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Title page

Conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities: How is it related to coming out experiences, LGB identity dimensions and well-being?

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Abstract

Even though Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) individuals are usually less religious than the general population, religion and/or spirituality are still a part of many LGB people's lives. This paper focused on investigating the relation between the conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities and subjective well-being, dimensions of LGB identity and outness. The participants were 126 LGB people, with 80 of them being female, from a mostly Catholic context in Southern Europe - Portugal. No significant correlations were found between religious/spiritual variables and subjective well-being. Conflict between religious and LGB identities was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with outness and positive affect; and positively correlated with negative affect and some LGB identity dimensions (Internalized Homonegativity, Difficult Process, Acceptance Concerns and Concealment Motivation). People who felt conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities were found to have higher scores on Difficult Process, Acceptance Concerns, Concealment Motivation and Identity Centrality, than those who did not experience it. Implications are discussed in terms of the diversity of strategies LGB people use to reconcile their dual identities.

Keywords:

religion, spirituality, sexual orientation, identity conflict, subjective well-being

Conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities: How is it related to coming out experiences, LGB identity dimensions and well-being?

The positive relationship between several aspects of religion and/or spirituality and well-being has been heavily studied in the general population. Religiosity (Bergan & McConatha, 2000), spirituality (Hadzic, 2011), religious participation and religious affiliation (Schwab & Peterson, 1990) have all been shown to be positively correlated with well-being and better mental health. However, in the case of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) people, often stigmatized and discriminated by most formal religions, this relationship becomes less clear. According to Barnes and Meyer (2012), when compared with the general population, LGB individuals report less religious affiliation, less attendance of religious services and prayer, and a lower level of self-reported religiosity. LGB individuals are also more likely to report that religion is not important (Lytle, Blosnich, De Luca, & Brownson, 2018) and a lower sense of belonging to their religious communities (Kralovec, Fartacek, Fartacek, & Plöderl, 2014), when compared with heterosexual samples. In addition, because many formal religions have traditionally condemned or criticized homosexuality, many religious LGB people experience a conflict or dissonance between their religious/spiritual identity and their LGB identity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

Even considering the lower rates of religious affiliation and behavior, LGB religious and spiritual people exist and have been the focus of many investigations. Boppana and Gross (2019) reported significant and positive correlations between religiosity and well-being, like those found in the general population. As for spirituality, Barnes and Meyer (2012) reported higher levels of spirituality for an LGB sample, when compared to the general population, and authors have found significant and positive correlations with life satisfaction and positive affect (Harari, Glenwick, & Cecero, 2014) and self-esteem (Stern & Wright, 2018). Other authors, though, have found different results for LGB population, from non-significant correlations

between religiosity and well-being (Harari et al., 2014) to even finding negative correlations between religiosity and self-esteem (Stern & Wright, 2018) and positive correlations with loneliness (Escher et al., 2018). Such results seem to indicate a more complex relationship between these variables for the LGB population than for their heterosexual counterparts.

Besides focusing on well-being and mental health, research about religion and spirituality in the LGB population has also focused on issues and subjects that are specific to the LGB experience, such as internalized homophobia and outness. As an example, religiosity was found by Shilo and Savaya (2012) to be associated with higher levels of internalized homophobia and lower levels of outness. Fewer authors have focused on the experience of conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities. The existing literature, mainly qualitative, reports that people who experience conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities report a great deal of negative feelings, emotions and cognitions (Anderton, Pender, & Asner-Self, 2011), including depression, anxiety and self-hatred (Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi & Geelan, 2012; Beagan & Hattie, 2015). The scarce quantitative research on this topic also found that people who experience this type of conflict have more difficulty accepting their LGB identity (Schuck & Liddle, 2001) and poorer mental health (Zeidner & Zevulun, 2018). Due to the lack of quantitative research investigating conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities, it is important to further investigate this experience of conflict, namely by identifying new correlates and comparing people who felt conflict with people who do not experience it, in terms of these variables.

Conflict between Religious/spiritual and LGB Identities

According to Coyle and Rafalin (2000), identity conflict occurs when two or more identity aspects that are important to an individual are perceived as being in part or completely incompatible. Authors such as Rodriguez (2009) and Anderton et al. (2011) have presented Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory to explain the feelings of conflict experienced by

