Microaggressions at Work and Self-Esteem of LGBT+ Professionals During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Las microagresiones en el trabajo y la autoestima de los profesionales LGBT+ durante la pandemia de COVID-19

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Abstract

This work sought to investigate the correlation between LGBT+ professionals' experiences of microaggressions at work and their self-esteem during the COVID-19 pandemic, and possible differences in the averages by age groups and organizational tenure. A total of 206 LGBT+ professionals participated and answered the LGBT+ Microaggression Experiences at Work Scale, the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, and a sociodemographic questionnaire. Descriptive analysis, Spearman correlation, and Mann-Whitney tests for independent samples were performed. Results indicated a weak and negative correlation between self-esteem and two dimensions of microaggressions: workplace values and cisnormative culture. Professionals aged 30 or older reported higher average levels of self-esteem and workplace values microaggressions. Professionals with more than one year of tenure had higher self-esteem averages; those with up to one year had higher averages across the three dimensions of microaggressions (workplace values, heteronormative assumptions, and cisnormative culture). This work is pioneering in the study of LGBT+ microaggressions in the workplace in Brazil, and its results contribute to advancing understanding of this population's experiences.

Keywords

self-esteem; well-being; discrimination; sexual orientation; gender identity

Resumen

Este trabajo buscó investigar la correlación entre las experiencias de microagresiones en el trabajo y la autoestima de los profesionales LGBT+ durante la pandemia de COVID-19, así como las posibles diferencias en las medias según el grupo de edad y la permanencia en la organización. Un total de 206 profesionales LGBT+ participaron y respondieron la Escala de Experiencias de Microagresión LGBT+ en el Trabajo, la Escala de Autoestima de Rosenberg y un cuestionario sociodemográfico. Se realizaron análisis descriptivos, la prueba de correlación de Spearman y la prueba de Mann-Whitney para muestras independientes. Los resultados indicaron una correlación débil y negativa entre la autoestima y dos dimensiones de las microagresiones: los valores en el lugar de trabajo y la cultura cisnormativa. Los profesionales de 30 años o más presentaron medias más altas en autoestima y en microagresiones hacia los valores laborales. Los profesionales con más de un año de antigüedad presentaron medias más altas en autoestima, mientras que quienes llevaban menos de un año presentaron medias más altas en las tres dimensiones de las microagresiones (valores en el lugar de trabajo, supuestos heteronormativos y cultura cisnormativa). Este trabajo es pionero en el estudio de las microagresiones LGBT+ en el ámbito laboral en Brasil y sus resultados contribuyen al avance en la comprensión de la experiencia de esta población.

Palabras clave

autoestima; bienestar; discriminación; orientación sexual; identidad de género

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Introduction

COVID-19 was characterized as a pandemic at the beginning of 2020, with the declaration of a state of Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) by the World Health Organization (WHO). During this crisis, thousands of people were confined to their homes to minimize the spread of the virus, causing major negative impacts across the social, economic, cultural, and political spheres (Cruz *et al.*, 2020).

The pandemic and social distancing measures had a strong impact on people's lives, disproportionately affecting minority groups (Moore *et al.*, 2021). The LGBT+ population (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and transvestite, and more classifications) was one of the most impacted by the pandemic in health and well-being, tending to present an increase in feelings of fear, uncertainty, and discrimination (Banerjee & Nair, 2020). Furthermore, during this period, they were more likely to face employment challenges and lose their jobs than non-LGBT+ individuals (Surfus, 2025), making it especially relevant to investigate their experiences of workplace discrimination related to indicators of psychological well-being during the pandemic context.

Traditionally, prejudice, discrimination, and hostility are phenomena often experienced by LGBT+ people (Morrison *et al.*, 2019), as diversities of gender identity and sexual orientation are usually perceived negatively in most societies. Sexual orientation is a concept that involves emotional, romantic, sexual, and affective attraction to other people (Pichler & Ruggs, 2018), while gender identity involves identifying the person within (or outside) the dichotomous view of "man or woman" (Franco & Salvador, 2020).

Because of marginalization, LGBT+ people are more likely to receive negative evaluations that increase the likelihood of discriminatory acts, a process that involves aspects such as stereotypes (generalization), prejudice (negative attitude), and discrimination (unjustified negative behavior; Myers, 2019). Such phenomena targeting the LGBT+ population tend to occur in various contexts, including schools (Fields & Wotipka, 2022), health services (Paranhos *et al.*, 2021), and organizations (Cech & Waidzunas, 2021), yet they remain underinvestigated (Pichler & Ruggs, 2018).

