

## HOMOSEXUALITY, FAMILY AND RELIGION: A PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS OF *PRAYERS FOR BOBBY*

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**ABSTRACT.** The relationship among homosexuality, religion and family is discussed, based on Socio-historical Psychology. For this purpose, the movie *Prayers for Bobby* is used as a cultural document, historically dated, which allows highlighting the forms of psychosocial experiences. Three categories of analysis of the 16 selected emblematic scenes were constructed: meanings of religion, homosexuality and family; the meaning of homosexuality and suicide; and intergenerational impacts of the homosexuality sign. The results indicate that the relationship among assumed homosexuality, religious dogma and the traditional family can trigger suicidal acts with volitional and conscious motivation; the sign, senses, meaning, mediation and internalization approaches have contributed to understanding the impact that socially constructed concepts of homosexuality have on the experience of young homosexuals sexuality and their affective relationships in the social and family spheres. Finally, it is considered that cinematographic production encourages discussions of complex issues and phenomena with persistent origins and historical representations, which mobilize new ways of thinking and constructing society. Homosexual meaning is set out pejoratively, with the strength of historical materiality and hegemonic maintenance of ideas, through conservative groups, who find an affectionate and subjective, fertile reproduction place in the family. In contrast, identity collectives, the LGBTQIA+ community, seek spaces for political debate and advances and ruptures of historically constructed notions in the process of signifying sexuality. The individuals' stories exchanging visions and words are inserted with new components constantly reformulated with meaning.

**Keywords:** Homosexuality; family; religion.

## HOMOSSEXUALIDADE, FAMÍLIA E RELIGIÃO: UMA ANÁLISE PSICOSSOCIAL DE *ORAÇÕES PARA BOBBY*

**RESUMO.** Discute-se a relação entre homossexualidade, religião e família, a partir da Psicologia Sócio-histórica. Busca-se investigar, por meio de uma análise fílmica, os sentidos e significados apresentados pela família, em relação à homossexualidade. Para tanto, utiliza-se a produção filmográfica *Orações para Bobby*, como um documento cultural, datado historicamente, que permite evidenciar as formas de vivências psicossociais. Nesta

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proposição, metodologicamente são adotados procedimentos de identificação, recorte, descrição e interpretação de cenas emblemáticas. Desse modo, realizaram-se a identificação, o recorte e a localização temporal, a descrição detalhada de textos das cenas com seus aspectos visuais e auditivos e construíram-se três categorias de análise das 16 cenas emblemáticas selecionadas: significados de religião, homossexualidade e família; significado de homossexualidade e suicídio; e impactos intergeracionais do signo da homossexualidade. Os resultados indicam que a relação entre a homossexualidade assumida, dogmas religiosos e família tradicional podem desencadear atos suicidas com motivação volitiva e consciente; as acepções de signo, sentidos, significado, mediação e internalização contribuíram para compreender o impacto que os conceitos da homossexualidade, socialmente construídos, incidem na vivência da sexualidade de jovens homossexuais e seus relacionamentos afetivos no âmbito social e familiar. O significado da homossexualidade apresenta-se de forma pejorativa, com força de materialidade histórica e de manutenção hegemônica de ideias, por meio de grupos conservadores, que encontram na família um lugar afetivo e subjetivo, de reprodução fértil, ao passo que coletivos identitários, como a comunidade LGBTQIA+, e buscam espaços para o debate político e avanços e rupturas dessas noções, historicamente construídas, no processo de significação da sexualidade.

