

## Revealing one's Homosexuality to the Family: An Integrative Review of the Scientific Literature

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### Abstract

Coming out in the family context is a subject that has not been widely investigated in the scientific literature. This study aimed to present an integrative review of the scientific literature to understand the repercussions of young adult homosexuals revealing their sexual orientation to their families. A total of 38 articles were retrieved from the LILACS, MEDLINE, PePSIC, PsycINFO and SciELO databases (January/2006-May/2016). Qualitative studies with homosexuals predominate, both with gays and lesbians, and others that highlight the role of the family in the coming out, which allows to know and identify issues related to the process of revelation or concealment of homosexuality. The studies also assessed the participation and feelings resulting from coming out to the family, with contexts in which conflicts prevailed observed and others in which there was acceptance by the family members. Cases in which young people turned to social networks as a support reference in the coming out process were also observed. There is a notable need for new studies on the theme, increasing the visibility of this process.

**Keywords:** Coming out, sexual behavior, family, homosexuals.

## A Revelação da Homossexualidade na Família: Revisão Integrativa da Literatura Científica

### Resumo

A revelação da homossexualidade (*coming out*) no contexto familiar é um tema ainda pouco investigado na literatura científica. O presente estudo teve por objetivo apresentar uma revisão integrativa da literatura científica a fim de compreender quais as repercussões da revelação da orientação sexual nas relações familiares de jovens adultos homossexuais. A partir das bases LILACS, MEDLINE, PePSIC, PsycINFO e SciELO (janeiro/2006-maio/2016), foram recuperados 38 artigos. Predominam estudos qualitativos com pessoas homossexuais, tanto com *gays* quanto com lésbicas, e outros que ressaltam o papel da família diante do *coming out*, o que permite conhecer e identificar questões ligadas ao processo de revelação ou ocultação da homossexualidade. Estudos também avaliam a participação e os sentimentos

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que acarretam a revelação nas famílias, sendo observado contextos em que os conflitos prevaleceram e outros nos quais houve acolhimento por parte dos entes. Também foram observados casos em que jovens buscaram a rede social como uma referência de apoio no processo de *coming out*. Nota-se a necessidade de novos estudos acerca da temática, ampliando a visibilidade desse processo.

**Palavras-chave:** *Coming out*, comportamento sexual, família, homossexuais.

## La Revelación de la Homosexualidad en la Familia: Revisión Integra de la Literatura Científica

### Resumen

La revelación de la homosexualidad (*coming out*) en el contexto familiar aun es un tema poco investigado en la literatura científica. El presente estudio tuvo por objetivo presentar una revisión integradora de la literatura científica a fin de comprender cuales son las repercusiones de la revelación de la orientación sexual en las relaciones familiares de jóvenes y adultos homosexuales. A partir de las bases LILACS, MEDLINE, PePSIC, PsycINFO y SciELO (enero/2006-mayo/2016), fueron recuperados 38 artículos. Predominan estudios cualitativos con los homosexuales. Los estudios también evalúan la participación de los sentimientos que conducen la revelación en las familias, siendo observados contextos en que los conflictos prevalecen y otros en los cuales hubo acogimiento por parte de los entes. También fueron observados casos en que los jóvenes buscaron la red social como una referencia de apoyo en el proceso de *coming out*. Se nota la necesidad de nuevos estudios acerca de la temática, ampliando la visibilidad de ese proceso.

**Palabras clave:** *Coming out*, comportamiento sexual, familia, homosexuales.

At present, great visibility is given to questions related to loving relationships and their modes of expression, both affective and of sexual intimacy. This movement comes from the feedback from cultural and historical changes and the patterns that delimit social relationships, which allows for more discussion about gender issues and sexualities, as well as their repercussions in the lives of homosexuals and their families (Lomando & Wagner, 2009; Nascimento, Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, & Santos, 2015; Prado & Machado, 2012). The studies on the subject of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transvestite, transsexual and transgender) are today a consolidated field of research, acquiring more space in the academic field and legitimacy with the social movements (Lomando, Wagner, & Gonçalves, 2011).