religious LGB people. According to this theory, cognitive dissonance occurs when an individual experiences tension between two thoughts or beliefs that are inconsistent. Maintaining the two contradictory cognitions is mentally and emotionally painful and so individuals try to adjust them to reduce the experience of conflict. When dissonance is perceived as persistent and high in magnitude, that is, when dissonance exists between elements that are of great importance to the individuals, they will feel motivated to engage in ways of alleviating the pressure (Anderton et al., 2011). Applied to this context, if someone's religious beliefs are important to them and if those religious beliefs are not affirmative of LGB people, they will start to feel a dissonance between their religious beliefs and their self-knowledge and start questioning one of the cognitions or both. The more the religious beliefs are important for the individual, the more they will tend to experience dissonance, tension and pain, and the more they will feel motivated to solve this dissonance (Anderton et al., 2011). This theory can also be applied to explain some of the things people might do to deal with dissonance. According to Anderton et al. (2011), people who experience dissonance will tend to avoid people and situations that increase their experience of conflict. Someone who feels conflict between their religious and LGB identities might thus try to avoid people, situations and other things that remind them of this conflict and it can either be avoiding LGB contexts and people, or avoiding religious contexts and people, or even avoiding both. Another way of alleviating their dissonance, supported by this theory, might be searching for others that are supportive of their beliefs and values. Thus, as LGB people in conflict start forming new cognitions about themselves or their religion, they might start to seek out people who would support their beliefs either about their sexual identity or about religion. Although cognitive dissonance theory provides a theoretical framework to potentially explain conflict between religious and LGB identities, Rodriguez (2009) considers that such a theory cannot be used to understand all the levels of complexity of this issue, such as personality issues and social implications.

Another theoretical model often referred by authors (e.g., Rodriguez, 2009; Zeidner & Zevulun, 2018) to explain this experience of conflict is the multiple identity conflict model, by Baumeister, Shapiro, and Tice (1985). According to this model, the multiple social roles, and multiple identities that people are strongly committed to, can start to be perceived as incompatible, making people feel like they are in an impossible situation. Being strongly and personally committed to both distinct identities is a key aspect because only such dual commitment can produce conflict. Feeling this conflict between multiple and strong identities, as an LGB and a religious identity, would then prompt people to look for ways of alleviating such conflict. According to Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000), LGB people with a strong religious identity can then take four different paths to alleviate their identity conflict: 1) rejection of the LGB identity; 2) rejection of the religious identity; 3) compartmentalization; and 4) identity integration. These four possible paths are often found in participants' reports from qualitative studies.

The first strategy is found in Itzhaky and Kissil's (2015) qualitative study, which focused on Orthodox Jewish gay men and their experiences of living in the closet. All the participants described the negative emotions they felt when they realized they were gay, such as shame, guilt, disgust, and self-hatred. The participants also described strategies used to deal with the initial conflict, such as denying being gay, entering a heterosexual marriage or using religious rituals to try to get rid of their "homosexual side". Denying their homosexuality did not end up when they figured they could not eliminate it; instead, participants reported focusing their attention in concealing their homosexuality. Although some of the participants had come out to themselves many years before the interview, all participants still reported experiencing negative emotions. Additionally, none of them mentioned having reconciled their conflict and or considered coming out to their families, because, in their opinion, it was not worth to lose their Orthodox Jewish communities.

Some LGB religious people, though, report choosing their sexual identity over their religious identity. Schuck and Liddle (2001), for example, report that, in their sample of 66 LGB people, nearly two thirds felt conflict and among those the most common response was to stop attending their religious institution. Five participants also decided to give up religion completely when they came out.

Another way of dealing with conflict that does not involve giving up any identity is compartmentalization, a process described by Baumeister et al. (1985). According to these authors, compartmentalization is a compromise between the two conflicting identities, that keeps them completely separate from each other, allowing people to solve the conflict they previously felt. LGB people who use this strategy tend to keep their LGB lives away from religion, and their religion away from the LGB part of their lives (Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000). Rodriguez and Ouellette (2000) differentiate compartmentalization from integration because people who integrate their identities have a positive gay identity and a positive religious identity and the two identities are combined. In the case of compartmentalization, the two identities are not combined but kept separate, with people building walls between the two and perceiving the barriers imposed by their religion or society as impossible to solve. Love et al. (2005) report an example of compartmentalization, with one participant in their study saying he kept his gay identity apart from his Catholic identity, having no need to have both identities interact and considering not feeling any conflict.

Lastly, it is important to mention that not all religious LGB people feel conflict between the two identities. Sherry, Adelman, Whilde, and Quick (2010) report that a few people in their study never felt conflict between the two identities either because they felt their religion was affirming of their sexual identity or because the issues were very small, because religion was not an important part of who they were. Coyle and Rafalin (2000) also reported the experience of a gay Jewish man who never felt any conflict between the two identities. This man attributed

this to the acceptance he felt from his parents and also the support and validation he felt from his rabbi when he disclosed his identity.

Some people seem to find ways of integrating or reconciling both identities, in a multitude of ways, such as returning to their original religion, finding a new alternative religion or different church that is affirming, or finding personal spiritual pathways that are not connected to a particular religion. Such paths were reported, for example, in García, Gray-Stanley and Ramirez-Valles's (2008) study that focused on the experience of gay, bisexual, and transgender Latino men, who grew up as Catholic. After experiencing and dealing with conflict, some of these men decided to remain Catholic, some joined other formal religions, and some followed other types of spiritual groups. Besides reporting the experience of LGB people who left religion, Schuck and Liddle (2001) also report the experience of LGB people who found a way of maintaining a religious and/or spiritual life. Some participants stopped attending their church but kept their faith and religious beliefs in a private way. Other participants first rejected religion completely, saying they felt the need to leave religion to be able to come out, but ended up returning to their religion of origin feeling reconciled with their beliefs. And others still left their previous religion but ended up choosing a more affirmative denomination. Being a member of an affirmative organization allows people to receive support, giving them a place to connect with others that also have religious and LGB identities, and thus giving them an opportunity to experience both aspects (Anderton et al., 2011).