**Palavras-chave:** Homossexualidade; família; religião.

## HOMOSEXUALIDAD, FAMILIA Y RELIGIÓN: UN ANÁLISIS PSICOSOCIAL DE ORACIONES POR BOBBY

**RESUMEN.** Se discute la relación entre la homosexualidad, religión y familia, establecido en la psicología sociohistórica. Busca indagar, a través de un análisis fílmico, los sentidos y significados presentados por la familia, en relación a la homosexualidad. Para esto, se usa la producción cinematográfica, *Oraciones por Bobby* como documento histórico y cultural que permite resaltar las formas de las experiencias psicosociales. En esta proposición se adoptan metodologicamente procedimientos de identificación, recorte, descripción e interpretación de escenas emblemáticas. De este modo, se construyeron tres categorías de análisis de las 16 escenas emblemáticas seleccionadas: significados de religión, homosexualidad y familia; significado de homosexualidad y suicidio y los impactos intergeneracionales de los signos de la homosexualidad. Los resultados indican que la relación entre la homosexualidad asumida, los dogmas religiosos y la familia tradicional puede desencadenar actos suicidas con motivación volitiva y consciente; los significados del signo, los sentidos, el significado, la mediación y la internalización contribuyeron a la comprensión del impacto que los conceptos de homosexualidad, construidos socialmente, tienen en la experiencia de la sexualidad de los jóvenes homosexuales y sus relaciones afectivas en la esfera social y familiar. Finalmente, se considera que la producción cinematográfica anima las discusiones sobre temas y fenómenos complejos, con raíces históricas y representaciones persistentes, en el cual moviliza nuevas formas de pensar y construir lo social; el significado de la homosexualidad se presenta de manera peyorativa, con la fuerza de la materialidad histórica y el mantenimiento hegemónico de las ideas, a través de grupos conservadores, que encuentran en la familia un lugar, cariñoso y subjetivo, de reproducción fértil, mientras que los colectivos de identidad, la comunidad LGBTQIA+ busca espacios para el debate político y los avances y rupturas de estas nociones,

historicamente construídas, en el processo de significar la sexualidad. Se insertan nuevos componentes, a través de las historias de personas que intercambian visiones y palabras impregnadas de sentido, que se reformulan constantemente.

**Palabras clave:** Homosexualidad; família; religión.

## Introduction

We are facing two socio-historic clashes: 1) the relationship between homosexuality and religion that can highlight heteronormative and ideas<sup>6</sup> conceptions, which are supported by christian values that are sometimes resistant to sexual minorities. Religious discourses on homosexuality point to it as pathological and curable. That is, they resort to: “1) it is a learned behavior; 2) from a spiritual problem; 3) is an anti-nature” (Natividade, 2006, p. 118).

Since 2006, this concept - a disease of the body and the spirit - has incorporated the proposition of curing homosexuality by professional or spiritual means, as evidenced by recent studies on the permanence and establishment of antagonistic structures to the plural experience of sexuality. Recent studies align with this (Gonçalves, 2019; Machado, 2017; Natividade, 2017; Reis & Santos, 2011; Ribeiro & Scorsolini-Comin, 2017).

Still, there are ideas of homosexuality rejection related to the possibility of sexual reorientation, in which young pentecostal evangelicals, under the laws imposed by religious authorities, saw homosexuality as a ‘sin’ since God ‘does not approve’ homosexual relationships, as opposed to defending the possibility, solely, of affective and sexual relations between men and women. Young people asserted that the church provided help for homosexual people to be ‘freed’ from homosexuality (Silva, Santos, Licciardi, & Paiva, 2008).

Speeches by pastors, evangelicals and catholic parliamentarians, based on science, mistakenly emphasize that homosexuality is not innate. It has an external cause that favors its origin. Thus, socially apprehended, it can be deconstructed through christian therapies, which help the individual develop sexuality consistent with religious precepts (Machado, 2017).

Discussions that cross the political, religious and health spheres around the ‘gay cure’ defended as a way out of homosexuality through specific treatments. Supported by religious, parliamentarians and professionals who call themselves ‘christian professionals’, advocate the treatment of sexuality by psychologists or through religion (Gonçalves, 2019). However, they go against professional ethical premises, especially Resolution nº 001 (1999, p. 2) of the Conselho Federal De Psicologia (Federal Council of Psychology), which establishes rules and actions for psychologists concerning the issue of Sexual Orientation; that is, professionals “[...] will not collaborate with events and services that propose treatment and healing of homosexualities”.

These discourses are supposedly based on theories from psychological knowledge and the social sciences, which are linked to religious principles: the belief that heterosexuality would be a natural condition since God created men and women with the principle of complementarity; deviation from nature due to social relationships and sexual abuse in childhood (Machado, 2017).

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<sup>6</sup> These ideas are based on the conception of a union of relationships, actions and situations performed between subjects of opposite sexes, which excludes all sexuality, sex and gender identity that do not fit these norms (Silva, 2019).

