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Coming out (or not) of Russian LGBT immigrants: what is changing regarding disclosure with an immigration experience

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Resumo

Este estudo explora como os imigrantes LGBT+ russos na Europa apresentam a sua experiência de *coming out* usando a Teoria do Processo Identitário para identificar princípios de identidade e ameaças associadas à saída da sua terra natal e às mudanças que ocorrem com o processo de imigração. Para este estudo, foram entrevistados 11 imigrantes russos LGBT+ que vivem em países que endossam leis e políticas a favor dos direitos LGBT+. Pelo prisma da sua experiência, a imigração é retratada como uma estratégia de enfrentamento bem-sucedida para lidar com ameaças à identidade. O estudo constatou que, no seu país de origem, os participantes experimentaram múltiplas ameaças de identidade com base na orientação sexual e enfrentaram desafios em diferentes situações de *coming out*, por exemplo, em relação a parentes, colegas de trabalho ou várias instituições sociais. Com o processo de imigração, eles conseguiram fazer frente à maioria das ameaças que os afetaram na sua terra natal, mas ao mesmo tempo os participantes enfrentaram novas ameaças de identidade no papel de imigrantes. No final, os participantes relataram que as dificuldades associadas à imigração valeram a pena, e até que encontraram a felicidade no novo país. Os resultados mostram a aplicabilidade do referencial da Teoria do Processo Identitário para estudar a experiência de imigrantes russos LGBT+, o que ajuda a compreender os motivos deste grupo minoritário, as dificuldades que enfrentam, seus desejos e necessidades. Estes resultados serão úteis para psicólogos, trabalhadores da área social e serviços de migração que trabalham com imigrantes LGBT+.

Palavras-chave: coming out, LGBT, Teoria do Processo de Identidade, imigração

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3000 Psicologia Social
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Abstract

This study explores how Russian LGBT+ immigrants in Europe present their experience of coming out using the Identity Process Theory framework to identify identity principles and threats associated with leaving their homeland and to changes taking place with the immigration process. For this study, 11 Russian LGBT+ immigrants living in countries that endorse laws and policies in favor of LGBT+ rights were interviewed. Through the prism of their experience, immigration is portrayed as a successful coping strategy in dealing with identity threats. The study found that in their home country, participants experienced multiple identity threats based on sexual orientation and faced challenges in different situations of coming out, for example, concerning family members, colleagues at work, or various social institutions. With the immigration process, they were able to cope with most of the threats that affected them in their homeland, but at the same time, the participants faced new identity threats in the role of immigrants. In the end, the participants believed that the difficulties associated with immigration are worth it, and even broadcast that they have found happiness in the new country. Findings show the applicability of the Identity Process Theory framework for studying the experience of Russian LGBT+ immigrants, which helps to understand the motives of this minority group, the difficulties they face, their desires and needs, which is useful for psychologists, workers of social and migration services who work with LGBT+ immigrants, providing assistance to this group of minorities.

Keywords: coming out, LGBT, Identity Process Theory, immigration

APA classification codes:
3000 Social psychology
3020 Group and Interpersonal Processes

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Introduction

While the LGBT+ agenda is hotly debated in Europe, in Russia every year it becomes more and more difficult to talk openly about this topic. Since 2013, when the “gay propaganda” law was approved throughout the country (Associated Press, 2013), the situation for Russian LGBT+ people has deteriorated, and many of them started to consider moving to other countries. On June 26, 2013, the Russian president signed a law that prohibits the “promotion” of non-traditional sexual relations among minors (Polsdofer, 2014). Many representatives of the Russian LGBT+ community are looking for ways to leave and immigrate to Western countries. Some ask for asylum because of the threat to life and health, while others solve this issue in less radical ways (Danilovitch, 2019; Fedorinova, 2020). Apparently, such an inalienable phenomenon of the life of the LGBT community as coming out is difficult in these conditions, both as specific events of disclosing sexual orientation to someone (Rasmussen, 2014), and as part of the development of sexual identity (Cass, 1979, 1984).

While the Russian authorities are proposing to equate LGBT+ people with extremists and to judge them in accordance with the law on extremism (The Moscow Times, 2021), more and more non-heterosexual people are considering more tolerant countries for calmer and safer life. It can be assumed that with the deterioration of the political situation in Russia in relation to LGBT+ people, the number of Russian LGBT+ immigrants in Western countries will grow. According to Rainbow Europe statistics published by ILGA Europe, a major international non-governmental organization that develops the LGBT+ movement and fights for equal rights for the LGBT+ community, in 2020 Russia is ranked 46th among European countries in terms of equal rights for non-heterosexuals (Rainbow Europe, n. d). In this rating only 3 countries have lower positions: Armenia, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the Russian-speaking LGBT+ community of immigrants is not well represented in the scientific literature. There are practically no statistics on the number of Russian LGBT+ people moving to other countries, possibly due to the fact that in their native country they are forced to lead a closed lifestyle for the most part. But, for example, in Germany there is a whole organization whose activities are aimed at helping Russian LGBT+ people that migrated to this country, named Quarteera (Quarteera, 2020); a similar organization also exists in the USA — RUSA LGBT (RUSA LGBT, 2020). The existence of such organizations also suggests that there is a constant influx of LGBT+ people to these countries.

Researching the experience of Russian-speaking LGBT+ immigrants is important for several reasons. First, it is a broader representation of this group and its problems and features in the scientific literature. Secondly, studying a given minority group can shed light on the needs of this community and contribute to the provision of more effective assistance from social workers, psychologists and migration services to this the population. Third, studying Russian LGBT+ immigrants will also enrich knowledge about migration processes in general. This research is carried out through the theoretical prism of Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986, 1993, 1996), which has been interested in better understanding identity threats and coping strategies from both migrants and LGBT+ people (Jaspal & Breakwell, 2014; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010; Vignoles et al., 2002, 2006). This work intends to be an extension of the application of this theoretical framework by focusing on immigration as a coping strategy in order to manage identity while at the same time being in itself a source of new threats.

The study focused on the experience of Russian-speaking non-heterosexual individuals that migrated to the most tolerant of LGBT+ people countries of Europe, according to Rainbow Map (Rainbow Europe, n. d.), an annually updated index of the social climate for LGBT+ people in European countries. First, the experience of Russian LGBT+ was viewed from the perspective of identity threat within the framework of the Identity Process Theory. Second, special attention was paid to the phenomenon of participants' coming out, since the disclosure of sexual orientation is an important experience in the context of the development of the identity of LGBT+ people. Third, it compares what has changed in the lives of the participants with the immigration process.

First of all, in this work, a literary review of three important foundations of research will be presented: a presentation of the phenomenon of coming out, an overview of the political situation in Russia and special legislation regarding LGBT+ people, and the theoretical research framework, Identity Process Theory. Further, the research methodology and analysis will be presented, where the experience of the participants regarding life in Russia, coming out in their home country and a new country, as well as their immigration experience, will be considered in detail. Finally, the paper presents a discussion with the summary of the analysis and its main implications, as well as a general conclusion.

Chapter 1. Literature review

The literature review starts by introducing the coming out and its meaning in the life of LGBT+ people. Next, it will be presented an overview of the research background, namely the situation in Russia regarding the LGBT+ community. Finally, the theoretical field within which the research is carried out, namely the Identity Process Theory (IPT), is introduced, along with examples of research drawing on its main tenets.

1.1. The process of coming out

Coming out is an experience that non-heterosexual people go through to explore, define and disclose their sexual orientation. (Hill, 2009). Disclosure of sexual orientation can be public or private, and for LGBT people, this process is associated not only with recognizing their orientation, but also with integrating this knowledge into their lives. (Monteflores & Schultz, 1978).

Coming out is usually considered not only as a separate event for revealing one's sexual orientation, but also as a developmental process with several stages. The most widely known developmental model of coming out is a sexual identity formation model (Cass, 1979, 1984). This model proposes six stages of development of LGBT+ people to the point where sexual orientation identity is integrated within the concept of self: identity confusion (awareness that homosexuality has a relevance for a person), identity comparison (a person's assumption that he might be homosexual), identity tolerance (a person tolerates homosexual identity), identity acceptance ("normalizing" homosexuality as an identity), identity pride (sense of group identity and belonging to a community, dividing the world into "them" and "us"), identity synthesis (integration of sexual orientation identity with other aspects of self) (Cass, 1979).

The stigmatization of sexual minorities leads to a lot of the stress associated with coming out. In addition, disclosure of sexual orientation is a psychologically difficult decision, for example, coming out in the workplace among colleagues is a rather controversial and sensitive issue (Wax et al., 2018). It is also quite difficult to come out to family members, especially if they are parents (Savin-Williams, 2003). It is worth noting that for parents, the disclosure of their children is also a rather difficult moment, which causes strong emotions from love to sadness (Kircher & Ahlijah, 2011) and give in response a variety of reactions from acceptance to rejection (Katz-Wise et al., 2016). LGBT+ people prefer to come out to mothers rather than fathers, as fathers are more likely to react negatively; in addition, fathers and brothers are more

likely to respond to disclosure by verbal abuse than mothers and sisters (Ben-Ari, 1995; D'Augelli et al., 1998; Savin-Williams, 1989). The coming out situation is also influenced by how supportive the parents are: young non-heterosexuals who feel supported by their parents, feel more confident during disclosure, and are also less prone to suicidal behavior (D'amico et al., 2015). Recent research that explored parental responses to coming out by three age cohorts of non-heterosexuals also showed that coming out is not getting easier for new generations of LGBT+ people (van Bergen et al., 2021). Many non-heterosexuals also choose not to disclose, thereby protecting themselves (Hunter, 2007).

Coming out is considered as a separate event (Hunter, 2007), but at the same time as a lifelong process, during which the LGBT+ individual constantly makes decisions whether to open up to his family, friends, work colleagues, and so on (Cohen & Savin-Williams, 2012). It is also customary to consider coming out as a developmental process with several stages, each of which implies different developmental tasks (Hunter, 2007).

Coming out is also influenced by context, for example, different cultures treat LGBT+ people differently. Non-heterosexuals face discrimination at all levels despite all efforts being made in some countries to improve the rights of LGBT+ people (Adelmaro, 2013). More than 40% of the world population lives in places where LGBT+ people are criminalized (Anton, 2010; International Work, 2016), it is therefore easy to assume that disclosing sexual orientation can be harmful to the emotional and physical well-being of LGBT+ people (Cole et al., 1996; Zwiers, 2009), which can lead them to the decision to choose other countries for living.

1.2. Coming out and immigration

Heterosexism in the home country affects the development of sexual identity among LGBT+ immigrants, and moreover, the culture of the home country and Western culture affect sexual identity not only after moving to another country, but before it (Fuks et al., 2018). The development of the sexual identity of LGBT+ immigrants and their openness are associated with the process of acculturation in the new country (Kuntsman, 2003; Boulden, 2009). Interestingly, LGBT+ immigrants tend to stigmatize their home country as homophobic, and the immigration process is an important contribution for them in the discovery of sexual identity; moreover, LGBT+ immigrants feel they are finding a "queer home" to which they can belong (Kuntsman, 2003).

Although migration seems to bring benefits to the LGBT+ person, it also needs to be considered that all immigrants go through the acculturation process, it's a process of cultural

and psychological change in a situation when two cultures meet (Sam & Berry, 2010 Those LGBT+ immigrants who seek acculturation tend to integrate much better into the local LGBT+ culture, and this helps them cope with internal homophobia that may have remained after living in a previous country (Bianchi et al., 2004).

LGBT+ immigrants face many challenges. For example, according to research, Latina lesbian immigrants in the US tend to be closed about sexual orientation so as not to ruin relationships with their families (Acosta, 2008). Ethnic background strongly influences the decision to disclose sexual orientation or not, which is why some LGBT+ immigrants choose not to come out due to cultural expectations (Kimmel & Yi, 2004). At the same time, the decision to be closed can turn into mental disorders for LGBT+ immigrants, including depression (Ullrich et al., 2003). Other findings (Fischer, 2003) suggest that non-heterosexual immigrants can use closeness and openness as a form of power.

In the next part, the context in which Russian LGBT+ persons are living and developing their sexual identities? will be specifically examined, including the political situation, legislation regarding non-heterosexuals and attitudes towards LGBT+ people on the part of the state and society.

