

Revealing homosexuality: perceptions of young Brazilian adults

Revelar-se homossexual: percepções de jovens adultos brasileiros

Revelarse homosexual: percepciones de jóvenes adultos brasileños

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Abstract: Considering the new perspectives on male and female homosexuality and the coming out process, the aim of this study was to investigate the perceptions of young Brazilian homosexuals about the coming out on the family relationships. This is a study of multiple cases supported by the qualitative research approach. Eight homosexuals (five gays and three lesbians) were interviewed, with an average age of 26 years old. The interviews were submitted to content analysis, in which categories were constructed a posteriori, highlighting similarities and differences between the cases. In front of coming out process in a heterosexist context, the individual can make this event a moment of silence and shame, as well as deal with guilt. Family and friends constituted the main support network in front of homosexual disclosure, considered fundamental after coming out.

Keywords: coming out; sexual behavior; homosexuality; family

Resumo: Considerando as novas perspectivas acerca da homossexualidade masculina e feminina e do processo de *coming out*, o objetivo do presente estudo foi investigar as percepções de jovens homossexuais brasileiros acerca do processo de revelação da orientação sexual no contexto familiar. Trata-se de um estudo de casos múltiplos qualitativo. Foram entrevistados oito homossexuais (cinco gays e três lésbicas), com idade média de 26 anos. As entrevistas foram submetidas à análise de conteúdo, na qual foram construídas categorias *a posteriori*, destacando-se semelhanças e diferenças entre os casos. Diante do processo de *coming out* em um contexto heterossexista, o indivíduo pode fazer desse evento um momento de silenciamento e vergonha, além de lidar com o sentimento de culpa. A família e os amigos constituíram a principal rede de apoio diante da revelação da homossexualidade, rede esta considerada fundamental após o *coming out*.

Palavras-chave: *coming out*; comportamento sexual; homossexualidade; família

Resumen: En vista de las nuevas perspectivas sobre la homosexualidad masculina y femenina y del proceso de *coming out*, el objetivo de este estudio fue investigar las percepciones de jóvenes homosexuales brasileños sobre la revelación de la orientación sexual en el contexto familiar. Se trata de un estudio de casos múltiples apoyado en el enfoque cualitativo. Fueron entrevistados ocho homosexuales (cinco gays y tres lesbianas), con edad media de 26 años. Las entrevistas fueron sometidas a análisis de contenido, en el que las categorías se construyeron *a posteriori*, destacando las similitudes y diferencias entre los casos. Ante el proceso de *coming out* en un contexto heterossexista, el individuo puede hacer de ese evento un momento de silenciamento y vergüenza, así como lidiar con el sentimiento de culpa. La familia y los amigos constituyeron la principal red de apoyo ante la revelación de la homosexualidad, red ésta considerada fundamental después del *coming out*.

Palabras clave: *coming out*; comportamiento sexual; homosexualidad; familia



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For centuries, homosexuality has been seen as sin, perversion, deviation, disease and crime. Many homosexuals experienced their homosexuality clandestinely or silently, because if it were not so, they could be targets of different types of physical or psychological violence (Lira & Morais, 2017). Nowadays, it is possible to observe a greater plurality in the ways of expressing sexuality with respect to both affective and sexual intimacy relationships. This is the result, among others, of cultural and historical changes in the patterns that delimit social relations (Nascimento, Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, & Santos, 2015; Pereira, Torres, Pereira, & Falcão, 2011; Prado & Machado, 2008; Simões & Facchini, 2009).

With the processes of industrialization, socioeconomic development and urbanization in the second half of the 20th century, lesbian and gay identities gained representativeness in their structuring throughout the West, including Brazil. Thus, it is important to highlight the process of social construction of the homosexual movement and the way in which struggles and rights have been seeking spaces in the middle of the 20th century to the present day (Molina, 2011). According to Conde (2004), social movements in the 1960s, such as feminism and sexual liberation movements, boosted the homosexual movement, which started to fight for its rights before the State and for distancing itself from preconceived notions related to Church.