Ganzevoort, Van der Laan, and Olsman (2011) draw attention to the fact that most people do not integrate their identities immediately in a permanent way, without ever rethinking it. Love, Bock, Jannarone, and Richardson (2005) also argue that this process is not static nor linear, with people having had moments where they felt more or less reconciled, influenced by new external challenges and obstacles that can create new crises throughout a lifetime.

Potential Correlates of Conflict between Religious/spiritual and LGB Identities

In qualitative studies, individuals often mention that their experience of conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities impacted their well-being greatly (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000) and their mental health, with some participants mentioning depression, anxiety, self-hatred and even suicidal ideation (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi & Geelan, 2012). The participants also frequently report feeling other negative emotions such as guilt and shame about their sexual orientation, during a period of conflict (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi & Geelan, 2012). Related to these feelings of guilt and shame, Began and Hattie (2015) also report that several participants mentioned an impact in their self-esteem, due the persistent exposure to condemnatory messages. Quantitative research focusing on this identity conflict and well-being or mental health is scarce. Gibbs and Goldbach (2015) also focused on mental health and reported that those with unresolved conflict had higher odds of having suicidal thoughts in the previous month, when compared with those who did not grow up in a religious environment. Zeidner and Zevulun (2018) found that Jewish gay men who reported greater identity conflict also reported poorer mental health, having higher levels of state anxiety, depression and loneliness than those who did not feel any conflict. Quantitative research on conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities has so far almost exclusively focused on internalized homonegativity. Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) reported that people who felt like their religion made it impossible to accept their sexual orientation had higher internalized homophobia than people who felt no conflict. Consistently, Gibbs and Goldbach (2015) also found that people with unresolved conflict between their sexuality and religious beliefs reported higher levels of internalized homophobia when compared to those who did not grow up in a religious environment. Apart from internalized homonegativity, Schuck and Liddle (2001) focused on the difficulty accepting the LGB identity. The authors reported that those who felt this type of conflict had higher levels of difficulty accepting their LGB identity

than those who did not experience any conflict. To the best of our knowledge, research on conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities has not yet focused on the relationship with other significant LGB identity dimensions (Mohr & Fassinger, 2006; Mohr & Kendra, 2011), such as acceptance concerns or concealment motivation, nor has it focused on outness.

Current research will thus contribute for the research on religion and spirituality among the LGB population, with the following research goals: 1) to identify correlates of the experience of conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities, focusing on LGB identity dimensions, subjective well-being and outness, and 2) to compare people who felt conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities and people who did not experience this conflict, in terms of LGB identity dimensions, subjective well-being and outness.

Method

Participants

The survey recruited participants who were at least 18 years old and identified as LGB, having been completed by a total of 126 participants. Demographic variables can be seen on Table 1. The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 66 years old (M = 29.41; SD = 9.69), with 85.7% of participants being between 18 and 35 years old. Regarding sex, 45 participants indicated being male (36%), 80 participants reported being female (64%) and one intersex (<1%). Three participants indicated a gender that was different from their assigned sex (1 trans man and 2 non-binary participants) and one reported being genderfluid (n = 4; 3.4%). Remaining participants were classified as "cisgender" (96.6%). Concerning sexual orientation, 37.6% identified as Lesbian (n = 47) and 30.4% identified as Gay (n = 38). For analysis purposes, Bisexual and Pansexual individuals were considered as being in the same group (n = 40; 32%). From this Bisexual or Pansexual group 32 participants were female. Participants also indicated their marital status and education level. Regarding marital status, 76.2% of participants were single (n = 96), 16.7% were cohabiting (n = 21), 5.6% were married (n = 7)

and 1.6% were divorced (n = 2). About education level, 23% of participants indicated having secondary education (n = 29), 51.6% had an undergraduate degree (n = 65), 23.8% had a master's degree (n = 30) and 1.6% of participants had a doctoral degree (n = 2).

Regarding their religious preferences, 54% of people indicated having no religious or spiritual preference (n = 68), either by saying they had "none" or "no religion" (n = 24) or considering themselves atheists (n = 30) or agnostics (n = 14). Christian religions were the next biggest group (n = 32; 25.4%), with people considering themselves either as "Catholic" (n = 21) or as "Non-Catholic Christians" (e.g., Christian, Evangelic, Protestant, etc.; n = 11). Seven people indicated some type of Non-Christian religion/spirituality as their preference (e.g., Buddhism, Spiritism, Islamism, Paganism, etc.; 5.6%) and 17 people (13.5%) indicated other spiritual beliefs, by stating they were "only spiritual" or that they believed in concepts such as "energy" or "love". Two 2 participants (1.6%) chose not to answer this question.