1.3. Research background: LGBT+ rights in Russia

In 2013, Russia at the federal level passed a law that prohibits the promotion of homosexual relations among children (the so-called gay propaganda law), since then LGBT+ rights in Russia have been a contested subject around the world (Associated Press, 2013). The authorities of the country defined propaganda as any actions that may arouse children's interest in manifestations of a homosexual nature, and defend that they have passed this law in order to protect children from this undesired propaganda. But besides the discriminatory law, there are other serious problems in Russia: torture, beatings, and murder of LGBT+ people. However, many victims prefer to avoid contacting the police in order to avoid humiliation and harassment. In terms of public attitudes, Russia has recently become less tolerant of non-heterosexuals (Buyantueva, 2018). According to the Russian state, it is necessary to defend "traditional values" that confront "non-traditional" Western values and defend morality and traditionalism from Western liberalism and individualism (Walstad, 2019).

Homosexuality in Russia was decriminalized in 1993 and in 1999 Russia adopted standards for the international classification of diseases (ICD-10), according to which homosexuality was removed from the register of officially recognized diseases (ARTICLE 19, 2013). Years have

passed since then, but the level of homophobia in Russia is still high. One of the latest studies of the Russian analytical center Levada was devoted to exploring the attitudes toward LGBT+ people. They found the highest level of support of equal rights for non-heterosexuals since 2015: 47% agreed that LGBT+ people should have the same rights as heterosexuals, and 43% were against it (Dergachev, 2019). Despite this, non-heterosexual people don't have the same rights and, in some regions of Russia, they are even in mortal danger.

For instance, in 2017 the opposition Russian newspaper "Novaya Gazeta" published a case of anti-gay purge in a federal subject of Russia, Chechen Republic (Chechnya). The article was about the fact that Chechen gays are subjected to tracking, trapping, and torture, and several people died from torture by the police (Milashina, 2017). This article was sharply criticized by the authorities of the Chechen republic. Ramzan Kadyrov, the leader of Chechnya, claimed there are no gays in the republic. Russian officials also made a lack of effort to understand the situation and take actions (Walker, 2017).

An international organization Human Rights Watch reported in 2017 that non-heterosexual people in the Chechen Republic are threatened not only by the authorities but also by their relatives. Chechen LGBT+ people become victims of so-called "honor killings" (Lokshina, 2017). In 2019 a new purge against Chechen gays was reported, but the Russian Government continued to do nothing regarding this situation (Caroll, 2019).

On the contrary, in 2019 Russian president Vladimir Putin claimed that there are no problems with LGBT+ people in Russia. But also added that it "must not be allowed to overshadow the culture, traditions and traditional family values of millions of people making up the core population" (Barber et al., 2019). As if to confirm his words, in 2019 there was a high-profile case with a gay couple of men from Russia who raised two adopted children. The children were adopted by one of the men who presented himself as single at the time of adoption. Due to information leakage, the state became interested in this case, and while the family was on vacation, their apartment was thoroughly searched, and their relatives began to be interrogated as if some crime had been committed. The family had to flee to the States without returning to their homeland, for security reasons, as they could be prosecuted due to the gay propaganda law. And because of the law prohibiting gay couples from adopting children, the family could lose their sons (Ring, 2019). It is thus easy to assume that LGBT+ families in Russia live in constant fear and tension.

It's also important to note that Russia is a very diverse country with over 180 different ethnic groups and cultures (National composition of Russia 2020, n. d.). Attitudes toward non-heterosexuals are also varying in different cultures and regions, and the issue in Chechnya is

one of the extreme examples which was made public. It’s well known that Chechen society is conservative, patriarchal-patrimonial and important culture concepts of Chechen culture are honor and selfless sacrifice (Johansson, 2017). Although Moscow region is usually perceived as the most tolerant to LGBT+ people, in 2019 in the center of Moscow a gay man was killed by a drunk man who was screaming homophobic swear words. The attacker used a kitchen knife and authorities opened a murder case but without raising a hate motive. In court, the accused claimed that the victim died because he “ran into” his knife. The jury found him guilty of wounding but decided that he should not be held criminally responsible for the murder (Lokshina, 2020).

These and similar cases lead LGBT+ rights defenders to conclude that in Russia LGBT+ people are discriminated, persecuted and killed with the tacit support of the state that claims to protect the traditional cultural values of the society. Also, LGBT+ rights defenders usually appeal to Western values and standards that are being implemented in European countries and reflected in laws protecting the rights of non-heterosexuals, in which, for example, the expression of homophobia is a crime.

In Russia, the state claims that the country's constitution guarantees the equality of human and civil rights and freedoms and separate rights are not needed for LGBT+ people. Russia also has signed many international documents guaranteeing equal rights for all people, but none of these documents mentions sexual orientation or gender identity. Russian criminal code lacks motivation for hate crimes based on sexual orientation, and when solving situations related to LGBT+ people, as well as in judicial practice, Russia doesn’t use The Yogyakarta Principles (The Yogyakarta Principles, 2007; The Yogyakarta Principles plus 10, 2017), which many countries rely on today in similar situations (even though the official site of the principles includes a Russian version of the text).

The Russian president claims that he is not going to legalize gay marriage during his mandate (Balmforth, 2020), and the latest version of the Russian constitution, published in 2020, reinforces the president's words and states that marriage is a union between a man and a woman (Osborn, 2020). Obviously, Russia also does not recognize as valid LGBT+ marriages contracted abroad.

In the context of such circumstances, it is quite easy for LGBT+ people in Russia to feel vulnerability and face threats to identity based on sexual orientation. To examine how Russian LGBT+ immigrants dealt with these threats, the current work adopts the framework of the Identity Process Theory.

1.4. Identity Process Theory

Different situations in life can alter people's sense of identity and cause them to reevaluate how they perceive themselves and how others perceive them. The Identity Process Theory, developed by Breakwell (1986), is an integrative model of identity construction, threat and coping in circumstances of change. In other words, this model focuses on how identity is affected by various changes and what coping strategies a person uses in response to these changes. The theory describes what a person needs to have a positive sense of identity, what ways people use to deal with identity threats, and what motivates people to protect their sense of self. It examines the dynamics between personal identity, interpersonal relationships and social structures (Breakwell, 2014).

According to Identity Process Theory, the construction of identity is regulated by two social psychological processes: assimilation-accommodation and evaluation. The first is associated with assimilating a new information (including new identities) into the structure of identity. The second is related to a process of attributing meaning to identity or evaluating how bad or good the identity is. These processes are considered universal and as being guided by several motivational principles, which represent the end states desirable for identity (Bardi et al., 2014; Breakwell, 1986; Jaspal et al., 2020). Four identity motives were described by Breakwell (1986, 1992, 1993, 1996, 2010): continuity, distinctiveness, self-efficacy and self-esteem. Empirical studies have extended this proposal by proposing additional principles (motives), namely: belonging, related to sense of acceptance by other people, meaning related to significance in one’s life (Vignoles et al., 2002, Vignoles et al., 2006), and psychological coherence, which is associated with the compatibility among one’s identities (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). The principles will now be defined and illustrated through empirical research.

The principle of continuity means motivation to maintain a connection between time and situation within an identity. Continuity does not refer to the absence of changes, but is a kind of general canvas that connects the past, present and future within an identity (Vignoles et al., 2002). If a person loses subjective continuity, then this can lead to negative consequences or inappropriate attempts to restore continuity (Breakwell, 1986). For example, Jaspal (2012) verified this principle has been threatened among British Indian and British Pakistani gay men, as it turned out during the research of their experiences. The call for marriage by the family creates divergences between ethnocultural and sexual continuity, which jeopardizes this principle. Participants view family-proposed marriage as a threat to continuity, as it led to the end of the present, in which gay identity is recognized, and to an uncertain future in undesirable

heterosexual relationships (Jaspal, 2012). Also, this principle arose in the study of HIV-positive Colombian gay men in London, who experienced threats to their continuity as they learned of their diagnosis and also did not find the expected support of their social environment in London (Jaspal & Williamson, 2017).

The principle of distinctiveness refers to a person's striving for being distinguishable from other people, identifying unique elements of his identity (Breakwell, 1993). Distinctiveness is defined as a motive that encourages the maintenance of a sense of differentiation from others, which influences a person's behavior (Vignoles et al., 2000). For example, in a study by Jaspal (2014), gay and bisexual men who practice chemsex talk about the threat of “positive” distinctiveness, and this threat is associated with being gay and HIV-positive — participants broadcast this as an undesirable difference from others.

The self-esteem principle refers to a sense of social value and personal worth (Bardi et al., 2014; Breakwell, 1993). For instance, over time it can be seen that the general attitude towards homosexuality has changed, and the modern representation of homosexuality, despite many difficulties, leads to a greater willingness to come out, as it became less dangerous for self-esteem (Bardi et al., 2014; Jaspal and Siraj, 2011).

As to the principle of self-efficacy, it is a motive for maintaining an identity structure that is characterized by competence and control, while the lack of efficacy is associated with a feeling of helplessness; efficacy is often associated with political attitudes and engagement? (Breakwell, 1993). Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) found that some bisexual men talk about their inability to resist the “temptation” of homosexuality, which undermines their principle of self-efficacy by depriving them of control.

The principle of belonging refers to the need to maintain either a sense of closeness or acceptance by others, both within the group and in dyadic relationships; threats to belonging often lead to coping strategies associated with identification with inclusive groups (Vignoles et al., 2006). British Indian and British Pakistani gay men express concern that coming out in their ethnic groups could jeopardize their belonging to them, and national sexual in-groups can become alternative sources of belonging for them (Jaspal, 2012). And as for British Muslim gay men the belonging principle is benefited from close relations with people from the same group (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012).

The principle of meaning refers to the need to find significance or purpose in one's life; the search of meaning is an important feature of human nature (Vignoles et al., 2006). This principle, for example, emerges in the study of British Pakistani Muslim gay men, some of

whom place a negative value on the institutional component of religious identity and a more positive value on the spiritual dimension of religious identity (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010).

In the same study, using the example of multiple identities of participants, another principle was proposed for expanding Identity Process Theory: the principle of psychological coherence, referring to the individual's perception of compatibility between their identities. This motive represents the need to ensure a sense of coherence between existing identities or roles, for instance, non-heterosexual identity, religious identity and a role in the family.

The significance of identity motives (or principles) may be culturally specific (Breakwell, 2010, 2014). In different cultural contexts different motives can be more or less important (Bardi et al., 2014). Also, while identity principles may be cross-culturally universal, coping strategies are considered fluid and dynamic, and individuals will act strategically to minimize identity threat (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009).

Identity Processes Theory has been applied over the years to the study of different groups. In particular, there are theoretical developments in the study of place identity (Speller et al., 2002), language and perception of identity threat (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009), experience of coming out (Jaspal & Siraj, 2011), experience of immigrants (Jaspal, 2014a; Timotijevic & Breakwell, 2000), various experience of gay and bisexual men (Jaspal, 2017, 2021, 2021a; Maatouk & Jaspal, 2020), experience of gay's parents (Jaspal, 2020). In addition, identity process theory has been widely used to study the experience of gays with a various multicultural and religious background (Jaspal, 2012, 2012a, 2014, 2015, 2020a; Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2012; Jaspal & Ferozali, 2020; Jaspal & Williamson, 2017). Thus, identity process theory has already shown its applicability in the same areas as this study.

The aforementioned research examines what identity threats participants face when confronted with certain life experiences and what coping strategies they use to cope with the threatening experience. Most of the abovementioned studies are devoted to how different identities coexist within one person, whether they can conflict with one another giving rise to another threat and how people deal with it. For future research, most studies suggest a deeper study of certain ethnic groups in certain countries and the complex relationships between different identities. The present study will contribute to this literature by adopting an additional angle on the topics of LGBT+ coming out, immigration, and intercultural relations.

In terms of the LGBT+ context, much of abovementioned research focus on the experiences of gay and bisexual men, often residing in their native country or as migrants to Anglo-Saxon countries. As for immigration, research is more focused on understanding multicultural experiences than on the immigration process itself and its impact on identity. Therefore, this

study is an attempt to expand the applicability of identity process theory to understand the experience of other members of the LGBT+ community, with a different hosting country and cultural background, in particular the group of Russian LGBT+ immigrants in Germany, Portugal, Spain and Finland — few European countries of the green sector of the Rainbow Map (Rainbow Europe, n. d), where LGBT+ rights are recognized. Since, due to the more tolerant policies of these countries, it can be assumed that in some aspects the life of Russian LGBT+ immigrants will change for the better with the move, but at the same time, the immigration process itself is a threatening experience. It was decided to select these countries to find out if immigration could actually serve as a coping strategy to address threats to identity based on sexual orientation.

The aim of this study is to answer the following research questions:

1. How do LGBT+ immigrants represent their experience of coming out in homeland Russia? Which Identity Process Theory principles are mobilized to present a threatened identity?