In Brazil, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, during the military regime, gay social movements marked history in search of not only visibility, but also civil rights and full citizenship. With the end of the military regime, cultural optimism arose, aiming at a new, more egalitarian, fair and democratic moment, even in relation to the expression of homosexualities (Conde, 2004; Franco 2009; Molina, 2011).

It can be said that in Brazil, the gay movement started in 1979, in São Paulo, and in the following years, there were new groups and associations from the arrival of the HIV virus, aiming at its containment. From this framework, several courses and groups for the prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs, which are now called STIs – Sexually Transmitted Infections) were created, as well as emphasizing the importance of education as the best form of prevention and guidance, forcing society to discuss sexuality (Facchini, 2005; Ferrari, 2004; Franco, 2009). In 1997, the first GLBTT (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transvestites and transgenders) Pride Parade took place – today the acronym is LGBTTQI+ (gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transvestites, queens, intersexuality and a symbol that indicates “more”, which means the scope to other manifestations of sexuality, such as asexual, pansexual, non-binary, among others). Currently, the LGBTTQI+ Pride Parade is one of the largest in the world (Cittadin & Lino, 2018). Although many rights have been achieved by this population in Brazil since then, such as adoption by same-sex couples and civil marriage, there are still prejudices that have persisted since the last century.

Even with the greater diversity in the ways of expressing sexuality in contemporary times, coming out – public disclosure of one's sexual orientation – is a process that can be very difficult

for some, due to the way that homosexuals are still seen in Latin American society. Another important term in this discussion is the outness – the process of self-acceptance of a homosexual identity for oneself, which may or may not be revealed to other people (Martins, Romão, Lindner, & Reis, 2010). In the present study, our focus will be on the coming out process.

In the research carried out by Martins-Silva, Souza, Silva Junior, Nascimento and Balbi Neto (2012), which analyzed the speeches produced by students in the last year of elementary school in public and private schools about homosexuality, it was found that for the denomination homosexuals are mostly attributed negative characteristics, such as, for example, “shame”, “naughtiness” and “terrible”. This reflects the values and thoughts of society about homosexuality that are organized to characterize it negatively. Such a view is the result of the influence of the heteronormativity of the current culture, which imposes an ideal of male and female behavior, in addition to seeing heterosexuality as something essential, biologically determined, which generates the stigmatization of the non-heterosexual, treating it as an “abnormality”. When these heterosexist norms are naturalized, the fear of how the phenomenon of the disclosure of sexual orientation will resonate in society can cause difficulties for the homosexual individual in his/her coming out process (Foucault, 1988; Martins-Silva et al., 2012; Perucchi, Brandão, & Vieira, 2014; Silva & Nardi, 2011).

Gender studies aim to problematize the heteronormative and essentialist perspective by proposing a solution to the dilemma of the binary sex-gender system according to which gender would be determined by the body, by the biological apparatus, and gender as something socially and culturally constructed. For Butler (2003), the fundamental problem would lie in the fact that, by associating gender as a natural datum and gender as culturally constructed datum, we would produce a notion of gender as an essence of the individual.

This intelligibility would produce certain situational gender performances that present themselves as the modulation of gender identifications based on the binary model of man and woman. The definitions of homosexuality and sexual orientation would also be influenced by these conceptions, promoting their plastering and framing. As a result, social segregation and homophobia would emerge, as if sexual orientation were not part of human dignity (Rios, 2012; Souza, Cerquinho, Nogueira, & Melo, 2013).

The concept of homophobia can be understood as “a set of practices, beliefs, dogmas, ideologies and discourses that aim to remove/exclude/discriminate any and all dissenting manifestations of heterosexual norms applied either to sexual practices or to gender” (Castañeda, 2007, p. 146). Recognizing homosexuality as a way of expressing healthy human sexuality is essential for homosexuals to have a better quality of life, not having to worry about their way of being, of living the consequences that their sexual orientation can cause in others and in society (Butler, 2003; Costa, Machado, & Wagner, 2015; Louro, 2004).

