COMUN. MÍDIA CONSUMO, SÃO PAULO, V. 23, E3191, JAN./DEC. 2026
https://doi.org/10.18568/cmc.2026.e3191

ARTICLE

How to bring up gay kids and grandkids: Paranoid motherhood and reparative grandmotherhood in *Pelo Malo*

Como criar filhos e netos gays: maternidade paranoica e avosidade reparadora em *Pelo Malo*

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ABSTRACT: *This article examines the film* Pelo Malo *(Mariana Rondón, Venezuela, 2013), drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's concepts of reparative and paranoid reading and the epistemology of the closet. These concepts are read alongside Judith Butler's work on kinship, Paul B. Preciado's account of the biopolitics of childhood, and bell hooks's writing on love and care within Black communities. The film stages two relational systems around the figure of the "effeminate boy." Marta, the boy's mother, reads her son through paranoid anticipation. Carmen, his paternal grandmother, takes a reparative stance. These positions are not sealed and remain open to intersection. The article argues that grandmotherhood, as portrayed in the film, constitutes a site of kinship that is more permeable to the child who exceeds the norms of gender and sexuality. Motherhood is permeated by guilt and the ever-present threat of social judgment, as evidenced in the medical literature examined by Sedgwick.*

Keywords: Pelo Malo*; effeminate boys; reparative reading; motherhood; grandmotherhood.*

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RESUMO: Este artigo analisa o filme Pelo Malo (Mariana Rondón, Venezuela, 2013) a partir de conceitos de Eve Sedgwick, particularmente as noções de leitura reparadora, leitura paranoica e a epistemologia do armário. Tais noções são articuladas com a discussão de Judith Butler sobre parentesco, com a biopolítica da infância de Paul B. Preciado e com a reflexão de bell hooks sobre amor e cuidado nas comunidades negras. O filme encena dois sistemas relacionais distintos em torno da figura do "menino afeminado". Marta, a mãe, lê o filho predominantemente pela lógica da antecipação paranoica. Carmen, a avó paterna, habita uma posição reparadora. Essas posições não são estanques e permanecem abertas à intersecção. Propomos que a avosidade, tal como retratada neste filme, constitui um lugar de parentesco mais permeável à criança que excede as normas de gênero e sexualidade. Já a maternidade é perpassada pela culpa e pela ameaça constante do julgamento social, conforme evidenciado na literatura médica analisada por Sedgwick.

Palavras-chave: Pelo Malo; menino afeminado; leitura reparadora; maternidade; avosidade.

"Hunting season"

Oh, deer,
how much tact
do I need
to get close to you?
(Gilberto Gil, *O Veado*/The Deer)

While analyzing the convergence of multiple sectors of American society around homophobic discourses in the essay *Tendencies*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1993) observes that the "hunting season" on effeminate children is always open. Her point of departure is a precise historical paradox. In 1973, American psychiatry removed homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. In 1980, it introduced Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood, a diagnosis that fell with particular virulence on effeminate boys. As Sedgwick (1993) stresses, the depathologization of the adult male homosexual was accompanied by the pathologization of the child whose gender expressions were deemed inadequate to his biological sex: "'extremely and chronically effeminate boys' — this is the abjection that haunts revisionist psychoanalysis" (SEDGWICK, 1993, p. 156).

In addition to giving a name to this alliance between psychiatrists, parents, schools, and diagnostic manuals around the control and surveillance of the child's body, whose conduct signaled a deviation still in development, *Temporada de Caça*[1] (Hunting Season) is also a Brazilian documentary by Rita Moreira (1988), produced in the same context and period as Sedgwick's (1993) analyses. In the cinema *verité* style, the filmmaker interviews a series of people about the wave of murders of

1 The documentary Temporada de Caça (Rita Moreira, 1988) departs from the murder of theater director Luís Antônio Martinez Correa, in the context of the moral panic associated with the HIV/AIDS pandemic, to discuss the presence of homo/lesbo/transphobia in Brazilian society. The epigraph that opens this article is drawn from the Gilberto Gil song that opens the film.

travestis and gay men in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. In the short film, a dialogue appears: "Have you heard on the news about the murder of homosexuals?" "Yes, I have." "And what do you think about that?" "I think they should be killed even more."

