



# Lights, camera, (trans)formation: theatre as a space for reflection on LGBTQIAPN+ oppression and resistance

*Luz, câmera, (trans)formação: o teatro como espaço de reflexão sobre opressão e resistência LGBTQIAPN+*

*Luces, cámara, (trans)formación: el teatro como espacio de reflexión sobre la opresión y la resistencia LGBTQIAPN+*

## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Violence against the LGBTQIAPN+ population, especially transgender people, reflects an alarming scenario of physical, psychological, and social oppression. Brazil leads the homicide rates for this population, highlighting the urgency of strategies that promote reflection and social transformation. Theater, through Augusto Boal's Theater of the Oppressed and Viola Spolin's playful techniques, presents itself as a powerful tool to give voice to the experiences of this community. **Objective:** To understand the experiences of oppression and resistance of LGBTQIAPN+ people through theatrical practices. **Methods:** A descriptive-exploratory qualitative study was conducted at a Community Center in Belo Horizonte-MG, using a snowball sampling technique for participant selection. Five theatrical encounters were conducted, applying Viola Spolin's games and techniques from the Theater of the Oppressed. Data collection was carried out through audio recordings and field diaries, with content analysis. **Results and Discussion:** Four categories emerged: 1. Need for escapism and desire for change. 2. Impacts on mental health and coping strategies. 3. Violence and social exclusion. 4. The search for recognition and belonging. Theater promoted emotional relief, critical reflection, and strengthened self-esteem, allowing for the reinterpretation of experiences of oppression and the construction of collective resistance strategies. **Final considerations:** Theater has established itself as a transformative tool, offering a safe space for expression and awareness, standing out as an effective means in the fight for inclusion and social justice for the LGBTQIAPN+ population.

**Descriptors:** LGBTQIAPN+; Theatre of the Oppressed; Viola Spolin; Oppression; Resistance; Social transformation.

## RESUMO

**Introdução:** A violência contra a população LGBTQIAPN+, especialmente pessoas trans, reflete um cenário alarmante de opressão física, psicológica e social. O Brasil lidera os índices de homicídios dessa população, destacando a urgência de estratégias que promovam reflexão e transformação social. O teatro, por meio do Teatro do Oprimido, de Augusto Boal, e das técnicas lúdicas de Viola Spolin, apresenta-se como uma ferramenta poderosa para dar voz às vivências dessa comunidade. **Objetivo:** Compreender as experiências de opressão e resistência de pessoas LGBTQIAPN+ mediante práticas teatrais. **Métodos:** Estudo qualitativo descritivo-exploratório, realizado em um Centro de Convivência em Belo Horizonte-MG, utilizando técnica de bola de neve para seleção dos participantes. Foram conduzidos cinco encontros teatrais, aplicando jogos de Viola Spolin e técnicas do Teatro do Oprimido. A coleta de dados foi feita por intermédio de gravações de áudio e diários de campo, com análise de conteúdo. **Resultados e Discussão:** Quatro categorias emergiram: 1. Necessidade de escapismo e desejo de mudança. 2. Impactos na saúde mental e estratégias de enfrentamento. 3. Violência e exclusão social. 4. Busca por reconhecimento e pertencimento. O teatro promoveu alívio emocional, reflexão crítica e fortalecimento da autoestima, permitindo a ressignificação das experiências de opressão e a construção de estratégias coletivas de resistência. **Considerações finais:** O teatro se consolidou como uma ferramenta transformadora, oferecendo um espaço seguro para expressão e conscientização, destacando-se como meio eficaz na luta por inclusão e justiça social para a população LGBTQIAPN+.

**Descritores:** LGBTQIAPN+; Teatro do Oprimido; Viola Spolin; Opressão; Resistência; Transformação social.

## RESUMEN

**Introducción:** La violencia contra la población LGBTQIAPN+, especialmente las personas trans, refleja un escenario alarmante de opresión física, psicológica y social. Brasil lidera las tasas de homicidios contra esta población, lo que resalta la urgencia de estrategias que promuevan la reflexión y la transformación social. El teatro, a través del Teatro del Oprimido, de Augusto Boal, y las técnicas lúdicas de Viola Spolin, se presenta como una herramienta poderosa para dar voz a las experiencias de esta comunidad. **Objetivo:** Comprender las experiencias de opresión y resistencia de las personas LGBTQIAPN+ a través de prácticas teatrales. **Métodos:** Se trata de un estudio cualitativo de tipo descriptivo-exploratorio, realizado en un Centro de Convivencia en Belo Horizonte, Brasil, utilizando la técnica de muestreo en bola de nieve para la selección de participantes. Se llevaron a cabo cinco encuentros teatrales, aplicando juegos de Viola Spolin y técnicas del Teatro del Oprimido. La recopilación de datos se realizó mediante grabaciones de audio y diarios de campo, con análisis de contenido. **Resultados y Discusión:** Emergieron cuatro categorías: 1. Necesidad de evasión y deseo de cambio. 2. Impactos en la salud mental y estrategias de afrontamiento; 3. Violencia y exclusión social. 4. Búsqueda de reconocimiento y pertenencia. El teatro promovió alivio emocional, reflexión crítica y fortalecimiento de la autoestima, permitiendo resignificar experiencias de opresión y construir estrategias colectivas de resistencia. **Consideraciones finales:** El teatro se consolidó como una herramienta transformadora, ofreciendo un espacio seguro para la expresión y la toma de conciencia, destacándose como un medio eficaz en la lucha por la inclusión y la justicia social de la población LGBTQIAPN+.