Thus, issues related to the questions of gender and sexuality originate from social struggles, such as those related to the LGBT movement, which, through their actions, conquered spaces and rights for this population (Victoria & Knauth, 2004). Regarding gender, for Butler (2003), it is

a process that has no start or finish, being considered something that is “done” and not something that is “is”. The author states that “all gender is, by definition, unnatural” (p. 35), understanding that sex, gender and sexuality do not establish a mutual relationship. According to Martins, Romão, Lindner, and Reis (2010), sexuality can be understood as “cultural elaborations about the pleasures and the social and bodily exchanges that include eroticism, desire and affection, as well as notions related to health, reproduction, use of technologies and the exercise of power in society” (p. 9). These forms are linked to the dimensions of the social life in the reproduction and production of values related to the collective life (Prado & Machado, 2012).

Homoaffective relationships have been gaining space and visibility in the scientific literature, in a posture of combating prejudices and promoting a culture of greater tolerance and respect for diversity (Nascimento et al., 2015). Regarding the disclosure of sexual orientation (‘outness’ – refers to admitting one’s homosexuality to oneself and ‘coming out’ refers to

the process of disclosure of one's sexual orientation, commonly called "coming out of the closet") and family relationships, it is noted that this is a challenge for the individuals who want to tell their families, since there is the fear of being rejected by family members and by society. One aspect is the frustration that the family can experience due to not living up to their expectations, since in a heteronormative way, homosexuality contradicts the socio-cultural construction of self and of the heterosexual man and woman. Here the expectation was the affirmation of the continuation of a patriarchal, rationalizing, sanitizing society concerned with not propagating any kind of threats from minority groups that affect the morality of traditional families (Maffesoli, 2007; Miskolci, 2015). For Martins et al. (2010), heteronormativity is understood as an "expression used to describe or identify a supposed social norm related to standardized heterosexual behavior" (p. 12), an idea complemented by Mélo (2012), who relates it directly to the gender roles expected for men and women.

Thus, the family is seen as the major foundation so that the subjects can reveal their sexual orientation to themselves and to society. However, they may be more exposed to experiences of prejudice and homophobia, which may be associated with mental and physical health problems (Zimmerman, Darnell, Rhew, Lee, & Kaysen, 2015). Conversely, the concealment of the sexual orientation can lead to serious problems of various orders, such as social, behavioral and psychological problems, which limit access to seeking social support and cause low self-esteem (Meyer, 2003). The revelation of sexual orientation may allow the subjects to feel protected by the family and the people that surround them in society and to maintain good health outcomes in general, as well as experience and feel the support received (Corliss, Austin, Roberts, & Molnar, 2009).

It should be noted that the process of coming out goes through a series of movements, from "coming out of the closet" to the persistence in remaining "in the closet" even for the homosexuals that have assumed their homosexuality. This is

justified by a number of social issues, such as the secrecy of homosexuality with co-workers or in order to be included in a particular group. This movement fuels the idea that feelings and desires for homosexual peers should be kept "secret, conforming to historically created expectations that such relationships should remain invisible in the public space and restricted to the private lives of those involved" (Miskolci, 2013, p. 303), that is, for society the "male" subject should impose his masculinity, leaving his sexuality aside and reinforcing gay oppression.

Homosexuality, when revealed to the family, can cause problems in the relationships. For the young people who decide to come out, there can be great frustration due to the impact caused for the family members, who, in many cases, cannot create a welcoming environment, in the way that is expected of this institution. Often, the family members express aggression, threats and other types of violence that show their intolerance, frustration and fear due to discovering their child is homosexual (Balsam & Mohr, 2007; Detrie & Lease, 2007; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2011).

The difficulty for parents and family members to deal with these issues must also be considered, as they are often surrounded by fears themselves and do not feel comfortable talking about and dealing with issues of sexuality in general (Zimmerman et al., 2015). From this perspective, the present study aimed to understand the repercussions in the family relationships for young adult homosexuals when revealing their sexual orientation. Within the paradigm of evidence-based practice – EBP (Mendes, Silveira, & Galvão, 2008), it was sought to gather the best empirical evidence for the understanding of this phenomenon, prioritizing publications in quality scientific journals and, consequently, to provide support and interventions for studies in this area.

## Method

### Study Type

This was an integrative review of national and international literature. The integrative review aims to gather and synthesize study re-

sults related to a particular subject or theme, in a synthesized and orderly manner, being one of the most used tools in the context of EBP. According to recommendations for carrying out an integrative review and starting from the search for the best evidence (Mendes et al., 2008), the guiding question of the present study was defined using the PICO method (P=population; I=interventions; C=comparisons; O=outcomes; Santos, Pimenta & Nobre, 2007). The question was worded as follows: What are the repercussions of the revelation of sexual orientation (O) in the family relationships (I) of young adult homosexuals (P)?