2. How is the experience of immigration represented as a way of coping with threat? Which principles are mobilized in discourse to present the new situation? What is the role attributed to being in a new place, as an immigrant?

Chapter 2. Method

2.1. Participants

Participants were 11 adults in the age group from 25 to 42 years old (mean age = 33,6), who identified as men (n=3) and women (n=8) and their sexual orientation as non-heterosexual (Annex A). During the recruiting process, gender was not the main parameter of selection, unlike specific sexual orientation.

The first interviewees were found through social media and influencers among the Russian-speaking LGBT+ community. After that, a snowball sampling strategy was applied. The search criteria for participants were age 18 and over, Russian citizenship and experience of life in Russia, affiliation to non-heterosexual orientation, migration to countries of the green sector of the Rainbow Map (Rainbow Europe, n. d.). However, for the participants, sexual orientation did not have to be the reason for the move. The study was introduced to potential participants as being about exploring how do Russian LGBT+ immigrants represent their experience of coming out in a homeland Russia and in a new country. One of the persons contacted decided not to participate in the study.

All the men in the sample identified themselves in terms of sexual orientation as gay, women identify themselves as lesbian, bisexual and pansexual (Annex A). All interviewees had a university degree, one participant was a master's student and others were professions although 2 of them did not have a job due to the circumstances of moving.

All of them had a Russian citizenship and lived in Russia before moving to European countries from the green sector of the Rainbow Map (Rainbow Europe, n. d.). Two of the participants moved from Saint-Petersburg, others moved from Moscow or Moscow Region, although most of them had lived in other regions before. To this moment, there is no data available on how many LGBT+ immigrants leaved different cities of Russia for coming to Europe, but it can be assumed that the largest cities of Russia, Moscow, and St. Petersburg, are, firstly, geographically closer to Europe, which makes them an intermediate point for immigrants. Secondly, it is likely that in the larger cities of Russia there are more opportunities for obtaining a good higher education and high-paying jobs that allow to move to another country, since this event requires certain financial investments.

At the time of the interview, the participants lived in the following European countries: Germany (n=4), Spain (n=3), Portugal (n=3) and Finland (n=1). All these countries were in the green sector of the Rainbow Map rating (Rainbow Europe, n. d.) at the time of the research. All

these countries also have a relatively high score in policies to integrate migrants, according to Migrant International Policy Index (Solano & Huddleston, 2020), and have different positions in the pink (favorable) sector of this rating.

As to marital status, six participants were married, three were in a relationship, one was in a process of divorce and one was single. Due to the migration legislation of the countries where the participants moved into, it is much easier to move in having the status of a married couple, since one of the partners has the right to legalize in another country due to family reunification. Most of the married participants deliberately married to make the move less problematic and more comfortable, taking advantage of the right to reunite with a spouse.

2.2. Procedure

The study is based on interviews that were conducted from June to July of the 2021. After a first contact an informed consent (Annex B) was sent to each potential participant containing information about the study, the interview procedure, anonymity of participation, the storage of data, and the right to withdraw participation. Following the signing of the informed consent be the participant, online interviews were scheduled and conducted using Zoom software. The interviews were recorded only in audio format and lasted from 24 minutes to 1 hour 39 min. On average, the interviews lasted 47 minutes. After the interview, the participants received a debriefing with gratitude for participation (Annex C), security measures, contacts for feedback, as well as psychological support resources for LGBT+ people. The protocol of the study, including the informed consent and debriefing, were pre-approved by the ISCTE Ethics Committee (Annex D).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow free elaboration of meaning by interviewees (Breakwell, 1990; Flick, 1997; Gill et al., 2008; Ryan et al., 2009). Interviews were conducted on a basis of a guideline (Annex E). All interviews were conducted in Russian, audio-recorded, fully transcribed, and then translated to English. The interview topic guide consisted of predetermined questions to collect demographic data and open key questions addressing the following main themes: an experience of immigration and coming out (or not) before and after moving from Russia. In order to achieve higher quality content for analysis, parts of the translated interviews were sent to a professional translator, who back-translated them from English into Russian. Only minor discrepancies were observed, thus allowing to have confidence that the translation preserved the original meaning.

All data was stored in a secure folder on the ISCTE server under a password, with limited access to the author of the thesis and the supervisor. This complies with the requirements for the protection of personal data as well as the requirements of the ISCTE Ethics Committee for working with a vulnerable category of research participants.

2.3. Analytic approach

Interview data was analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Coyle & Murtagh, 2014; Terry et al., 2017). The thematic analysis was carried out on the basis of the Identity Process Theory (Breakwell, 1986), and the so-called principles of the theory were used as categories. In the practice of research with the IPT framework, themes are used to combine the most relevant principles when researching certain groups of participants (e.g., Jaspal and Coyle, 2009).

The analysis was carried out using the NVivo software version 20.5.0 (Bazeley & Richards, 2000; Richards, 1999). The translated interviews were uploaded to the program, and case numbers were assigned to each participant. For each principle of IPT a separate category was created; in addition, separate categories were created when identifying patterns among participants regarding relationships with family, interactions with social structures, friends, colleagues; as well as references to the political situation in Russia and references to LGBT+ legislation. To ensure the quality of the analysis, an independent coder, unfamiliar with the details of the study, was instructed with the categories and dictionary developed for the study (Annex F) and as a result of inter-coding consensus procedures, the coding of the interview extracts has been adjusted for a more accurate interpretation of the data.

The next section presents the findings of the data analysis, which are divided into three parts: (1) the identity threats experienced by the participants while living in Russia, (2) the experience of coming out and the related principles of IPT, (3) the acquisition of the identity of an immigrant and the threats associated with the new role.

Chapter 3. Analysis

Thematic analysis does not imply counting mentions of a particular topic, but to illustrate to which principles the participants referred most, a summary of their presence across interviews is presented in Table 1. For the participants in this study, the principles of continuity and psychological coherence were the most discussed, which were combined into one category when analyzing the data due to their strong interconnection. The principle of distinctiveness turned out to be the least present in the current data.

Table 3.1
Appearance of the Principles

Principle	Number of interviews where it was presented	References (number of extracts coded)
Continuity + Psychological coherence	11	56
Self-esteem	10	47
Self-efficacy	10	42
Belonging	8	26
Meaning	7	24
Distinctiveness	5	7

In the data of this study, three main themes arise: (1) threats to the principles of continuity and psychological coherence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy during life in Russia, (2) coming out: how self-esteem, psychological coherence, and self-efficacy threats are coped through immigration, (3) threats to belonging, self-efficacy and self-esteem in the new role as immigrant.

3.1. Threats to the principles of continuity and psychological coherence, self-esteem, and self-efficacy during life in Russia

Examining life in Russia of the participants sheds light on the motives for moving to another country: various identity principles are threatened due to different circumstances.

3.1.1. Continuity and Psychological coherence

Continuity principle refers to the human motivation to maintain a sense of temporal continuity across time and situation (Breakwell, 1986). And psychological coherence refers to establishing

feelings of compatibility among one's (inter-connected) identities (Jaspal & Cinnirella, 2010). In the process of data analysis, both of these principles turned out to be interrelated: the participants broadcasted that their sexual orientation identity felt like an on-and-off situation, often precisely because they reported feeling a conflict between their several identities. Participants most often talked about considering it very difficult to conjugate being an LGBT+ person with their role at work or being a member of their family. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) also claimed that these principles are interconnected.

The following extract illustrates precisely the situations and threats that participants faced to the principles of continuity and psychological coherence, mostly in family and workplace situations.

Participant 2 hid from her mother that she went to a meet a girl with whom she had an affair on the Internet. Her mother threw a scandal on her because she was absent from home for several days. Seeing her mother's feelings, she felt that she would not be able to reveal to her the truth about her sexual orientation, as this would mean the end of her relationship with her mother. Therefore, she made the decision to leave home:

> *Participant 2: And I came home and realized that my mother was offended. We had a scandal. And maybe that night I was driven by fear. Um, I realized that I couldn't stay at home, I couldn't confess. I packed my things, ran away from home. This moment broke everything.*

For this participant it seemed impossible to be a good daughter and at the same time a lesbian. In addition, she said it was a crucial moment for her, it 'broke everything', which can be understood as alluding to a threat to the continuity of her identity that needed to be coped with. Jaspal (2012) also found that maintaining continuity can be problematic for non-heterosexual individuals because coming out can ruin relationships with family members. Another participant, Participant 4, was forced to end her relationship with her mother due to total rejection. She was very worried that the same would happen with the relationship with her father, and felt relieve that he did not react in the same way:

> *Participant 4: And I told him that, you know, here, we are with a girl named [A] together and everything is fine, and I am happy, and he... I was very afraid, and he said: ah, well, okay. And he continued to talk about Mendeleev.*

All participants in this study talked about having trouble in being comfortable with their sexual orientation at any given time because in reality the society expected them to be heterosexual. For some, it was impossible to imagine that one could ever come out at work in Russia. Participants alluded they had to pretend to be heterosexual and figure out how to avoid discussing their personal lives. In the following extract, Participant 7 is telling about how he tried to deal with this type of situation by introducing his partner as a friend to his coworkers. He also pointed to this limitation, as if at work he really had to "cut off" an important part of himself and pretend that it does not exist, choosing in this situation his professional identity. Participant 9 shares similar experiences: he liked to have fun in gay clubs in Russia, where he felt like himself. But as soon as he went to work, he had to "forget" about his sexual orientation, as if one person went to the club and another went to work:

> *Participant 7: It's a "small" limitation, that you cannot talk about some of your inner qualities and be completely open with your colleagues. And it turns out that you have to somehow limit yourself and protect yourself from the external environment. In principle, I did not like it, I actually once said that I... I will go, there, I will meet with a friend, yes. That is, when, there, I had a partner, I introduced him then as a friend, when we, there, had some common holidays and events.*

> *Participant 9: But this, in principle, meant dancing, relaxing, communicating, perhaps there, somehow meeting someone and being in this environment. But everything that was there remained there. Everything that came out within the framework of the working week — I was [...] a different person, one might say.*

Some participants, being in a relationship, had to come up with cover stories in order to present a partner in any given context. In this situation, the participants chose the role of a friend, colleague, or relative, but not one based on sexual orientation, which also refers to the principle of psychological coherence. For example, Participant 6 usually told her girlfriend was her sister, while Participant 5 came up with a variety of options:

> *Participant 6: I told: here, we went there, then there. And people did not understand: who is this? It's such a thing that in all countries... it's probably in all countries that you introduce your girlfriend as your sister. So, you, there, are 35 years old [laughter],*

and you still go on trips with her and live with her... you still live with her, yes. And I had such a moment: that I live with my sister, travel with my sister.

Participant 5: M, for the last 12 years I have always introduced my husband to everyone not as a boyfriend, not as my beloved. It was always either a brother, or a cousin, or... well, here... a relative, but not a husband.

The examples of the participants in this section support the statement that it’s crucially important for people to feel a sense of intra-individual comfort with their different social identities (Amiot & Jaspal, 2014).

Participants broadcasted experiences related to the fact that different identities within them come into conflict and at the same time, in some situations, it is simply impossible to live according to a certain identity continuously. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) also suggest that when two identities conflict, individuals try to choose between one of them, and in many situations during their life in Russia, participants had to choose other identities as their public image, as opposed to identities based on sexual orientation.

3.1.2. Self-esteem

The principle of self-esteem means a sense of personal worth or social value. It refers to the drive to derive a positive self-conception. In a threatening situation a person feels danger to personal worth or to self-esteem (Breakwell. 1986). In the context of this principle, research participants talked about social pressure, misunderstanding by other people, losing confidence in interacting with a social environment, which is illustrated by the examples below.

For instance, Participant 1 shared a feeling of “self-suppression” related to people and discriminatory laws that affect people’s attitudes in Russia. She did not feel her own worth, she was forced to experience tension in a society that seemed unsafe:

Participant 1: ...like no one does bother you to live, but at the same time, no one gives you a chance to live, yes, because there are laws all around, I don’t know, all around... […] Well, that is, this is such a very big pressure that I constantly had to keep inside myself, and it, apparently, was so encapsulated there that it was even very difficult to find it, to realize that it exists, this pressure. This is internal... well, like self-suppression.