**Descriptorios:** LGBTQIAPN+; Teatro del Oprimido; Viola Spolin; Opresión; Resistencia; Transformación social.

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## INTRODUCTION

Historically marginalized groups, such as women, indigenous peoples, Black people, immigrants, and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, transvestite, queer, intersex, asexual, aromantic, agender, pansexual, non-binary, and other identities (LGBTQIAPN+) population, face different forms of oppression that manifest themselves in a systemic and structural way. Oppression, in this context, is understood as the imposition of concentrated power that generates exclusion, social inequality, and subordination, keeping these groups in positions of vulnerability<sup>(1,2)</sup>. This repression can manifest itself in various ways, from social exclusion and discrimination to more visible practices of physical, economic, and psychological violence.

Violence, in turn, is one of the cruelest and most immediate expressions of this oppression, functioning both as an instrument of control and intimidation. For these marginalized groups, violence is not only physical, but also psychological, emotional, and institutional, aiming to delegitimize their identities and existence. In the case of the LGBTQIAPN+ population, this violence is particularly devastating, reflecting a combination of direct and indirect aggressions that compromise the dignity and safety of these individuals. Studies indicate that discrimination against transgender people, for example, is not only represented in the form of physical violence, but also emotional and institutional violence, amplifying the impact of oppression<sup>(3,4)</sup>.

In 2023, at least 321 transgender and gender-expansive people were victims of fatal violence worldwide, including the use of firearms and interpersonal violence. It is

important to note that most of the victims (84%) were Black people, 50% of whom were Black Trans women, which shows how one form of prejudice directly reinforces another. It is estimated that around 78% of the murders were committed with firearms, and romantic partners, friends, or family members murdered 36% of the victims whose killers were known. In addition, half of the victims were misidentified or referred to by false names by authorities. It is observed that, in all these cases, violence is not limited to physical aggression but includes psychological and institutional violence, extending to the deepest levels of impact on the mental health and well-being of these individuals<sup>(3)</sup>.

Data from the United Nations (UN, 2024)<sup>(5)</sup> show that homophobic and transphobic attacks seek to punish those who challenge gender and sexuality norms, violating fundamental human rights based on justifications rooted in personal values—values that are entirely distorted in this context. In parallel, unfortunately, Brazil is no different: in 2023, a member of the LGBTQIAPN+ community was murdered every 38 hours, with the main causes being homicide by third parties (80%), suicide (7.83%), and other deaths (12.17%), involving violent methods such as stabbing and asphyxiation<sup>(6)</sup>.

Although this number is already alarming, there is evidence to suggest that these data are still underreported in Brazil, since reporting depends on the recognition of victims' gender identity and sexual orientation by the media outlets that report the deaths, and many people omit such information for fear of being judged or suffering attacks. Brazil thus remains the country with the highest number of homicides of trans people in the world, an

alarming indicator of oppression against this population<sup>(7,8)</sup>.

From another perspective, although the current literature is expanding, it still presents significant gaps when it comes to effective interventions that combat oppression against LGBTQIAPN+ individuals and strengthen the resilience of this community, resulting in insufficient or nearly nonexistent representation of these minority groups<sup>(9)</sup>. Especially in the context of the arts, little has been explored regarding how cultural and artistic practices can contribute to social transformation and public awareness about violence against LGBTQIAPN+ people. In light of this reality, theater emerges as a powerful means to expose violence and promote critical reflection on gender and sexuality norms, giving visibility to the issue<sup>(3-10)</sup>.

Therefore, the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), created by Augusto Boal, is one of the most innovative and effective approaches in this field, offering an interactive platform in which the audience becomes an active participant in building solutions to the oppressive situations portrayed on stage. Through its techniques, which include the expression of subjectivity, TO allows participants to explore forms of resistance and social transformation, fostering empathy and understanding of the realities experienced by victims of violence, such as LGBTQIAPN+ individuals—an essential element for empowering others to resist as members of the LGBTQIAPN+ community<sup>(11,12)</sup>.

By incorporating TO in addressing oppression against the LGBTQIAPN+ population, this study seeks to explore the potential of this approach to engage communities in discussions about discrimination and prejudice. Additionally, the

theatrical games proposed by Viola Spolin, which include playful techniques and improvisation practices that encourage spontaneity and self-awareness, can act as a complementary tool. Spolin, by focusing on action and play as means of expression and understanding, offers a space for participants to develop empathy and critical thinking skills, preparing them to deal with situations of oppression in everyday life, thus respecting the diversity they will encounter throughout their lives<sup>(11-13)</sup>. Such theatrical games function as a means of developing participants' sensitivity to the experiences of trans people and other members of the community portrayed, creating a safe environment for learning and collective reflection to reduce the incidence of violence<sup>(14,15)</sup>.

By combining the transformative power of TO with theatrical play techniques, the aim of this study was to understand the experiences of oppression and resistance of LGBTQIAPN+ people through theatrical practices. By integrating these experiences into the process of awareness and social change, the goal is not only to make the experiences of this population visible, but also to stimulate the construction of a more inclusive and respectful society from its foundation. Therefore, this research also aims to answer the following question: How can theater understand the experiences of oppression and resistance of LGBTQIAPN+ people?

