

## INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA: IDENTIFYING THE SUBJECT'S ADAPTATION STRATEGIES IN THE FIELD

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#### Summary

A deeper understanding of issues related to internalized homophobia, heteronormativity, LGBTQIAP+ representation, self-care, and mental health is essential to promote inclusion, equality, and well-being for LGBTQIAP+ individuals in rural areas. Thus, this article addressed the issues of internalized homophobia, the impacts of heteronormativity, and the lack of reference and representation faced by LGBTQIAP+ individuals in rural areas. The need to confront conservatism, strengthen self-care and mental health, seek community and support were discussed, in addition to final considerations and future perspectives. The work also highlights the importance of promoting LGBTQIAP+ awareness, education, and visibility, as well as the creation of safe spaces, expanded representation, and emotional support to build a more inclusive and egalitarian rural society.

**Keywords:** Internalized Homophobia; Heteronormativity; LGBTQIAP+ Representation; Self-Care and Mental Health.

#### Abstract

An in-depth understanding of issues related to internalized homophobia, heteronormativity, LGBTQIAP+ representation, self-care, and mental health is critical to promoting the inclusion, equality, and well-being of LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. Thus, this article addressed the theme of internalized homophobia, impacts of heteronormativity, and lack of reference and representation faced by LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. The need to confront conservatism, strengthen self-care and mental health, seek community and support, as well as final considerations and future perspectives were discussed. The work also highlights the importance of promoting LGBTQIAP+ awareness, education, and visibility, as well as the creation of safe spaces, increased representation, and emotional support to build a more inclusive and egalitarian rural society. **Keywords:** Internalized Homophobia; Heteronormativity; LGBTQIAP+ Representation; Self-care and Mental Health.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The desexualization of sex, which manifests itself in the imposition of heteronormativity and virility as dominant social standards, has generated a series of challenges for LGBTQIAP+ individuals. Those who do not fit these molds often find themselves in a position of stagnation, confronting stereotypes such as that of the "brute, booze-drinking, womanizing macho". In addition, the lack of reference and positive representation contributes to the perpetuation of prejudices, with homosexuality often being approached in a pejorative manner, through jokes and digs from family, friends, and society itself (Nascimento, 2010).

Given this context, many LGBTQIAP+ individuals feel the need to pretend that they are not part of this community, fearing conservatism and the possible negative consequences that may arise from this revelation. However, it is important to highlight the importance of strengthening the psychological aspect so that these individuals can discover themselves, accept themselves and avoid the development of depressive disorders. Denial of one's own identity can cause significant psychological damage, making emotional support and individual empowerment essential.

In rural contexts, this situation is even worse. Rural exodus has been a reality for many LGBTQIAP+ subjects, since rural areas often do not recognize or see these

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individuals as an integral part of this environment (Magalhães, 2017). The lack of action and respect for diversity in these places creates a hostile environment, making it difficult to self-identify and seek support. This lack of acceptance in the field has led many individuals to abandon their roots in search of more inclusive spaces that are open to diversity.

Additionally, country music has stood out as a basis for resistance and empowerment for the LGBTQIAP+ community. The “Queernejó” movement, for example, has gained strength, bringing LGBT presence to the country music scene, which has historically been marked by a conservative culture. This artistic expression has been fundamental in challenging stereotypes, promoting visibility and combating internalized homophobia.

However, it is important to highlight that violence against the LGBTQIAP+ community in rural areas continues to be alarming. According to the Dossier of Deaths and Violence against LGBTI+ in Brazil, LGBTQIAP+ individuals living in these areas find themselves in conditions of aggravated vulnerability due to their sexual orientation and gender identity (Resende, 2016). The conservative context of the countryside makes self-identification difficult and creates an environment conducive to the perpetuation of prejudices, taboos, and a lack of social and nightlife spaces geared towards the LGBTQIAP+ community.

Faced with these realities, many LGBTQIAP+ individuals find themselves faced with difficult choices: whether to come out, live in the closet, or seek to join other LGBTQIAP+ people in search of ways to overcome prejudice and challenge prevailing social norms. It is essential that society as a whole engage in the fight for equality and respect for diversity, creating safe and inclusive spaces so that all individuals can live fully, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. In this context, this article aims to propose a reflection on the aspects that characterize this reality, as well as the psychosocial implications of this process of internalization.