Hunting season, extermination, and murder were tools to "correct the deviation" and sanction gender and sexual dissidence. Sedgwick (1993) analyzed this organization around anticipation and interception, whose target is the future, the gay adult that the effeminate child might become. In discussing the studies of Richard Friedman and Richard Green in the years following the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Third Edition (DSM-III), Sedgwick (1993) identified how they constructed the image of a "healthy homosexual," who was, by definition, adult, masculine, and non-effeminate, taken as the standard against which the effeminate boy was measured as a pathology in formation.

The attention to effeminate children had immediate consequences for the role of the mother. The mother who was affectionate toward her effeminate son could be cast as the cause of the problem, classified as overprotective and excessively present. Sedgwick (1993) stresses that no position within the institutional field offered the caregiver the possibility of simply letting the child be. And regarding mothers, the author continues: "any involvement in it by a woman is over involvement, any protectiveness is over protectiveness, and, for instance, mothers 'proud of their sons' non-violent qualities' are manifesting unmistakable 'family pathology'" (SEDGWICK, 1993, p. 160).

The film *Pelo Malo* (*Bad Hair*, 2013), by Venezuelan filmmaker Mariana Rondón, takes up this hunting season and situates it within a public housing complex in Caracas. Junior is nine years old and wants to straighten his curly hair to please his mother and to be photographed at the start of the school year. Marta, a single mother, unemployed and responsible for a baby, decodes her son's desire as a harbinger of homosexuality and reorganizes the domestic space around this reading. The paternal grandmother, Carmen, a Black woman, receives the boy differently; she lets him dance and tends to his hair with care. The film

dramatizes the distance between these two ways of dealing with the child, and this distance is its central conflict. This distance has an epistemological dimension in addition to a psychological one, and it is on the former that the analysis focuses.

We have chosen the Venezuelan film to think about motherhood and grandmotherhood as detached from natural categories, while at the same time pressured by norms of conduct. Motherhood and grandmotherhood can occupy distinct positions within the apparatus that shapes an effeminate child, and in Rondón's work it is possible to identify some of these differentiations. Carmen occupies a place within the field of kinship that is less committed to the project of producing a compliant subject, and this has consequences for Junior.

The analytical path moves through the constitution of the effeminate boy as a problem to be corrected, through the epistemological regime of the closet as a structure preceding the individual closet (SEDGWICK, 1990), and through the articulation of *petroafecto* [petro-affect] (MONTENEGRO, 2019) with State masculinity in Bolivarian Venezuela. The analysis turns to the paranoid structure of Marta's gaze, Carmen's reparative position, and the proposition that grandmotherhood constitutes a permeable figure within the field of queer kinship.

Oil, Masculinity, and *Pelo Malo*

María Montenegro (2019) proposes a reading of the film through the notion of petro-affect, "the potentiality of oil and its derivative products to configure social structures, bodies, and objects, as well as their capacity to shape behaviors, ideas, and cultural practices in modern societies" (MONTENEGRO, 2019, p. 993, our translation). The saturation of Venezuelan affective life by the logics of the oil economy produced an economic dependency in the country that extended to a particular structure of desire and masculinity.

Chavismo mobilized popular sectors and placed women in positions previously reserved exclusively for men, such as the security forces and

popular militias, while at the same time consolidating authoritarian masculinity as a national ideal under the figure of the *hombre nuevo*[2], the revolutionary man whose body is disciplined and virile. Throughout Rondón's film, it is possible to observe how this State masculinity circulates through everyday life in Caracas. In images of citizens shaving their heads in solidarity with an ailing Chávez, as well as in the murals, graffiti, and posters present in the urban landscape, the individual body is the locus where the nation is either reproduced or threatened.