## METHODS

This is a qualitative and descriptive-exploratory study, and the population referred to in this research was composed of people served at a Community Center located in the municipality of Belo Horizonte (MG). Originating from the articulation be-

tween the Autonomous Trans Movement (MovaT), Trans Employability (Equi) and Transvest, the institution where the study was carried out is a non-profit Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) focused on the LGBTQIAPN+ population, whose objective is to promote dignity, integrity and humanity through activities of job creation, training, culture and collective care. Data collection took place between August and October 2024, with each theatrical meeting lasting a mean of 2 hours. The study had as its theoretical framework the Theatre of the Oppressed, by Augusto Boal, and as its methodological framework the theatrical games of Viola Spolin.<sup>(11-13)</sup>

In view of this, the sample in question was formed using the snowball technique, a strategy widely used to reach hard-to-reach groups. This methodology is based on the initial identification of "seeds," which can be documents or key informants with characteristics relevant to the study. To broaden the representativeness of the sample, the inclusion of participants sought to encompass a diversity of age groups, social classes, and LGBTQIAPN+ identities, ensuring a more diverse analysis of experiences of oppression and resistance and giving voice to all possible experiences. This information was gathered through a preliminary questionnaire that identified income bracket, gender identity, and history of access to cultural activities.

These initial informants, in turn, referred new participants from their contact networks, allowing the gradual expansion of the sample so that the research would become even more robust and comprehensive. Thus, the process continued until data saturation was reached, the point at which the collected insights began to show repetition and no longer ad-

ded new relevant perspectives to the study<sup>(16)</sup>.

Participants were invited to take part in the activities through the official communication channel of the aforementioned Community Center, made available on social media. Initially, the researchers engaged in a pilot study, which allowed them to experience the daily life of the space, interact with other potential participants, and share experiences, strengthening their bond with the community to facilitate the progress of the research. For three months, the researchers regularly attended the site, visiting at least once a week. After this period of interaction and bond building, a formal invitation was extended to potential participants to join the study, bringing with them their life experiences, which would be of great value in achieving the intended results.

The study included individuals who voluntarily participated in at least one meeting and who self-identified as part of the LGBTQIAPN+ community, including subjects who, although identifying as heterosexual, reported having had at least one homoaffective experience in the past. Although participation was open to everyone, including those who chose to attend only one meeting—taking into account the characteristic turnover of the service—the group that identified strictly as heterosexual, without any previous homoaffective experience, was excluded from the study, as it was understood that they would not bring, in such a specific way, the nuances of oppression and resistance that this study sought to understand.

Due to the turnover and non-continuous participation of individuals in all meetings, a rigorous data collection protocol was established. Thus, the activities

were recorded through audio recordings and detailed field diaries, ensuring the consistency of facts captured across different meetings. Additionally, it is important to note that the researchers looked for patterns and recurring themes in the transcriptions to identify significant elements, even in contexts involving distinct subsets of participants.

To carry out the procedures described, data were collected using a socio-demographic questionnaire addressing age, education, household arrangements, and social support resources. The activities, in turn, followed the stages detailed in the schedule adapted from Viola Spolin's *Improvisation for the Theater* game file, promoting playful and spontaneous experiences<sup>(17)</sup>.

In addition, the schedule of the meetings was structured into five stages to promote a journey of learning and creative expression, focusing on theatrical dynamics and themes related to communal life. These meetings were therefore organized to foster group integration, creativity, and critical reflection through the *Theatre of the Oppressed*, in order to achieve the objective of data collection. The definition of the theme for each meeting was constructed collaboratively between researchers and participants, considering both the emerging demands from informal conversations at the Community Center and the issues addressed in the literature on LGBTQIAPN+ violence and resistance.

The methodological process of the meetings, in turn, was designed to generate reflection, self-knowledge, and creative expression. The first meeting introduced dynamics such as "Name and Gesture" and "Mirror," creating a welcoming environment and stimulating introspection.

In the second, theatrical games such as "Swap Places" and the creation of social scenes allowed participants to reflect on communication and conflict resolution, highlighting the impact of power dynamics and social pressures. The third meeting focused on the creation of characters and narratives, encouraging the exchange of life experiences, especially in relation to violence and discrimination. The fourth meeting led participants to construct a personal timeline, reflecting on significant moments of oppression and social support, transforming these experiences into theatrical scenes. The fifth, finally, focused on individual reflections and collective feedback, allowing participants to share and process their experiences of violence and resistance, promoting greater empathy and mutual understanding, so that everyone would activate a sense of belonging to a community and understand that they were not – and are not – fighting alone.

From this perspective, the methodology was designed to provide an experience of personal and collective transformation, strengthening the ability to express and deal with issues of violence, oppression and social support, as well as with difficult feelings related to the subject. At the end of each meeting, participants were invited to answer brief reflective questions, such as: How did you feel during today's activity? What caught your attention or moved you the most? What changes or feelings would you like to take from this experience into your daily life? Furthermore, the participants' progress throughout the sessions was analyzed comparatively, to identify, from this perspective, any changes in the accounts and emotional expressions, in order to capture



emotional perceptions about the activities carried out.