## 2. DEVELOPMENT

### 2.1 Internalized homophobia

According to Cerqueira-Santos et al (2017), internalized homophobia is a complex phenomenon that affects many LGBTQIAP+ individuals, including those living in rural areas. Internalized homophobia occurs when people who belong to the LGBTQIAP+ community internalize and adopt negative attitudes and beliefs about their own sexuality or gender identity. In rural settings, where conservative social norms and traditional stereotypes are prevalent, internalized homophobia can be especially impactful.

Social pressure and lack of acceptance can lead to denial of their own identity by LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the countryside. Many feel compelled to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity for fear of rejection, isolation, or violence. This denial can result in intense internal conflict, damaging the self-esteem, authenticity, and mental health of these individuals.

Internalized homophobia is also associated with the adoption of adaptation strategies to fit into heteronormative and masculine standards imposed by society. LGBTQIAP+ individuals may feel pressured to adopt stereotypical behaviors in order to feel accepted and avoid the stigma associated with their sexual orientation or gender identity. These adaptation strategies can range from complete denial of identity to attempts to suppress traits considered non-conforming to prevailing norms (Paveltchuk & Borsa, 2019).

Internalized homophobia in rural areas is influenced by the lack of positive references and representation. The absence of inspiring role models that reflect the diversity of the LGBTQIAP+ experience in rural areas contributes to the perpetuation of stereotypes and prejudices. The lack of representation also hinders the process of self-identification and acceptance, as LGBTQIAP+ individuals may feel isolated and without examples of people living their lives authentically.

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It is essential to recognize the emotional and psychological impacts of internalized homophobia on the well-being of LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. Fear of rejection, the need to hide one’s identity, and constant concern about how others perceive one can lead to high levels of stress, anxiety, and even depression. Coping with internalized homophobia requires a process of self-reflection, acceptance, and building a positive identity (Antunes, 2017).

To combat internalized homophobia, it is crucial to promote education, awareness and open dialogue in the field. It is necessary to create safe and inclusive spaces where LGBTQIAP+ individuals can come out.

express themselves freely, share their stories, and support each other. Strengthening self-esteem and emotional resilience through access to resources such as support groups, therapy, and LGBT-QIAP+ literature also plays a key role in overcoming internalized homophobia.

## 2.2 Impacts of heteronormativity and virility

Heteronormativity and the imposition of standards of manhood have a significant impact on LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. According to Pereira et al (2022), heteronormativity is a belief system that assumes that heterosexuality is the only “normal” and expected sexual orientation, while manhood is associated with stereotypical traits of masculinity, such as strength, aggression, and sexual promiscuity. These standards establish rigid social norms that exclude and marginalize those who do not fit these expectations, causing emotional and psychological harm.

In this context, LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field may face pressures to conform to heteronormativity and virility as a way to avoid discrimination and social stigma. The need to conform to traditional gender roles can lead to the development of a false identity, where individuals hide or repress their true sexual orientation or gender identity. This denial of authenticity can lead to loss of self-esteem, internal conflict, and feelings of inadequacy.

The imposition of standards of manhood in rural settings can be particularly harmful to LGBTQIAP+ individuals. The stereotype of the “rough, boozing, womanizing macho” prevalent in rural areas creates significant pressure for men to conform to this ideal of masculinity. Those who do not fit these stereotypes may face ostracism, intimidation, and even physical violence, which contributes to the silencing and denial of their own identity (Medeiros, 2017).

Expectations of virility can also impact LGBTQIAP+ women in the field. They may be rendered invisible or devalued, as heteronormativity often relegates them to traditional gender roles, such as wives and mothers. The pressure to conform to these roles can limit their life choices and restrict their freedom of expression and self-determination.

The imposition of heteronormativity and virility in the field also affects interpersonal relationships and the sense of community. LGBTQIAP+ individuals may struggle to connect with others and form authentic relationships due to fear of rejection or the need to hide their identity. This can result in social isolation and feelings of loneliness, compounding the negative impacts on mental health and overall well-being.

For Rodrigues (2017), challenging heteronormativity and deconstructing standards of virility is essential to creating a more inclusive and welcoming environment for LGBTQIAP+ individuals in rural areas. It is important to promote the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities, educate rural communities about the existence and validity of these experiences, and encourage acceptance and mutual respect. Deconstructing these destructive standards opens space for greater expression and acceptance of the diverse identities present in rural areas.

## 2.3 Lack of reference and representation

The lack of reference and representation, in turn, is a significant challenge faced by LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. The absence of positive and inspiring role models that reflect their experiences and identities can lead to the invisibility and marginalization of these individuals. The lack of reference hinders the process of self-identification and acceptance, since LGBTQIAP+ individuals may feel isolated and without examples of people who live their lives authentically (Flores, 2019).