Tension and fear in disclosing orientation can negatively affect a person's sense of self. Hiding of one’s sexual identity is often related to feigning heterosexuality, which can have negative consequences for self-esteem (Maatouk & Jaspal, 2020). Participant 7 was forced to hide his orientation in Russia, pretend being heterosexual, and limit communication with other people, which made him feel like a “second-class person”, and this influenced his psychological state:

> *Participant 7: That is, roughly speaking, 50 percent of your internal resources are spent on limiting yourself from some additional unwanted contact, which, in principle, has a very negative effect in the future on some psychological data, on... that is, some kind of discontent, as a second-class person, I had to hide.*

Participant 4 once got on a video that was filmed by homophobic people at the exit from the festival of LGBT+ films in Moscow, and in this video, she was called a scum. Feeling a threat, she realized that even such a small episode of depreciation was enough to think about immigration. And while paying attention to homophobic comments on the Internet, Participant 4 took at her own expense devaluating comments related to non-heterosexual women:

> *Participant 4: Well, I kind of see that there is homophobia, but specifically I experienced it, well, in some very small doses. Well, a small dose, which... which I got, was enough for me.*

> *Participant 4: And you go into these homophobic comments and find out, firstly, that as a homosexual woman... you don’t exist, that is, you as... don’t seem to exist, because the girls just hug — it’s not serious at all. [...] And it’s as if it’s not like talking to you directly, but it’s all the same as if it’s a dialogue with you.*

Participant 5 shared the experience that a man who dresses and looks beautiful in Russia, instead of admiration, will receive a rather negative accusatory comment, using orientation as an insult, which also undermines self-esteem:

> *Participant 5: ...this burden is the burden of life in Russia, and you... you cannot buy yourself a beautiful thing in case not to make people think: what, are you gay?*

In the context of self-esteem, research participants have issues of relationships with society and experiences related to how society perceives them. Participants talk about such difficult experiences as sadness, pressure, the need to hide, depreciation, which negatively affects self-esteem.

3.1.3. Self-efficacy

The principle of self-efficacy is related to competence and control of one's life (Vignoles et al., 2002). In the interviews for the most part, participants talk about their helplessness in relation to authorities and laws and in the constant expectation that the authorities or other people will harm them. The participants did not have the feeling that this could be influenced in any way.

The work of two interview participants was related to interaction with children, and another participant continues to work with teenagers after the move. They all talk about their fears about the gay propaganda law, which makes working with children unsafe for the LGBT+ people. Participant 1 was afraid of going to jail, which could happen if at the workplace somebody learned about her sexual orientation. Participant 9 actively worked with young people within the framework of government organizations in Russia. On the one hand, he would like to include the LGBT+ agenda into his work, but on the other hand, he understood that this was not possible in Russia. As for Participant 4, she worked as an Italian teacher and sometimes dealt with Russian teenagers who would like to go to universities in Italy. She did not always know how old her students were, but in order not to fall under the law on gay propaganda, just in case, she did not discuss her orientation with students:

> *Participant 1: Because it could affect my work, because I worked with children: we have a law of propaganda of homosexuality, uh, among underaged, and I could at best be fired, at worst end up in jail.*

> *Participant 9: That is, I... well... because of my activities, the public [dimension] is always closed, I also work with children, that is, this sphere is also... And I work with people, in Russia it is impossible to be open in this sphere of educational, children's and political, all this youth policy...*

> *Participant 4: I work with teenagers, well, conditionally, teenagers... […] God knows them... now suddenly it will turn out to be... they did not tell me that they were not 18,*

and somehow something will happen. OK. Well, that is, I leave this side of life aside somehow, and I don't talk about it. Um, because they are still on the territory of Russia, and I... I have a Russian passport, God knows, I don't want to get involved somehow.

Participant 11, also mentions the gay propaganda law, but in a different context. She is a scientist and was going to defend a dissertation on Russian lesbian families, but because of the law she was not allowed to do this at the university, the leadership of which immediately made it clear that in Russia she would not be able to defend her PhD thesis, and it could not be influenced in any way:

Participant 11: Well, in short, here, in general, in these numbers, um, like a candidate's dissertation... Well, there it was also called a candidate's dissertation. And the topic was about lesbian parenting. Well, there, a propaganda law came out, there it was... from 2011 to 2013 it was published everywhere. And the final level was 2013 — the federal law on propaganda, and at that moment the faculty told me that I should go somewhere else with my topic, because I would not defend [the thesis] in Russia.

Also participants mentioned that they generally didn't feel safe in the current political regime in Russia, they felt threatened not only as members of the LGBT+ community, but also as citizens. For instance, Participant 10 expresses fear of the police, from whom it is not known what to expect, she doesn't feel calm in the presence of the police:

Participant 10: Well, probably, when I compare life in Germany and in Russia, I... I recall some such everyday questions that... well, there, relatively speaking, I... [laughter] I do not feel calm when I see the police, there, in Moscow. Or there, well... I cannot calmly, there, just sit, have a drink, there, wine or cider, there, with friends on the street in a park in Moscow.

Another participant was persecuted by homophobes in Russia, but he could not contact the police, as it could be even more dangerous for him. Some people found his account on a gay dating app and started sending threats to his mobile phone:

Participant 5: Um, I received an SMS in such a format that you must conclude an agreement with us, otherwise all your photos... well, they also lied that there are

photographs of an intimate nature, they will be published and posted along your street where you work and where you live, we figured you out by locations. This was the situation.

After this incident, Participant 5 suffered a micro-stroke and firmly decided that it was necessary to start the process of moving to another country.

The discriminatory laws that the participants appeal to in their interviews are for them a limiting factor in their life, which they felt could not be changed in any way. Living in Russia and working with children and adolescents, LGBT+ persons are in danger, as punishment for gay propaganda can be applied to them at any time. On the one hand, they have to tightly control their interventions and statements, distinguishing between public work life and secret personal life; and on the other hand, they are shackled by the circumstances that they are powerless to change the situation while living in Russia. And this applies not only to the law on gay propaganda, but also to the political regime in general, in which it seems almost impossible to ask for help in a situation of discrimination and persecution due to sexual orientation.

The previous principles were the ones most referred by the participants, but all principles came up in the data. Next sub-section presents the examples of how they were mentioned in participants' accounts.

3.1.4. Belonging

The belonging motive refers to the need to maintain or enhance feelings of closeness to, or acceptance by other people, whether in dyadic relationships or within in-groups. Threats to belonging lead to various coping strategies, including identification with more inclusive in-groups and self-stereotyping (Vignoles et al., 2006). Belonging to a significant group turned out to be important for the participants in the context of Russian realities, but some of them mentioned that a collision with the rest of the world outside the group is unpleasant and dangerous for them.

For Participant 2, finding a community of women on the Internet who like women was an important experience on the path to understanding herself ("I found people who understand me"). And Participant 6 in Russia was surrounded mainly by lesbians:

Participant 2: I was in search of myself, um, I went to read information on the Internet, came across blogs, where it turned out that I was not the only one [laughter]... who likes women. I found people who understand me and started communicating with them.
Participant 6: But since we in Russia did not live... in a kind of vacuum of these lesbian relationships, that is, we had, basically, all friends... well, I... [...] And everybody around me are lesbian couples, or just, yes, lesbians.

Interestingly, she calls this lesbian circle a vacuum, which constituted her safe social circle, where she could always find support. But not all participants could rely on belonging to an in-group. One of the participants, during his life in Russia, could not find friends in the LGBT+ community at all:

Participant 9: I have never had a gay company of friends, that's just to hang out only as gays. Yes, well, because I did not find such friends.

Also, the participants spoke about belonging not only in the context of LGBT+ people. For example, Participant 4 says that in Russia she had no experience of communicating with the LGBT+ community, but there was a circle of people with whom she shared values and interests and in which she felt comfortable:

Participant 4: I was a little bit in my bubble and left it a little, um... I have never, for example, been in some big thematic community. [...] I was still in graduate school, then I kept in touch with my university friends, and when I talk about the bubble, this is this bubble of smart, pro-European intellectual people who would never think of making homophobic comments.

In addition, one of the participants experienced difficulty in being a citizen of Russia, which also posed a threat to the principle of belonging. Participant 5 says that he talked a lot on the Internet in LGBT+ groups on social networks, but in the process of these interactions he realized it's impossibility to belong to Russia as a citizen:

Participant 5: And during this communication, more and more, and more and more we realized that the country, in principle, Russia, does not need us, but at the same time we

are not needed anywhere. Because everyone has their own citizens, and each country takes care of its citizens, of its citizens.

Remembering their life in Russia, the participants talked about the importance of belonging to and being accepted by a group of people. Some of them failed to find friends in the LGBT+ community, some managed to find such connections on the Internet, for some, the university community became a safe host environment, and some surrounded themselves mainly with representatives of the LGBT+ community. At the same time, the topic of belonging to Russia as citizens and disappointment in connection with the inability to be a necessary citizen of their country arises.

3.1.5. Meaning

The principle of meaning motivates individuals to search for purpose and significance in their existence (Vignoles et al., 2006). Most of the participants talked about values that are of great importance to them, but which they could not find in Russia due to political circumstances. For instance, Participant 1 said that human rights that people in Russia do not have are important to her and have a lot of meaning for her life:

Participant 1: I got married, and my wife and I decided to move to a country where our rights would be fully respected, because we wanted to have a legalized relationship… […] And as for some basic fundamental things, yes, then we decided to expand the family, decided to have children. This is possible only here, well, of course, not only here, but in Russia it would be impossible to do it.

And for Participant 3, it mattered that her values were shared, that these ideas were supported. In Russia, she was engaged in the promotion of women's amateur sports, was very passionate about this idea and devoted a lot of time to it. But as soon as she shared her ideas with other people, she met with misunderstanding:

Participant 3: Yes, that is, they looked at me as an idiot who rushes with some ideals, who pushes some lofty ideas. That is, in general, Russia still has such an attitude.

But in addition to human rights and common values with other people, there were other interesting meaningful things. For example, Participant 6 dreamed of moving to Spain in general, as she was fascinated by this country, enthusiastically studied the language and culture and waited for a suitable opportunity for this for a long time:

> *Participant 6: Yes, it's amazing that I once studied Spanish, dreamed of Spain [laughter], [name] didn't dream of Spain, but I wanted to leave already too, that is… it happened, yes.*

Participants named various aspects that are important for them in life in the context of moving. Interestingly, the principle of meaning arises here both in the context of a threat, when it is impossible to have something very important in the home country, and in a motivating context, when a meaningful dream serves as a basis for making a decision about immigration.

3.1.6. Distinctiveness

A threat related to this principle is an unwanted feeling of distinctiveness from others. Or a feeling that refers to the drive to establish and maintain a sense of differentiation from relevant others (Vignoles et al., 2000) but in the studied cases this aspect does not arise at all. As to feeling of distinctiveness participants talked about this, but not as much as about violations of other principles in the context of living in Russia.

The most striking example is the story of Participant 5. He cries when he says that his mother's relatives did not let him go to her funeral when she died. He connects this episode with the old mentality of people who divide others into different categories, what made him feel an unwanted distinction from his family members:

> *Participant 5: …there was also an incident such that my cousin would not let me in... in general... my mother has a brother, an uncle. He has his own family and his relatives. Uh, they didn't let me in... I wasn't allowed to go to the funeral. That is, neither to say goodbye, nor in general — to the cemetery and not to the morgue. Here. [crying sounds] I was not allowed to say the last words. Ohh... I was there only after some time.*

Participant 5: ...well, this is also one of the reasons — that... well, the old mentality here, this ingrained division of people into people and non-people also makes it sensitive.

The experience of this participant boils down to the fact that in the mentality of the post-Soviet countries there is a strong division into "ours" and "enemies", and, being an LGBT+ person, one can be undesirably excluded even from one's own family with the unwanted feeling of distinctiveness.

Summarizing the topic of threats that participants faced in Russia, it is important to note that among all of them there was one participant who stood out from all in that she did not seem to have experienced identity threats during her life in Russia, this is Participant 8 (Annex G). Moving to another country began to matter to her only when she developed a long-term, serious relationship with a woman who dreamed of living in Spain. And by coincidence, she was able to simply transfer to the Spanish office of the company in which she worked in Russia, and without demotion.

It seems that for this participant, the principles of identity were not threatened: before immigration, she lived her comfortable life with a good career, and even the difficult political situation in Russia did not seem to concern her personally. This is the only such case among all the participants in the study, but it is worth taking into account that this participant represents a certain part of the Russian LGBT+ community, which is similar in their ideas about life in Russia.

3.3. Coming out: how self-esteem, psychological coherence, and self-efficacy threats are coped through immigration

As mentioned above, almost all of the participants experienced many difficulties associated with living an open life in Russia. At the same time, it seems that openness also depends on the context of the relationship even after moving to another country. Participants talking about being open or closed in their sexual orientation in four relationship contexts: workplace, friends, family, and social institutions.