A second clash takes place in the family context. Studies reveal an increase in the number of families that support the sexual orientation of their children, and the media often collaborates for this change, as it has contributed to the acceptance of sexual diversity (Reis & Santos, 2011). Accordingly, research with 11 young homoaffectives who practice some christian religion (catholic, evangelical and spiritist) stated, for the most part, that their families, even inserted in a certain religion, gradually accept their sexual orientation. Thus, young people “[...] caused a change in the perception that parents had about homosexuality” (Ribeiro & Scorsolini-Comin, 2017, p. 8). However, the family institution is often averse to and repulsed by homosexuality, as it maintains a rigid and heteronormative position with its children, which supports a mindset anchored in a traditional society thought (Reis & Santos, 2011; Taquette & Rodrigues, 2015).

Considering the clashes and impasses highlighted above involving homosexuality, religion and the family, and the implications these may cause for family dynamics and the emotional development of its members, this article seeks to investigate, through a movie analysis of the international full-length movie *Prayers for Bobby*, released in 2009, the meanings and significance presented by the family about homosexuality.

The aim is to discuss the following questions: What are the meanings and senses portrayed in the movie about homosexuality? How do these concepts make sense in the family dynamic and, specifically, the mother-child relationship? Which meanings show a permanent strength in the process of signification in culture? How does the movies enable the reframing of crystallized ideas and affections?

## Theory and Socio-historical Context

Understanding the historical and social dimensions of a problem is to rescue the debates and disputes over meanings that ideas occupy in life in society. Vygotsky (1991) is an advocate of how these dimensions are directly and indirectly related to the process of forming subjectivities. Therefore, it is necessary to review the historical period portrayed in the film analyzed here and its repercussions today.

The North American historical context of the movie stands out, based on the real story of Bobby, a homosexual teenager who perceives and experiences his sexuality in the USA's late 70s and early 80s amid a traditional and christian family. That historical period is important for the LGBTQIA+ community, especially the year 1969 with the well-known Stonewall Revolution in New York (USA), where gays, lesbians, transvestites and transsexuals, among other minorities, revolted against oppression and police raids who arrested and attacked them. Such a revolution is recognized as a reference for freedom and the democratization of citizenship for these populations (Santos, 2008). The 1970s allowed for political disputes due to the strong transformations experienced by the country after the Cold War and liberal movements that occurred in the 1960s, like the movement mentioned above. The conservative christian right movement that contradicts the ideals of sexual freedom, abortion, feminism and other minorities would mobilize and gain support from neoconservatives and christian fundamentalists in the search and conquest of political power to undertake their social, cultural and economic programs as an attempt to reduce the advances achieved in the 60s (Rezende, 2018).

Concomitantly and contradictorily, this period gave rise to signs of resistance, especially evidenced by the creation of the term homophobia in 1972, the removal of homosexuality from psychiatry diagnostic manuals in 1973 and the decriminalization of homosexuality by the European community in 1982 (Poeschl, Venancio, & Costa, 2012).

The appearance of AIDS (Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome) in the 70s and 80s reinforced the concept of homosexuality as a sin. All the scientific lack of knowledge about this new disease was publicized and disseminated through the world media with terms such as 'gay cancer', 'lepers of the 80s', and 'punishment from God' (Brito & Rosa, 2018).

These occurrences nurture ideas with permanent power and resistance to change, as is unfortunately observed in contemporary times. The persistence of conservative and traditional aspects are barriers to guaranteeing the LGBTQIA+ community's rights. It is asserted that even today, different religions with a christian base demonstrate strength in the political and social environment, not only in the country where the full-length movie is set but also in Brazil, especially with the growth of the evangelical party in Congress. These ideational configurations gain power in public decisions and strengthen expressions and opinions with traditionalist and prejudiced bases (Machado, 2017). Alongside, there has been the growth of right-wing governments in power at all levels of the Federation, which are guided by more conservative social policies that reinforce moralism in the political sphere and, consequently, in society.

There is a strong traditionalist presence in different social institutions. Also, in 2020, the WHO (World Health Organization) banned blood donation by men who had sexual relations with other men in the last 12 months before the donation, which excludes the possibility of blood donation by homosexuals. This decision is based on health parameters, which are justified on the premise that there is an occurrence of HIV among the homosexual group. However, this statement seems to be associated with the history of homosexuals with the virus. On the other hand, the Brazilian Supreme Court, due to the new coronavirus pandemic, which has had repercussions on the low stock in blood banks, claims that such a prohibition is based on discriminatory ideas regarding sexual orientation, which prevents homosexuals from undertaking the solidarity gesture of blood donation, even if they have taken all due care with the use of condoms in sexual practice. As a result, on May 8, 2020, the Supreme Court, in a historic decision, put an end to the restriction above, with 7 out of 11 justices voting to end the ban. However, this decision was not well accepted and bodies such as Anvisa and the Ministry of Health still instruct blood donation laboratories not to comply with the STF's decision until the case is fully finalized (Frades, 2020; Ker, 2020).