Junior is a Black effeminate boy, and his hair condenses both racial belonging and gender deviation, traits he gradually comes to understand as responsible for his mother's emotional distance. "*Pelo malo*," the racist term used to refer to curly hair in societies of colonial heritage, also points to a trait of femininity, in opposition to the closely cropped, disciplined hair of the national man. Junior's body escapes this synthesis on both sides. His curly hair inscribes him within a raciality that the Bolivarian nation has rhetorically incorporated without divesting it of its colonial stigma, and his effeminate mannerisms inscribe him within a sexuality that the virile ideal of the *hombre nuevo* cannot accommodate. "*Pelo malo*" is the material sign of a child produced by the apparatus of gender and race as a problem, without being able to accommodate him.

Marta longs to return to her job in security work. Her application is turned down by the employer because of tardiness in her previous position. The difficulties of reconciling single motherhood with caring for two children translate into exclusion from the labor market and the absence of institutional structures of care. She depends on the help of a neighbor, whom she must pay, and the scarcity of money makes it difficult to sustain this support. In order to secure the job, in addition to the challenge of leaving the children, she ends up accepting the sexual advances of the employer. Constantly confronted by violence and moving

2 Reference to the concept coined by Che Guevara, centered on solidarity as opposed to individual self-interest.

through spaces of oppression, she is also the vector of transmission for the control exercised over Junior's body, correcting him so that he might respond to a field of forces that formed her and that constitutes her as a viable mother within this environment (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Marta begins dancing with Junior and becomes irritated with the boy, frightening him.



Source: screenshot by the author.

Giancarlo Cornejo (2011) describes this mechanism of surveillance drawing on his own Peruvian childhood. The school psychologist recorded his file with the notation of "sexual identity problems." The physical education teacher summoned his father. Blame was placed on the mother, pathologized for an affection deemed excessive. Cornejo (2011) underscores that the dissociation between homosexuality and transgender identity was a strategy of the adult, male gay movement to gain respectability, a strategy that sacrificed the effeminate boy by leaving the specificity of his experience unnamed. This is exactly what Sedgwick (1993) had anticipated, since post-DSM-III psychiatry constructed a "healthy homosexual," and the effeminate boy was left in the interstice between the depathologization of homosexuality and proclaimed normality, precisely the place where hunting season could proceed with institutional sanction.

The epistemological regime of the closet: Knowledge, ignorance, and childhood

In *Tendencies*, Sedgwick (1993) opens with a disturbing statistic. Queer adolescents are two to three times more likely to attempt suicide than other young people. And nearly thirty percent of youth suicides are committed by gay and lesbian youngsters. The question that organizes the essay is completely political: how does a culture systematically produce this destruction without recognizing it as such? Almost as a call to care about and love these children and adolescents, Sedgwick (1993) asks herself and asks us: How to tell kids who are supposed never to learn this, that, farther along, the road widens and the air brightens; that in the big world there are worlds where it's plausible, our demand to get used to it.

Sedgwick's project (1990) treats ignorance as an epistemological position that is constructed and differentially distributed. Ignorance regarding queer existence is the product of institutions, practices, discourses, and obstructions that work to impede the circulation of certain forms of knowledge. The school pursues teachers willing to discuss gender and sexuality; the family keeps the child away from deviant adults, blocking lines of transgenerational knowledge. Queer adolescents are systematically deprived of information and respect. The elementary conditions of survival are withheld as a matter of policy. The closet is a structure for the distribution of knowledge and nonknowledge according to functional positions within a field of relations. Drawing on D. A. Miller, Sedgwick (1990) observes that the open secret attests to the phantasmatic recovery of the private/public and inside/outside binarisms. The closet keeps in operation precisely the distinctions it would pretend to suspend. That is:

> In many, if not most, relationships, coming out is a matter of crystallizing intuitions or convictions that had been in the air for a while already and had already established their own power-circuits of silent contempt, silent blackmail, silent glamorization, silent complicity (SEDGWICK, 1990, p. 85).