In all the meetings, the activities followed both Viola Spolin's approach and the principles of TO<sup>(18-11)</sup>. While Spolin's technique was applied through improvisation and interaction dynamics—promoting a safe and creative space for participants to express their experiences and reflect on them, feeling represented—TO served as the theoretical framework for more in-depth discussions.

In this regard, Spolin, with her emphasis on spontaneity and individual expression, provided a playful and accessible environment that encouraged the exploration of emotions and experiences. TO, in turn, grounded in the concepts of Augusto Boal, guided reflections on oppression, resistance, and empowerment, offering a foundation for understanding social dynamics and the forms of personal and collective transformation. Together, these approaches enabled a deep analysis of the issues of violence and social support experienced by the participants, fostering both personal development and a critical understanding of the social realities present in their daily lives<sup>(11)</sup>.

Participants' statements were recorded through audio and transcribed for content analysis, according to Yin (2018)<sup>(19)</sup>, and the researchers documented the activities in field diaries. To increase participants' trust in the researchers, in cases of emotional discomfort or reports of violence, they were informed that they would be welcomed and referred for professional support, though this was not necessary. Thus, each participant was identified with the letter P followed by a random number; the meetings were designated by the letter E, followed by the corresponding mee-

ting day (from 1 to 5).

The study, considering what was presented in this section, fostered the strengthening of self-esteem, the humanization of narratives, and social mobilization for justice and equality, in addition to contributing to academic research. In this sense, the Research Ethics Committee (REC) approved the project, with CAAE number 79664324.8.0000.5134.

## RESULTS

### Sociodemographic Profile of Participants

Initially, 20 participants were invited to participate in the study, but after applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 12 agreed to participate, and these are therefore the participants in this research. Attendance at the meetings varied according to the availability of each individual, and was recorded as follows: ten people participated in the first meeting; eight in the second; six in the third; nine in the fourth; and 12 in the fifth.

Of the 12 participants, eight were present at all meetings, while the others attended at least one. From this perspective, to ensure the quality of data analysis and avoid biases resulting from turnover, methodological strategies were adopted that considered both individual accounts and the triangulation of information across the different meetings. In this way, it was possible to capture the diversity of experiences and perspectives, maintaining the coherence and depth of the analysis.

The mean age of the participants was 29 years; regarding gender identity, six participants identified as transgender; three identified as non-binary and three as cisgender. Regarding sexual orientation, eight participants identified as homosexu-

al, two as bisexual, and two as pansexual. Concerning race/color, nine participants identified as Black or brown, and three as white. Finally, it was observed that nine of the 12 participants were homeless, temporarily residing in shelters. This reinforces the importance of the research in understanding the social vulnerabilities faced by this population and in recognizing their experiences within the studied context, so that they have advocacy groups to defend their rights as citizens.