Based on the above, it can be seen how the shared and historically delineated meanings configure homosexuality pejoratively. In this way, religious meanings are added and shared socially and culturally, with the same negative emphasis, which, in turn, will be directly related to the subjectivities constitution through the internalization of signs produced socio-historically.

Thus, religion is considered a cultural production that implies subjectivation effects through the signs linked to it, which modify the worldview and behavior of those who appropriate it (Vygotsky, 1991).

## Method

Therefore, from Vygotskian conceptual premises of senses and meanings, the categories of homosexuality, family and religion will be discussed. They are based on the defense of the subject in historical and social dimensions. This interpretation is added to other reflections in Brazilian context that approach the "Prayers for Bobby" movie as a key document for the academic debate on homosexuality: from the perspective of the British School of Cultural Studies (Rezende, 2018), the Gestalt -therapy (Conde, 2016), Discourse Analysis (Silva, 2015), studies based on Foucault and Butler (Santos, 2015), bibliographical

research (Silva, 2019), character analysis and consequences of coercion on homosexuality based on Skinner's Behavior Analysis (Barreto & Ribeiro, 2014).

An attempt will be made to establish a critique articulated with the current social panorama, which reaffirms psychology's commitment to combating discrimination and guaranteeing the rights of social minorities.

The empirical context proposes conducting a socio-historical analysis of the North American "Prayers for Bobby" movie, a biographical drama released on January 24, 2009, by Lifetime Productions, with the direction of Russel Mulcahy, in English. It addresses the family, religious and sexual life of Bobby Griffith between 1978 and 1981 in the state of Michigan (USA), where homosexuality was discriminated against by the christian religion in which his family congregates.<sup>7</sup>

In the full-length movie, Mary Griffith, Bobby's mother, is a religious woman who fully follows the biblical interpretations of her community. After discovering that her son, Bobby, is homosexual, she desperately seeks her son's "cure" through therapies and religious services.

The revelation about Bobby's sexuality deeply impacts the family relationship that its members lived, which generates consecutive experiences of forms of intolerance by cults that label him as a sinner, family members who perceive him as a shameful factor and even a psychiatrist who treats him like a person with a mental health condition. The situation becomes unbearable for Bobby, who gives up school (high school) and lives with his family. Even more distant, Bobby still suffers from the guilt he experiences with his homosexuality, allowing his trajectory to be written in a diary until he commits suicide (Lopes, 2018). This fact led his mother to experience deep anguish due to her inability to solve alone the existing divergence among her biblical reading on homosexuality, sin and suicide and Mary's vision of Bobby as a kind boy who never did any harm to others. This conflict is resolved by reading the deceased son's diary and approaching an inclusive church, changing her perspective of homosexuality and God's love (Lopes, 2018).

The socio-historical analysis undertaken here considers the movie as a document that portrays an era, presents its characters, and contextualizes situations and dramas. Thus, it constitutes a methodology for identifying factual information to answer questions or hypotheses of research interest (Sá-Silva et al., 2009). Since the chosen document is the full-length movie mentioned above, the strategies adopt procedures for identifying, clipping, describing and interpreting emblematic scenes (Xxxxxx et al., 2019) that address the relationship among homosexuality, family and religion.

Therefore, the identification, clipping and temporal location, detailed texts of the scenes description with their visual and auditory aspects were carried out. The scenes described below are categorized and interpenetrate each other. Behold what was presented to reflection.

## Results

### Religion, family and homosexuality meanings:

- 1) Religious music in the background while scenes of paintings with images of Jesus Christ pass (00:00:01);
- 2) Female protagonist, whose name is Mary, working with

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<sup>7</sup>Synopsis: "True story of Mary Griffith, gay rights crusader, whose teenage son committed suicide due to her religious intolerance. Based on the book of the same title by Leroy Aarons". IMDb. Prayers for Bobby. *IMDb*. United States. Retrieved January 16, 2020, from <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1073510/>.

a sewing machine (00:00:23); 3) Bobby, Mary's son and also the protagonist, walking on a bridge (00:00:39); 4) Frames with images of Mary and Bobby together (00:00:54); 5) Bobby's father filming a family moment where everyone seems happy and united (00:01:40); 6) Bobby and Mary's family are together celebrating Bobby's grandmother's birthday and reciting Bible verses. Ed, Bobby's brother, walks around the room with a female handbag hanging from his shoulder, mimicking female behavior. Mary orders him to stop. Ed asks, "Why? What's the matter, Mom?". Mary replies, "It's disgusting", Bobby's grandmother agrees and says, "If you ask me, queers should all be lined up and killed" (00:02:52).