International reports indicate that Brazil is among the countries with high levels of violence against LGBT+ individuals, particularly transgender individuals (Amnesty International, 2024). In addition, Brazilian data indicate that approximately one LGBT+ person is assaulted every hour in the country (Pinto *et al.*, 2020).

In organizations, LGBT+ people are one of the most marginalized groups, due to heterosexism and homophobia (Diniz *et al.*, 2013). In North America, it is estimated that between 15% and 43% of LGBT+ professionals have experienced overt discrimination, such as being fired, denied a promotion, or being victims of violence, based on their sexual orientation (Pichler & Ruggs, 2018). Due to their marginalization, it is more difficult for LGBT+ people to enter the labor market (Monte & Nascimento, 2020), making it even more challenging to remain employable for transgender women (Cayres *et al.*, 2020).

In some countries, overtly discriminatory behaviors against sexual and gender minorities are socially and legally condemned. In Brazil, since 2019, the Federal Supreme Court has ruled that acts of homophobia and transphobia constitute crimes equivalent to racism and are therefore punishable by law (Côrtes & Buzolin, 2024). However, these behaviors became more subtle rather than going extinct, making them difficult for parts of the population to perceive and for the judicial system to respond to. This subtlety led to frequent discrimination (Souza *et al.*, 2017; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). For example, a study of academic faculty indicated that women belonging to sexual minorities perceived the highest levels of subtle forms of discrimination in the workplace, such as incivility (rude and disrespectful behavior). In addition, organizational tenure was negatively correlated with the perception of this subtle discrimination, indicating that the less tenure, the more subtle discrimination tends to be perceived (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). In turn, age may also be related to differences in the perception of subtle discrimination (Basford *et al.*, 2014), with older people tending to perceive it more readily (Alves & Menandro, 2017; Basford *et al.*, 2014).

Subtle forms of discrimination are called microaggressions and are understood as everyday verbal, behavioral, or environmental actions, whether intentional or not, that express hostility, derogatory or negative contempt, and insults against minorities (Nadal,

2008). The literature on experiences of microaggressions against LGBT+ people in the workplace is still scarce, mainly due to the lack of robust instruments to measure it. Given this, Resnick and Galupo (2019) developed the LGBT+ Microaggression Experiences at Work Scale (LGBT+-MEWS), a measure that assesses LGBT+ people's experiences of microaggressions at work related to their sexual orientation and gender identity. The use of the acronym LGBT+, to the detriment of LGBT+, was the authors' choice so as to reach non-heterosexual and non-cisgender people in a broad way, without exploring specifics between gender identities and sexual orientation.

The validity evidence of the instrument's internal structure indicated three dimensions: workplace values, heteronormative assumptions, and cisnormative culture. Workplace values encompass an organization's overall value system, including interpersonal interactions among LGBT+ workers and their co-workers, as well as workplace status related to hiring, promotions, pay scales, and job security. Heteronormative assumptions describe the everyday heterosexism experienced in the workplace by LGBT+ people, involving the assumption that the person is heterosexual and statements that aim to marginalize, invalidate, or discredit their experiences as LGBT+, even if they are seemingly harmless statements. Cisnormative culture involves the gender identity and expression of LGBT+ people and how this is experienced in the workplace, reinforcing the notion that people identify with the sex they were assigned at birth, rather than considering the multiplicity of identities and gender expressions. This separation between dimensions is important to reinforce that there are significant differences in microaggressions suffered by transgender people due to their gender identity (Resnick & Galupo, 2019).

Research using the LGBT+-MEWS identified that LGBT+ people's experiences of microaggression in the workplace are negatively related to job satisfaction and positively related to job stress, depression, anxiety, and general stress. The results also show that even people who do not openly identify as LGBT+ can experience such discrimination (Richard, 2021).

The discrimination suffered by LGBT+ people tends to cause greater insecurity about the possibility of losing their job when compared to heterosexual and cisgender colleagues, who are people whose gender identity corresponds to their biological sex (Yilmaz & Göemen, 2016). Discrimination and insecurity negatively influence the view of LGBT++ youth in preparing for the job market and developing their career interests. Influenced by low social support and high identity conflict, they tend to exhibit significant vocational indecision and low career-oriented maturity, resulting in limited energy for development (Cheng *et al.*, 2017).