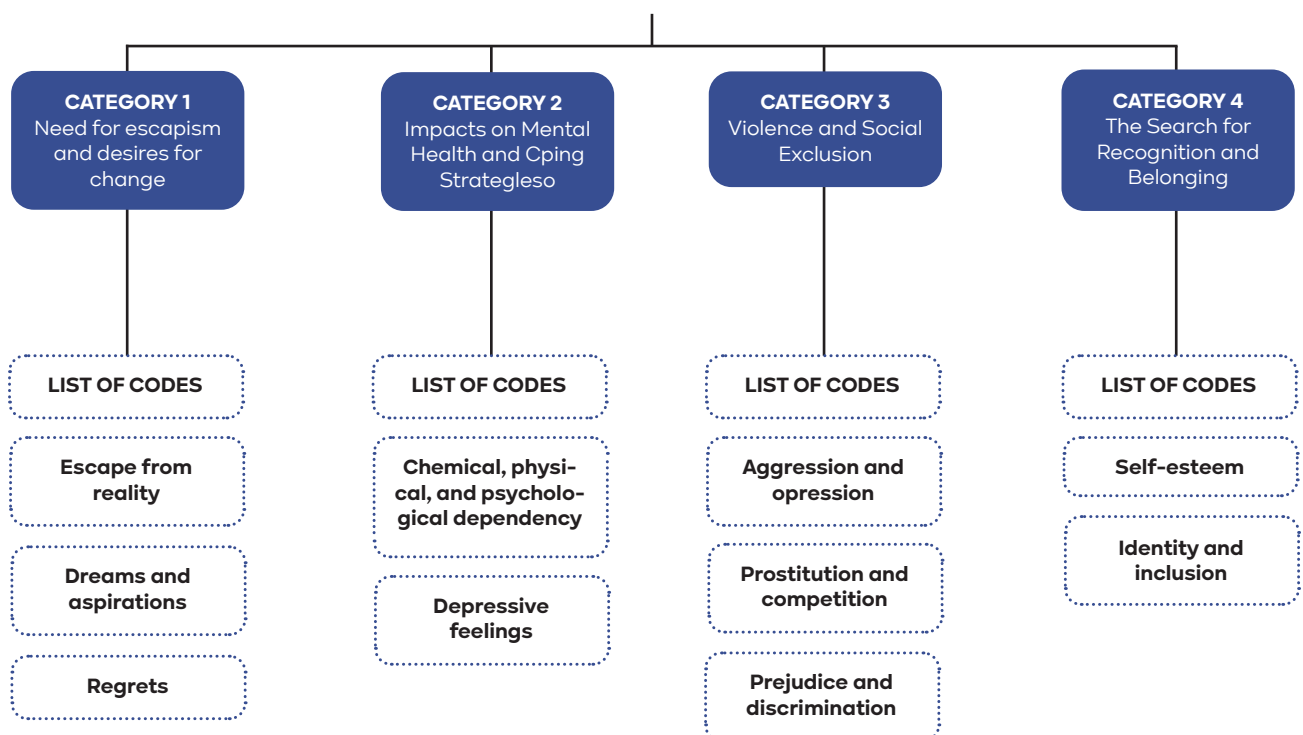
### Narratives and Categories Found

During the theatrical activities, participants were invited to express their perceptions at the end of each session. In general, the accounts given during these moments demonstrated how the games and theatrical dynamics provide emotional relief and a connection of the individuals with their own experiences and with themselves, generating a greater sense of

identity and belonging. Furthermore, the accounts and non-verbal attitudes, such as disinhibition and increased verbalization throughout the sessions, suggested that participants felt safer and more involved with each session, with increased self-esteem and collective confidence, as they were gradually becoming a team.

The responses obtained evidenced immediate emotional and reflective impacts, divided into four main categories, namely: Category 1: Need for escapism and desire for change; Category 2: Coping strategies and health challenges; Category 3: Violence and social exclusion; and Category 4: Search for recognition and belonging. Each of these categories reflected different aspects of the participants' experiences, highlighting how experiences of vulnerability and oppression, which are described below, are confronted and transformed by theater and art as a whole.

Figure 1 - Flowchart of the categories found in the results



Source: Prepared by the authors

### Category 1: Need for escapism and desire for change

Category 1 of emotional impacts, observed from the responses of the participants in this study, encompassed accounts that highlight the search for emotional relief and significant changes in the lives of individuals in the community in question, reflecting a constant attempt to escape the oppressive reality, since it is a group that suffers a great deal of violence and oppression in general. Thus, through theater, these expressions of desires and transformations could reveal themselves as both a form of resistance and a re-signification of their own existence, giving solidity to the feeling of unity with themselves.

The need to escape immediate reality is a recurring theme in the participants' statements, so that, in some cases, the search for imaginary or ideal refuges is seen as an attempt to find peace and tranquility amidst the chaos and social violence. During Meeting 1, which focused on building a welcoming environment, with dynamics such as "Name and Gesture" and "Mirror," members were able to connect with their emotions in a playful way, providing a symbolic outlet for the suffering experienced in everyday life. Through these dynamics, voices emerged more clearly about how, often, the body and mind seek alternative forms of relief in the face of oppression, using symbolic or real escape, with theater functioning as an opportunity to reconfigure these forms of escape, as can be observed in the following testimonies.

Ah, I do not know. I was in the sky, like that, and then it happened again. The cloud would go, the cloud would come. I stayed on the cloud itself, in the main zone.

I was sleeping, floating. And I felt like I wasn't even here, I felt like I was really on the cloud, you know? I was just up in the clouds (P1; E1).

I wasn't able to travel and, to sleep, I use controlled medication, but if the environment isn't calm, I can't rest. Here, with you all, I felt peace, but I still struggle against a world where calm and respect are rare [...] we live in a competitive environment, where those who have more are valued and those who do not are marginalized. I got used to living in prostitution, but I never wanted to compete with others. Society sees us superficially, only through status and appearance. I want to improve my life and get out of this crazy world (P3, E1).

I live in a building where most residents are Trans women, and their lives are very troubled. Many times, they do not give others peace, with fights and arguments at night. I can only relax, like I did today, when I see that everyone is calm and sleeping, because the noise and the fights, which go on until late, keep me from resting (P2, E1).

Beyond the immediate escape, many participants share dreams of overcoming adversity, aspiring to a better future. Therefore, the desire for change is not limited to idealization, but reflects an active search for personal renewal and reintegration into society. In Meeting 3, participants were invited to develop characters and stories that reflected their own experiences, an exercise that contributed to the manifestation of aspirations for transformation, aligning with the role of theater as a tool for re-signification and renewal, since art generates lightness and, therefore, relates to the notion of dreaming of a prosperous future. All this is further eluci-



dated in the following passages:

When I take my life back, I will do so through education. I went back to psychology college (P5, E2).

[...] What I expect from my life now—I also believe that my only commitment in life is my own happiness. I cannot give in to social pressures that say you have to be successful, you have to have a profession, and you have to do something for society (P8, E1).

This category, therefore, reflects the participants' search for emotional relief and transformation in the face of an oppressive reality. The accounts within it highlighted the use of imagination to find peace and tranquility, given that human creativity is intimately linked to personal comfort, while the struggle for concrete changes, such as resuming studies and the pursuit of happiness, reveals a resistance to social pressures, considering that the group of participants belongs to a minority that is frequently reprimanded by the standards of the social body. It is crucial to point out that, in this reality, theater emerged as a space for re-signification, allowing symbolic escape and the manifestation of the desire for a better life, so that theatrical activities provided emotional connection and strengthened desires for personal and social renewal.

## **Category 2: Impacts on Mental Health and Coping Strategies**

The second category addresses, according to the responses given by the members of this study, the impacts on mental health they face and the strategies they use to deal with these challenges. In their detailed narratives, it is undeniable that the connection between health, experiences of violence, social exclusion,

and marginalization is central.