### **Indexing Databases and Descriptors Used**

The databases used were LILACS, MEDLINE, PePSIC, PsycINFO and SciELO. The descriptors consulted were: coming out, *comportamento sexual*, *família*, *gays*, *homossexuais*, *homossexuais femininas*, *homossexuais masculinos*, *homossexualidade*, LGBT, outness, *rede de apoio*, *relações familiares* and *revelação da orientação sexual*. As justification for the choice of nomenclatures, it should be noted that the female homosexual - or lesbian - is a "woman who is attracted affectively and/or sexually by people of the same sex/gender" (Martins et al., 2010, p. 14). The male homosexual is a man who is attracted "sexually, emotionally or affectively to people of the same sex/gender" (Martins et al., 2010, p. 14). Furthermore, for these authors, sexual orientation "refers to the ability of each person to have a deep emotional, affective or sexual attraction to individuals of a different gender, of the same gender or of more than one gender, as well as having intimate and sexual relations with these people" (p. 10).

In the present study, the use of the term "*orientação sexual* (sexual orientation)" was chosen in order to restrict the searches to only the cases of discovery of male or female homosexuality, not entering other fields of sexuality, such as in the case of bisexual or transsexual/transgender/transvestite people, for example. From these words, combinations were made to broaden the

search for the data. The combinations were: *homossexualidade* AND *relações familiares*; *gays* AND *rede de apoio*; *revelação da orientação sexual* AND *família*; *gays* AND *relações familiares*; *rede de apoio* AND *revelação da orientação sexual*; coming out AND *família*. It should be noted that the descriptors *homossexualidade*, *homossexuais*, *homossexuais femininas*, *homossexuais masculinos*, *gays*, *comportamento sexual*, and *relações familiares* were found in the VHL descriptors, while the descriptors LGBT, *revelação da orientação sexual*, *família*, *rede de apoio*, outness and coming out were selected through studies that used them in their keywords.

### **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria**

The inclusion criteria were: (a) indexed articles published in scientific journals, according to the review method recommendations from EBP (Mendes et al., 2008); (b) written in Portuguese, English or Spanish; (c) published from January 2006 to May 2016; and (d) with the theme pertinent to the objective of the review and that answered the guiding question. Articles that did not correspond to the objective of the present study were discarded, given their low degree of providing evidence for the practice. The exclusion criteria adopted were: (a) books, book chapters, letters, reviews, news articles, annals of congresses, editorials, dissertations and theses; (b) articles published prior to 2006; (c) studies that did not fulfill the objective and did not answer the guiding question; and (d) literature review articles.

### **Procedure**

**Data Collection.** Data collection was carried out in May 2016. After the initial searches using the descriptors and their combinations, the inclusion and exclusion criteria filters were applied. The studies were then re-analyzed in terms of titles and abstracts in a new evidence-filtering procedure, conducted by two independent judges. From this, the studies were retrieved and read in full, in order to make a new selection, now more detailed and using the full texts. These procedures were carried out by

two independent judges, both psychologists that work with the theme. Cases of disagreement were analyzed by a third judge. After this process, the articles that composed the *corpus* were gathered and organized in a spreadsheet according to the titles, authors, year of publication, aims, instruments, sample, main results, conclusions and limits/potentials. From these elements, the articles were discussed, considering the analytical procedures of the integrative review (Mendes et al., 2008).

**Data Analysis.** The final *corpus* was organized in an Excel spreadsheet, highlighting, for each article retrieved in the final sample, the following aspects necessary to identify the profile of the publications: title, authors, institution of origin, year of publication, periodical, objective, method/type of study, sample, instruments, main results, main conclusions, limits and potentials/contributions, and gaps for new studies. The presentation of the review/synthesis of the knowledge was based on the recommendations of the PRISMA system from the criteria recommended in its checklist (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & PRISMA Group, 2009). Thus, the articles that made up the final *corpus* were analyzed in order to answer the guiding question. Based on the results of the studies in the databases and the guiding question, two categories were elaborated, so that, in each of them, the articles that had a similar theme were discussed. It should be noted that social markers were not taken into consideration for the selection of the studies, as this point was not listed for the composition of the *corpus* or for the formation of the categories of analysis. In this way, the following broad categories were constructed:

1. Homosexuality and family: outness and the coming out process and
2. The family faced with the coming out process of the child. These categories will be explored in the Discussion section.