3.3.1. Workplace

Participants in the study have many experiences related to the issue of openness or closedness in the workplace. Much of this experience is related to work situations in Russia. Participant 3 shares her experiences that in Russia she had to remain silent about her sexual orientation, as she was afraid that the behavior of colleagues towards her might change because of this. And Participant 9 is talking about complete closeness at a workplace while he was living in Russia, although his close friends knew about his sexual orientation:

> *Participant 3: But in other, of course, places where I worked, I could not do anything of the kind, and... well... because I understood quite clearly that, first of all, this information would most likely change the attitude towards me, if it does not entail certain sanctions, there, and so on. So, unfortunately… unfortunately, like this.*

> *Participant 9: And I was always the soul of the company and so on, only my relatives knew, with whom I could talk about this, literally, there are several people there. And the rest... everything related to work... I am generally... completely closed [laughter].*

In these situations, there is a psychological threat to the principle of psychological coherence: the professional identity of Participant 3 and Participant 9 may be threatened because of the identity by sexual orientation. As for Participant 4, who teaches Italian online, her degree of openness changed after moving to Germany. With her adult clients, she is free to talk about her personal life. It seems that her feelings about how others would perceive her changed with the move, in other words, the participant stopped feeling a threat to self-esteem even though her clients still live in Russia:

> *Participant 4: I try to do this with my students. Here. Now, therefore, with them for me... right now, what is with mine at work... for me this is not coming out. I am aware of this, well, as a fact, I just talk about it, as I would talk about something else.*

Participant 7 in Russia also faced the fact that colleagues tried to clarify his personal life and even looked for brides for him ("they always tried to marry me with someone"). For this participant, it was difficult to build close relationships with colleagues due to the fact that he was gay, and he had to always keep aloof. Interestingly, after moving to Portugal, he first got a job in a company in a department with a rather homophobic boss who joked about him. But nevertheless, the participant felt that he, in which case, had rights that he could defend:

Participant 7: Well, and, accordingly, it was difficult, of course, to work in this company in terms of... very often they ask how your personal life is, how is it... some such personal moments. They always tried to marry me with someone and so on. And I always had to somehow get away from these issues, say, there: I do not discuss my personal life, I do not have time for this.

Participant 7: And my... my boss — he was also something like that, in principle, well... a homophobe, and it was felt, here. […] I have certain rights, that you shouldn't be afraid to declare yourself and... well, the main thing is in the correct form: not to demand, but simply to communicate correctly with the person in order to put him in his place.

In this situation, Participant 7 felt that he had rights, that if something happened, those rights would protect him and that he could rely on these rights to defend himself in front of the boss. Here the principle of self-efficacy arises: the participant develops a sense of control; he realizes that he can influence the situation and change it in his favor which gives him a sense of security.

It can be assumed that related to work, the participants felt different threats to identity associated with the principles of psychological coherence, self-esteem and self-efficacy. Those participants who talk about their work after the move prefer a more open lifestyle at a workplace, feel more freedom and confidence to declare their sexual orientation and can rely on their rights to defend themselves. While in Western countries there is a growing recognition of LGBT+ people as desirable members of society in general and in the workplace in particular, and laws are being passed prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, in a sense, it facilitates the process of disclosure for some LGBT+ people (Marrs & Staton, 2016). Unfortunately, the tendency towards hatred of LGBT+ people is still growing in Russia, and laws, on the contrary, instead of protecting the rights of LGBT+ people, are more likely to discriminate against them, therefore, the experience of Russian LGBT+ people in their home country with regard to coming out at work is rather negative: they carefully hide their orientation, especially if they work with government agencies or children, as can be seen from the examples above.

3.3.2. Friends

For the most part, in the context of relationships with friends, participants broadcast more positive coming out experiences due to greater acceptance. In Russia Participant 1 had a circle of friends, who were aware of her personal life, although she didn't declare her sexual orientation:

> *Participant 1: That is, I have never in my life advertised my relationship, there, um, there were some close friends who knew, yes, who saw who I was in a relationship with, with whom I came to parties, with whom I lived, with whom I go, there, on trips, and they seemed to have no questions.*

Although the participant did not come out in front of her friends in the classical sense, it seems that this was not necessary for her, she felt safe among her friends who accepted her for who she is, and her self-esteem in the relationship with friends wasn't threatened.

Participant 3 doesn't remember coming out to friends in Russia. After she moved to Germany on a grant, started working on her project and made new friends in a business incubator, she still had difficulty in disclosing. But she was inspired by the experience of another Russian LGBT+ person who appeared in her new circle of friends as she also got the grant:

> *Participant 3: …until this girl began to openly and calmly talk about that, here, this is her wife, that they were specially married, there, in Denmark, to be together… […] …and I saw how all Russian-speaking and non-Russian-speaking people relate to them... […] Until that moment I did not understand that I could do that too. Yes, and it had a very strong influence on me, like: oh, wow, that is, they didn't throw stones at her, she did not become an outcast, there, everyone did not stop communicating with her, but kind of like, yes... cool!*

Participant 3, even in Germany, seems to feel threatened in terms of her self-esteem, as she has a fear that other people will not be able to appreciate her if she confesses her sexual orientation. Her friend's example helped her to move towards coping with the threat. In addition, for her, this is a positive step towards solving the threat to her sense of continuity: the moment came when she realized that she had the opportunity to be herself. As for Participant 9, it was

easy for him to live a more open life in Germany, in comparison to Moscow, where he had a closed lifestyle. He moved with his partner, whom he later broke up with. But their new circle of friends was aware of their relationship, and in general, his friends were aware of his orientation:

> *Participant 9: But when I arrived here... and it is clear that I moved with a guy... and our entire social circle — all friends — everyone understands everything and everyone knows everything. [...] That is, I already... all my friends who are in my close circle, everyone knows that I am gay. That is, not the way it was in Moscow.*

For this participant, during his life in Russia, it was critical to hide his sexual orientation because of his work. So much so that it was unsafe to admit it to friends. In Germany, Participant 9 runs his own business, actively works with young people and can afford to live an open life with friends, as he no longer expects possible punishment because of who he really is, and this is associated to a principle of self-esteem.

Participant 2's experience is interesting in that she was able to disclose to her Russian friends only after several years of living in Portugal. She tells about the situation of coming out to her friend, who helped her escape from home before moving to another country:

> *Participant 2: I spent three years in Portugal, received my documents and went to Russia. [...] Ah... I said to a friend in the face, sitting in a cafe. Because it was this person who brought me to her when I ran away from home. [...] And I thought I could be honest enough. Uh... she didn't react particularly aggressively. I was surprised, very much surprised. She said that I... um... still remain the same person in her eyes, nothing changes. But, nevertheless, after I flew away from Russia, our communication stopped.*

The participant associates the termination of the relationship with her friend to the coming out, but accepts this as a fact that did not destroy her. With the move to Portugal, she was able to cope with the threat to self-esteem, which may have influenced her desire to come out to her friends in Russia.

In the context of relationships with friends, the principle of self-esteem is mainly actualized among the participants. And it looks like friends can satisfy the need for value and acceptance, so coming out to them was easier for the participants, which is in line with the findings from previous studies that coming out is often first made to friends, especially to same-aged peers,

as the most supportive and safest group of people (Herdt & Boxer, 1993; Savin-Williams, 1990a, 1990b, 2001).

3.3.3. Family

When talking about coming out to a family, the participants share various experience of interacting with different family members. Participant 10 generally does not feel the need to discuss her personal life with her parents:

> *Participant 10: I do not discuss my personal life with my parents at all, I never discussed it, even when I, there, dated boys. Here. Somehow, they are not interested in it, I am... […] Therefore, I think that if I, there, relatively speaking, I am not going to marry a girl, then I will not tell anything.*

It turns out that for this participant, the need to disclose to the parents will arise when it will no longer be possible to hide it, and it will only be necessary to present them with a fact. Participant 10 did not expect her parents to understand her and shielded them from being informed about her sexual orientation, thus avoiding threats to her self-esteem. For Participant 5, on the other hand, it was important to open up to his family: his brothers and mother. In an interview, he shares his positive experience of coming out with one of the brothers ("I love you the way you are") and a rather warm and accepting conversation also happened with his mom:

> *Participant 5: …and then he also asked me: with whom do you want to start a family? Well, and I said at the time when I was with the guy I was dating: I want to try to start a family with that guy, here. He said: you know, I don't care where you are, who you are with, how are you, I love you the way you are, we are a family, and it's great.*

> *Participant 5: And I say: Mom, so, we will have a wedding... like... I found for myself a man, I want to make a family, but we have to go, here... a wedding in Portugal. Mom at that moment simply did not say anything. She says: I am very happy for you, she said, I am very... […] Mom was 61 years old. She said: I, she says, am very glad that you will not be alone on this earth, that is, I can leave with peace.*

Family matters a lot to this participant, and it looks like he felt threatened to the principle of psychological coherence, not understanding how to be a good son and brother and at the same time gay. But nevertheless, he found the strength to confess to his family even before he moved to Spain with his husband. It was also important for him that his mother had time to see their wedding photos before she died from an incurable disease.

Participant 2, who ran away from home to go to her beloved in Portugal, did not confess to her mother for a long time, who did not understand why her daughter suddenly made such a radical decision. Only after some time of life in another country, she was able to write her a letter:

> *Participant 2: And to my mother... I told my mother in a letter, while still being here, safe [laughter]. I remember very badly, this is such a difficult moment for me, probably, that I decided to forget it [laughter]. I remember that my mother cried a lot.*

The participant had enough self-esteem to disclose to her mother. Before that, as mentioned above, it was inconceivable for this participant that she would bring up this conversation with her mother, and this was the turning point for her to leave for Portugal.

The situation of coming out to the family is mostly related to the principle of self-esteem, and the principle of psychological coherence also arises in the examples from the participants. Opening up to family members seems to be a really emotionally challenging moment for both parties to this situation, and it goes in line with the findings of Savin-Williams (2003), who claims that it's hard to disclose to relatives and parents. Also, the examples confirm findings of Kircher & Ahlijah (2011) who showed that the coming out of a child is difficult for parents, and also findings of Katz-Wise et al. (2016) about different variations of rejection and acceptance in response to disclosure. And the findings of this study show how the situations of coming out to family members and the immigration process are interrelated.

3.3.4. Social institutions

In the context of life in Russia, the participants did not talk about disclosure in the framework of interaction with any social institutions or services. But after moving to Europe, many participants began to behave openly when interacting with various structures. This is similar to Jaspal's (2014) finding that immigration was a turning point in the manifestation of identity by

sexual orientation. For example, it became easy for Participant 1 to present facts from her personal life in a new country when necessary:

> *Participant 1: I do it every time I go, I don't know, to the clinic, to the bank, and I need something there, I don't know… well… […] …in some situations where […] I have to tell a person something about myself, regarding my personal life. There, if it concerns my health, there, if it concerns joint parenting, if it concerns a joint mortgage, […] need still tell something about my marital status, or, there, sexual orientation, if regarding my health, then yes, I do.*

Apparently, Participant 1 did not expect anything critical for her in response to the disclosure: she wass confident that she could be open and would not meet a negative reaction, as was the case with her in Russia. Life in another country has become more predictable and controlled in simple everyday things like visiting doctors or banks, and these seem to no longer to be a threat to self-efficacy.

Before moving to Russia, Participant 5 and his husband remotely solved the process of buying an apartment in Spain, and the creation of a family account in a Spanish bank was a big event for them:

> *Participant 5: And we bought one apartment 50-50, payment was made from one bank account, the bank account was opened as a single family account for two spouses. That is, the account number is generally one account, but two owners. […] …this was our first feast in Moscow, in Russia, that we opened a family account. [cough] It was [something] we even celebrated.*

In the described situation, the principle of meaning arises: in Russia it is impossible to open a family bank account even for a heterosexual family, such an option is absent as a fact. And the fact that the bank recognized Participant 5 and his spouse as a family was a significant and joyful event, which was even honored with a celebration.

Participant 6 and her wife, after moving to Spain, went to the doctors together, as Participant 6 speaks Spanish, but her spouse does not. They introduced themselves as spouses and without any problems used the right to attend doctor's office together:

Participant 6: Although, yes, we have a lot of experience here like going to the doctors... going to the doctors... [name] since she does not speak Spanish, not all doctors speak English, I go with her everywhere all the time. And they are all very cute. I say: this is my wife, she does not speak, I will follow her... speak for her, tell everything about her, and everyone responds very... very well. [...] There was no such thing as "wait outside the door".