Given the possibility of investigating the changes that occur in the life of the individual who revealed his homosexuality, from his/her own perspective, the opportunity arises to seek to understand what are the biggest difficulties that the homosexual has to disclose his/her sexual orientation, considering his/her expectations, as well as the way he/she experiences himself/herself, his/her own life and his/her own routine after the coming out, considering the significance of this phenomenon by the individual himself/herself, his/her family and society (Poeschl, Venâncio, & Costa, 2012; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2010; Soliva & Silva Junior, 2014; Toledo & Teixeira Filho, 2013).

These repercussions of coming out have also been explored in the scientific literature in its interface with the health of this population, notably young adults (Perucchi et al., 2014), seeking to protect them in a context of strong vulnerability represented by possible greater exposure to homophobia, for example (Lira & Morais, 2017). Based on such understandings, it is possible to reflect on the elements that make disclosure more difficult and how to overcome them, as well as on the consequences that this process can bring. Based on this panorama, the aim of the present

study was to investigate the perceptions of young homosexuals in Brazil about the process of disclosure of the sexual orientation in the family context.

Method

Study design

It is a qualitative multiple case study (Yin, 2005). It was set in a larger study that aimed to investigate how the disclosure of the sexual orientation of young homosexual adults has had an impact on family dynamics, from the perspective of the homosexual's parents and siblings (Nascimento, 2018). The study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution of origin of the first two authors. According to Brazilian legislation, this study was based on Resolution No. 466, of 12/12/2012 of the National Health Council, which addresses the risks and benefits for research involving human beings. The organization and writing of this qualitative study followed the guidelines of the COREQ (Consolidated Criteria for Reporting Qualitative Research) protocol.

Scope

Eight homosexuals of both genders, aged between 18 and 39 years old, were interviewed, who revealed to their family members their homosexual sexual orientation. The average age was 26 years. In the composition of the sample, we opted for the inclusion of young adults who had other members also participating in the research (fathers, mothers and siblings) and reporting the repercussions of the process. Thus, eight families participated in the largest study, and for the present study, only the narratives of young homosexual adults were analyzed, prioritizing the voices of the focal individuals.

Instruments

For data collection, a semi-structured interview was used, applying a script with questions about the objectives of the study. In general, data were questioned regarding the assumption of being homosexual for the individual, the repercussions of coming out on the family and society and the identification of the support networks present in the life history of each participant, in addition to questions related to his/her routines and experiences.

Procedure

Data collection. The research started after approval by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution of origin of the authors. The initial contact with the participants took place through invitations on social networks and through the researchers' contact networks. On these occasions, the objectives of the study and the terms of the work were explained. Those interested in participating voluntarily read the Free and Informed Consent Form (FICF) of the research and, being in agreement, interviews with possible participants were scheduled. Data collection was carried out through interviews. This method prioritizes the expansion of the theme, establishing, in different contexts, the common aspects and the particularities of each interview. The individual interviews took place in the Psychology school-service to which the authors were linked and were carried out face to face, on dates and times previously agreed with the participants.

A cis researcher, heterosexual, conducted all interviews, who had already carried out previous investigations on this topic, having social repertoires in relation to both the subject in question and experience in conducting this type of interview. Before conducting the interview, the

participants confirmed their consent by signing the Free and Informed Consent Form. In this document, it was made clear that the names used in the research would be fictitious, as well as the environment in which the interview would be conducted respected the interviewee's comfort and security and information. It was also considered the fact that, even though there was no risk in participating in the research, some contents covered could provide some type of psychological discomfort. If this happened, the possibility for these participants to talk to the responsible researcher, who is also a psychotherapist, was made available. No participant requested any kind of assistance or follow-up after the interview. The interviews were audio-recorded, with the participant's consent, and transcribed in full and in its entirety for later analysis, composing the *corpus*.