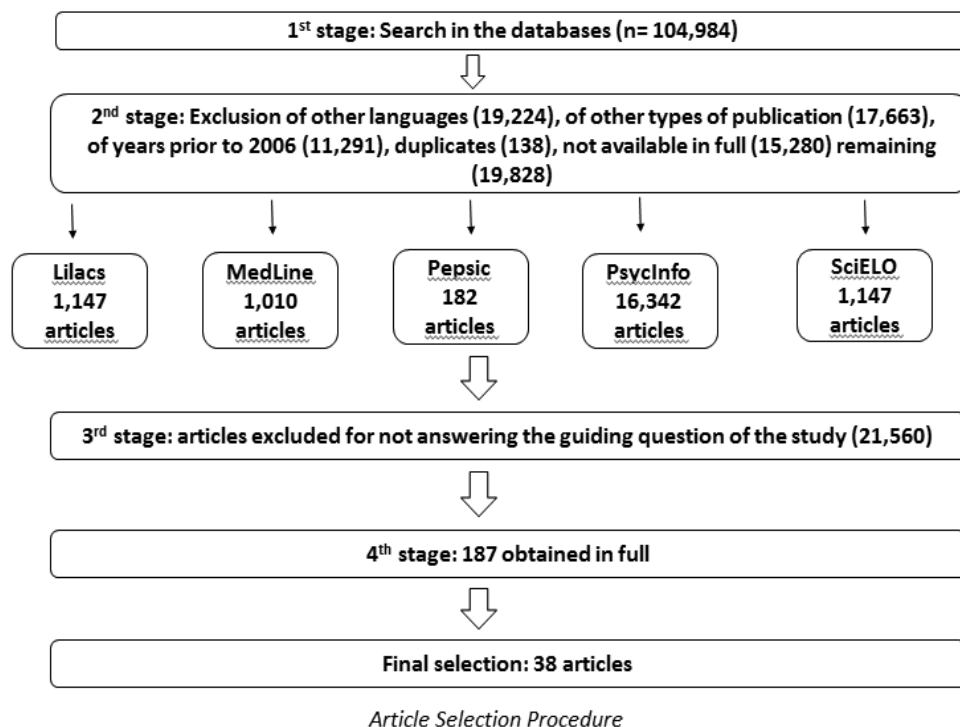
## Results

The processes of search, selection and retrieval of evidence are summarized in the flow-

chart (Figure 1). The final *corpus* consisted of 38 articles. The year of greatest production was 2014, with 21% of the publications, followed by 2015 with 18%. It should be noted that the majority of the studies (73%) were conducted after 2010, which indicates that homosexuality gained more space and strength in the scientific literature in the following six years. The majority of publications were written in the English language (42%), with most of them performed in the United States. This factor shows that, in the international literature, the revelation of sexual orientation in the family has been researched for longer, with there being more studies about the subject.

The origin of the authors included countries such as Germany, Brazil, Canada, Spain, the United States, Israel, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Portugal and Turkey, with Brazil representing 44% of the sample. The journal that most appeared among the publications was *Temas em Psicologia* (7.8%), followed by *Estudos de Psicologia* (5.2%) and *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* (5.2%). The other journals appeared only once each, representing, therefore, 2.6% of the sample each. It was noted that studies related to coming out are being performed in Brazil and published in periodicals related to Psychology. Studies on the process of disclosure of sexual orientation are still scarce compared to the number of studies related to homosexuality, which mostly cover related issues, such as HIV and other pathologies, public health, mental health, alcohol and drugs, risk behavior, body image, suicide, same-sex parenting, and queer theory, among others.

Qualitative investigations represented 73.6% of the sample, with 26.4% represented by quantitative studies. In the majority of cases, the qualitative studies used semi-structured interviews (Ceballos-Fernández, 2014; Etegeoff & Daiute, 2013; Soliva & Silva, 2014), questionnaires (Poeschl, Venâncio, & Costa, 2012) and clinical processes (Diamond & Shpigel, 2014; Frazão & Rosário, 2008). The quantitative studies, for the most part, used scales (Santos & Fernandes, 2009) and questionnaires (Cadieux & Chasteen, 2015).



**Figure 1. Flowchart of search, selection and eligibility of the studies.**

The main aims of the articles were to investigate the repercussions of homosexuality in the lives of gays and lesbians (Ceballos-Fernández, 2014; Silva, Frutuoso, Feijó, Valerio, & Chaves, 2015), to comprehend the family dynamics during the coming out process (Palma & Levandowski, 2008; Santos, Brochado, & Moscheta, 2007) and to investigate the prejudices faced by homosexuals inside and outside the family context (Santos & Fernandes, 2009; Toledo & Teixeira, 2013).