Some mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and insomnia, appear repeatedly in their accounts, directly affecting the participants' quality of life and well-being. During Meeting 4, when individuals drew their personal timelines, it became clear how deep and persistent these impacts are throughout their lives. From this, the process of enacting the stories, through improvisation and dramatization of moments of suffering, allowed the participants to express their anxieties safely and reflect on them collectively, so that each of their stories touched one another, which was reflected in the following testimonies.

I take controlled medication to sleep, but if the environment is not calm, I cannot find peace (P7, E1).

My heart is, like, wrecked. I think about my house and I feel this way (P1, E1).

The use of substances, both recreational and medicinal, is often portrayed as a way of coping with emotional pain, as well as being associated with regret. Although this strategy provides temporary relief, the negative consequences of substance use are evident in the shared stories.

During Meeting 3, the study participants were able to reflect on the impact of substance use on their lives through improvisation, using theater as a tool to deal with these challenges and seek overcoming them. It is therefore pointed out that reflection on past choices, especially regarding substance use, is also a crucial issue in terms of the suffering experienced by these people, since regret, as a significant emotional experience, and reveals the desire for change and learning from past mistakes. Therefore, in Meeting 2, when encouraged to explore improvisa-

tion and theatrical games, many participants revisited their stories in a cathartic way, transforming feelings of regret into moments of resistance and self-knowledge, feelings that are quite clear in the following mentions.

I needed to fight back against drug use; otherwise, I would be dominated by it. From a young age, I was drawn to crack, believing that everyone was my friend, but I was mistaken. When I arrived in Belo Horizonte, I decided to fight against that urge and stopped using it, because I knew that if I continued, it would destroy my life (P4, E1).

When I realized what was happening, I said, my God, I was out there doing sex work, going who knows where, putting myself at risk without any awareness. I thought I was having fun here, that everything was fine. No — when God came to show me, I was in the depths of hell. Many terrible things happened (P3, E1).

It harmed me deeply. The drug was a curse in my life. I spent a long time addicted, without control (P5, E1).

Anxiety comes and I have to drink. Then I drink and forget the problem (P9, E1).

This category therefore addresses the impacts of violence and social exclusion on the participants' mental health, including anxiety, depression, and substance dependence. Through theatrical activities, such as timelines and improvisations, they were able to reflect on their experiences, reframe their pain, and seek coping strategies. To this end, and fulfilling its cathartic objective, the theater proved to be a transformative space, promoting self-knowledge, resilience, and facing challenges.

### Category 3: Violence and Social Exclu-

### sion

Physical and psychological violence against LGBTQIAPN+ people, in turn, is the central theme of this third category. This is because the narratives of the members of this group describe episodes of aggression that result not only in bodily harm, but also in profound social exclusion, marginalization, and loss of identity, issues that reveal themselves as serious mental harm.

In Meeting 5, then, participants were invited to reflect on their experiences of violence and oppression in a private and safe space, allowing for greater openness in discussions about these experiences, enabling these people to allow themselves to be seen in their most delicate state of vulnerability. Thus, the practice of performing arts helped to amplify these voices, giving visibility to suffering, but also to resistance in the face of oppression seen in the reported experiences, as in the excerpts shown below:

Because nowadays, when you bring a man into your home, he wants to beat you, he wants to hit you, he wants to control you, I don't know. If you've just taken off an outfit you used to wear with your boyfriend, he wants to order you to take off even your clothes, right? (P2, E2)

Then you get scared of, like, leaving. Some of them threaten to kill you. Then you're left with that trauma inside you. And then there are neighbors who see it, they call the cops, and... soon the police are arriving, and then you have to go to the station, and you avoid it, and then you have to stay away from the other one, and then it turns into that whole mess (P3, E2).

My friend's husband came home from work in a rage, went to the bar and "robbed" her, leaving her body inside the bar, waiting for the police to arrive; they're not

afraid of justice, they're not afraid of justice at all! Nevertheless, they say they're afraid of justice, but they're not (P1, E4).

My heart is starting to race again, like my aunt, right? He never actually beat me, never hit me, but he messed with me psychologically. And that's the worst kind of abuse, the worst there is (P3, E2).

[...] In my childhood, I suffered a lot of bullying at school. When I started going through puberty, around 10 or 11 years old, I began to suffer abuse from men, from my neighbors, you know? They'd put a hand here, something there. It was the first time I was walking down the street and a guy touched me, called me "hot." And at the time I didn't understand, I was so childish that I didn't understand that this was violence. I thought, "Wow, everyone called me ugly at school and all that. Suddenly I became beautiful." There was also a neighbor, once, an old man in his seventies, when I was 11 years old, he came and tried to kiss me because I went to watch television at his house. Then I told my grandmother, and she kind of blamed me, saying, "No, you shouldn't have been at his house, you put yourself in that situation" (P5, E4).

[...] We saw our friends dying like that, being beaten and unable to do anything. There were 15, 20 men, three, four cars following, and when you looked, you were already being attacked (P3, E1).

First marriage, I was married for 35 years, I didn't have love, I only got hit on the head, kicked, I was hospitalized for being hit in the lung with a broom, and my ex-husband went there and forced me to have sex, without my consent, you understand? So, you know, I spent those 35 years being beaten, humiliated, he sold me to men, you can have sex with her, because for me it's free, but for you it's a penny (P2,

E5).