Data analysis

The interviews were coded through content analysis (Bardin, 2011), composed of research techniques that systematically grant the description of messages and attitudes related to the statement, as well as inferences about the data collected. This codification occurred first in each interview, producing categories based on the meanings brought by each participant and, in a second moment, using the totality of the interviews, to identify similarities and differences in the reports to support the discussion. Two independent researchers carried out this coding process, which was reviewed by a third judge, the research advisor. Content analysis produced categories *a posteriori*, that is, revealing movements and meanings from the respondents' statements. The interpretation of these categories was based on the studies available on homosexuality, gender, family and support network (Antunes & Machado, 2005; Cadieux & Chasteen, 2015; Costa et al., 2015; Delgado, Vega, Gutierrez, Zaffirri & Ramirez, 2016; Diamond & Shpigel, 2014; Frigo et al., 2014; Lomando, Wagner & Gonçalves, 2011; Nunan, 2010; Ortiz-Hernández, 2005; Ryan et al., 2010; Sedgwick, 2007; Soliva & Silva Junior, 2014).

Results and Discussion

In this section, first the data for characterization of the sample and presentation of cases will be brought. Subsequently, the categories constructed *a posteriori* from the analytical process described in the Method will be discussed, which resulted in two main categories: (a) Experiences of homosexuality itself and its possible consequences and (b) The coming out process and the support networks.

In characterizing the participants, fictitious names were used. The ages ranged from 22 to 34 years, with two being married and six being single, as can be seen in Table 1, which also brings data about religion and ethnicity.

Table 1.

Characterization of participants by fictitious name, age, marital status, religion and ethnicity (N=8)

Fictitious name	Age	Marital status	Religion	Ethnicity
Arthur	26	Married	Catholic	White
Pedro	22	Single	None	Pardo
Gisele	31	Married	Spiritist	White
Sofia	22	Single	Catholic	White
Antônio	34	Single	Atheist	Negro
Caio	24	Single	Candomblé (afro-Brazilian religion)	Pardo (mixed-race)
Bruno	22	Single	Catholic	Pardo (mixed-race)
Marina	25	Single	Atheist	Pardo (mixed-race)

When talking about feelings the before coming out, the participants pointed out several difficulties and negative emotions, such as suffering, fear, guilt, frustration, insecurity and the fear that the closest people would walk away if they knew about their sexual orientation. Arthur says that, in the face of his first homosexual experiences, *“he didn't know how to deal with it, and then it was all very confusing and very disturbing, he was very frustrated and very insecure”* and, therefore, he had a behavior *“very agitated, very rebellious”*. Gisele reported that her greatest difficulties during the disclosure process occurred when she was faced with the fact that she was attracted to people of the same sex – which was not expected by herself. Antônio went through difficulties to accept himself, and it was even necessary to reframe his negative idea about homosexuality. Bruno said that, despite having a good relationship with his father, who lives in another city, he did not tell him about his homosexuality, because he depended on him financially and was afraid of losing that support. Pedro also depends financially on his father and, even though he knows about his sexual orientation, he does not take his boyfriend home, for fear of causing conflicts. For Marina, on the other hand, one of the main factors that caused her fear to come out was the prejudice against homosexuals in her professional environment.

It is noted that the coming out caused sensations such as "relief" and "freedom", as the participants no longer had to hide their sexual orientation, nor had to disclose sexual identities that did not represent them. In some cases, the “coming out of the closet” brought changes in the way the homosexual was treated within his/her family, changing the family dynamics to receive more support from family members. Pedro, Caio and Bruno said that they felt “free” for not having to hide what they think and what they do from others, nor to worry about what others think about them. Sofia said that she felt better because she no longer had to “keep to herself” what she felt, that she could talk about it to other people, and she didn't have to lie to her parents anymore, because she did it when she went to her girlfriend's house, which caused her anguish. Gisele and Antônio spoke of the feeling of "relief" when coming out. For Gisele, hiding her sexual orientation was *“extremely tiring, keeping (...) a secret. So (coming out) is to take 300 kilos off your back, when they discover your secret”*.

On the other hand, in some cases, respondents reported negative emotions when coming out. Arthur reported that he had *“some very negative surprises”* and that he had to learn to live with people he believed had no prejudice. In addition, some respondents had to deal with the fact that family members did not immediately welcome the news of homosexuality, which will be reported below.