## Discussion

### *Homosexuality and Family: Outness and the Coming out Process*

It should be noted that the studies selected cover the revelation of the sexual orientation of both gays and lesbians, in the family, professional and personal contexts, allowing the investigation and identification of issues related to the coming out process – the revelation or concealment of their homosexuality, also known as the process of “coming out of the closet”. “Coming out of the closet” or not can give the homosexual a series of counterpoints, so that

the revelation of the sexual orientation can be made consistent with the environment in which the subject is inserted, as, for example, if the environment is warm and receptive, the revelation can happen, if the environment is hostile, the “closet” may, in this case, remain closed (Miskolci, 2013; Silva & Rodrigues, 2012). Thus, it can be noted that coming out does not always happen, due to issues that can be listed in this category. It was identified that these groups seek support in society in order to feel encouraged to reveal their sexual orientation, the family being seen as the source of possible encouragement for their children, which does not always occur and that can favor the individual remaining “in the closet”.

For Guardarrama and Alfonso (2012), according to the statements of the homosexual men interviewed, one of the points for the delay in “coming out of the closet” is the lack of information and discussions about homosexuality, which delayed the revelation and the process of acceptance within the families of each participant. In the study by Costa, Machado, and Wagner (2015), the homosexuals interviewed showed a strong tendency to reveal their sexual orientation

to their family and friends, confident that they would be accepted and that they could find a point of support and refuge in these people. Not being seen as possible sources of prejudice and discrimination. For these interviewees, prejudice was only observed in environments outside the family, such as at work.

One important point is that the family is worried about the prejudices that the child may suffer, which does not guarantee that the prejudice will not happen inside their own house. There are veiled prejudices, such as saying that they do not discriminate against the child, however, that it is good that this information remains only among them, reinforcing the idea of maintaining secrecy related to intimacy within the private environment, as if the affections cannot be visible in the public sphere (Miskolci, 2013).

From these studies (Costa et al., 2015; Guardarrama & Alfonso, 2012), it was noted that if there were more discussions and information about homosexuality, the possibility of breaking paradigms and prejudices could occur, so that both the homosexuals and their families could go through the acceptance process in a less painful way. It is also worth reflecting on the expectation and reality experienced by the homosexuals who opt for the process of coming out, even if selective, so that they can seek support from friends or institutions that welcome them without prejudice.

It has to be considered that, historically, the idea was created that homosexuality was an "improper" sexuality, being considered subordinate to other groups that have different ways of putting their sexualities into practice (Silva & Strey, 2007). The practice of sexual relations considered "more appropriate" and "natural" was advocated, with anything that was different from the initial idea – procreation – being considered inappropriate and perverted. Homosexuality, formerly called homosexualism – which gives the idea of pathology – was on the list of perverted acts (Lomando & Wagner, 2009). However, the American Psychology Association in 1970, together with the Federal Council of Brazilian Medicine in 1985 and the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1993, stopped considering ho-

mosexuality to be a "sexual deviation disorder" and found that homosexuality did not constitute a disease or even a perversion (Mott, 2006), but an orientation (Martins et al., 2010).

In a study only with lesbians, it was identified that they see the family as a fundamental nucleus for the revelation of the sexual orientation, since they feel strengthened to fight for their ideals, having the home as a point of support. If they suffer from any social discrimination due to their sexual orientation, the interviewees said that, with the support offered by their fathers and mothers, they could fight for their rights. The family was also seen as fundamental for the subjects to feel encouraged and supported to reveal their sexual orientation, which also provided strength for them to reveal themselves in the workplace and in other places outside his home (Palma, Piason, Bezerra, & Strey, 2010; Sabat, Trump, & King, 2014). It can be observed that with the male population the discourse is not always the same, with discrimination being more noticeable in the statements analyzed, which may also be related to gender issues (Costa et al., 2015; Simpson, Miranda, Mundo, & Azevedo 2007).