As we have seen in the description above, the music, the religious images and the family reunion portray the harmony and happiness experienced in the relationship between mother and son under the protection of traditional religious principles. In this direction, we also highlight the painting with the smiling image of Mary and Bobby.

Religion's emphasis on the movie images is highlighted in the recitation of biblical verses and indicates a family context guided by religious bases and meanings. In this imagery context, we are presented with the family's shared view and pejorative meanings of homosexuality. This is how they appear: when the grandmother and the mother, Mary, scold their eldest son after a joke in which he reproduces stereotypes about homosexuals. Both refer to his behavior with expressions such as "it's disgusting" and "... queers should all be lined up and killed".

Such expressions demonstrate the hostile image that the family has of homosexuality and reveal their support of religious dogmas that permeate shared meanings regarding homosexuality. Thus, religion is used as a mediating instrument for constructing meanings about the sexuality in question by Bobby's family.

In this context, Vygotsky (1991) states that instruments and signs mediate man's interaction with the world and interpersonal relationships. The signs act on human behavior as a psychological guide, acting on this level, both individually and collectively. In this sense, we consider that the meanings of religious principles gain meaning in the signification process and constitute themselves as a mediating sign and support of family actions on homosexuality (Vygotsky, 1991).

We can assert that it is through the family that the world-meaning process begins (Sarti, 2004). The family acts in society as an institution responsible for the symbolic ordering of its members. It presents, constructs and reproduces the rules and notions of the society in which it is inserted. In this regard, the understanding of family dynamics is subsumed in a certain social environment with its determinations.

### **Homosexuality and suicide meanings: maintenance and ruptures**

Another group of symbolic scenes, which reiterates our analysis, is described below:

7) Upon arriving home, Ed, Bobby's older brother, finds him lying in bed after trying to commit suicide by ingesting pills and, scared, questions his brother why he tried to do that. Bobby responds that he couldn't take the pills and claims, "I didn't wanna go to Hell, but... I am." Ed imperatively asks his brother to explain himself better. Bobby claims everyone in the family will hate to know, but reveals, "I don't dream about girls like you do. I dream about boys". They argue about revealing Bobby's sexuality to his parents but ultimately decide not to. Ed promises he is not going to say anything. (00:10:48);

8) "I didn't want to tell you, but he was in such bad shape. I'm really worried about him. He thinks he might be homosexual.", Ed reveals to Mary, contrary to his promise to his

brother, the argument he had with Bobby. Mary soon contradicts, stating that Bobby cannot be gay and thanks her son for telling her what happened, "There is no doubt in my mind that God can handle this. He'll help us. He'll heal Bobby. In order for all of us to be together in the Kingdom of Heaven. We cannot stray. We cannot sin like that. That is a terrible sin. The Bible calls it an abomination. In Leviticus, if a man lies with another man, they should both be put to death." Soon after, Bobby arrives home and realizes his brother has broken his trust. His mother offers help and tells him he is not gay and could heal with God's help. (00:12:53).

9) Bobby wakes up on the sofa in the living room, the day after his older brother tells his parents about his sexuality, to the sound of a radio transmitting a Christian religious program (00:15:20);

10) Mary is listening to the radio while writing notes with biblical passages (00:15:27);

11) Upon realizing that Bobby has awakened, Mary enters the living room, spreading the notes over the furniture, advising him "to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then, you won't be doing what your sinful nature craves. When the Holy Spirit controls your life, It will produce love, joy, kindness, goodness and self-control." Bobby questions if everyone in the family needs to know, and Mary replies that the family loves him. Bobby leaves the room (00:15:35).