According to the participants, most of the people with whom they lived had a positive reaction to the disclosure. Arthur expresses that he exchanged frustration, fear and insecurity for peace and security, because he had the support of his family, the religious community he was part of and the school where he studied. Pedro saw himself *“totally different from before”*, after the coming out, and he had no problems related to acceptance by his family and closest people, recognizing that *“before, he stopped doing everything, talking, talking, living (...). Now, after you don't have to pretend or hide anything, it's different”*. Antônio said that those who know about his sexual orientation respect him and did not feel any different treatment from them after the coming out. Bruno reported that he expected to encounter great difficulties, which did not happen, since his mother and sister accepted his condition well: *“they (mother and sister) try to get closer to me, wanting me to open up more, wanting to know more about my life”*. Marina also noted that her family members approached her after the coming out, fearing that she would go into depression in the face of the process.

On the other hand, there were cases in which the disclosure information was not well received by the interviewees' relatives. Pedro's mother was “uncomfortable” with the news at first. Sofia's mother was initially “nervous” and “crying” at the situation, and her father didn't even want to talk about it, which made her think that *“he was going to ignore me, that he wasn't going to talk to me anymore”*. Gisele even thought about leaving home, as she was finding difficulties in family

relationships. When she made the decision to go and live alone, her mother started to accept and living at home got better. The interviewee reports that she does not care about the opinion of other people about this, and that she does not feel different after the coming out process, because “*she has not changed the way she dresses, behaves and talks to people*”. Marina also had some difficulties at the beginning of her coming out process, feeling sad at times, when she reported: “(the mother) *laughed and looked at me and said ‘you are not that, you do not know what you want from your life’*”.

Experiences of homosexuality itself and its possible consequences

Stigmatized individuals are exposed to threats to their self-esteem. Some social institutions (some families and schools, segments of the church and the state) and some mass media occasionally manifest stereotypes that homosexuals are inferior and have moral defects. In the face of outness, the individual may feel afraid to come out, maintaining secrecy and discretion regarding his/her sexuality, and thus repressing what he/she feels (Martins et al., 2010). In addition, he may even question his own value as an individual, a situation that can be associated with depression, shame, guilt, fear, distrust, insecurity, anxiety, psychosomatic complaints, feelings of loneliness, frustration, social isolation, difficulty in establishing and maintaining romantic relationships, domestic violence, risky sexual behavior, alcohol and drug abuse, eating disorders and suicidal behavior or ideation (Herek, Cogan, Gillis, & Glunt, 1997; Louro, 2004; Miskolci, 2009; Nunan, 2010; Prado & Machado 2008; Ryan et al., 2010; Sedgwick, 2007).

“Discovering” the desire for a person of the same sex is a complex task that involves a web of feelings and fears. This discovery occurs when the individual realizes that he does not fit many of the characteristics that he should have, according to heteronormative and sexist family and social precepts. Men, for example, are expected to be strong, do not cry, be interested in women, have children to continue the surname, among other attributes and actions (Costa et al., 2015; Frigo et al., 2014; Maffesoli, 2007). Due to the fear of family and social rejection, supposedly a consequence of the act of “coming out”, many young people are afraid to do so, which can cause emotional damage that will drag on for a lifetime – such as depression, anxiety, not being able to maintain stable and healthy relationships, having a risky sex life, among others –, profoundly marking the subjectivity, considering that disclosure is seen as liberating (Lomando et al., 2011; Miskolci, 2009; Puckett, Woodward, Meireish, & Pantalone, 2015). The fear of young people is based on questions that, associated with the certainty that their desires are not in the arms of a sexual opposite, are made in the form of complaints, being formulated in the face of something considered “wrong”. Where's the boyfriend (girlfriend)?”, “When are you going to date?”, “When are you going to give me grandchildren they become more coercive as young people avoid the trajectory imposed on them (Oliveira, 2013; Soliva et al., 2014). In addition, such questions can be experienced as violence both in the face of the process of outness and the possible option to be silent in the face of social expectations built in relation to the sexual orientation of these young people.