Understanding work as one of the most important spaces for socialization and social identity construction (Borges & Yamato, 2014), experiences of discrimination in the workplace due to sexual orientation can negatively affect the victim, resulting in problems of self-esteem, self-concept, and self-image (Teixeira-Filho & Rondini, 2012). A qualitative survey on microaggressions at work, carried out with 100 openly LGBT+ American employees, indicated that 75.9% to 82.5% felt negative impacts on their well-being, 50.9% to 59% on their productivity, and 52.8 to 69.4% thought about leaving their current job because of this phenomenon (Galupo & Resnick, 2016).

As the LGBT+ population is a more vulnerable group, internal and external conflicts in the construction of their identity and the difficulty of seeing themselves in a positive way tend to make their adaptation to adverse situations more complicated, such as discriminatory attitudes and behaviors (Silva & Cerqueira-Santos, 2018). LGBT+ people subjected to micr aggressions tend to report negative impacts such as depression, trauma, and low self-esteem (Nadal, 2018, 2019). Exposure of LGBT+ people to discriminatory behavior from significant others tends to harm psychological well-being, negatively affecting self-esteem (Jaspal, 2021).

Self-esteem is the set of thoughts and feelings about oneself (Hutz *et al.*, 2014). It describes the self-assessment of one's abilities, capabilities, aptitudes, and way of being, which can result in positive (self-approval) or negative (depreciation) attitudes (Silva & Cerqueira-Santos, 2018). Self-esteem tends to vary according to age group. A meta-analysis study on the normative trajectory of self-esteem throughout life, considering 191 longitudinal studies published between 1975 and 2016, identified a trend of growth in

self-esteem between 4 and 11 years of age, stability from 11 to 15 years of age, and strong growth at age 30, reaching a peak at age 60 (Orth *et al.*, 2018).

Self-esteem also tends to increase with organizational tenure. Workers with greater organizational tenure have higher levels of experience and specialization (Puyod & Charoensukmongkol, 2019) and are more likely to be assigned to more important tasks (Hui *et al.*, 2023). In addition, they are likely to be more recognized and respected by their peers (Fischer, 2008), which tends to increase their self-esteem.

However, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the job market, leading to workers' emotional exhaustion, which in turn affected their self-esteem. So, there was a tendency towards more negative self-assessments among professionals (Modesto *et al.*, 2020). As the LGBT+ population is a more vulnerable group, social distancing intensified emotional suffering (Santana & Melo, 2021), with reports of higher levels of alcohol use, lower levels of hope for the future, and a sense of connection and pride in the LGBT+ community (Scroggs *et al.*, 2020), as well as being more prone to instability in the job market (Goldberg, 2020).

In view of this, the present study sought to investigate the correlation between LGBT+ professionals' experiences of microaggressions at work and their self-esteem during the COVID-19 pandemic, and possible differences in the averages by age groups and organizational tenure. Based on the literature, the following hypotheses were investigated in this study: (H1) LGBT+ microaggression experiences at work are negative and significantly correlated with self-esteem; (H2) LGBT+ professionals aged 30 or more have significantly higher self-esteem than younger ones; (H3) LGBT+ professionals with more than one year in the organization have significantly higher self-esteem than those with less time; (H4) professionals aged 30 or more have significantly higher perceptions of LGBT+ microaggression experiences at work; (H5) professionals with up to one year in the organization have significantly higher perceptions of LGBT+ microaggression experiences at work than those with less time.

Although LGBT+ people are one of the most marginalized groups in organizations, there is still a lack of research in Brazilian organizational literature that focuses on them (Zanin, 2019), with even more limited research focusing on their reality, especially in the pandemic context. In view of this, the present study is among the first quantitative efforts to investigate workplace microaggressions among Brazilian LGBT+ professionals. Considering its exploratory nature, this study intentionally investigated this population broadly, without restricting the sample to specific types of organizations or professional categories. This approach allows for an initial, more comprehensive mapping of these experiences, thereby identifying common dynamics that may transcend specific sectors.

Method

Type of Study

This is a quantitative, cross-sectional study (Richardson, 2017).

