



Gender, sexuality and work: Heteronormativity and moral harassment against homosexuals in the organizational context



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research was to analyze the association between heteronormativity and moral harassment against homosexuals in the organizational context. Using the integrative literature review methodology, databases such as SciELO, Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar were consulted. During the search, specific keywords were used in association with search descriptors AND and OR, in order to select only Brazilian articles, in Portuguese, free, available in full, and published between the years 2016 and 2021. As a result, it was found that homosexual professionals face aggravated forms of moral harassment, reflecting ingrained prejudices based on distorted moral and social conceptions. Like women historically relegated to secondary roles, sexual minorities often suffer insults and discrimination in the workplace because of their sexual orientation.

Heteronormativity, which establishes heterosexuality as the dominant norm, perpetuates harmful stereotypes and creates an environment conducive to the emergence and perpetuation of moral harassment against LGBT+ individuals. As a consequence, the pressure to conform to prevailing heterosexual standards can result in the concealment of sexual identity at work, as a strategy to avoid discrimination or exclusion. In addition, the lack of awareness and education about sexual diversity contributes to an organizational culture that does not facilitate open and respectful dialogue on these issues. Thus, the need for more inclusive and educational organizational policies is highlighted, aiming to mitigate moral harassment and promote respectful and diverse work environments. It is concluded that confronting heteronormativity not only protects the rights of LGBT+ professionals, but also strengthens organizational culture and contributes to well-being and equity within organizations.

Keywords: Moral harassment, Gender, Sexuality, Homosexuals, Work.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection between gender, sexuality and the work environment reveals a social dynamic permeated by challenges, one of which is the phenomenon of moral harassment. Moral harassment is characterized by being a form of psychological violence in the workplace, where an individual or group is the target of hostile, repetitive and intentional behaviors aimed at humiliating,

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embarrassing, intimidating or isolating the victim. These behaviors can include insults, ridicule, social exclusion, defamation, assignment of humiliating tasks, veiled threats, among others. The impact of moral harassment is not restricted to the professional sphere, but profoundly affects the mental health, emotional well-being, and even the physical health of the affected person (Lima; Muner, 2021; Heloani, 2016).

Specifically, moral harassment against homosexual professionals emerges as an aggravated expression of this problem. LGBTQ+ individuals often face hostility and discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity, creating a toxic and exclusionary work environment. Pejorative comments, social exclusion, and even the refusal of promotions or development opportunities are common forms of moral harassment that negatively impact the professional and personal lives of these professionals (Domingos et al., 2020; Carrieri; Aaron; Diniz, 2013).

In the broader context of gender, sexuality and work, issues of sexual identity and orientation continue to be areas of conflict and inequality. Heteronormative norms, which privilege heterosexuality as the expected and acceptable norm, perpetuate the marginalization and invisibility of nonconforming identities. This normative framework not only reinforces harmful stereotypes but also limits the career opportunities and emotional well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals in workplaces (Pompey; Souza, 2019).

Thus, heteronormativity represents a challenge that transcends the personal and professional spheres, influencing daily interactions and organizational policies. In confronting these often neglected issues, it is essential to explore the dynamics of power and exclusion, as well as to seek effective strategies to promote inclusive work environments that are respectful of sexual and gender diversity (Meireles; Ferrarini, 2023).

In this context, the objective of this research was to analyze the interaction between heteronormativity and moral harassment against homosexuals in the organizational context. The rationale for conducting this research lies in the importance of understanding the complex and often harmful dynamics that permeate work environments for LGBTQ+ professionals. As Pompeu and Souza (2018) reiterate, for homosexual professionals, this phenomenon is aggravated due to hostilities based on sexual orientation or gender identity, creating significant barriers to professional and personal development.

METHODOLOGY

Regarding the method used in this research, it was decided to perform an integrative literature review. This method was chosen for its ability to synthesize knowledge from different studies and offer an understanding of the topic in question, in this case, the interaction between gender, sexuality

and work in organizational contexts, with a focus on moral harassment against homosexual professionals.