When this “discovery” occurs, many young people are faced with the fear of rejection that often occurs in the coming out, being able to experience the moment of the disclosure with silence and a feeling of shame. Arthur, for example, experienced this, he had his outness still in his childhood, in a period whose taboo about homosexuality was even greater compared to the present day; by Bruno, who expected a negative reaction from his family to the disclosure; and by Marina, who feared being stigmatized in the professional field. The concealment of homosexuality becomes, over time, an increasingly difficult and painful task (Soliva et al., 2014). This factor contributes to making the so-called coming out of the closet so liberating, in some cases.

Furthermore, according to Sedgwick (2007), “even among the most openly gay people, there are very few who are not in the closet with someone who is personally, economically or

institutionally important to them” (p. 22). This is the case of Bruno, for example, who did not tell his father about his homosexuality for fear of not receiving his financial support. This statement reinforces the idea that the fear of causing negative reactions to the disclosure and consequently suffering losses leads some to hide their sexual orientation. In this specific case, the financial support of the family of origin is a marker that crosses Bruno’s decision to remain “in the closet” only for his father, fearing for the rupture in relation to the social support received from this figure.

The feeling of guilt after outness was another aspect pointed out in the data collection. Given the current situation, learning and internalization of the negative meanings associated with homosexuality and the transgression of gender roles persist, which is called internalized prejudice. This can lead to the rejection of their own sexual orientation (Ortiz-Hernández, 2005). Because there is a strong and harmful stereotype of homosexuals in society, there is a tendency for members of the LGBTQ community to take them for themselves, producing negative feelings about their own identity, such as guilt for experiencing same-sex desires (Antunes et al., 2005; Nunan, 2010). This circumstance was experienced by Antônio, whose idea of homosexuality was associated with aspects such as sexually transmitted infections (STIs), prostitution, promiscuity and drug abuse, and it was necessary to deconstruct them to accept his own sexual orientation. Thus, it is highlighted that the difficulties of these young people accepting themselves are not only due to elements of their own subjectivity and the relationships established in the family microcosm, but to the way in which the social imaginary about homosexuality is constructed, perpetuated and transmitted in the most diverse aspects of socialization.

According to a survey by Delgado et al. (2016), the participants experienced a double life: the “socially accepted” and the “abnormal”. Through the data collected, it was possible to verify that, in most cases, the disclosure caused sensations such as “relief” and “freedom”, because the participants no longer had to hide their sexual orientation, nor had to disclose sexual identities that do not represent them, as in the case of Pedro, Sofia, Gisele, Antônio, Caio and Bruno, for example. The disclosure of homosexuality causes changes in the patterns of family interaction because the individual no longer needs to hide. The existence of family secrets tensions relationships, plaster spontaneity and creates barriers for the secret to be kept, causing distance between its members and the perpetuation of interdictions in relation to sexuality (Lomando et al., 2011). Thus, in some of the cases, the way of treating the individual was changed, changing the family dynamics, whether seeking to open up more, offering support, among other changes, as reported by Bruno and Marina, for example. It is noted, from these cases, that the family seeks to restructure itself in the face of the coming out of one of its members, with adjustments that can be more or less conscious and promote greater or lesser well-being on the part of these young adults.

The coming out process and the support networks

Social support networks consist of the set of individuals and significant groups that make up the relationship links received and perceived by the individual, in which connection, resources (information, advice and instrumental assistance) and affirmation (notion that the individual is heard and cared for and that their perceptions, feelings, thoughts and behaviors are valued) are directly provided (Brito & Koller, 1999; Morais, Koller, & Raffaelli, 2012). Such networks are associated with individual well-being, being a fundamental factor to face stress and physical and emotional difficulties (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Morais et al., 2012; Rutter, 1987; Samuelsson, Thernlund, & Ringström, 1996).

With regard to the impact caused by homophobia, social support is related to less depression and anxiety, greater satisfaction with life and greater self-esteem in the LGBTQ+ population (Beals, Peplau, & Gable, 2009; Lehavot & Simoni, 2011). In addition, the connection with the LGBTQ+ community is also seen as a predictive factor for psychological health, through

greater self-esteem and a sense of belonging (Lira, Morais, & Boris, 2016; Riggle, Whitman, Olson, Rostosky, & Strong, 2008).