Reinforcing the idea of discrimination in the family nucleus and contradicting the study of Costa et al. (2015), Palma and Levandowski (2008) found, during interviews with lesbian women, the perception that family members reacted negatively to the coming out process. There were improvement in the posture after some time in some cases, while in others, the fathers and mothers still did not accept the daughter's homosexuality, which is somewhat similar to the reality experienced by many men interviewed in other studies (Cadieux & Chasteen, 2015; Guardarrama & Alfonso, 2012). These negative reactions have led to the investigation of alternatives to help lesbians with their families, such as psychological care for all – parents and children – in a way that helps the internal organization of the whole family.

In this way, psychological support for the family and for the homosexual is essential, so that there is better comprehension and a greater probability of acceptance, both for the revealer

and for the recipient of the information. Studies have confirmed the conflict between parents and children after disclosure of the sexual orientation, as well as emphasizing that the support from the network is of paramount importance for the whole family, so that they can understand and potentiate the acceptance of the orientation of the child or sibling (Cadieux & Chasteen, 2015; Jackson & Mohr, 2016; Arm, Horne, & Levitt, 2009). It should be noted that the acceptance is also a process. Acceptance can happen immediately, gradually, or not at all, as with the coming out, which can be expressed to nobody, a few people or to everybody in the circle of friendship, not necessarily at the same time.

In a study carried out by LaSala (2013), through the performance of a family therapeutic process with the nuclei involved in the study, it was concluded that there was a clash between family life and male and female homosexuality and that the coexistence between the parents of both sexes and the gay or lesbian children generated a number of conflicts due to not accepting the sexual orientation of the child. In this way, attention is drawn to the desire for acceptance as a process that can be a mechanism of less frustration for homosexuals who have been rejected by some of the family and the social network, since, over time, the situations can go through positive changes. Because it is a process, it is possible that after an undetermined time the situation can change, while the homosexuals can also decide to reveal their sexual orientation to more people than they may have already, highlighting the notion of the “closet” as a fluid concept that is in permanent movement (Miskolci, 2013; Sedgwick, 2007).

In the study by Silva and Rodrigues (2012), the difficulties in “coming out of the closet” were highlighted, citing that society shapes identity and, therefore, this disclosure can lead to serious personal tensions within the work and family contexts. These tensions favor the subjects not revealing their sexual orientation, possibly generating situations of disaffection not only for them, but also for the possible partnerships formed. The interviewees reported not revealing

themselves due to the expectations that the family and society have, such as marrying, having children, and the types of places they frequent, as in the study by Passamani (2015), in which the men interviewed reported having heterosexual marriages, having children and being homosexual, maintaining extramarital relations. The “creation of closets” is also seen, where individuals hide behind social and religious concepts, in order to remain “locked in” (Poeschl et al., 2012; Sedgwick, 2007; Solórzano & Mendoza, 2014).

The study by Sedgwick (2007) should be mentioned, in which the author portrayed the issues related to staying in the “closet” and the fact that this is a subject that has not yet been completely covered with regard to the scope of the knowledge, that is, there is still much to discover, experience and know about homosexuality and the issues related to sexuality. The author referred to the “closet” as something that in some cases homosexuals are forced to return to in certain circumstances of their life, such as, for example, when faced with a new job or a certain group of friends or family members. Thus, the creation of the closet arises according to the need of the homosexual to come out or to go back inside it.

For Silva and Nardi (2011), the judiciary has a fundamental role so that everyone can feel free to experience their sexuality, without discrimination based on sexual orientation. Thus, it can be observed that the revelation of sexual orientation differs from family to family, whether it is a revelation by a man or woman, with homosexuality generally still not being well received by families, denoting an image of “mistake”, of discrimination and of guilt on both sides, making the moment even more conflicting for the families. In the families where the news was welcomed, the strengthening of the bonds and a lower risk of internal and external conflicts can be seen. More studies that evaluate coming out are recommended, aiming to encourage families to know other similar stories, promoting a culture of acceptance and encouragement from the recognition of diversity.



### *The Family Faced with the Coming out Process of the Child*

Studies show that the coming out process of a child can lead to various forms of violence within the family, which can generate situations of diverse tensions, causing psychic suffering and uncertainties, which in many cases contradict what the young person would expect to receive. Sometimes the home of these young people has turned out to be the scene of major conflicts, mainly after the revelation of the sexual orientation. There were attempts by the family to bring the young people to the hegemonic sexual norm, which creates more suffering for all involved. One way parents try to resolve this issue of the revelation is through physical and psychological violence, which can cause the disclosure to be delayed or hidden, depending on the case. This difficulty encountered in the revelation attempt may or may not lead to not disclosing, with the emotional consequences possibly being highly diverse, in addition to causing the young people a number of frustrations due to failing to acknowledge their sexual orientation. Therefore, the home becomes a place of contradictions, since it is expected that it will provide support and be a refuge in the face of discrimination from society. Prejudice within the home can lead to a rupture of the bond between parents and children, permanent or definitive withdrawal, and even expulsion of the young person from the home, which is often painful for everyone (Ceballos-Fernández, 2014; Perucchi, Brandão, & Vieira, 2014; Santos & Fernandes, 2009; Soliva & Silva, 2014).