Participants

A total of 206 Brazilian LGBT++ professionals participated, aged between 18 and 56 years (M = 28.17; SD = 7.06), with 144 under 30 years old. As for organizational tenure, it ranged from 3 months to 32 years (M = 2.98; SD = 4.56), with 102 participants having spent more than 1 year in the organization. Most participants identified as male (57.8%), female (36.3%), and non-binary (5.9%). Transgender people made up 11.2% of the sample, with only 6.3% having a social name.

Regarding sexual orientation, the participants identified as lesbian (18%), gay (49%), bisexual (22.8%), asexual (2.9%), pansexual (2.9%), and heterosexual (2.4%). Participants declared themselves as white

(59.2%), brown (24.8%), black (12.1%), yellow (3.4%), and indigenous (0.5%).

Most participants had completed higher education (30.6%), followed by those with incomplete higher education (26.2%), complete graduate studies (23.8%), incomplete graduate studies (10.7%), complete high school (5.8%), and incomplete high school (1.5%). The majority resided in the Southeast region (80.6%), followed by the South (6.3%), Northeast (5.8%), Midwest (5.3%), and North (1.9%).

Instruments

Sociodemographic Questionnaire. Built for this work, it addresses information such as age, skin color, education, organizational tenure, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

LGBT+ Microaggression Experiences at Work Scale (LGBT+-MEWS) (Resnick & Galupo, 2019). This scale has 27 items distributed in three dimensions: workplace values, heteronormative assumptions, and cisnormative culture. The adaptation study for the Brazilian context was conducted by Zarife and Ribeiro (2023), showing good indices of model fit to the data: RDWLS χ^2/gl = 1.21; CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, SRMR = 0.076; RMSEA = 0.031 (90% *CI* = 0.018–0.041). The response options ranged from 1 (*never*) to 5 (*very often*).

Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES) (Rosenberg, 1989). This unidimensional, 10-item scale aims to assess self-esteem through questions about feelings of respect and acceptance of oneself. The adaptation to the Brazilian context was performed by Hutz and Zanon (2011), with an internal consistency of .86. The response options ranged from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 4 (*strongly agree*).

Procedures

The research instruments were made available via a virtual link (Google Forms) that provided access to an online form containing the Free and Informed Consent, research objective, data confidentiality, and conditions for participation. The elaboration of the Free and Informed Consent followed the guidelines indicated in Resolution 510/2016 of the National Health Council of Brazil (Conselho Nacional de Saúde [CNS], 2016).

Participants were recruited using snowball sampling, a strategy particularly effective for reaching specific or hard-to-access populations, such as the target population of this study, because it relies on peer networks to build trust and facilitate access (Ting *et al.*, 2025). The link was shared on social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn) and sent to LGBT+-specific groups and non-governmental organizations. Data collection occurred between June and August 2021.

Upon opening the link, participants had access to the online version of the Free and Informed Consent. After reading the document, respondents were prompted to select the mandatory option "I have read, understood, and am interested in participating in the research" to access the questionnaire. If they did not accept, they would receive a thank-you message, ending their participation.

Ethical Aspects

This research was approved by the local Research Ethics Committee (Brazilian Platform, CAEE: 39232120.2.0000.5152). Data collection complied with the requirements established in Resolution 510/2016 of the National Health Committee (CNS, 2016), which governs research involving human beings in Brazil. In accordance with this resolution, all participants provided informed consent prior to participation, were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their data, and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without prejudice. Additionally, the study was designed to minimize potential risks and protect participants' rights and well-being.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 26.0 software. At first, descriptive analyses were carried out (means, standard deviations, and percentages) in order to characterize the sample and verify the levels of microaggressions that LGBT++ professionals had experienced at work and their self-esteem. The Kolmogorov–Smirnov and Shapiro–Wilk tests were performed to assess the normality of the distributions of the variables investigated, with p-values > .05. Once non-normality was identified, non-parametric data analyses were performed.

Spearman's correlation analyses were performed to verify relationships between self-esteem and the dimensions of LGBT+ microaggressions experienced by LGBT++ professionals in the workplace. Mann-Whitney tests were performed for independent samples (two groups) to investigate differences in self-esteem and dimensions of experiences of LGBT+ microaggressions in the workplace by age group (under 30 and 30 or more) and organizational tenure (up to 1 year and more than 1 year). Effect size analyses, using r, were performed when statistically significant differences were identified between groups (Field, 2020).