The scenes described above allow us to understand that when he begins to understand his sexuality, which precedes his first suicide attempt, the feeling of guilt floods Bobby's existence, and, to avoid being hated by his whole family, he tries to take his own life. However, he resorts to religion, the guiding presence of his actions, feelings and thoughts, when Bobby tells his brother that he couldn't kill himself because he didn't want to go to hell (according to his religion, taking a life is a condemnable sin). Even though Bobby could not commit suicide, his anguish can be seen when he says he already feels like he is in hell because he believes he is a sinner and everyone in his family hates him.

It is noticed that the discovery of Bobby's sexuality becomes a destabilizing fact, with an affective-volitional basis, which drives new dynamics in the family. These events alter senses and meanings that, until then, were consistent with their fossilization and hegemonic presence in culture: they range from indifference to new attitudes among family members. For example, upon learning of her son's sexual orientation, Mary resorts to the traditional and fossilized principles that constitute her and finds a way out in the possibility of a cure for what, in her conception, would be a disease. With this, we strongly reiterate the influence of religion in the family environment. To impress and strengthen this idea, Mary reproduces notes with biblical messages and spreads them around the house, reiterating Bobby's desire to "convert" himself to his sexuality. This conversion depends on the Holy Spirit's action in his life by expanding religious experience in the young man's routine. The predominant form of maintenance prevails in opposition to the possibility of rupture and transformation.

Bobby's images show discomfort and sadness generated by the attitude of his brother and mother due to the disrespect for his desire to keep his sexuality secret. The exhibition breaks with the idea of a possible shared secret and the acquisition of an alliance. However, the mother's actions of spreading notes and making everyone in the family aware of Bobby's sexuality are understood by her as demonstrations of love and unity due to everyone's love despite his "sinful nature".

Given this, it is clear that homosexuality in its material condition, that is, which was historically materialized, has socially shared meanings and has maintenance strength based on historical and social structures. In the process of meaning, it also has the dimension of the senses, which attribute experiences in different historical and social contexts. The movie



portrays an appropriation mediated by religious conceptions, which, for the mother, had the meaning of something sinful since what is considered legitimate for her religion are heterosexual relationships.

Interpersonal relationships occur mediated by signs (Vygotsky, 1991), as the relationship between Mary and Bobby was mediated and supported by religious signs, Mary could not accept him as gay because the shared meanings, in their cultural context, determined the senses experienced, which prevented her, in a way, from conceiving the child's sexuality as legitimate, which implied a significant change in the relationship between them.

### **Intergenerational impacts of the appropriation of the homosexuality sign**

Another group of scenes that expand the analytical perspective beyond the family relationship can be seen below:

12) Bobby's doorbell rings. Mary opens the door and finds Bobby's friends dressed in women's clothing (dresses, wigs and dark makeup). Friends ask if Bobby is home (00:32:54);

13) His mother goes to his room asking, "Bobby, you know it's enough you to go God knows where at night, but now you're bringing these deviants into my house?". Sitting on the couch at home, embarrassed friends listen to the entire discussion. Bobby replies to his mother, "It's my house too, and they're my friends." She questions if that's really what the boy is. They continue to discuss how Bobby's friendships influence his behavior and how all Mary's criticism of her son makes him unhappy. Mary replies and claims her criticisms are based on the Bible.

Bobby does not accept such an argument and claims that even if he tries, his sexuality cannot be changed. He disagrees with what he chose, homosexuality, but adds that his family chose to condemn him for it. (00:33:00).

Above, it is clear that months have passed since the discovery of Bobby's sexuality before the family. Mary's beliefs and convictions remain unchanged, but Bobby seems to increasingly disbelieve in the possibility of curing his homosexuality. For that matter, there is a process of rupture of homosexuality vision taken as a sin by religious mediation. For Bobby, if his sexual orientation is a sin, then it will be a "capital" sin of immediate condemnation to hell because once others (family, society) are aware of his sexuality, earthly life already becomes unbearable.

In the same direction, after an attempt to live other experiences, the scenes portray Bobby's return to the family, as we will see below:

14) Bobby's family gathered in the living room, having dinner, talking and smiling. Bobby comments that he wants to move to Portland and that he met a guy. The family members express embarrassment. Simultaneously, Mary gets up and asks the girls to help clear the dishes, ignoring what Bobby said. Bobby's younger sister asks, "We're supposed to pretend we didn't hear that?" another sister replies, "Yes," with an expression of discontent (00:39:07); 15) Bobby gets up and goes to the kitchen where Mary is, who ignores the subject, even when Bobby talks about his relationship, happiness and shame for being in this situation. Mary claims that the shame comes from him, who knows it is wrong and that the bible says so. But Bobby says it's Mary who believes that and that if she doesn't accept who he is, she better forget about him. Thus, Mary says, "I won't have a gay son!" and Bobby responds, "Then Mom, you don't have a son," and they say goodbye. (00:39:49).