In a study about the acceptance process of mothers faced with the disclosure of the sexual orientation of their child, it can be perceived that those homosexuals who received support from the family could deal more calmly with issues related to their sexuality (Oksal, 2008). In general, there are family difficulties in accepting the sexual orientation that conflicts with what is established by the culture as “correct” - heteronormativity. In relation to mothers, it was observed that they can go through the process of invisibility of the sexual orientation of the child, in an attempt to escape the possible preoccupations in

relation to their suffering. Another process identified is that of blame, which could be diminished by these mothers seeking information on how to deal with and understand their own processes (Hauer & Guimarães, 2015). Both the concerns and the guilt can be diminished through dialogue with the children, as well as by seeking support from relatives, friends or even institutions that can help in this moment. Just as coming out is a process for the family, the revelation of homosexuality is also a process for the homosexual and, accordingly, time is often needed to be reflective and, perhaps, to be accepted.

In the study by Lomando et al. (2011), as well as in the previously mentioned studies, the importance of family and friends was observed when the sexual orientation was revealed. For the authors, the communication media helped in the process of parenting faced with the reality exposed, in that the media shows them how the outness and coming out processes and the whole process that the homosexual faces occur, trying to diminish in parents and in society a possible view they often have that gay and lesbian children are disconnected, that they do not seek to involve themselves in constituting a family, and in some cases are thought of as anti-family.

In order to illustrate the importance of the media regarding the revelation of the sexual orientation of a child, there is one study that addresses homosexuality in a particular Brazilian soap opera (Scorsolini-Comin & Santos, 2012). The soap opera can be understood as a vehicle of information for parents who experience homosexuality in the home, providing the opportunity to understand, in a scenic way, the experiences of homosexuals, their suffering and the importance of the family in accepting the coming out (Frazão & Rosário, 2008; Hank & Salzburger, 2015).

In the study of Toledo and Teixeira (2013), it was noted that sexuality is still seen within the norms of the nineteenth century, which causes great suffering for homosexuals. It was observed that in the interviews where there was no disclosure of the sexual orientation there was also no discrimination in the family. While in those cases where the disclosure occurred, moments

of intrafamily homophobia were experienced. It should be noted that the people who did not tell the family perceived that there would be repression if they did tell, with their silence continuing to be a form of apprehension. In this sense, Diamond and Shpigel (2014) suggested that if the family is aggressive, remaining “in the closet” may be the best alternative to avoid possible confrontations and negative attitudes and that they could seek support in other ways, such as from friends, support groups, LGBT NGOs and through individual therapy. It is important to mention that, while remaining in the “closet” to avoid family conflicts, seeking help, as the authors cite, is of paramount importance to the physical and mental health of the young people, so that, even if not revealing it to the family, they can experience their sexuality according to their orientation, not following the social model used. Caring for oneself is also asserting one’s rights, even if this is not revealed to the family, as seen in the Frost, Meyer, and Schwartz (2016) study, in which the support of friends and LGBT groups was of paramount importance for less stress in the quotidian and higher quality of life, regardless of the support or not of the family.

In the view of Santos, Brochado, et al. (2007), families end up reacting to the revelation in a troubled way, they may feel betrayed by their children because they think they knew them intimately, however that they “hid” something from them, in addition to thinking about the “wrong” choice that was made. They see homosexuality as a punishment, feeling guilt due to believing that their child “preferred” to be gay because of a possible mistake in their upbringing. There is a lack of acceptance by the family, which gives the homosexual a feeling of inferiority and low self-esteem, leading to prejudices in other areas, such as school and work (Guarnero, 2007). The importance of family acceptance should be noted, since this, as in the aforementioned study, assists in the self-esteem of gays and lesbians, as well as being a reference of social support and collaborating so that they have good health in general. Family support protects against possible depression and the use of substances such as alcohol and drugs, as well

as helps to avoid risk behaviors and suicidal ideation (Feinstein, Wadsworth, Davila & Goldfriel, 2014; Ryan, Russell, Huebner, Diaz, & Sanchez, 2010). However, acceptance may not happen in the family and considering this possibility, it is up to the homosexual to deal with the sexuality and the family context so that he/she is not subjugated, which is usually a difficult process that can lead to physical and emotional fatigue.