To conduct the integrative review, databases such as SciELO, Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar were selected. The search strategy used involved the combination of specific keywords related to the topic, as well as the use of appropriate search descriptors. The keywords included terms such as "gender", "sexuality", "work", "moral harassment", "heteronormativity", "LGBTQ+", among others relevant to the scope of the research. These keywords were combined using Boolean operators such as "AND" and "OR", allowing a more precise search of articles pertinent to the topic.

The initial search was carried out with the objective of identifying studies that directly addressed the relationship between gender, sexuality, moral harassment and the work environment, especially focusing on the experiences of homosexual professionals. Both theoretical articles and empirical studies that offer information on the manifestations of moral harassment, the psychological and organizational impacts, as well as the coping and mitigation strategies adopted by various organizations were analyzed.

As an inclusion criterion, only Brazilian articles, published in Portuguese and available for free in full, were selected. This approach aimed to ensure the accessibility of the studies consulted and the representativeness of the experiences and realities faced by homosexual professionals in the Brazilian context. In addition, it was decided to select only articles published between 2016 and 2021, reflecting the current research on the subject.

The analysis of the studies followed a qualitative methodology, centered on understanding the information extracted from the selected articles. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurrent patterns in the coded data. This approach allowed an in-depth understanding of the manifestations of moral harassment reported in the reviewed studies, as well as the psychological and organizational impacts described by the authors. By grouping and analyzing the emerging categories, it was possible to highlight trends in the reported experiences and identify gaps in existing knowledge on the subject.

The results of the analysis were interpreted in the light of the theoretical context on gender, sexuality, bullying and work, promoting an in-depth discussion on the practical and theoretical implications of the findings. At the end of the analysis process, a sample of three scientific articles was obtained. The information of the articles, such as year of publication, authors' names, objective, methodology, and main results, were synthesized in an Excel spreadsheet for later analysis.

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

Through the integrative review, three scientific articles were obtained, as shown in chart 1.

Table 1. Selected articles

Authors	Objective	Methodology	Main results
Santini, Tosta and Nunes (2018)	To characterize the occurrences of moral harassment at work against homosexuals in organizations in the western region of Santa Catarina	Qualitative and descriptive research	This research investigated moral harassment against homosexuals in organizations in the western region of Santa Catarina, with the objective of identifying the most frequent hostile strategies directed at gay and lesbian individuals in different professional sectors. Unlike studies involving heterosexual workers, which frequently mention strategies such as deterioration of working conditions and social isolation, this research revealed a higher incidence of situations that directly attack the dignity of individuals, in a direct, visible and collective way. The hostile strategies observed included offensive phrases, mockery, insulting criticism, insinuations, mockery and other behaviors that belittle homosexuals, using pejorative terms such as "" and "". Participants reported that the mere condition of being homosexual often triggered these forms of violence, as if their sexual orientation automatically made them targets. In addition, the survey indicated that many of those affected did not initially realize that they were being victims of moral harassment, reflecting a lack of awareness on the subject and an organizational culture that does not promote open and educational discussion about diversity and respect.
Alencar, Santos e Melo (2018)	To identify the existence of moral harassment of LGBT in Business Organizations in the Metropolitan Region of Cariri.	Basic, exploratory, descriptive and qualitative research	This study addressed moral harassment in the workplace, detailing its definitions, causes, consequences for victims and aggressors, in addition to classifying its various forms. Special emphasis was placed on bullying directed at LGBT professionals, exploring their specific difficulties in the labor market, from access to job retention, highlighting the importance of competency-based opportunities, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. The research also elucidated the concept of homophobia and its practical manifestations in the work context, pointing to the need to reduce these discriminatory behaviors in organizations. Additionally, the study highlighted the absence of specific legislation against moral harassment in the private sphere, emphasizing the importance of existing laws and the fundamental role of corporate social responsibility in promoting inclusive and respectful work environments.
Ávila, Martins and Dutra (2021)	To analyze the cultural factor and moral harassment in organizations in the labor market of the LGBT public	Literature search	The article addresses moral harassment in organizations, particularly highlighting discrimination against homosexuals. Bullying is described as a common phenomenon in the workplace, often the result of a lack of empathy and understanding of people's individual characteristics. Historically, labor relations have evolved from a scenario of equality to a hierarchical system, where power differences have been established, perpetuating inequalities. In the current context, especially under authoritarian leadership and pressures for results, the work environment can become conducive to bullying. This behavior not only affects the self-esteem and well-being of employees, but can also lead to social and