16) Bobby writes in his diary, "Sometimes I hurt so bad... And I'm scared, and I'm alone... I'm dammed. I wish I could crawl under a rock and sleep forever", expressing loneliness at being away from family in Portland and still feeling guilty about dating a man. The scenes show flashes of Bobby lost in a forest and trapped in barbed wire with his eyes closed. It continues with Bobby trying to call his boyfriend and going to look for him, finding him flirting with another man in a nightclub. Bobby is overcome with despair and heads for a bridge, committing suicide. Flashbacks of Mary praying and saying she would not have a gay son represent Bobby's memories. (00:45:53)

Bobby had spent a few weeks in Portland, the most populous city in Oregon (USA). During that time, Bobby could meet other homosexual people and have an affective relationship with a man, allowing him to live his first experiences with his sexuality.

Upon returning home, Bobby no longer saw the family environment, specifically his mother, as capable of dealing with his sexuality and the positive way he experienced it. Mary did not wish to hear her son talk about it, nor was she willing to discuss with Bobby again how her beliefs were at odds with the young man's sexuality.

When confronting his mother, Bobby reveals how psychologically it is difficult to dissociate his sexuality with guilt, sin and disgust since his family links these meanings to homosexuality, taught and repeated throughout childhood and adolescence. Affectively, Bobby is overcome by this shame, but rationally, he sees that he is not doing anything wrong or that makes him unworthy. Mary does not agree and hits back, reiterating the abnormality of Bobby's sexuality.

The conflict, a possible break with fossilized aspects in the culture, intensifies and ends with Bobby giving up his family connection due to his sexuality and Mary giving up her relationship with her son for contradicting her religious doctrine. We see in Bobby's attitude how sexuality is an extremely important factor for the subject's individuality, defined as "part of himself", while religion for Mary makes sense as a basis for taking attitudes and defending moral convictions. In this direction, we can resort to the Vygotskian meaning of being the peculiar drama of human activity, with intense conflicting reflection to decide the steps of our stories. (Dellari Jr, 2011). Thus, the scenes of inaction around him help to conduct the suicidal action.

## **Discussion**

The meanings linked to religious dogmas guide and sustain intergenerational relationships. They share and acquire pejorative meanings, experienced specifically on homosexuality. Affections, in their affective-volitional basis, are nourished by hostility and rejection. In other words, the use of instruments and signs, dogmatic in question, are configured interactionally between people and the world around them. The signs, in turn, shed light on indefinities and insecurities and emerge as a relief to these, forming individual and collective conduct.

In this sense, in the meaning process proposed here, following the Vygotskian perspective, the religious principles shared and defended in the social environment in American society are configured as a mediating sign and support for historically reinforced family meanings, thoughts and actions about homosexuality.

These principles are presented, ordered, constructed and reproduced from birth through institutions. The family is the first to play this role, subject to the other structural societies' determinations (Sarti, 2004). The effectiveness of this process imprints submission, as it operates wrapped in first and primary affections under unequal conditions,

which prevents the possibility of refusals: love, guilt, betrayal, and hatred are signs that are bodily and objectively marked.

The discoveries of the possibility of other ways to go in dramas and stories occur in later moments and new experiences with other people outside the family institution. Thus, the body, and sexuality in particular, drives new destabilizing psychological dramas with an affective-volitional basis, which trigger dynamic rearrangements in the family. Ideas and signs that have fossilized elements in societies' social and cultural structure are tested, and intergenerational relationships conflict and sometimes manage to break down and overcome (Vygotsky, 1991). Homosexuality, unfortunately, still operates today with the maintenance of dogmas, as opposed to the rupture and transformation defended by science. As mentioned, dogmas maintenance is initially effective in the family.

Thus, not only because of social organization but mainly by affections and bonds present in the environment, the family is the main means of mediation between the individual and society. This institution is socially constructed and loaded with the values and subjectivities of its members. The family is immersed in society and the social ties that produce and reproduce relationships and ways of being, including sexuality, from the historical perspective of its time (Meira & Santana, 2014; Tamarozzi, 2020).