Several authors state that the families, as well as the young people, need support in order to continue in a way that goes well with the disclosure of the sexual orientation of the subject. These authors reinforce the importance of the support network that encompasses friends, relatives, psychologists and also religion. It should be noted that the families that received this type of support were able to cope better with the changes in the family environment (Etengoff & Daiute, 2013; Puckett, Woodward, Mereish, & Pantalone, 2015). In families that are more adaptable the disclosure is more relaxed, with a greater possibility of acceptance (Robinson & Brewster, 2016; Silva et al., 2015; Willoughby, Malik, & Lindahl, 2006).

From this body of literature analyzed, it can be observed that the coming out process varies from family to family and, often, one cannot predict what will be the reaction of the family nucleus when faced with the information. In attempting to explain the extremely varied expressions and reactions, several variables related to the contexts (micro and macrosocial), to the family history and even to more or less availability for dialogue about sexualities can be perceived. The social support network has been identified as being of paramount importance in this process to assist in the possible new dynamics of the family after the revelation.

### Final Considerations

The disclosure of the sexual orientation, in many cases, is a conflicting process for both the revealer and the recipient. It should be noted that, many of the studies analyzed highlighted the denial of the family faced with the coming out, caus-

ing diverse difficulties for the homosexual. In general, mothers accept their children more easily when faced with the revelation, while fathers mostly deny it, especially when it is a son that is homosexual. Another relevant factor is how each family manages to organize themselves to seek support and also to support their child, with even religion contributing to the acceptance.

Regardless of the country where the research was carried out, the presence of denial and conflicts was observed, and, consequently, the difficulties encountered by the homosexual who, in addition to suffering from prejudice in society, also experienced unwelcoming situations within the family. On the other hand, there were cases in which the family welcomed their child, so that they were made to feel that they belonged to the family. In other cases, the subject had to seek help through other support networks, and in many cases, depression and psychoactive drug use were part of this road map, including suicidal ideation.

The present study was able to answer its guiding question, which was "What are the repercussions in the family of revealing the sexual orientation?". It can be observed that the repercussions are usually not encouraging at first, however, in some cases, they gain space with the passage of time. There is an initial shock, which causes fathers and mothers to deny the reality, giving the homosexual a period of intense internal struggle and generating feelings of denial, guilt, fear, revolt and shame. After a while, and in families that are open to the reality, these feelings are abandoned and replaced by new ones of belonging and acceptance within the family.

It should be noted that the majority of the studies analyzed the coming out process through the discourse of the young person who revealed their sexual orientation to the family, so that few of the studies reviewed gave space for listening to fathers, mothers and siblings, in order to investigate their point of view faced with the process. Another relevant factor is the social support network, which was not mentioned in many of the studies, with it being interesting to investigate whether or not the presence of people from

the community or new characters in the life of the participant are direct or indirectly active in the process of coming out.

It is suggested that new empirical studies on the theme be conducted aiming to give voice to these family members and to the homosexuals, which could also contribute to the creation of networks of support and encouragement for those involved, as well as to understand how these "closets" are created, recreated, displaced and socially and culturally transformed in the process of development. To grasp this movement of the concepts and the notion of process (not always continuous) seems to be a pressing need in the empirical studies analyzed, in a proposal more fluid and open to constant reflections. Attention policies for this population could focus on the coming out processes, promoting clinical listening that provides greater acceptance and, consequently, a greater sense of belonging, integration and quality of life.

### *Authors' Contributions*

Substantial contribution in the concept and design of the study: Geysa Cristina Marcelino Nascimento and Fabio Scorsolini-Comin.

Contribution to data collection: Geysa Cristina Marcelino Nascimento.

Contribution to data analysis and interpretation: Geysa Cristina Marcelino Nascimento and Fabio Scorsolini-Comin.

Contribution to manuscript preparation: Geysa Cristina Marcelino Nascimento and Fabio Scorsolini-Comin.

Contribution to critical revision, adding intellectual content: Geysa Cristina Marcelino Nascimento and Fabio Scorsolini-Comin.

### *Conflicts of interest*

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest related to the publication of this manuscript.

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