It seems easy to come out in front of doctors when you can rely on the rights that enable spouses to be together at the doctor's appointment. The principle of self-efficacy reappears in this situation, but again not in the context of a threat.

Summing up in relation to interactions with social structures, in this context we can talk about the principles of meaning, self-esteem, self-efficacy and continuity. At the same time, the participants do not name a lot of threats related to their life in a new country; rather, on the contrary, they talk about positive aspects that affect their sense of identity.

Considering all the cases of coming out, we can say that several principles are involved in them at once: self-esteem, self-efficacy, meaning, and psychological coherence. Interestingly, as Jaspal and Cinnirella (2012) associated coming out with the belonging and self-esteem principles of identity while researching British Muslim gay men. It can be assumed that the aspect of religion makes its own adjustments to the self-perception of individuals and the sense of threats, and different cultural contexts result in different results.

3.4. Threats to belonging, self-efficacy and self-esteem in the new role as immigrant

Although usually moving to another country is also associated with the emergence of a new identity of an immigrant and might threaten national, professional and other identities, in interviews not all participants focus on this aspect. Most of them talked about language difficulties, some of them mentioned some personal hard situations. But, summing up the results of moving, none of the participants regrets what happened, and does not want to go back. In addition, many participants broadcast that all the difficulties associated with the move are worth it.

3.4.1. Language issues

Unsurprisingly, language incidents arise in the immigration process. As Jaspal and Coyle (2009) claim, the language is a symbolic marker of identity and language-related situations can trigger the perception of identity threat. Not all participants move to Europe with knowledge of the language of the country in which they are going to live. Participant 1 shares that poor language skills prevent her from joining society:

> *Paticipant1: Well, first of all, I got immigrant status. Well, anyway, I've never been an immigrant in my life. And, of course, this quite strongly affects the sense of self within the country, that is, there is no feeling that I am a super-full-fledged member of society, there, because, for example, I do not speak the language well, although I am learning it.*

Here we see the actualization of the threat according to the principle of belonging: language serves as an obstacle to feelings of belonging in a new country. As for Participant 6, on the contrary, she would prefer to communicate more with the local population of Spain, as she speaks the language and also wants to belong to the new culture. But it so happens that there are only Russians among her acquaintances:

> *Participant 6: Well, I don't want to communicate with Russians, I want to join... I like the culture, I know this Spanish culture, I want to speak Spanish... um... But it's funny. that we have a lot of friends here, Russian acquaintances [laughter].*

Participant 7, on the other hand, managed to focus on communicating exclusively with the Portuguese after the move, in order to develop a sense of belonging:

> *Participant 7: And it helped me a lot that, uh, in the first year I made one hundred percent isolation from the Russian-speaking community, that is, it was such a deliberate choice. I decided for myself that I would devote this year to communication only in Portuguese, that is, I set a goal to learn the language quickly, and I really wanted to adapt to this society.*

This participant shared that this approach helped him adapt more quickly: for example, he had to look for some local laws on his own in order to help himself in different situations without resorting to the help of Russian-speaking people. But right after moving he did not have

enough linguistic knowledge to explain his feelings, which made it difficult to communicate with other people who simply did not understand him:

> *Participant 7: But when some emotional background was already touched, that is, there, some romantic feelings or, there, some kind of conflict situation, there, I didn't like something… […] Portuguese immediately started to become kind of very clumsy and stupid… […] And they told me: listen, I don't understand you, they say.*

In this example, the principle of self-esteem arises: Participant 7 had no opportunity to be understood and accepted due to the language barrier.

For Participant 11, not only the language was a test when moving to another country. Here the principle of belonging is threatened: after Participant 11 led an active social life in Russia, was part of the university, part of the activist LGBT+ community, in a new country (Finland) without knowing the language, she could not integrate into any social circle. The extract below illustrates how she faces a threat to the principle of self-efficacy, as simple everyday things have gotten out of control.

> *Participant 11: …this language bothered me wildly for the first few years, because you stupidly go to the store and you don't understand what is written there. That is, at first, I went all the time with a dictionary on my phone to the store, because it infuriated me, sometimes I just left this store in tears...*

We can say that the language barrier is a rather serious threat to identity in three aspects at once: belonging, self-esteem and self-efficacy. This complements the position of Jaspal and Coyle (2009), who in their research found that in situations with language, threats to the principles of belonging and distinctiveness are actualized, but they also suggested exploring the linguistic issues in other cultural contexts.

3.4.2. Unemployment and personal issues

Several participants shared challenges related to unemployment they faced during the move. For example, before the move, Participant 6 worked in good positions in banks, and after the move, for the first time in her life, she was unemployed and became financially dependent on her wife:

Participant 6: Oh, in fact, I didn't think it would be so difficult. Uh, the first thing... what happened was that I had to completely trust the person, rely on her completely, because I have always been myself financially. I never lived on anyone's money, I always, on the contrary, helped others there, and it was... a difficult experience.

Breakwell (1986) confirms that the experience of unemployment poses a threat to identity. Before that, Participant 6 was more accustomed to being in the role of the person who helps, and independently managing her budget:

Participant 6: And even to this day, there, I find it difficult for myself, there, to buy some clothes, because I understand that I am not earning anything now, everything is earned by [name], and for me at first it was very difficult psychologically.

When moving, her professional identity and her usual role in the relationship with her partner suffered, which deprived her of control over her own life and became a threat to the self-efficacy principle as she lost her usual control over her budget and immediately after the move could hardly influence her job search due to the fact that the move took place almost to lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic in 2020. This vision broadens Breakwell's approach to unemployment, which primarily links job loss to the principle of self-esteem (Breakwell, 1986) due to losing a social status with losing a job, but perhaps it would be meaningful if Participant 6 found herself in the same situation but in Russia. Her social environment has changed, and she is more concerned with helplessness in her situation than social status. The same principle, self-efficacy, arose in the situation described by Participant 7:

Participant 7: Another point, it was very difficult to get used to, to come to terms with this moment of waiting for the receipt of any documents. For example, when I was already waiting for my first residence, I no longer knew when it would come, and I had some kind of fear. [...] And there was such a fear that I was lying now, and the police would rush in to me [laughter], they would put a bag on my head, they would take me away and deport me. I really had this fear at some point.

In the situation of long waiting for a residence permit, a lot of uncertainty arose for Participant 7, and he began to be haunted by fear in the form of frightening images. Control over life was lost: it was not clear what to expect and when.

3.4.3. Values

Although moving to another country with a different culture is quite resource-intensive in terms of physical and emotional resources, those who move have the goal of changing their lives. As seen in the examples above, participants faced many threats regarding their identity by sexual orientation, which served as a sufficient motivation for them to move. If relocating to another country is viewed as a coping strategy to deal with these threats, it appears that this strategy is successful for the participants. According to Breakwell (1986), action is a social expression of identity, and the identity processes, guided by the principles, also direct the action, and in search of different principles a person is searching ways to satisfy the needs of identity. Any activity with the goal to remove a threat to identity is a coping strategy. For the participants immigration seems to have been precisely the action that was required in order for them to cope with threats.

For Participant 1, the threat to the principle of meaning was resolved by immigration: in Russia, she could not have a full-fledged recognized family and have children. And in Portugal it became possible:

> *Participant 1: And as for some basic fundamental things, yes, then we decided to expand the family, decided to have children. This is possible only here, well, of course, not only here, but in Russia it would be impossible to do it. […] Here we are full-fledged parents…*

It is important for her that now she and her wife are legally recognized at the state level, that they have equal rights to the child as full-fledged parents. It was also meaningful for Participant 1 to improve the quality of life in general. She seems endlessly ready to list how her life has improved in Portugal:

> *Participant 1: The quality of life has changed. Very much. Because it changed... how... I became less sick. The ecology has changed, that is, it is much better here than in Russia, the quality of products has changed, here it is a much higher quality, with a larger assortment and at a lower cost than in Russia.*

Participant 10 highlights other meaningful aspects of life, for her it is, first of all, the representation of different groups and the pluralism of opinions in society of Germany that is related to freedom for her:

> *Participant 10: I see different everywhere… I don't know… on all kinds of poles, somewhere else, stickers for LGBT support, against fascism, against racism. And I really like that it's all kind of... that it's all visible, that it's all, as it were, on... in front of your eyes, that no one allows himself to somehow hide or close it. Well, that is, there is some kind of feeling of freedom and closeness of those ideas that I support.*

Several other participants talk about their sense of freedom:

> *Participant 5: It's easier here. [cough] I don't know, it's comparable to how you were in prison and now you're released.*
> *Participant 3: Yes, you no longer understand how... how why would you drive yourself back into the cage for some reason, yes. I mean... and you definitely don't want that.*

Interestingly, the participants use the words "cage" and "prison" to refer to Russia, and the move to Europe has provided them with a freedom that is meaningful for them (the principle of meaning), but which they lacked in their home country. Also, participants talk about their sense of security and calmness:

> *Participant 5: It... in terms of now, of course, earnings have become less, but in terms of the safety of life it is... safety of health, safety of life — it far outweighs all the disadvantages of a lack of earnings. […] Um, well, about immigration… about immigration, it's basically… it's about getting security. That is, so that for any of your persecution, uh, there is a criminal punishment for the person who does it.*

> *Participant 10: Well, it is clear that all this crap related to politics, of course, it kind of worries me too, and, relatively speaking, that... uh... in Germany you feel much calmer and more secure in this regard, here. In Germany, everything is somehow… calmer or something, you can breathe out normally [laughter], that's it.*

These examples also go back to the principle of meaning, but at the same time, for the most part, they relate to the solved complexity with the threat to the principle of self-efficacy. Participants feel that the new state protects them, that they can rely on it and on the law, which makes life more controllable, there is no need to constantly fear that someone might harm. The participants have a sense of fair justice, there is a positive image of the police, in contrast to Russia.

And, perhaps, it is important that despite the different difficulties associated with the move, the participants broadcast a feeling of happiness:

> *Participant 2: I came here through five countries by train [laughter]. And... I felt happiness.*

> *Participant 5: So... still from immigration... Hmm... Happiness! Just happiness! I don't know how to describe it. I'm happy. So I moved, I'm happy.*

The threats faced in immigrant status do not seem to be as significant as personal feelings of freedom, security and happiness. It seems that immigration became a turning point where participants re-conceptualized threating aspects of their identities (Jaspal, 2014). Speaking about the threats to identity associated with the immigration experience of Russian LGBT+ people, mainly participants in the role of immigrants faced threats to the principles of belonging, self-efficacy and self-esteem. This is somewhat at odds with the findings of Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000), in which they, studying the experience of migrants, found among the participants threats to all four original principles: self-efficiency, self-esteem, continuity and distinctness, but perhaps it's due to different contexts and circumstances of immigration processes.

Given the negative psychological and social experience in Russia, immigration seem to have empowered individuals to feel freer in opening their sexual orientation and able to defend this identity when needed. Jaspal (2014) came to the same conclusion while researching gay Iranian migrants to the UK.

Chapter 4. Discussion

4.1. Findings

The main goal of this study was to understand what changes in the experience of coming out in the process of immigration to European countries among LGBT+ Russians. Identity Process Theory provided a useful and comprehensive framework to better understand the experience of Russian LGBT+ immigrants in Europe in the context of dealing with their identity based on sexual orientation. By focusing on identity threats and coping strategies, this framework provides a deeper understanding of the motives behind the move of Russian LGBT+ people to European countries and helps to consider coming out in different life situations from the point of view of threats to identity principles. It also allows to consider the emergence of a new identity as immigrant and how this identity is represented in this group.

The goal of the research was, firstly, to explore which identity principles arise in presenting a threatened identity and to examine how do Russian LGBT+ immigrants represent their experience of disclosure in Russia and in Europe. Secondly, to explore the immigration experience as a coping strategy in dealing with threats, to see what principles appear in presenting the new situation, and to examine a new identity of immigrant also in the context of threats.

As to the experience of life in Russia, the participants in the interviews talk about threats to identity that arise for all the theory's principles: continuity, self-esteem, self-efficacy, distinctiveness, meaning, belonging and psychological coherence. In other words, Russian LGBT+ people have enough reasons and motives to move to other countries to preserve and protect their identity based on sexual orientation. It is interesting that after moving to Europe, in the experience of the participants, only five principles out of seven emerge as a positive aspect: all, except for distinctiveness and belonging, since the reasons for the threats for these principles remained in their home country and did not arise in the experience of living in a new country in the context of identity by sexual orientation.

