of social media, such as Facebook, WhatsApp groups, and specific applications for the non-heterosexual public: “[...] *there is a Facebook group of students in my undergraduate program of gays and lesbians [...] each one posts their life experiences, in the university, in graduation, in adopting children. This group creates bonds of friendship and comforts us*” (Interview 11, gay man). “*I have contact with other LGBT people, mainly on the internet, each sharing their stories and struggles*” (Interview 14, lesbian woman).

Final considerations

The heterosexual *habitus* was present in the speech of all the participants. It influences their perceptions, feelings, and thoughts about their sexuality and gender identity through mechanisms of approaching and distancing themselves from the hegemonic norm. Their reports were based on situations perceived as generating suffering, from difficulties in establishing relationships to trying to fit in socially by performing heterosexuality. It can be explained by the long process of incorporating and reproducing socially accepted practices and ways of being.

The family and educational institutions are spaces of reproduction of the heterosexual habitus, with important manifestations of symbolic violence against people with other

sexualities. Whether it is the suffering of revealing oneself to be non-heterosexual or the need to hide, heteronormativity is at the root of suffering for people with LGBT identities since childhood. Although many of the problems faced outside the campus are also reproduced inside, the university is a space with potential for these people to experience freedom in reconstructing themselves. Furthermore, LGBT militancy was shown to be a group of great social capital for non-heterosexual people, with a transformative potential of their lives, and a transgressive character due to the greater capacity to bargain in symbolic interactions.

In many contexts, this is already a reality, as in the case of the Gay-Straight Alliances or Gender Sexuality Alliances in high schools and universities in the United States and Canada, which seek to promote a safe and supportive environment for diverse sexual and gender identities. We can see that such initiatives generate widespread inclusive benefits since the institutional mechanisms and the development of extended actions against phobias and discrimination tend to make schools and university *campuses* safer and healthier for everyone. We emphasize the importance and the potential that actions like these carry because even if transformations in the social structure are slow, such efforts can reduce the weight of the “little everyday things”. It would enable a life in which, to paraphrase one of the activist interviewees, people can exist socially, regardless of their sexual and gender identities, as the people we all are.

Since education and university training comprises an important process of personal development, in which students’ racial, sociocultural, and gender identities are also produced and organized, it is necessary to continue rethinking the educational policies related to diversity to reduce and transform normalizing discourses of bodies, genders, social relations, affectivity, and love that effectively intervene against all discriminatory, sexist, and LGBTphobic behavior. Furthermore, we indicate the need for new research on the theme, preferably interventional, to generate the scientific and political basis for recreating social and institutional interactions regarding LGBT people.

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Rodrigo Otávio Moretti-Pires jointly elaborated the construction of the research project with Marcelo Vieira, who carried out the field collection, processing and analysis of the data. Both built the first version of the manuscript, improved with the analysis and contributions of Mirelle Finkler

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