Results

The results showed a weak and negative correlation between self-esteem and two dimensions of LGBT+ microaggression experiences at work (Table 1). This implies that the greater the perceptions of microaggressive experiences regarding workplace values (rs = -.145, p < .05) and the cisnormative culture (rs = -.138, p < .05), the lower the participants' self-esteem. These findings partially support H1.

Table 1. Spearman's Correlation Analyses Between Self-Esteem and Dimensions of LGBT+ Microaggression Experiences at Work

Item	*M*	*SD*	Self-esteem	Workplace values	Heteronormative assumptions	Cisnormative culture
Self-esteem	2.99	.05	-			
Workplace values	2.09	.07	-.145*	-		
Heteronormative assumptions	2.81	.07	-.077$_{n.s.}$	.518**	-	
Cisnormative culture	1.74	.07	-.138*	.639**	.541**	-

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; n.s. = non-significant relationship.
* $p \leq .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 2 presents the results of differences in the mean self-esteem and dimensions of experiences of LGBT+ microaggressions at work by age group (under 30 and 30 or more) and organizational tenure (up to one year and more than one year). The results, considering the self-esteem variable, showed professionals aged 30 or more had significantly higher means than younger ones (U = 3290.000, z = -2.842, p < .01), as well as professionals with more than one year in the organization compared to novices (U = 3350.500, z = -3.014, p < .01). However, effect sizes were low (r = .20 and r = .21, respectively). These findings support H2 and H3.

Table 2. Comparison of Self-Esteem and Dimensions of LGBT+ Microaggression Experiences at Work, According to Age Group and Organizational Tenure

Item		*M*	*SD*	Rank average	*p*	*r*
Self-esteem						
Age group	Under 30	2.90	.68	95.35	<.01	.20
	30 or older	3.20	.57	121.07		

» Table 2. (continued)

» Table 2. (continued)

Item		*M*	*SD*	Rank average	*p*	*r*
Organizational tenure	Up to one year	2.84	.65	82.57	<.01	.21
	More than one year	3.12	.62	106.65		
Workplace values						
Age group	Under 30	2.02	.96	97.90	.05	.13
	30 or older	2.25	.94	115.04		
Organizational tenure	Up to one year	2.24	1.03	104.74	<.05	.15
	More than one year	1.90	.84	87.53		
Heteronormative assumptions						
Age group	Under 30	2.79	1.11	95.35	>.05	-
	30 or older	2.85	.96	121.07		
Organizational tenure	Up to one year	2.97	1.12	104.03	<.05	.14
	More than one year	2.64	1.02	88.14		
Cisnormative culture						
Age group	Under 30	1.77	1.04	104.42	>.05	-
	30 or older	1.64	0.87	99.64		
Organizational tenure	Up to one year	1.83	1.04	103.85	<.05	.14
	More than one year	1.54	0.78	88.30		

As for the dimension of workplace values, marginally significant differences were identified in relation to the age group, with professionals aged 30 or more presenting higher means (U = 3657.000, z = -1.894, p = .05) and significant differences in relation to organizational tenure, while professionals with up to one year of tenure presented higher averages (U = 3675.000, z = -2.151, p < .05). In both cases, the effect sizes were low (r = .13 and r = .15, respectively).

For the dimension of heteronormative assumptions, no statistically significant differences were identified regarding the age group (U = 4158.500, z = -0.602, p > .05). Professionals with up to one year in the organization had significantly higher means (U = 3737.000, z = -1.987, p < .05), with a low effect size (r = .14).

Considering the dimension of cisnormative culture, no statistically significant differences were identified regarding the age group (U = 4187.000, z = -.545, p > .05). However, professionals with up to one year in the organization had significantly higher means (U = 3753.500, z = -2.008, p < .05), with a low effect size (r = .14). These findings partially support H4 and support H5.

Discussion and Conclusions

The objective of this work was to investigate the correlation between LGBT+ professionals' experiences of microaggressions at work and their self-esteem during the COVID-19 pandemic, and possible differences in the averages by age groups and organizational tenure. Spearman's correlation analyses were performed in order to verify the relationship between dimensions of LGBT+ professionals' microaggressions experienced at work and their self-esteem. In addition, Mann-Whitney tests were performed for independent samples (in two groups) with the aim of investigating differences in the means of self-esteem and in the dimensions of LGBT+ microaggression experiences at work by age group (under 30 and 30 or more) and organizational tenure (up to one year and more than one year).