Table 1

Demographic and Religious Characterization of the Sample

	Frequency	Percent
Age		
18 to 25	50	39.7
26 to 35	58	46.0
36 to 45	6	4.8
46 to 66	12	9.5
Sex		
Male	45	35.7
Female	80	63.5
Intersex	1	0.8
Gender Identity		

Cisgender	112	96.6
Transgender/TGNC	4	3.4
Sexual Orientation		
Lesbian	47	37.6
Gay	38	30.4
Bisexual or Pansexual	40	32.0
Nationality		
Portuguese	119	94.4
Brazilian	5	4.0
Other	2	1.6
Marital Status		
Single	96	76.2
Cohabiting	21	16.7
Married	7	5.6
Divorced	2	1.6
Education Level		
Secondary education	29	23.0
Undergraduate degree	65	51.6
Master's degree	30	23.8
Doctoral degree	2	1.6
Religious Preference		
No Religious Preference	68	54.0
Catholic Christianity	21	16.7
Non-Catholic Christianity	11	8.7
Non-Christian Religion	7	5.6
Other Spiritual Beliefs	17	13.5
Total	126	100.0

Measures

Subjective well-being. Subjective well-being was measured using both the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Pavot & Diener, 1993) and the Positive and Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS; Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The SWLS is a 5-item scale measuring overall life satisfaction (Pavot & Diener, 1993). In the original version, the items are rated from 1 - Strongly disagree to 7 - Strongly agree, with total scores ranging from 7 to 35 and the highest scores indicating higher levels of life satisfaction. In this study, a Portuguese adaptation by Simões (1992), presented by Nunes (2009), was used. This version measures the items with a five-point scale instead of seven, with total scores ranging from 5 to 25, and showed a Cronbach's alpha of .77 in the original study by Simões (1992) and of .86 in Nunes's (2009). In the current sample a Cronbach's alpha of .79 was found. The PANAS assesses positive and negative affect (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). The original scale consists of 10 items measuring positive affect and another 10 items measuring negative affect. The items are presented as single words (e.g., Distressed; Enthusiastic; Irritable; Proud) and participants are asked to rate the extent to which they have felt that way on a scale from 1 - Very slightly or not at all to 5 - Very much. The Portuguese version by Simões (1993), presented by Nunes (2009), was used. This version measures each component using 11 items instead of 10, with the scores from each measure ranging from 11 to 55. The original study reports a Cronbach's alpha of .82 for the positive affect measure and .85 for the negative affect measure (Nunes, 2009). In this sample an alpha of .85 was found for the positive and of .87 for the negative affect measures.

Dimensions of LGB identity. The different dimensions of the LGB identity were measured using the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Identity Scale (LGBIS; Mohr & Kendra, 2011), a 27-item measure that evaluates eight dimensions of LGB identity: Acceptance Concerns; Concealment Motivation; Identity Uncertainty; Internalized Homonegativity; Difficult Process; Identity Superiority; Identity Affirmation and Identity Centrality. Participants were asked to

evaluate each sentence about their experience as an LGB person using a 6-point rating scale, from 1 - Strongly agree to 6 - Strongly disagree. The LGBIS is a revision and extension of a previous measure that only measured lesbian and gay identity development and did not account for identity centrality and identity affirmation (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000). The Portuguese translation was developed by Oliveira, Pereira, Costa, and Nogueira (2010), as well as the validation by Oliveira, Lopes, Costa, and Nogueira (2012), measuring each item on a scale from 1 to 7. As such, in this study the translation by these authors was used, with the exception of two additional items from the current LGBIS (Mohr & Kendra, 2011), that had to be translated. In the original paper, Mohr and Kendra (2011) report Cronbach's alpha scores from .75 to .91 across samples for the eight the dimensions; and in the present sample it ranged from .75 to .88.

Outness. The Outness Inventory (Mohr & Fassinger, 2000) is an 11-item measure and was used to measure the degree to which the participants were open about their sexual orientation to their family (mother, father, siblings, and extended family/relatives), the world (new straight friends, work peers, work supervisors and strangers) and their religion community (members and leaders). Each item is measured with a 7-point Likert-type scale from 1 - Person definitely does not know about your sexual orientation status to 7 – Person definitely knows about your sexual orientation status, and it is openly talked about. In addition, a non-applicable option is presented. The Portuguese translation presented by Gonçalves (2017) was used. In her sample, the following Cronbach's alpha were found: .80 for outness to family, .88 for outness to the world and .99 for outness to religion (Gonçalves, 2017). In the present sample a Cronbach's alpha of .84 was found for outness to family and of .89 for the world. The two items of outness to religion were strongly and significantly correlated ($r = .73$) ($\alpha=0.81$ overall).

Conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities. Conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities was measured using 5 questions created by Page, Lindahl, and Malik (2013), that asks participants to rate from 1 - Strongly disagree to 5 - Strongly agree

what they felt when they came out to themselves, regarding this type of conflict (e.g., "*I felt accepted or supported by my religion*"; "*I felt conflicted between my spiritual beliefs and my sexuality*"). The original authors reported a Cronbach's alpha of .88 and in this study an alpha of .82 was obtained. To measure the conciliation between religious/spiritual beliefs and sexual orientation at the time of answering the survey, an additional single item question was created. The participants were asked to rate the sentence "*Comparing with the moment when you came out to yourself as an LGB person, do you feel that, at the present moment, the conciliation between your religious/spiritual beliefs and your sexual orientation is…*", from 1 - Much worse to 5 - Much better.