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The lack of representation also contributes to the perpetuation of negative stereotypes and prejudices. When homosexuality and other LGBTQIAP+ identities are portrayed only in a pejoratively or as a source of jokes, this reinforces the notion that these identities are inferior or abnormal. The lack of positive representation creates a harmful cycle of stigmatization, making it difficult to accept and respect sexual and gender diversity in the field.

In this sense, the lack of reference and representation can lead to loneliness and the feeling of being an “outsider” in one’s own community (Gomes *et al.*, 2020). LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field often feel isolated, without people to identify with or share their experiences with. The lack of connection with other members of the LGBTQIAP+ community can exacerbate feelings of alienation and make it difficult to form strong social bonds.

Positive representation is crucial to building an inclusive and welcoming society. Having visible and successful LGBTQIAP+ figures in the field can challenge stereotypes, promote diversity, and encourage others to come out and live their authentic lives. Representation provides inspiring role models that help break down barriers, combat internalized homophobia, and create a sense of belonging.

The lack of role models and representation affects not only LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field, but also their mental and emotional health. The lack of positive role models and success stories can contribute to feelings of inadequacy, low self-esteem, and loneliness. Continuous exposure to negative stereotypes without positive counterparts can result in a significant impact on the psychological well-being of these individuals (Antunes, 2017).

Therefore, it is essential to work to increase the representation and visibility of the LGBTQIAP+ community in rural areas. This can be achieved through awareness campaigns, inclusive education programs, and the promotion of safe and welcoming spaces for the expression of the diverse identities present in the countryside. Creating opportunities for LGBTQIAP+ individuals to share their stories and experiences is essential to building a more inclusive rural society, where everyone can feel represented, respected, and valued.

## 2.4 Facing conservatism

The prevailing conservatism in the field poses a significant challenge for LGBTQIAP+ individuals. Conservatism is often rooted in traditional social norms, rigid religious beliefs, and a lack of familiarity with the diversity of sexual orientations and gender identities. Given this context, LGBTQIAP+ individuals may face stigmatization, discrimination, and social exclusion, which leads them to hide or deny their true identity (Araújo *et al.*, 2020).

Addressing conservatism in the field involves overcoming the fear of rejection and the need to maintain personal safety. LGBTQIAP+ individuals often find themselves in situations where they must decide whether to come out and face the potential negative consequences, or whether to remain in the closet and hide their identity to avoid conflict or retaliation. This decision is personal and complex, and requires courage and support to make.

An important strategy to combat conservatism in the field is to seek out communities and support networks. According to Machado (2018), connecting with other LGBTQIAP+ people can provide a safe space to share experiences, seek guidance, and strengthen one's sense of identity. These communities can be found in local organizations, support groups, or through online networks, providing a sense of belonging and solidarity.

In this sense, education and awareness are essential to promote inclusion in the field. It is important to provide accurate and up-to-date information about sexual orientations, gender identities, and the challenges faced by LGBTQIAP+ individuals. Raising awareness about human diversity and LGBTQIAP+ rights can help challenge deep-rooted stereotypes and prejudices, fostering a more welcoming and respectful environment.

Visibility and representation also play a crucial role in confronting conservatism. Showcasing positive examples of successful and happy LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field can deconstruct negative stereotypes and challenge conservative narratives (Freitas, 2018). The presence of inspirational figures and successful role models can encourage others to come out and live their lives authentically, building a more inclusive environment for everyone.

In short, cultural and social change is a gradual but necessary process to confront conservatism in the field. This requires the engagement and collaboration of diverse parts of society, including community leaders, educators, health professionals, religious leaders and the LGBTQIAP+ community itself. Promoting open dialogue, fostering empathy and working to dismantle deep-rooted stereotypes and prejudices are important steps towards creating a more inclusive and egalitarian rural society.

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## 2.5 Self-care and mental health

Self-care and mental health play a crucial role in the well-being of LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. Dealing with internalized homophobia, conservatism, and lack of acceptance can be emotionally challenging, making self-care a vital necessity. This involves taking the time and

effort to take care of yourself physically, emotionally and psychologically (Baére & Zanella, 2022).

Self-care for LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field includes adopting strategies that promote emotional strength and resilience. This may involve seeking professional support, such as therapy or counseling, to address emotional issues related to identity, stress, and anxiety. Self-care may also include engaging in activities that bring pleasure and relaxation, such as hobbies, exercise, meditation, or other forms of self-care.