Overall, negative correlations were identified between LGBT+ professionals' self-esteem and two of the three dimensions of microaggression they experience at work. This indicates that the more an LGBT+ professional is subjected to microaggressions at work, the lower their self-esteem is. This result follows the literature, which indicates that LGBT+ persons, when subjected to microaggressions, tend to have low levels of self-esteem (Nadal, 2018, 2019).

Historically, the LGBT+ population has been a frequent target of prejudice, discrimination, and violence (Morrison *et al.*, 2019). However, considering the period of the data collection, the findings of the present research should also be interpreted in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Evidence suggests that they experienced heightened vulnerability during this period (Moore *et al.*, 2021) and were disproportionately affected in terms of health and well-being (Banerjee & Nair, 2020). More specifically, the social distancing measures imposed during this pandemic period, although necessary, provided significant experiences of profound loss of social connections, community spaces, and support from social networks specific to their sociosexual identities, which intensified pre-existing mental health disparities (Souleymanov *et al.*, 2023). Such conditions may have amplified the negative relationship between workplace microaggressions and self-esteem, as individuals were already exposed to intensified stressors.

Self-esteem is the set of thoughts and feelings people have about themselves (Hutz *et al.*, 2014). According to the literature, it is related to professionals' attitudes, motivation, and performance. Higher self-esteem can increase job satisfaction, productivity, positive work attitudes, motivation, and adaptability. Conversely, lower self-esteem tends to increase sensitivity to stressful and adverse situations (Pierce & Gardner, 2004).

Whereas experiences of discrimination at work based on sexual orientation can negatively affect the victim, being linked to low levels of self-esteem, self-concept, and self-image (Teixeira-Filho & Rondini, 2012), as well as the importance of self-esteem in attitudes and behaviors (Pierce & Gardner, 2004), it is important to promote inclusive (and non-hostile) work environments for LGBT+ professionals. Interventions should aim to avoid or curb behaviors that lead to negative work experiences, such as microaggressions, and to protect employees' self-esteem.

More specifically, the results of this study indicated a weak and negative correlation between self-esteem and workplace values, one of the dimensions of experiences of LGBT+ microaggressions at work. This indicates that the more experiences of microaggressions regarding workplace values happen at work, the lower the self-esteem of LGBT+ professionals tends to be.

The workplace values dimension addresses an organization's general value system, including aspects such as job insecurity, questioning employees' competence, negative interactions with colleagues (e.g., derogatory jokes and insults), and disregard for harassment complaints (Resnick & Galupo, 2019). Given that workplace values indicate the behaviors expected of employees by the organization, the existence of "negative" values directed at LGBT+ professionals may indicate an organizational culture that accepts, or even worse, encourages, such behaviors.

According to the literature, organizational culture significantly influences how individuals from minority groups perceive discrimination, and discrimination is perceived more intensely when it is tolerated within

the culture. Consequences tend to be negative impacts on well-being at work, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and performance (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019).

Also, subjecting an LGBT+ person to negative experiences on a constant basis negatively impacts their personal and professional relationships, their mental health, and the acceptance of their own LGBT+ identity (Nadal *et al.*, 2011). In turn, feelings of uncertainty about identity (or non-acceptance) are related to high levels of stress, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Richard, 2021). Thus, it is important to build work environments that foster positive, supportive values for LGBT+ professionals.

Results of this study also indicated a weak and negative correlation between self-esteem and cisnormative culture. Indicating that the more experiences of microaggressions related to the cisnormative culture happen at work, the lower the self-esteem of LGBT+ professionals tends to be.

The cisnormative culture dimension addresses the disregard for the multiplicity of gender identities and expressions that wrongly reinforces the idea that people always identify with the sex assigned at birth. Thus, during LGBT+ professionals' interactions in their work environment, colleagues and the organization at large do not consider their gender identity and expression. This encompasses a lack of inclusive policies regarding bathroom use, neutral language, and dress codes (Resnick & Galupo, 2019).