Procedure

The research proposal was submitted within the study program of the first author. The study followed a brief procedure of the hosting institution's Review Board, namely a checklist of ethical issues and recommended informed consent (as an anonymous online correlational study waived a more thorough review). An online survey was created using Qualtrics. To make sure all the translations were easily understood by the participants, the survey was pre-tested by four volunteer students, whose suggestions were taken into account. The sample was recruited through social media (e.g., Facebook), using snowball sampling and by contacting Portuguese LGBTQI+ groups and associations and asking them to share the online survey. Prior to answering the survey, the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and anonymous and that they could interrupt their participation at any moment by exiting the survey. To proceed with the survey, participants had to explicitly and freely consent to their participation in the study. After the data was collected, it was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 25. Answers to open-ended questions, such as religious preference, were classified into appropriate categories.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Concerning subjective well-being, positive affect ranged from 16 to 52 (*M* = 38.21; *SD* = 6.48), negative affect ranged from 11 to 49 (*M* = 26.21; *SD* = 7.85) and life satisfaction ranged from 8 to 25 (*M* = 17.95; *SD* = 3.87). Participants reported low levels of Internalized Homonegativity (*M* = 1.53; *SD* = 1), Identity Uncertainty (*M* = 1.60; *SD* = 0.96) and Identity Superiority (*M* = 1.71; *SD* = 0.93); medium levels of Acceptance Concerns (*M* = 2.88; *SD* = 1.24), Concealment Motivation (*M* = 2.89; *SD* = 1.33), Difficult Process (*M* = 3.20; *SD* = 1.51) and Identity Centrality (*M* = 3.72; *SD* = 1.16); and higher levels of Identity Affirmation (*M* = 4.82; *SD* = 1.29). Regarding the outness level, participants seemed to be the most out to their siblings (*M* = 5.61; *SD* = 2.01), their mother (*M* = 5.25; *SD* = 1.93) and their heterosexual friends, both old (*M* = 5.26; *SD* = 1.94) and new (*M* = 5.6; *SD* = 1.80). Participants seemed to be less out to members of their extended family (*M* = 3.56; *SD* = 1.99), members of their religious communities (*M* = 3.13; *SD* = 2.48) and leaders of their religious communities (*M* = 2.36; *SD* = 2.06). Participants, thus, had higher levels of outness to the world (*M* = 4.81; *SD* = 1.83) and their family (*M* = 4.62; *SD* = 1.66), lower levels of outness to their religion (*M* = 2.86; *SD* = 2.23) and a medium level of overall outness (*M* = 4.47; *SD* = 1.57).

Concerning the conflict felt between religious/spiritual and LGB identities, participants tended, on average, to neither agree nor disagree with the sentences (*M* = 3.00; *SD* = 1.08). Regarding the conciliation between religious/spiritual beliefs and sexual orientation, participants considered it, on average, to be the same as at the time when they first came out (*M* = 3.48; *SD* = 0.97). Based on their answers to the two questions about conflict participants were categorized in two groups, identity conflict and no identity conflict. Fifty-two participants reported that they felt conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities, either at the time when they came out to themselves or at the time of answering the survey (41.3%), and 74 participants reported no conflict felt at either time (58.7%).

Significant gender differences were found regarding conflict between religious and LGB identities, $t(120) = 2.40$, $p = .027$, with men ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.15$) reporting higher levels of conflict than women ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.00$). Significant differences between sexual orientation groups were also found, $F(2, 122) = 4.18$, $p = .018$. Post hoc testing showed that Gay men ($M = 3.38$, $SD = 1.10$) reported more conflict than Bisexual/Pansexual individuals ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.15$). No significant differences were found between Lesbian women ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 0.93$) and Gay men, nor between Lesbian and Bisexual/Pansexual individuals. No significant differences were found on conflict between religious and LGB identities regarding age, $F(3, 122) = 0.07$; p = .976, marital status, $F(3, 122) = 0.82$; $p = .484$, or education level, $F(3, 122) = 0.31$; $p = .815$. Differences between cisgender and trans and gender diverse participants were not explored due to sample size.

Relation between conflict between religious and LGB identities and dimensions of LGB identity, subjective well-being and outness levels

Table 2 presents the correlations between conflict between religious and LGB identities and dimensions of LGB identity. Conflict was significantly and positively correlated with Acceptance Concerns (AC), Concealment Motivation (CM), Internalized Homonegativity (IH) and Difficult Process (DP). Table 3 presents the correlations between conflict between religious and LGB identities, subjective well-being variables and outness levels. Conflict between religious and LGB identities was significantly and negatively correlated with positive affect, outness to the world and overall outness, and positively correlated with negative affect.