Self-discovery and acceptance of one's identity are fundamental parts of self-care for LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. This may involve a process of self-reflection, education, and connection with others who share similar experiences. As individuals become more aware of and accepting of themselves, it becomes possible to cultivate positive self-esteem and a more compassionate view of oneself (Belarmino *et al.*, 2022).

Therefore, it is important to recognize the warning signs of mental health problems and seek help when necessary. Stress, pressure and stigma can contribute to the development of conditions such as depression and anxiety. Therefore, it is essential to be aware of signs that something is not right, such as mood swings, social isolation, lack of pleasure in daily activities or difficulty concentrating, and to seek support from qualified health professionals.

In addition to individual care, building support networks and meaningful relationships is essential for the mental health of LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. Reaching out to other LGBTQIAP+ people can provide a sense of community, belonging, and mutual support. This can be done through support groups, community events, or online platforms dedicated to fostering emotional support.

Self-care should also include advocacy and active participation in creating more inclusive and equitable environments. This may involve engaging in activism activities, such as participating in LGBTQIAP+ movements or advocating for policies and legislation that promote equal rights (Gomes *et al.*, 2020). By fighting for social justice, LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field strengthen their own resilience and contribute to improving the mental health and well-being of the entire community.

## 2.6 The search for community and support

Schulman (2012) states that the search for community and support is a crucial aspect for LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field. Finding a sense of belonging and connection with others who share similar experiences can be transformative. Community provides a safe space to share stories, challenges, and achievements, as well as providing emotional support and validation.

Connections with other LGBTQIAP+ people in the field can be found through support groups, local organizations, community events, and online platforms. These spaces provide opportunities to share experiences, advice, resources, and relevant information. Connecting with the community can also help reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness by fostering an environment of mutual support.

In addition to the LGBTQIAP+ community, it is important to seek support from allies, friends, and family who are understanding and supportive. Having a support system that is not exclusive to the LGBTQIAP+ community can be an additional source of emotional and practical support. Support from those close to you can help strengthen self-esteem, provide guidance, and create an environment of acceptance within your personal context (Siqueira, 2015).

Seeking community and support can also involve participating in events and activities that promote LGBTQIAP+ visibility and inclusion in the field. Participating in marches, parades, festivals, and other celebrations is a way to connect with other LGBTQIAP+ individuals, build social bonds, and strengthen a sense of pride and belonging.

It's important to remember that sometimes finding community and support can involve overcoming obstacles and challenges. In more conservative rural areas, you may need to deal with a lack of resources specific to the LGBTQIAP+ community. However, it is possible to find creative ways to connect, such as establishing local support groups, partnerships with urban organizations or participating in online networks (Facchini, 2012).

The search for community and support is an ongoing and personal process. As individuals As LGBTQIAP+ people in the countryside discover and explore their identity, it can be helpful to experiment with different forms of connection and support until you find those that are most meaningful and enriching (Machado, 2018). Community and mutual support are fundamental to resilience, self-acceptance, and the ability to face challenges and fight for a more inclusive society.

### 3.FINAL CONSIDERATIONS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

Discussions surrounding internalized homophobia, the impacts of heteronormativity, and the lack of reference and representation for LGBTQIAP+ individuals in rural areas highlight the urgent need to promote equality, inclusion, and respect. Overcoming these challenges requires collective and individual action. It is essential to continue strengthening LGBTQIAP+ awareness, education, and visibility in rural communities, creating safe spaces, expanding representation, and supporting self-care and mental health for LGBTQIAP+ people.

Furthermore, it is important to break down the stigmas and prejudices associated with sexual and gender diversity in the field, encouraging open dialogue and building bridges of understanding between people of different sexual orientations, gender identities and cultural backgrounds. Raising awareness about the struggles and challenges faced by LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the field is essential to creating a more inclusive, fair and equal society, where everyone can live and express their true identity without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

Moving forward, it is crucial to continue strengthening support networks and LGBTQIAP+ communities in the countryside, fostering connections between individuals, sharing experiences and seeking joint solutions. Furthermore, it is necessary for community leaders, governments, educational institutions and health professionals to actively engage in the creation of inclusive policies, support programmes and services tailored to the needs of LGBTQIAP+ individuals in the countryside. Only through collective effort and continued struggle will it be possible to ensure a more equal, respectful and welcoming future for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.

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