The literature indicates that the work environment is one of the most significant spaces for constructing social identity (Borges & Yamato, 2014) and influences employees' self-esteem (Modesto *et al.*, 2020). It so happens that exposing LGBT+ people to situations of discrimination from people who are important to them tends to negatively affect their self-esteem and psychological well-being (Jaspal, 2021). Thus, when faced with an organizational environment in which cisnormative culture is perpetuated, with co-workers replicating such attitudes, they may experience low self-esteem.

In this sense, the lack of inclusive organizational policies that address, for example, the multiplicity of gender identities and expressions may be related to a low identification of the individuals with the work environment and with the organization, which tends to indicate low levels of self-esteem and high stress levels (Willis & Lee, 2019). Still, the presence of inclusive policies for LGBT+ people is positively related to mental health, job satisfaction, and improved interpersonal relationships (Galupo & Resnick, 2016). Such policies provide a greater sense of acceptance to LGBT+ professionals, reducing anxiety and the feeling of fear, thus increasing comfort in the workplace (Hossain *et al.*, 2019).

The results of this study indicated a non-significant correlation between self-esteem and heteronormative assumptions. The heteronormative assumptions dimension addresses heterosexist assumptions that invalidate the experience and identity of LGBT+ professionals, such as assuming their sexual orientation from their appearance and considering someone a spokesperson for the LGBT+ community because of their sexual orientation, identity, or expression of gender. Often, such assumptions are rooted in the social environment and, because they are considered harmless, are more difficult for the issuer and the LGBT+ professional to perceive (Resnick & Galupo, 2019).

The literature identifies that some organizations may have a more heteronormative culture than other social spaces, especially when composed mostly of heterosexual cis men (Palo & Jha, 2020). Heteronormativity in the workplace imposes that lesbian women and gay men behave according to the hegemonic discourse, for which it is necessary for them to express themselves in a heterosexual way (Burton & Bairstow, 2013), leading to the marginalization of the LGBT+ population (Diniz *et al.*, 2013) that does not adhere to this requirement.

A survey of Indian LGBT+ professionals found that most of the participants reported facing one or more cases of discrimination, with non-verbal discrimination being the most recurrent due to heteronormative assumptions. Faced with these situations, people who openly talk about their sexual orientation in the workplace, in general, were not bothered by heteronormative comments or confronted the aggressor. They have developed coping strategies for exposure to such situations, and the way they handle such discrimination serves as a form of protection and can influence how these actions impact them (Palo & Jha, 2020).

This is a possible explanation for the non-significant relationship identified between self-esteem and heteronormative assumptions: LGBT+ professionals' self-esteem may be protected by these defense mechanisms

in the face of situations of heteronormative assumptions. However, the severity of these discriminatory actions should not be disregarded by organizations, as it is necessary to investigate their relationship with other constructs such as well-being and mental health.

Based on the differences in means, this study found that professionals aged 30 or older had significantly higher self-esteem than younger professionals. The literature indicates that self-esteem increases throughout life, with rapid growth until age 30, peaking at age 60 (Orth *et al.*, 2018). Taken together, life experiences tend to influence how older individuals adapt to and perform in the workplace compared with younger individuals (Pérez-Fuentes *et al.*, 2019).

For the workplace values dimension, professionals aged 30 or more had marginally significant higher means. A possible explanation for this result involves career time and professional maturity, which, over time, would lead to a more accurate perception of discriminatory situations and value-related impediments in the professional environment. In a qualitative study with middle-aged and elderly homosexual men about their perceptions and behaviors in situations of prejudice linked to values in the workplace, they indicated that, although late, they perceived questions about their position in the company, disqualification for a promotion, and different treatment by co-workers, later becoming experts in perceiving such situations (Alves & Menandro, 2017).

As for the heteronormative assumptions and cisnormative culture dimensions, no statistically significant differences were identified across the age groups. Unlike the workplace values dimension, heteronormative assumptions and cisnormative culture involve situations that can be experienced by LGBT+ people even before they enter the job market. Considering the sample for this study was composed only of adults, a possible explanation for non-significant results would be the daily discrimination to which LGBT+ people are subjected by society, which is essentially hetero- and cisnormative, regarding gender stereotypes and social roles.

The literature points out the fact that LGBT+ people face the fear of rejection, ignorance, and isolation from society and insecurity since their process of identification and acceptance of their gender identity or sexual orientation, persisting during their attempts to enter the labor market and (Palo & Jha, 2020) middle age to old age, while looking for professional stability (Alves & Menandro, 2017). Faced with frequent and early contact with situations of discrimination, LGBT+ people tend to develop coping strategies of different natures, such as remaining passive in the face of microaggression, confronting the author of the microaggression, or protecting themselves (Papadaki *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, within the age groups considered in this study (adult life), early contact and coping strategies may have influenced the non-significant results.