Table 2

Correlations for conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities and LGBIS dimensions

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Conflict	--								

2. LGBIS - AC	.400***	--							
3. LGBIS - CM	.232**	.450***	--						
4. LGBIS – IU	.092	.346***	.239**	--					
5. LGBIS – IH	.223*	.474***	.460***	.380***	--				
6. LGBIS – DP	.391***	.534***	.268**	.296**	.360***	--			
7. LGBIS – IS	-.049	-.021	-.039	.068	-.141	-.002	--		
8. LGBIS – IA	-.023	-.201*	-.208*	-.241**	-.497***	-.237**	.244**	--	
9. LGBIS – IC	.145	.147	-.085	-.104	-.148	.147	.258**	.478***	--

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed

Table 3

Correlations for conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities, subjective well-being measures and outness levels

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Conflict	--							
2. Positive Affect	-.187*	--						
3. Negative Affect	.191*	-.277**	--					
4. Life Satisfaction	-.122	.508***	-.370***	--				
5. Out to family	-.046	.184*	-.181*	.206*	--			
6. Out to world	-.219*	.194*	.020	.162	.384***	--		
7. Out to religion	-.231	.271*	-.352**	.074	.554***	.601***	--	
8. Overall outness	-.225*	.240**	-.100	.207*	.772***	.822***	.902***	--

Note: *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001, two-tailed

Comparing identity conflict and no identity conflict groups on subjective well-being, dimensions of LGB identity and outness levels

Table 4 presents t-test results on subjective well-being, LGBIS dimensions and outness levels, for the identity conflict and no identity conflict groups. No significant differences were found between the two groups on subjective well-being or outness levels, but significant differences were found on four LGBIS dimensions. The two groups differed significantly on Acceptance Concerns, $t(124) = 3.14$, $p = .002$, Concealment Motivation, $t(124) = 2.22$, $p = .028$, Difficult Process, $t(124) = 4.40$, $p < .001$, and Identity Centrality, $t(124) = 2.10$, $p = .038$, with people who felt conflict between their religious and LGB identities reporting higher levels on each dimension.

Table 4

Independent samples t-test results on subjective well-being, LGBIS dimensions and outness levels, for the conflict and no conflict groups

	Identity Conflict		No Identity Conflict				
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*df*	*T*	*p*
LGBIS – Acceptance Concerns	3.28	1.24	2.60	1.17	124	3.14	**.002**
LGBIS - Concealment Motivation	3.20	1.35	2.67	1.29	124	2.22	**.028**
LGBIS - Identity Uncertainty	1.59	1.05	1.61	0.90	124	-0.10	.923
LGBIS - Internalized Homonegativity	1.70	1.19	1.41	0.82	84.03	1.50	.138
LGBIS - Difficult Process	3.86	1.45	2.74	1.38	124	4.40	**.000**
LGBIS - Identity Superiority	1.69	0.87	1.73	0.98	124	-0.29	.776
LGBIS - Identity Affirmation	4.75	1.36	4.87	1.25	124	-0.52	.602
LGBIS - Identity Centrality	3.98	1.13	3.54	1.15	124	2.20	**.038**
Positive Affect	37.38	6.89	38.80	6.15	124	-1.21	.229
Negative Affect	27.52	8.66	25.14	7.13	124	1.69	.094
Life Satisfaction	17.69	3.50	18.14	4.13	124	-0.63	.530

Out to family	4.64	1.63	4.61	1.70	124	0.11	.915
Out to world	4.56	1.81	4.98	1.83	124	-1.26	.208
Out to religion	2.64	2.16	3.15	2.34	54	-0.84	.407
Overall outness	4.25	1.63	4.62	1.51	124	-1.29	.199

Discussion

The present investigation aimed to better understand LGB people's experiences of conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities. In order to achieve this, we aimed to, on the one hand, identify correlates of the experience of conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities, focusing on LGB identity dimensions, subjective wellbeing and outness. On the other hand, we sought to compare people who felt conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities with people who did not experience this conflict, in terms of LGB identity dimensions, subjective well-being and outness.

Most participants indicated having no religious or spiritual preference or religious/spiritual beliefs, something that was expected considering the available data on Portuguese LGB people's religious preferences. In Moleiro et al.'s (2013) study, 82.8% of LGB people did not identify with any religion, a percentage that indicates a large majority of non-religious LGB people in Portugal. It is worth to notice though, that in this study only 54% of people indicated no religious or spiritual preference, closer to some data found in the USA (e.g. Barringer & Gay, 2017; Dahl & Galliher, 2010; Longo, Walls, & Wisneski, 2013).

Participants tended, on average, to neither agree nor disagree with the sentences regarding the conflict felt at the time of coming out to themselves. In the study in which this measure of conflict was first presented, Page et al. (2013) report a slightly lower average for their sample, which seems to indicate that the participants of the current study felt relatively more conflict at the time of coming out to themselves than the ones in the original study. By classifying the participants as having felt or currently feeling conflict or no conflict between

their religious/spiritual and LGB identities, we were also able to understand that more than half of the participants never felt such a conflict. These results are in line with those found by Gibbs and Goldbach (2015), with a bigger sample of more than 2000 participants, showing that more than half of their LGB participants did not experience conflict between their religious and LGB identities. This finding translates the diverse strategies (Anderton et al., 2011; Rodriguez & Ouellette, 2000) used by LGB individuals in resolving the conflict between these two identity dimensions, particularly in the Portuguese context where more conservative Catholic religious values are prevalent.