			professional isolation of victims. In addition, moral harassment can be veiled and difficult to prove, which creates a challenging environment for those seeking justice. Specifically, there is mention of discrimination against homosexuals, who face prejudices based on wrong moral concepts and social prejudices. Just like women, who have historically been relegated to secondary positions, sexual minorities are also vulnerable to bullying in the workplace, often facing insults and discrimination due to their sexual orientation.
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Source: Survey data (2024).

The research conducted by Santini, Tosta and Nunes (2018) analyzed moral harassment directed at homosexuals in organizations in the western region of Santa Catarina, revealing an alarming and distinctive panorama in relation to previous studies focused on heterosexual workers. While the latter often mention deteriorating working conditions and social isolation as forms of harassment, the study identified that for gays and lesbians, hostile strategies are more visible, direct and collective, directly attacking the dignity of individuals.

Among the hostile strategies observed were the use of offensive phrases, mockery, insulting criticism, insinuations, mockery and other behaviors that belittle homosexuals. Pejorative terms such as "" and "deer" were commonly employed, exacerbating the harmful impact of harassment. The mere condition of being homosexual often triggered these forms of violence, suggesting that sexual orientation alone already placed them as potential targets.

One aspect revealed by the survey was the lack of perception on the part of the victims that they were being the target of moral harassment. This reflects not only a lack of awareness on the topic, but also a poor organizational culture that does not promote open and educational discussion about diversity and respect. The absence of an environment that stimulates dialogue on these issues contributes to the perpetuation of discriminatory behavior and to the invisibility of the problem.

The study by Santini, Tosta and Nunes (2018) points to the urgency of organizational policies that not only explicitly prohibit moral harassment, but also educate and sensitize employees about the different forms of discrimination, especially those based on sexual orientation. Implementing regular training, clear anti-harassment policies, and promoting an inclusive culture are crucial steps in mitigating bullying against gay men and ensuring a safe and respectful work environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Alencar, Santos, and Melo (2018) offer an analysis of bullying in the workplace, with a particular focus on the experiences of LGBT+ professionals. The authors' research not only defines bullying in its various forms, but also explores its causes, consequences for victims and perpetrators, and highlights the specific difficulties faced by LGBT+ individuals in the labor market.



The authors emphasize the importance of ensuring competency-based opportunities, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. This is crucial to ensure that all professionals have access to and are able to keep their jobs without discrimination. In addition to addressing the concept of homophobia, the study examines its practical manifestations in the work context. These range from hostile attitudes and discriminatory behaviors to the social and professional exclusion of LGBT+ individuals within organizations.

One of the significant conclusions of the study by Alencar, Santos and Melo (2018) was the finding of the absence of specific legislation against moral harassment in the private sector, which highlights the need to properly apply existing laws and promote corporate social responsibility. This entails implementing internal policies that explicitly prohibit bullying and promote inclusive and respectful work environments for all employees.

Thus, the study by Alencar, Santos and Melo not only illuminates the difficulties faced by LGBT professionals in the labor market, but also highlights the importance of legislative measures and organizational practices to combat moral harassment and promote equal opportunities within organizations.

In a complementary way, Ávila, Martins and Dutra (2021) offer an analysis of moral harassment in organizations, with a specific focus on discrimination against homosexuals. It was verified how moral harassment is a prevalent phenomenon in the workplace, often due to the lack of empathy and understanding of people's individual characteristics.