Along this line, the worldviews of families about sexualities are still supported by the hegemony of fossilized ideas of heteronormativity. What is not foreseen in this set of ideas must be rejected, discriminated against and prevented, even by violent acts (Perucchi et al., 2014). This ideology is sustained through taboos, beliefs and dogmas, as punctuated by homosexual men in their narratives about their families, which are based on prejudiced and stereotyped meanings, always reaffirmed, largely by religious beliefs, health and illness concepts and gender roles, which makes them afraid to express their sexuality in the family and social context (Lima Silva et al., 2015). Religion and its dogmas greatly contribute to family regulation and have been presented as one of the main pillars of support for concepts reinforcing prejudice and discrimination against those who do not fit the hegemonic norm. (Nativity, 2019).

To bodies are assigned forms of control. We know the positions defended by authors of Cultural Psychology and the socio-historical perspective, which highlight the inseparability between mind and body. The body is not merely an instrument of the mind. It is an instrument of social relations. Body construction permeates the person's development (Vygotsky, 1991; Amorim & Rosseti-Ferreira, 2008). To that end, the homosexual body is subjected to the scrutiny of these structural relationships in society, being conceived in the mediation of religious culture by meanings such as "sick" (curable), sinful, non-normative, unnatural and disgusting; therefore, the homosexual person materializes, objectifies/subjectifies amid these terms (Natividade, 2006).

From this perspective, the mediation of religious culture on homosexuality imprints pejorative and negative meanings on the body: dualities that the sin concept carries with its impurity, its tendency to death and destruction, and its hellish and lonely destiny. Thus, if homosexuality is experienced as sinful, it can create in the subject a self-deprecation and psychic vulnerability that restricts his possibility of fully living his sexuality. All that remains is the complete cover-up of his desire ("living in the closet"), religious conversion (with no clinical results to confirm the change in sexual orientation) or the impossibility of living with himself, the latter being captured in the movie as the suicide.

Here, we can observe suicide as a symptom of the general social struggle, in which alienating toxic social relations do not allow the existence of the different, which contaminates people's vital force. Still, from the socio-historical perspective, we can

understand it as a volitional and conscious act due to the infeasibility of remaining in the life designed by another. Sense of suicide presents an action involving motives, emotions, affections and thoughts. Therefore, the suicidal act, as a historical construct, is also moved by emotional motivations and, thus, derived from the affective-volitional basis of human actions (Berenchtein Netto, 2007).

## **Final considerations**

Cinematographic production opens up the possibility of representing and encouraging discussions that reflect and problematize social dynamics, which demonstrates methodological fertility for the historical-social study by addressing complex issues and phenomena with persistent historical origins and representations, where the elements represented in the plot focus on the cultural environment of which they invite the viewer to be a part, while also mobilizing new ways of thinking and constructing the social.

Hence, the movie is a cultural production that can stimulate reflections and questions in collective thinking, especially through the transmission of contents linked to social, shared meanings, often representing the way of living and seeing the world of certain human societies.

It is considered that analyzing homosexuality as an object of study, from the Vygotskian perspective, implies thinking about the historical materiality and the genesis of the meanings linked to it. Undertake further analytical-explanatory efforts of the relationships of meanings configured in the family, religious and subjective fields. Thus, socio-historical meanings of homosexuality have come under the interpretative mantle of Christian doctrines as negative and guilty of the homosexual person. These meanings have acquired hegemony in the social environment and, consequently, in the family institution, where the subjective construction of its members occurs and is reproduced.

The drama of "Bobby" enables us to see both a subjective debate about the character's affective and family condition and a social discussion about the historical period portrayed in the work, marked by a series of conflicts and protests by the LGBTQIA+ community. These aspects increased tensions in the hegemonic process of signification and meanings about homosexuality, citizenship and individual rights in a broader spectrum. Such tensions are still observed today and remain as an intense battlefield. In the religious ideas and heteronormative structures spheres, small meaning ruptures could be observed in the meaning process, thanks to these new ideas circulating in identity collectives.

The fossilized meanings appropriated by the family about homosexuality surprise the family dynamic when Bobby's sexuality is revealed. This understanding prevents accepting what is different, which causes intense emotional suffering.

Finally, it is considered that the view that conceives reality and derives meaning from it for the subjective constitution is the product of a socio-historical construction, mediated and built in the relationship context. Meanings are constituted, intertwining, through the stories of people who exchange visions and words permeated with meaning, constantly re-signified.

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