Significant differences were found between males and females and between sexual orientation groups regarding conflict between religious and LGB identities, with males reporting higher levels of conflict than females, and gay men reporting higher levels of conflict than bisexual/pansexual individuals, but not lesbian women. To the best of our knowledge, no other authors reported such differences between males and females. One possible explanation for this could be the differences in religiosity found by authors such as Scroggs and Faflick (2018) and Sherkat (2002), according to whom GB males tend to be more religious and have more church attendance than LB females. There is also a possibility that gender differences on conflict might be connected to differences on LGB identity dimensions, namely the fact that (cisgender) Portuguese men have previously reported more difficulties in their process of accepting their LGB identity, more dissatisfaction with their identity and more sensibility to stigma (Oliveira et al., 2010). According to the latter authors, this might be due to the fact that men are under increased societal pressure to be dominant and strong, and are also not as used to a collectively discriminated gender identity as women are, and thus might have more difficulty dealing with stigmatization coming from society or, in this case, from religious institutions.

Conflict between religious and LGB identities was found to be significantly and negatively correlated with outness to the world and overall outness, which means that the more conflict people felt at the time when they first came out to themselves, the less they were out to the world or out in general (to the world, the family and religion), at the time of answering the survey. In previous studies, authors have found religiosity to be associated with lower levels of disclosure of one's LGB identity (Shilo & Savaya, 2012), and religious LGB people have tended to be more motivated to conceal their identity (Moleiro et al., 2013). The relationship found between conflict and outness could reflect people being religious and, thus, being less out and more motivated to hide their identities. As mentioned in the literature review, people deal with conflict between LGB and religious identities in various ways, in a dynamic process, for instance by choosing their religious identity over their LGB one, denying it or concealing it (Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015); stopping to attend religious settings and giving up religion (Schuck & Liddle, 2001), or trying to find ways to integrate both identities such as maintaining their religion by changing some beliefs, changing to another religious tradition or look for ways to be spiritual without a formal religion (García et al., 2008). It is also important to remember that these are not permanent and static solutions, and that people might vary throughout life on the conflict they feel and the strategies they use to deal with it (Love et al., 2005). Participants who felt conflict between their religious and LGB identities when they first came out to themselves, might then be at different stages of conflict or reconciliation when answering the survey, and might be religious or not religious, depending on the strategies used. When considering, then, the reasons why people who felt this conflict when they first came out to themselves tend to be less out at the time of answering the survey, it might also be useful to understand the way they are dealing with their LGB identity.

Conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities was also found to be significantly and positively correlated with LGBIS dimensions, namely Internalized

Homonegativity, Difficult Process, Acceptance Concerns and Concealment Motivation. The two groups created based on identity conflict differed significantly on Difficult Process, Acceptance Concerns, Concealment Motivation and Identity Centrality, with people who felt conflict between their religious and LGB identities having higher scores on these dimensions. Looking at the existing literature on this type of identity conflict, internalized homonegativity (or internalized homophobia) has been the most studied, with Gibbs and Goldbach (2015) reporting that those who had unresolved conflict between their sexuality and religious beliefs felt significantly higher internalized homophobia, and Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) finding that participants who felt like their religion made it impossible to accept their LGB identity also felt higher internalized homophobia. On the other hand, both studies reported lower Internalized Homophobia for LGB people that left their religion of origin as a way of dealing with conflict (Gibbs & Goldbach, 2015; Ream & Savin-Williams, 2005). Ream and Savin-Williams (2005) also reported that people who found other ways of dealing with conflict, such as reconciling the two identities and remaining in their religion, or finding a different religion that allows them to accept both identities, presented similar levels of internalized homophobia than those who never felt conflict. As such, the significant correlation between conflict at the time of coming out to themselves and current internalized homophobia, could be an indicator of some people still feeling some type of conflict at the time of answering the survey, or not having solved their conflict entirely. Nonetheless, the two groups did not significantly differ on internalized homophobia, probably due to the fact that this internalization of negative attitudes about homosexuality occurs through socialization not just in religious institutions but in the general society as well (Barnes & Meyer, 2012).

Regarding the significant relation with Difficult Process, Schuck and Liddle (2001) found that those who reported conflict between their sexual orientation and their religion at the time of coming out, reported more difficulty accepting their LGB identity than those who did

not feel conflict. This difficulty accepting their LGB identity is also reported by qualitative studies, often recounting long processes of self-acceptance including negative feelings such as shame and guilt (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi & Geelan, 2012), and sometimes with periods of self-hatred and denial (Itzhaky & Kissil, 2015). Qualitative studies can also help us understand results about Acceptance Concerns and Concealment Motivation. All participants from Itzhaky and Kissil's (2015) qualitative study with Orthodox Jewish gay men mentioned being dedicated to concealing their identity from their families and communities, as a mean of maintaining their religious communities. Catholic participants from Pietkiewicz and Kołodziejczyk-Skrzypek's (2016) study also reported fear of disappointing their religious families, being discriminated and saw that as a reason to conceal their identities.