Depending on where or for whom the coming out occurs, participants' experiences can be divided into four categories, that are also social contexts: work, family, friends, and social institutions. At a workplace the participants felt different threats to the principles of psychological coherence, self-esteem and self-efficacy, since professional identity conflicted with sexual identity, participants were afraid of losing control over their lives and, in general, there was no confidence for adequate self-esteem. And after the move these threats become

resolved, and participants tended to be more open with colleagues, and felt confidence at defending themselves and relying on their rights. A tendency of acceptance of LGBT+ people and anti-discrimination legislation in Western countries contributes to coming out at a work (Marrs & Staton, 2016), what is still impossible in Russia. In relationships with friends, the participants for the most part broadcast positive experiences both in Russia and after moving, and this experience is mainly associated with the principle of self-esteem as friends give desirable sense of value.

Coming out to the family is emotionally challenging to both parties and the participants stressed that it was very hard to disclose to their family members, a finding that is consistent with early research on this topic (Savin-Williams, 2003). Disclosure to parents and other relatives was related to two identity principles: self-esteem and psychological coherence: it is important for the participants what family members thought of them, and also, they faced the fact that identities in terms of sexual orientation and role in the family came into conflict. Interestingly, some of the participants disclosed to their family before the move, meeting different reactions from rejection to acceptance (Katz-Wise, 2016). Other participants were able to confess to family members only after the move, and some participants remain closed to their families even after the move. As for social institutions, the participants have not mentioned disclosing their sexual orientation in this context when presenting their experience of life in Russia. And starting to live in European countries, when interacting with various structures (banks, clinics, services, etc.), they quickly and easily became more open and talked about positive aspects in a context of meaning, self-esteem, self-efficacy and continuity principles. This is in line with early findings that immigration is a turning point in the presentation of one's non-heterosexual identity (Jaspal, 2014). At the same time, some participants still felt a threat to self-esteem when addressing the possibility of coming out to the Russian-speaking population in the new country.

As for the immigration experience, it brought to participants both new threats and new positive aspects. Talking about living in a new country, participants referred difficulties in adopting a new language as well as other personal difficulties, but also advantages, as well as new values: higher quality of life, freedom, security, and happiness.

Only a few participants moved to Europe with a knowledge of the language of the chosen country. Language is a symbolic marker of identity and language issues can threaten identity (Jaspal & Coyle, 2009). In these issues participants perceived threats to identity in three aspects: belonging, self-esteem and self-efficacy, as they feel the impossibility of belonging to a new culture due to poor knowledge of the language, and being an adult and the inability to do simple

everyday things at the same time deprived the participants of the feeling of control over their lives and self-esteem. This complements Jaspal and Coyle (2009) in their findings of threats to the principles of belonging and distinctiveness in situations related to a new language.

Some participants faced the experience of unemployment when they moved. According to Breakwell (1986), this experience poses a threat to identity in the principle of self-esteem. This research broadens this approach to unemployment as participants face a threat to self-efficacy principle in the situations where they lost their jobs with moving.

Overall, it can be concluded that relocation as a coping strategy for resolving identity threats also has created new threats. But despite the difficulties associated with the immigration process, this coping strategy seems to be successful, as the participants reported to have acquired new value orientations that positively affected their identity, such as the sense of freedom. Also, participants talk about the sense of security and calmness and even happiness. The new values seem to be linked to being a full-fledged citizen who has not only responsibilities, but also rights.

To sum up the experience of immigration of Russian LGBT+ people in Europe, as immigrants they face threats to the principles of belonging, self-efficacy and self-esteem, which are due to the inability to feel part of a new culture because of the language barrier, some fears associated with not understanding how everything works in a new country and the need to wait for documents, with worries about losing a job. Earlier research of migrants' experience (Timotijevic &Breakwell, 2000) evidenced threats to self-efficiency, self-esteem, continuity and distinctiveness. It can be assumed that research in different cultural contexts will give rise to different threats, perhaps also depending on the threats that originated migration in the first place.

After the move participants tended to live a more open and free life in terms of sexual orientation identity and are able to defend it, which also matches the findings of Jaspal (2014) who explored immigration experience of gay Iranian migrants to the UK. Summing up the results of migrating, participants affirmed that they don't regret it and do not want to go back to Russia, arguing instead that all the immigration difficulties are worth it and that they feel happiness. It is also worth noting that the analysis did not reveal significant differences in the narrative of the participants regarding experiences in different countries. At times, participants from different countries expressed very similar thoughts and feelings. This may have to do with the fact that all the countries discussed in this study belong to the green sector of the Rainbow Map (Rainbow Europe, n. d.), which means participants had approximately the same rights for LGBT+ people and attitudes towards them.

4.2. Practical implications

Since the deterioration of the political situation and attitudes towards LGBT+ people in Russia, it can be assumed that the number of LGBT+ immigrants to European countries will grow. This study provides an understanding of what are the motives for their move, why they choose European countries, what change they want to their lives. The use of IPT principles helps to better understand that their experience of migration is largely related to identity threats that relate to sexual orientation, and a comparison of the experience of coming out in Russia and in Europe sheds light on which of the threats are being addressed by immigration as a coping strategy. Findings of this study can thus be useful and pivotal for the provision of qualified assistance and support to LGBT+ immigrants from Russia.This knowledge can be useful also for psychologists who work with LGBT+ immigrants, for social workers who provide assistance to immigrants, for workers in migration services, as well as for LGBT+ people in immigration processes in general or those who are just planning to move.

4.3. Limitations and suggestions for future research

First of all, size of the sample, homogeneous in terms of age group, heterogeneous in terms of sexual orientation, professions, marital status and chosen countries for moving may provide possible limitations for transferability of results.

Also, it is worth noting that the research was conducted on translated content, which may have led to some misinterpretation of the narrative of the participants, despite the double-checking of some extracts of the text by a third party using a reverse translation. In addition, the study presents a small layer of the experience of Russian LGBT+ immigrants: only four countries from the green sector of the Rainbow Map (Rainbow Europe, n. d.), these countries are at the top of the ranking in terms of LGBT+ policies and legislation, which brings limitations for transferability of the results in relation to the experience of immigration to other European countries.

For future research, it is proposed, firstly, to expand the range of countries where Russian LGBT+ people move, and to compare the experience of immigrants in the countries of the green, yellow and red sectors of the Rainbow Map: this would make possible to better understand the motives for moving of Russian LGBT+ people to certain countries, and to see if in all countries immigration can become a successful coping strategy for dealing with an

identity threat. In addition, it is proposed to study non-heterosexuals not only from Russia in order to expand the understanding of the experience of LGBT+ immigrants from different non-European countries, using the Identity Process Theory. It will also allow to see the similarities and differences between LGBT+ immigrants in Europe from different cultures while using the same theoretical framework. It is also proposed to study the experience of LGBT+ immigrants who move from one European country to another, and compare their experience with the experience of non-European immigrants, also based on the framework of Identity Process Theory. This will help to understand even deeper what drives different people along the path of immigration, and will help to transfer the experience of LGBT+ immigration, so that this knowledge will form the basis of practical help and support for LGBT+ immigrants in the future.

In addition, in the process of analyzing, difficulties arose in the interpretation of certain principles of the Identity Process Theory in relation to examples from interviews. Since the research is being conducted in a new cultural context for this framework, it was difficult to find support in previous works to confirm the correct correlation of examples and principles. For future research, it might be useful to use the Identity Process Theory to study the Russian cultural context and, in particular, Russian LGBT+ people, in order to gain experience in analyzing this particular layer.

4.4. Conclusion

The present study employs Identity Process Theory to provide new knowledge about the experience of Russian LGBT+ immigrants in Europe and processes underlying their identities. Before moving to European countries, participants experienced threats to their identity based on sexual orientation in the context of all principles of the Identity Process Theory. Immigration has become a coping strategy for them to deal with the identity threats. Participants reported many difficulties in the context of the closedness or openness of their life in Russia, and the four most significant situations of disclosing their sexual orientation were identified: work, family, friends and social institutions. The situations of coming out in Russia, including those that were not accomplished, were associated with threats to identity principles of self-esteem, psychological coherence, and self-efficacy. Conversely, coming out situations in Europe are more associated with positive aspects regarding self-esteem, self-efficacy and continuity. Although the experience of immigration and the acquisition of a new identity as immigrants was associated with the emergence of new threats, namely in terms of belonging, self-efficacy

and self-esteem, in general, the participants did not convey much importance to this, as they valued profiting from other values and supports: openness, freedom, safety, protection, calmness, and happiness. It can be argued that immigration as a coping strategy to address threats to identity based on sexual orientation was successful for these participants.

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Annexes

Annex A

Participants

№	Duration	Age	Gender	Sexual orientation	Country	Profession	Marital status
Participant 1	40 min	34	Woman	Lesbian	Portugal	Psychologist	Married
Participant 2	24 min	32	Woman	Lesbian	Portugal	Real estate agent	Married
Participant 3	1h 05 min	36	Woman	Bisexual	Germany	CEO	In a relationship
Participant 4	47 min	29	Woman	Bisexual	Germany	Italian teacher	Engaged
Participant 5	1h 20 min	39	Man	Gay	Spain	Communications Engineer, freelancer	Married
Participant 6	1h 39 min	37	Woman	Lesbian	Spain	Economist (unemployed)	Married
Participant 7	58 min	29	Man	Gay	Portugal	Engineer, freelancer (unemployed)	In a process of divorce
Participant 8	35 min	42	Woman	Lesbian	Spain	Creative director	Married
Participant 9	55 min	34	Man	Gay	Germany	Owner of a company	In a relationship
Participant 10	58 min	25	Woman	Pansexual	Germany	Kitchen worker, student	Single
Participant 11	56 min	33	Woman	Lesbian	Finland	Scientist	Married

Annex B

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INFORMED CONSENT

STUDY

The present study arises in the context of a *master´s dissertation* at ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa. This study concerns to Russian LGBT immigrants and explores how do Russian LGBT immigrants represent their experience of coming out in a homeland Russia and in a new country.

RESEARCHER

The study is carried out by Uliana Skornyakova (wings.hands@gmail.com), who can be contacted if you have any questions or comments. The supervisor of the master thesis is Carla Mouro (carla.mouro@iscte-iul.pt).

INTERVIEW

During the interview you may touch sensitive topics that can bring up unpleasant memories and feelings. You have the right to provide information only to the extent that you consider necessary, and also have the right to refuse to talk on certain topics or answer certain questions. Participation in the study is strictly voluntary: you can freely choose to participate or not to participate. If you choose to participate, you can stop your participation at any time without having to provide any justification. At any time, you can withdraw from the study: during the interview with showing your opinion or after the interview by writing an e-mail to the researcher. At any time, you can withdraw the consent. In addition to being voluntary, participation is strictly confidential. You will have one interview session lasting 1-1,5 hours only after you send the signed consent and we will make an appointment for online meeting. At your request, online-meeting can take place without video.

DATA AND PROTECTION

You also be asked for the following data: name, gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, geography (country/countries). The interview will be audio-recorded only (not video) and then transcribed to text. Recordings and transcriptions will be held in separate folders on the ISCTE cloud space, protected by a password, and only the researcher and supervisor will have access to the data. This data will be kept for 5 years and then will be destroyed. The Data Protection Officer at ISCTE is Professor Nuno David (dpo@iscte.pt). The data will not be transferred to a third party and will not be transferred outside the EU.

Your participation in the study, which will be highly valued as a contribution to the advancement of knowledge in this field of science, consists of the interview. You have no risk of being recognized in the publication of the study as your name will be anonymized in the transcription of the interview. That means that your name will be never linked to analyzed data. At any time, you have right of access, rectification, deletion, limitation and opposition to the use of the data by contacting the researcher by e-mail. In case of violations of data protection, you can complain to Comissão Nacional de Proteção de Dados in Portugal (geral@cnpd.pt) or the corresponding Data Protection Authority in

your country of residence (list of countries is available on this link https://edpb.europa.eu/about-edpb/board/members_en).

CONSENT FORM

- I have read and understood the information sheet.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project, and that I can withdraw my data without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.
- I agree and consent to the processing of the given information and data for the purposes of this research study.
- I understand that my name will be anonymized in the transcription of the interview and will never be linked to analyzed data.
- I understand that the data will be stored on a secure cloud-based system provided by ISCTE.
- I understand that by signing this consent below, I agree to take part in research.

O I have read and agree with the statements above and consent to participating in this study.
O I do not consent to taking part in this study.

_________________________ (location), _____ / ____ / _______ (date)

Name:____

Signature:____

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Annex C

DEBRIEFING/EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH

Thank you for having participated in this study. As indicated at the onset of your participation, the study is about Russian LGBT immigrants. More specifically, about coming out experience of abovementioned group in Russia and in a new country.