As the family is commonly seen as a place of safety and affection, having it as a social support network may be the most expected and desired by homosexuals in view of the disclosure of their sexual orientation (Perucchi et al., 2014; Silva, Frutuoso, Feijó, Valerio, & Chaves, 2015; Toledo, 2007). However, sometimes, the family can exercise a hegemonic model in its structure and organization, being able to react in a negative way to the behavior considered “deviant” of the member and having violent physical or psychological mechanisms, to try to fit this individual again to the rules of the family nucleus (Ceballos-Fernández, 2014; Diamond et al., 2014; Perucchi et al., 2014).

It is noted that it is common for the family to react negatively to the homosexual child's coming out process, responding to the disclosure with emotions such as shame, anger, sadness and fear, in addition to exerting psychological or even physical violence on the individual. Such reactions are usually caused by different factors, such as the influence of the heteronormative social model, the fear of the individual being marginalized and stigmatized, or the fact of not knowing how to deal with the strangeness of having a family member with same-sex partners, before reaching, in certain situations, the acceptance of the homosexual relative (Cadieux et al., 2015; Ceballos-Fernández, 2014; Diamond et al., 2014; Etengoff & Daiute, 2013; Perucchi et al., 2014, Poeschl et al., 2012; Toledo et al., 2013). The cases of Arthur, Pedro, Sofia, Gisele and Marina, for example, show resistance on the part of some of their family members regarding the acceptance of sexual orientation. Such resistances may have different outcomes in each case, which must also be monitored over time, allowing these families to better assimilate the process and build their own intelligibilities about the homosexuality of one of their members.

Considering family and friends as the main social support networks for the individual who discloses his/her sexual orientation towards himself/herself and others (Frigo et al., 2014; Lomando et al., 2011), it is observed that, in episodes in which the homosexual can find comfort and safety when “coming out of the closet” in front of them, a positive family and social dynamic is favored. In such cases, the links between him/her and others are maintained or even strengthened.

Arthur, Pedro and Bruno show that their lives became better after the coming out process compared to when they were still “in the closet”, which they attribute to the support they received from family and friends. The same can be said about Antônio, who had no problem after the disclosure, because his family always very well accepted his sexual orientation. Thus, it is reinforced that the social support promoted by the family can contribute to outcomes considered more adaptive, favoring that the acceptance of the coming out process promotes greater proximity between members, an important indicator for the mental health of these individuals and consequent experience of sexuality in a less fragmented way.

Final considerations

From the cases discussed in the present study, difficulties were identified on the part of homosexual individuals in dealing with their own sexual orientation and with the coming out process, considering the social models of expression of sexuality established. In the reports gathered here, it is suggested that the fear of exposure is based on possible consequences of the coming out in the family, such as the deconstruction of expectations in relation to the expression of the children's sexuality, which can promote the interruption of psychological, financial and/or institutional support, the possibility of being stigmatized by society, among others. Thus, some end up choosing to hide their condition, being deprived of expressing their own subjectivity, which could allow them to experience their own sexuality as it really is, without having to repress what they feel.

Regarding the homosexual support network, such as family and friends, the homosexuals interviewed reported that there was an improvement in their life in situations where there was acceptance by this network. They also became less afraid, experiencing daily life with less guilt and anguish, in a more integrated and health-promoting experience. Thus, the importance of the support network for these individuals in the coming out process is reinforced. Although the family cannot always be considered a protective instance par excellence, its potential for welcoming these individuals in moments of greater emotional mobilization is reinforced, as represented by the sharing of the coming out.

A limitation of the study was its cross-sectional design, allowing access to transformations through the participants' narratives from a single moment. The fact that the collection was carried out in just one meeting may have inhibited other data and experiences from being mentioned in the interviews. It is suggested to carry out new studies to expand the interviewees' statements about how they experience themselves in the process of outness and coming out, as well as interviewing the network of these participants to also know their surroundings. With new research in this context, new perspectives can be discussed, so that issues related to homosexuality are clarified so that, thus, the taboos that still exist can be deconstructed, operating a movement of greater acceptance, greater care and, consequently, greater protection of these young people in the face of this important identity process.

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