Historically, the authors' study discusses the evolution of labor relations, which were initially more egalitarian, but which over time have become hierarchical, perpetuating inequalities and establishing power differences that can be exploited for harassment practices.

The current context, as outlined by the authors, is described as conducive to bullying, especially under authoritarian leadership and in environments pressured by results. This behavior not only negatively impacts the self-esteem and well-being of employees, but can also result in the social and professional isolation of the victims. The difficulty in proving moral harassment, often veiled, is highlighted as an additional challenge for those who seek justice within organizations.

Specifically in relation to homosexuals, the article points out that they face prejudices rooted in mistaken moral and social concepts. Like women historically relegated to secondary roles, sexual minorities are often the target of insults and discrimination in the workplace due to their sexual orientation.

Heteronormativity, in this context, refers to the set of cultural and social norms that establish heterosexuality as the only valid, natural, and predominant sexual orientation in society. These implicit and explicit norms are internalized over time, shaping the expectations and behaviors of



people within organizations. In the workplace, heteronormativity manifests itself in a variety of ways that negatively impact homosexuals and other sexual minorities.

First, there is an expectation that all employees conform to the dominant heterosexual standards. This can result in subtle or explicit pressures for individuals to conceal or deny their sexual orientation in order to better integrate or avoid discrimination. In addition, heteronormativity perpetuates stereotypes and prejudices that marginalize homosexuals. This can include associating negative, stereotypical, or ridiculed characteristics with LGBT+ people, such as the belief that they are less competent, less trustworthy, or less suitable for certain roles or responsibilities within the organization.

From this heteronormative perspective, discriminatory behaviors such as insults, bad jokes, derogatory comments, or social exclusion are often justified or tolerated, contributing to a hostile and non-inclusive work environment for homosexuals. These practices not only affect the emotional and psychological well-being of LGBT+ employees, but also have direct impacts on their productivity, job engagement, and professional development opportunities.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The intersection between gender, sexuality and the workplace reveals a complex dynamic permeated by significant challenges, with bullying emerging as a phenomenon of great concern. This type of psychological violence in the professional environment is characterized by hostile and repetitive behaviors that aim to humiliate, embarrass, intimidate or isolate the victim. Among the most common forms of moral harassment are insults, ridicule, social exclusion, defamation and veiled threats, which impact the professional environment and the mental health of those affected.

Specifically with regard to homosexual professionals, moral harassment is aggravated, reflecting deep-rooted prejudices based on mistaken moral and social concepts. Similar to women, historically relegated to secondary roles, sexual minorities often face insults and discrimination in the workplace because of their sexual orientation. Heteronormativity, which establishes heterosexuality as the dominant and expected norm, perpetuates these harmful stereotypes and creates an environment conducive to the emergence and perpetuation of bullying against LGBT+ individuals.

In the organizational context, heteronormative norms shape expectations and behaviors that marginalize and discriminate, limiting the career opportunities and emotional well-being of LGBT+ employees. Pressure to conform to dominant heterosexual standards can result in concealment of sexual identity at work in order to avoid discrimination or exclusion. In addition, the lack of awareness and education about sexual diversity contributes to an organizational culture that does not promote open and respectful dialogue on these issues.



The reviewed studies highlight the need for clear and effective organizational policies that not only prohibit bullying but also promote inclusion and respect for sexual and gender diversity. Regular training, robust anti-discrimination policies, and the promotion of an inclusive culture are key steps to mitigate bullying and create a safe and welcoming work environment for all employees. The implementation of these measures protects the rights of LGBT+ professionals, as well as strengthens the company as a whole, promoting a culture of respect, equal opportunities, and organizational well-being.

Therefore, confronting heteronormativity and its ramifications in the workplace is not only a matter of social justice, but also an essential strategy for the success and sustainability of modern organizations. By recognizing and combating these discriminatory norms, companies not only benefit their employees but also strengthen their reputation as agents of positive change in society.



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