In the context of your participation, security measures will be taken for you, namely your name will be changed when the study is published. The recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be held in separate folders on the cloud drive under the password.

We remind that the following contact details can be used for any questions that you may have, comments that you wish to share, or to indicate your interest in receiving information about the main outcomes and conclusions of the study or about research topic in general: wings.hands@gmail.com

If you need psychological support, please contact the following help centers that provide support for LGBT+ people:

- THRIVE https://thrivelifeline.org
- SAGE National LGBT Elder Hotline https://www.sageusa.org/what-we-do/sage-national-lgbt-elder-hotline/
- LGBT National Help Center http://glbtnationalhelpcenter.org
- LGBT Helpline https://fenwayhealth.org/care/wellness-resources/help-lines/
- Russian LGBT Network https://lgbtnet.org/activities/programma_psikhologicheskoy_pomoshchi/

Once again, thank you for your participation.

Annex D

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COMISSÃO DE ÉTICA

PARECER [Final] 32/2021

Projeto *"Coming out (or not) of Russian LGBT immigrants: what is changing regarding disclosure with an immigration experience"*

O projeto *"Coming out (or not) of Russian LGBT immigrants: what is changing regarding disclosure with an immigration experience",* submetido pela investigadora Uliana Skornyakova, financiado pelo EU HORIZON 2020, foi apreciado pela Comissão de Ética (CE) na reunião de 15 de fevereiro de 2021.

A apreciação do projeto suscitou, porém, algumas reservas plasmadas no Parecer [Intercalar] 15/2021, relativas a matéria de proteção de dados pessoais, entre outros, em relação às quais a investigadora veio agora prestar esclarecimentos adicionais.

A Comissão de Ética entende que os esclarecimentos satisfazem os requisitos éticos exigíveis e esclarecem as questões suscitadas.

A Comissão de Ética recomenda duas retificações no consentimento informado:

i) O Direito do titular de dados de apresentar reclamação processa-se junto da Autoridade de Proteção de Dados em Portugal (CNPD) ou da autoridade do país de residência do titular de dados (e não junto do European Data Protection Board como consta na atual versão do consentimento).

ii) No consentimento informado não se descortinaram os contactos do Encarregado de Proteção de Dados do ISCTE, o que é obrigatório.

A Comissão reitera ainda a recomendação de que os dados brutos (que envolvem categorias especiais de dados) devem ser armazenados em servidores ou serviços cloud licenciados pelo Iscte, designadamente através de uma pasta no Sharepoint, com exclusivo acesso dos dois investigadores envolvidos, evitando-se uma pasta partilhada no OneDrive.

Em suma, assumindo que serão realizadas as retificações acima descritas, e assegurados que se encontram a natureza voluntária da participação, as medidas técnicas e organizativas adequadas em matéria de proteção de dados pessoais e os direitos dos titulares dos dados, entende a Comissão de Ética emitir parecer favorável, sem prejuízo da ratificação deste parecer na próxima reunião.

Relator: Nuno David

(com Maria Eduarda Gonçalves e Madalena Ramos)

Lisboa, 27 de março de 2021

O Presidente da Comissão, Professor Doutor Sven Waldzus

O Relator: Professor Doutor Nuno David

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Annex E

Interview Guideline

Introducing
I am developing a study about the experience of Russian speaking LGBT immigrants in Europe. In this interview, I will ask questions regarding the reasons for your immigration, as well as questions about your life in Russia and current life in your new country.

Questions
1. First, could you please share what is your age and profession? Where were you born? Where do you live now? When have you migrated to xxx country? Are you doing something similar or different from what you were doing in Russia?
2. If you look back, how would you describe your life in Russia?
3. How did you decide to move to another country (What happened?)? What experiences have contributed to your decision to immigrate? Can you describe this experience and give examples of specific situations that you feel have contributed to your decision? How did you manage the situations you described?
4. What were the reasons for choosing xxx country? Was this the only option you considered?
5. Now I would like to ask you something very personal, but that would be very helpful for me to better understand your experience. Have you ever made coming out in Russia? How would you describe this experience? Could you give me an example of these situations? What is the meaning of coming out to you?
6. It is very probable that the immigration experience changed your life in some aspects. What are the changes that you felt? In what situations do you feel them? Could you please describe them?
7. Now you live in Europe. What differences did you expect from your previous country? How can you describe your life in another country comparing it with your life in Russia? Could you please give the exact examples of comparing?
8. Again, I would like to ask you about the coming out experience, but in the new country. Have you ever made coming out in the new country? Can you describe this experience, what were these situations?
9. I do not have more questions to pose to you, but I would like to know if you feel that there is something else that you would like to say. Were there some questions missing in the interview that would help me to understand better your point of view? Please feel free to add any comment.

Thank you very much for helping me with this research. Are there any questions that you would like to make about the study?

Annex F

Principles	**Meaning**
Continuity	Continuity across time and situation. Refers to the human motivation to maintain a sense of temporal continuity. There is some conceptual thread connecting past, present, and future within a person's identity. A threat to this principle means that a person feels a contradiction between what is happening in reality, with the conception of the person's identity in a sense of temporal continuity. *Example:* Nick realized himself as a trans person, feeling that he is a woman in a man's body. The evidence of his body contradicts his conception of his real identity. *Example:* Jimmy lives in a small village in India and he was found to have leprosy. He was discovered accidentally when a doctor came to a village to promote health care. Jimmy was placed in a center specializing in the treatment of leprosy, but he refuses to accept that he suffers from leprosy. The common belief in his home village is that leprosy comes as a punishment of one's sins. And Jimmy doesn't believe he has leprosy because he is not sinful. The social belief system leads to conclusions about self-description and the diagnosis threatens the continuity of identity.
Distinctiveness	Uniqueness or distinctiveness from others. A threat is an unwanted feeling of distinctiveness from others. Or a feeling that refers to the drive to establish and maintain a sense of differentiation from relevant others. *Example:* John realized he's gay but he lives in a small village in the north of nis native country. He is the only one gay in his village what makes him feel unwanted distinction from others. *Example:* Lisa has depression and her family ignores her diagnosis being convinced she's just lazy and doesn't want to work. She would like them to recognize her special diagnosis and understand that because of this diagnosis she is different and cannot do ordinary things the same way. She wants them to realize her uniqueness.
Self-efficacy	Confidence and control of one's life. The individual will try to maintain an identity structure which is characterised by competence and control. The absence of efficacy is associated with feelings of futility, alienation, and helplessness. *Example:* Anna was used to go to rallies and protests in her native country, as she was sure

	that by doing so she influenced something. But the political regime changed, the protesters began to be persecuted, punished and imprisoned. Anna felt helpless in this situation and vulnerability in the fact that in fact she could not influence anything. *Example:* Tony was in a good position in the company, his opinion was always listened to and considered an excellent professional in his field. Tony knew that he could influence certain business decisions, and this always led to good results for the company. After it was accidentally revealed that he was gay, his opinion was no longer taken into account. Tony has lost influence and control in his workplace.
Self-esteem	A sense of personal worth or social value. Refers to the drive to derive a positive self conception. In a threatening situation a person feels danger to personal worth or to self-esteem. *Example:* Mary realized herself as a lesbian. When she shared this with her family and friends, she faced rejection, close people turned away from her, and she was left alone feeling she's not valued anymore. *Example:* Anny suddenly lost her husband after a heart attack and became addicted of alcohol. She felt confident in the identity of "wife" and, when she started drinking, she changed a lot in behavior and became more aggressive, which others began to notice, and she lost social support. She buried herself in a haze of non-identity induced by intoxication and after that she lost her self-esteem.
Belonging	Maintaining feelings of closeness to and acceptance by other people. The belonging motive refers to the need to maintain or enhance feelings of closeness to, or acceptance by, other people, whether in dyadic relationships or within in-groups. Threats to belonging typically lead to various coping strategies, including identification with more inclusive in-groups and self-stereotyping. *Example:* As a teenager, Marina felt a sexual attraction to girls, but when she tried to talk about it with her peers, she faced misunderstanding and rejection. Later, using the Internet, Marina found forums where a girl with similar feelings and experiences communicated. Being part of this group of girls has become very important for Marina. *Example:* Olga identified herself as a trans community and was in the process of transitioning from woman to man. For various

	reasons, Olga at some point decided to reverse her transition and found herself misunderstood in the trans community, which stopped accepting her. It took her a while to find the community of people who are going through detransition. Olga began to attend meetings of this community, where she was accepted, and also found new friends.
Meaning	Finding significance and purpose in one's life. Motivates individuals to search for purpose and significance in their existence. The search for meaning as an essential feature of human nature, portraying the sense that one's existence is meaningful as a core feature of psychological well-being. The search for meaning plays a key role in coping successfully with life events, including military combat, terminal illness, and bereavement. *Example:* Sonia is a young Jewish Israeli. She believes that she needs to give birth to many children in order to recover the losses caused by the Holocaust. Her great-grandparents whom she never knew had perished during the Holocaust. She percieves the Holocaust as a personal loss. Her knowledge of the Holocaust alone was construed as being sufficient in rendering the Holocaust a psychologically salient phenomenon. This process of meaning-making of the Holocaust benefits the meaning principle of identity, which seeks purpose and significance in the existence of one's group. *Example:* Habib is a Muslim. He wants to be a good Muslim. His religious commitments outlaw everything which might undermine Islamic unity. His psychosocial world is perceived through a primarily religious lens. Being a good Muslim determines his life.
Psychological coherence	Establishing feelings of compatibility among one's (inter-connected) identities. This motive represents the need to ensure a sense of coherence between existing identities. *Example:* Katarina is a staunch Christian, but at the same time she is bisexual. Both identities, religious and sexual orientation, are important for Katarina, and for the comfortable coexistence of these identities, she revised the Holy Scriptures and found a suitable interpretation of the text for herself. *Example:* Mark was very fond of his father, with whom they were always on good terms and believed that he was a good son, but he always hid his sexual orientation (gay) from his father. The father accidentally found out about Mark's sexual orientation and told him that he could not

	be a good son for him if he was gay. Mark's psychological coherence was threatened, as two of his important identities began to conflict with each other.

Annex G

Participant 8

This case is interesting because her narrative about life in Russia is different from what was shared by the other participants. Participant 8 had experiences of life in Russia interspersed with experiences of life in different countries. She rather for a long time retained faith in Russia as a progressive country. In addition, Participant 8 had good, in her opinion, living conditions, which she did not want to change for anything.

When friends from other countries hinted to her that the political situation in Russia was not entirely safe, Participant 8 defended her home country:

Participant 8: And everyone told me that in Russia the situation seemed to be not very good, but I, on the contrary... it was until 2010, when, in fact, the law, yes, about LGBT people was created. Before that, everything seemed to be fine, I told everyone: what are you, what are you, what are you? It's just that you have it... you know, old ones... you just don't know Russia, everything is super in Russia, everything is cool in Russia. I was always told: you know, with human rights in Russia, well, somehow it's not very good, but I said: why are you, but you don't know anything at all, you're a fool.

Also, this participant made a good career in a universal company with an office in Moscow:

Participant 8: I worked at a great job, I felt comfortable, we had a wonderful team.

Interestingly, over time, Participant 8 came to understand that the political regime in Russia is becoming tougher. But she seemed not to be interested in it, it was easier for her to close her eyes to it, remaining within the framework of her comfort, which consisted in the fact that no one was pursuing her or killing her:

Participant 8: ...well, politics is one thing, yes, you do not agree. But on the other hand, as it were, politics is politics, but if you abstract yourself and put on a damper, a blinker, yes, then it's okay for you to live here, well, really. Nobody throws stones at you, and down the street by the hand... in Moscow, yes... within the Garden Ring, let's say [laughter]... that's why... everything is fine. [...] This comfort — yes... how to say it... it's a little... it's external comfort, and it's clear that it's all shaky, and it's not clear how it will all end. But there, at this moment, you feel good, you are not killed, you are not dying, and there is... there is something to eat, and you can ride, here. It was all there.

It was also not important for her to declare about herself, about her sexual orientation: she felt comfortable within her organization, she had no fear that she would face discrimination:

Participant 8: I was not afraid of discrimination, I was not afraid of some kind of hate in my direction. And I am more than sure that it would not have been, simply because I was lucky to work in this environment. I'm not talking about the fact that it doesn't exist – it does, of course. No, it would not have been, I was probably just shy, I didn't want to protrude in advance or something... Somehow, there, to beat my chest, to be different again. Well, that was some kind of embarrassment. There was no fear... there was no fear that I will face, there, with some... but, nevertheless, here... I did not want to.