In the present investigation, we also found conflict between religious and LGB identities to be significantly and negatively correlated with positive affect and positively correlated with negative affect. This means that the more conflict people felt, the less they felt positive emotions and the more they felt negative emotions. The relationship between conflict and well-being (or lack of it) is another common experience reported by LGB people in qualitative studies. Some people describe the way it has affected their well-being (Coyle & Rafalin, 2000) and/or their mental health, including experiences of loneliness, depression, anxiety and suicidal ideation (Beagan & Hattie, 2015; Schuck & Liddle, 2001; Subhi & Geelan, 2012; Zeidner & Zevulun, 2018). Some participants also reported the experience of negative feelings and emotional scars, even after the conflict has been solved (Subhi & Geelan, 2012). In a quantitative study, Page et al. (2013) also reported that participants who tried to solve their conflict by leaving Christianity reported higher levels of depression and lower self-esteem, which shows that the emotional struggles can persist even after people tried to solve the conflict. The significant correlations found regarding positive and negative affect are, then, potentially explained not only by the possibility of some participants still being in conflict at the moment of answering the survey,

but also as a consequence of the experience of conflict in the past – the emotional scars mentioned by Subhi and Geelan that have long-lasting effects (2012).

Finally, it is important to mention the significant group differences on Identity Centrality, with people who felt conflict between their religious and LGB identities reporting higher levels of Identity Centrality than those who did not experience any conflict. As mentioned by Wedow, Schnabel, Wedow, and Konieczny (2017), and consistent with Baumeister et al.'s (1985) multiple identity conflict model, people experience identity conflict when the two competing identities have high salience for the individual. As such, LGB religious people experience conflict when both identities are seen as incompatible, and both are central to their identity. The relationship between discrimination and identity centrality has been formerly found for other minority identities, specifically for Black racial identity, with Sellers and Shelton (2003) finding a correlation between racial identity centrality and perceived racial discrimination. Dunn and Szymanski (2018) applied this to the LGB population and found a significant and positive correlation between heterosexist discrimination and identity centrality, and a significant and positive correlation between heterosexist discrimination and search of meaning. People who experienced conflict between their religious/spiritual and LGB identities are likely to have participated or to currently participate in religious ceremonies and activities, mainly from formal religions, that condemn homosexuality. LGB people who experience conflict could have possibly dealt with more situations of heterosexist discrimination than people who are not religious. From Dunn and Szymanski's (2018) results we could hypothesize that the constant exposure to heterosexist discrimination that LGB people who feel conflict have faced, could have increased their LGB identity centrality, and also their necessity to search for meaning. According to Dunn and Szymanski (2018), people who experience heterosexist discrimination tend to try to make sense of their lives, their identities, and the discrimination they have faced, in order to cope and find purpose. From their investigation, the authors were

able to conclude that one of the ways people use to find meaning is getting involved in LGBTQI+ activism, as a way of reframing their experience, blaming those who discriminated them, instead of internalizing the negative messages received. However, this correlation between heterosexist discrimination and search for meaning, could also possibly explain why some people who feel identity conflict do not leave religious communities, but instead actually turn to religion and spirituality as a way to deal with their identity conflict.

Future Directions

Considering our findings and the literature on these topics, several suggestions for future research in this field can be provided. Firstly, the measure chosen to assess identity conflict was only previously used once by its original authors and more research about its psychometric properties would be useful for future studies about this type of conflict. More robust and validated measures, in different languages, are key to the future development of the empirical research in this domain. Secondly, more diverse samples should be studied, so that, namely, the experiences of older LGB people, men and people with lower education levels might be properly addressed. Mixed qualitative and quantitative methodologies could further help in identifying the needs reported by LGB religious people in their communities. Thirdly, and more importantly, intersectional identities, distinct religious memberships and practices and, overall, diverse cultural settings are needed to provide a more comprehensive view and understanding the experiences and strategies used by non-heterosexual and non-cisgender religious persons to reconcile their multiple identities, and how diverse LGBTQI+ people search for meaning.

Limitations

Some limitations of the current investigation should be mentioned. For instance, the sample size could be larger to enhance generalizability of results. Additionally, most of the sample was comprised by women, with at least an undergraduate degree, and under 35 years old, thus having limited representativity of other samples. Nonetheless, by using snowball

sampling and asking people to share the survey with their friends, we might have reached participants who are only out to some friends or people who are not yet in contact with LGBTQI+ associations and groups, which is common for people who experience conflict between the two identities. Finally, we need to mention that all data was collected through self-report measures which could be subject to social desirability bias.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present investigation was able to deepen a new understanding of the experiences of conflict between religious/spiritual and LGB identities. Some relevant results were found, with males and Gay men experiencing more conflict; a better understanding of how identity conflict relates with well-being, LGBIS dimensions and degree of outness; and the significant group differences on identity centrality between those who felt conflict and those who did not, which should be further investigated in the future.

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