This category highlights the experiences of violence and social exclusion faced by LGBTQIAPN+ people, resulting in physical and psychological harm and the social marginalization of this group in all areas. Despite this, participants demonstrated resilience and courage in sharing their stories during the theatrical activities of Meeting 5, which provided a space for acceptance and reflection, since theater proved to be a powerful means to amplify voices, reframe trajectories, and strengthen the fight for justice and inclusion.

#### **Category 4: The Search for Recognition and Belonging**

The search for recognition and belonging is a fundamental need for the participants, an issue addressed in Category 4, which encompasses both the desire of an individual and/or minority group to be recognized individually and the yearning for inclusion in social groups and society in general.

In this sense, the appreciation of individual experiences and identities is essential for the participants, which makes the desire to be recognized in their totality and authenticity a central theme in their speeches. In Meeting 2, the improvisation exercises created a space for participants to express themselves freely, promoting an exchange of experiences that fostered the appreciation of identities and reinforced the much-desired feeling of belonging to a community, which was lucidly described in the following statement:

Unfortunately, they live in a world of competition, but we are equal. I want to improve myself and I'm looking for every way to get out of this crazy world (P1, E5).

The participants emphasize the im-

importance of being accepted both within their communities and by themselves. In this regard, the Theatre of the Oppressed, as a theoretical framework, guided the discussions on how power dynamics and exclusion affect identity, fostering in the theater a search for acceptance and belonging. In Meeting 4, the participants represented their timelines and enacted them, reflecting on how they perceive themselves in the social context and how they would like to be recognized, so that self-knowledge became an important stage in this process, as seen in the statements transcribed below:

It seems I can never meet expectations. But today, I follow my truths and finally feel like I belong (P4, E5).

[...] there are times when they discriminate against us, dismiss us for being "old," "old queen," and other things. But I was once very young, I earned money, and I never humiliated another person for being older. I remember that. Today, I feel it in my skin, but it doesn't shake me, you know why? Because they think we are old and dead. We are like a star; we only lose our shine when we fall into the sea, that is, when we die (P6, E5).

The categories identified in this study, considering everything that was discussed and presented, reveal the complexity of the experiences lived by LGBTQIAPN+ people in contexts of vulnerability, which often shape their lives. Through theatrical narratives and the dynamics of the Theatre of the Oppressed and Viola Spolin, it was possible to observe how these individuals confront violence and social exclusion, but also seek spaces of resistance, belonging, and change in an effort to mitigate this injustice. Theater, as a tool for reflection and transformation,

emerges as an effective means to make these issues visible and to foster dialogues that promote inclusion, empathy, and social awareness through artistic expression and the consequent promotion of critical thinking.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight the complex experiences of violence and exclusion faced by the LGBTQIAPN+ population, especially transgender people, and how these experiences can be interpreted and given new meaning through theatrical practices. The Theatre of the Oppressed (TO), created by Augusto Boal, proved particularly useful, as it promoted critical reflection and the collective construction of solutions to the oppressive situations portrayed.

Thus, the results of this research converge with international findings on theatre as a means of resistance and social transformation. In this vein, Das & Raghavan (2024)<sup>(20)</sup> explore the potential of theatre as a space for re-signification for LGBTQIAPN+ communities, highlighting its ability to transform experiences of oppression into collective action. Similarly, several studies indicate that theatrical practices have a positive impact on promoting mental health among vulnerable populations, strengthening resilience and creating new coping mechanisms<sup>(21,22)</sup>.

With regard to Category 1, Need for escapism and desire for change, the participants' narratives revealed both a search for imaginary refuges and concrete aspirations for overcoming. Escapism is frequently used as a coping strategy by trans populations in contexts of marginalization, so that, according to Kattari et al. (2017)<sup>(23)</sup>, social isolation and lack of access to re-

sources lead many trans people to create mental escape spaces as a way of dealing with daily challenges. In theatre, then, these idealizations can be transformed into concrete actions, allowing participants to rehearse alternatives to situations of oppression and be better prepared to deal with harsh reality.

Moreover, from the speeches, it is clear that the use of substances serves as an escape factor for temporary relief. Dramatization, therefore, not only externalizes internal conflicts, but also stimulates the collective construction of solutions. As proof of this, Crossley et al. (2019)<sup>(22)</sup> highlight that dramatizing internal conflicts not only helps with emotional understanding, but also strengthens community resilience.

Regarding Category 2: Impacts on Mental Health and Coping Strategies, the accounts of anxiety, depression, and substance dependence illustrate the cumulative impacts of experienced oppressions on a person's mental health. During the theatrical sessions, the activities allowed for the exploration of symbolic alternatives to mitigate or at least lessen these challenges. For example, the use of the Rainbow of Desire, as proposed by Boal, enabled participants to externalize internal conflicts and experiment with solutions through dramatization<sup>(11)</sup>. The dramatization of episodes of violence in controlled settings makes it possible for vulnerable individuals to try out alternatives for dealing with risky situations, serving as a space for resistance and protest<sup>(20)</sup>.