As for organizational tenure, professionals with more than 1 year of tenure had significantly higher mean self-esteem than those with less than 1 year. A possible explanation is the greater experience, confidence (Puyod & Charoensukmongkol, 2019), recognition, and respect that people with more organizational tenure tend to receive from their colleagues (Fischer, 2008), and the insecurity of newcomers and fear of professional instability, especially during the pandemic (Blanuša *et al.*, 2021). This pandemic context may have further intensified the vulnerability of LGBT+ professionals, increasing sensitivity to workplace and social stressors, and potentially amplifying perceptions of microaggressions and their impact on self-esteem.

Considering workers in general, the literature indicates that during the COVID-19 pandemic, newcomers to organizations experienced increased job insecurity. The uncertainty arising from this factor is associated with higher levels of stress and lower tolerance for emotional distress (Blanuša *et al.*, 2021). Also, years of experience within an organization affect job satisfaction and how an individual behaves and handles stressful situations (Pérez-Fuentes *et al.*, 2019).

Other results of this study indicated that professionals with up to one year in the organization had significantly higher mean scores across all dimensions of experiences of microaggressions at work. This is in line with the literature, which indicates that people with less organizational tenure tend to perceive subtle discrimination more readily (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). Moreover, studies indicate that the LGBT+ population, during the COVID-19 pandemic, was more severely subjected to job instability (Goldberg, 2020) and emotional suffering due to isolation (Santana & Melo, 2021). Emotional distress tolerance is related to perceiving stressful situations as threats. In the workplace, the

lower the tolerance for emotional distress, the greater the perception of microaggressions and their negative impacts (Richard, 2021), which may have been enhanced by the short time at the company in the present study.

Regarding the limitations of this study, the relatively small sample, composed mostly of highly educated white people from the Southeast region, differs from the general Brazilian population, which may limit the generalizability of the results. Another limitation involves half of the participants having identified themselves as cis gay men to the detriment of other sexual orientations, gender identities, and expressions. The literature indicates that this is true of most research involving people who identify as LGBT+ in organizations (Castro *et al.*, 2021). In addition, there was low participation of professionals who identify as transgender people, which is another similarity with previous studies in the area (Galupo & Resnick, 2016; Resnick & Galupo, 2019; Richard, 2021). Considering that the unemployment rate and the prevalence of informal or self-employment are higher in this group (Costa *et al.*, 2020), the inclusion criterion of having been affiliated with an organization for at least 3 months may have contributed to the low adherence among transgender people. Another limitation of the study is the lack of data collection that would allow for the creation of contrasting groups or criteria with the population that does not identify as LGBT+, which would enrich the study.

However, it is worth mentioning that this study was of a pioneering nature in the field of LGBT+ professionals' experiences of microaggression at work in the Brazilian context, as well as in the use of the LGBT+-MEWS, presenting data that indicate the correlation of the construct with the self-esteem variable and differences when it comes to sociodemographic issues. The results advance understanding of LGBT+ professionals' experiences within organizations. They can assist public and private organizations in diagnosing and managing diversity, in creating effective, preventive policies and strategies to improve self-esteem among this part of the population, and in seeking a more inclusive workplace. Such strategies may include raising awareness with leadership, internal training for employees, training in the area of People Management aiming at retaining LGBT+ professionals, welcoming actions for newcomers to the organization, the implementation of inclusive policies (unisex bathrooms, statements, and/or implementation of neutral language), and the implementation of reporting channels with a specialized team for investigating and addressing incidents.

Given the impact of microaggressions on LGBT+ professionals in the workplace and the lack of publications on this topic in Brazil, it is important that new research be conducted covering its relationship with other variables, such as well-being, employability, and anxiety, in addition to investigating the coping strategies developed by this population and their implications. Furthermore, it is important that further research be conducted outside the pandemic context, using more homogeneous samples, to verify whether the results found here are sustainable. It is also suggested that future studies compare the experiences between LGBT+ people and people who do not identify as LGBT+, as well as examine potential differences across gender, socioeconomic status, and professional categories.

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