Regarding Category 3: Violence and Social Exclusion, the narratives highlighted the continuity of structural oppressions that dehumanize the LGBTQIAPN+ population. From this perspective, episodes of

physical, psychological, and symbolic violence were amplified and re-signified during the theatrical dynamics—these scenes allowed participants to rehearse responses to oppressive situations, encouraging the creation of coping strategies and generating strength to fight for their rights. According to Transgender Europe (2023)<sup>(8)</sup>, Brazil leads the global ranking of homicides against trans people, reflecting the severity of structural transphobia in the country—a context that reinforces the need for interventions promoting collective awareness and resistance.

Between 2022 and 2023, 321 murders of trans and gender-diverse people were recorded worldwide, remaining alarmingly high, with Latin America and the Caribbean being the most affected region, accounting for 236 cases. Of the victims, 94% were trans women or transfeminine people, and about half of them (48%) were sex workers—especially in Europe, where this percentage reaches 78%. Furthermore, lethal violence against trans people is strongly linked to racism, with 80% of the victims being trans people of color, a 15% increase compared to the previous year. The intersection of factors such as misogyny, racism, xenophobia, and sex worker continues to be a constant, with victims being predominantly Black and trans women of color, many of whom were sex workers<sup>(8)</sup>.

These data highlight the persistence of structural and systematic violence that disproportionately affects the most vulnerable trans people, such as migrants and sex workers, reinforcing the urgency of inclusive policies and the need to bring visibility to this violence at all levels. In this regard, the importance of implementing public policies to ensure improvements



in the provision of public services for the LGBTQIAPN+ community is notable, given that, even in the political sphere, these members are consistently overlooked.

In this context, arrests and convictions do not always represent full justice but may offer emotional closure for the victims' families and friends. However, many cases of fatal violence against transgender people remain unsolved or unprosecuted, mainly because the issue is omitted, discredited, and not monitored, as it should be. To address this situation, inclusive policies such as improving employability, training health professionals, and creating specialized police units are essential to combat violence and support vulnerable communities<sup>(3)</sup>.

Finally, Category 4: The search for recognition and belonging highlights how theatrical art can provide spaces for validation and inclusion. Evidencing this idea, Psomadaki et al. (2022) and Huhmarniemi et al. (2023)<sup>(24,25)</sup> argue that inclusive artistic practices create safe spaces in which marginalized populations can connect, share experiences, and build a sense of belonging, finding people with similar experiences. Therefore, through techniques such as Image Theatre, participants were able to express their struggles and aspirations bodily, promoting reflections on the dynamics of power and exclusion.

Thus, theatre emerged as an effective means to make structural issues visible, stimulate empathy, and foster collective solutions. These practices not only contribute to the strengthening of LGBTQIAPN+ communities, but also offer tools for building a more inclusive and respectful society; therefore, it is urgent that they be implemented.

Although the study demonstrated

the potential of theater as a tool for re-signification and social transformation, some weaknesses should also be considered. The sample used, composed of participants selected by convenience, may not be representative of the entire diversity of the LGBTQIAPN+ population, which limits the generalization of the results and prevents them from representing the majority of the community's components. In addition, the short duration of the interventions may have restricted the impact of the proposed activities, especially with regard to the development of lasting changes. Another weakness was the impossibility of conducting a monitoring, which could have allowed a longitudinal analysis to understand the lasting aspects of the proposed activities, since quick activities like these may only represent momentary fragments of these individuals' lives.

On the other hand, the study presented important potential. By adopting theatrical approaches, such as Theater of the Oppressed and Viola Spolin's techniques, it was possible to create a safe and welcoming space, promoting the expression of experiences of oppression and resistance. In addition, the activities allowed participants to explore creative and collective strategies to face challenges, strengthening community ties and raising social awareness of structural issues of violence and exclusion.

Furthermore, the results highlighted the immediate impact of the theatrical interventions through daily post-session evaluations, in which participants shared perceptions, reflections, and emotions. This also allowed for a comparison between the sessions, which shifted from an initial focus on escapism and vulnerability to themes related to personal empowerment

and the desire for transformation. In short, these results emphasize the importance of expanding and deepening similar initiatives, with longer implementation times and the inclusion of diverse profiles within the LGBTQIAPN+ community.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study reaffirms the fundamental role of theater—especially the Theatre of the Oppressed and Viola Spolin’s techniques—as a powerful tool for expression, reflection, and the social transformation of the experiences of oppression faced by the LGBTQIAPN+ population. Throughout the five theatrical sessions, it was possible to observe immediate impacts on participants’ emotional processing, critical reflection, and personal empowerment. Thus, the evolution of the narratives, marked by the transition from themes of escapism to resistance and self-valuation, highlights the potential of theater to reframe experiences of vulnerability and promote new forms of coping and individual strengthening.

The study also underscores theater as a safe and welcoming space capable of fostering a sense of belonging and mobilizing participants in the pursuit of social transformation, preventing them from becoming complacent within the current context. However, the absence of longitudinal monitoring represents a limitation, making it impossible to assess the long-term impacts of the interventions carried out. It is therefore recommended that future studies incorporate this stage to deepen analyses and strengthen evidence regarding the benefits of theater for vulnerable populations.

Finally, the results reinforce the importance of cultural initiatives that pro-

mote visibility, dialogue, and awareness of the structural violence faced by the LGBTQIAPN+ community. Theater thus becomes consolidated not only as an artistic tool but also as an effective means of resistance, healing, and the construction of a more just and inclusive society.

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