That is, the secret had already circulated before being told. The closet had already been built before being named. The Acanfora case, analyzed by Sedgwick (1990), demonstrates this operation in a legal register. A teacher was removed from teaching for revealing too much of his homosexuality by speaking publicly about his situation. The Court of Appeals upheld the removal for the opposite reason; he had revealed too little, by failing to disclose in his job application his involvement in a student homosexual organization, a participation which, as the school itself stated, would have prevented his hiring. Thus, "the space for simply existing as a gay person who is a teacher is in fact bayonetted through and through, from both sides, by the vectors of a disclosure at once compulsory and forbidden" (SEDGWICK, 1990, p. 70). The regime makes both movements difficult, since revealing too much and revealing too little are equally penalized. The regime produces an almost total impossibility of maintaining a stable position of existence, and this impediment is its function. The apparatus thus ensures the maintenance of compulsory heterosexuality as a norm.

This double bind has a genealogy traced by Sedgwick (1990) to the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, when knowledge and sex became conceptually inseparable in Western culture: "knowledge means in the first place sexual knowledge; ignorance, sexual ignorance; and epistemological pressure of any sort seems a force increasingly saturated with sexual impulsion" (SEDGWICK, 1990, p. 73). Homosexuality is the model of secrecy around which modern culture organized its grammar of the sayable and the silenceable, and the closet is the structure through which this grammar was distributed across Western modernity.

The gay specificity of the closet, far from making it a peripheral phenomenon, is precisely what makes it a central structure for understanding how knowledge, privacy, and publicity were processed as political categories. Sedgwick (1993) sets out to disarticulate the coincidences that produce what she names the monolith, examining the family as the entity in which the coincidence of heterogeneous elements is expected:

> a surname
> a sexual dyad
> a legal unit based on state-regulated marriage
> a circuit of blood relationships
> a system of companionship and succor
> a building
> a proscenium between "private" and "public"
> an economic unit of earning and taxation
> the prime site of economic consumption
> the prime site of cultural consumption
> a mechanism to produce, care for, and acculturate children
> a mechanism for accumulating material goods over several generations
> a daily routine
> a unit in a community of worship
> a site of patriotic formation (SEDGWICK, 1993, p. 6).

When these elements coincide, the monolith closes. Their disarticulation creates the possibility of forms of life excluded by the norms. The queer project refuses this simultaneous coincidence. Sedgwick (1993) applies the same examination to sexual identity. Biological sex, gender assignment, personality traits, the sex of the preferred partner, self-perception as homo- or heterosexual, the choice to procreate, all of this comes with a longing for fitting. The queer analytical work consists in demonstrating that this tautochrony is a historical construction and that the pressure to make it coincide is the mechanism by which lives are destroyed. Sedgwick (1993) further recounts how attachment to cultural objects is a practice of survival, and reflects on this predilection:

> I think that for many of us in childhood the ability to attach intently to a few cultural objects, objects of high or popular culture or both, objects

> whose meaning seemed mysterious, excessive, or oblique in relation to the codes most readily available to us, became a prime resource for survival. We needed for there to be sites where the meanings didn't line up tidily with each other, and we learned to invest those sites with fascination and love (SEDGWICK, 1993, p. 3).

This sensibility informs the concept of paranoid reading and reparative reading (SEDGWICK, 2003). The reparative position[3] is the competence to find in fragments the resources life requires. Paranoid reading trusts that texts will always be decodable and recalcitrant instruments. In *Pelo Malo*, this argument allows the relation between mother and son to be considered. Junior learned to anticipate Marta's gaze, to calculate the visible before acting, to rehearse before the mirror the image to be presented. These are effects of a paranoid reading developed as a survival competence within the regime of rejection and proximity she administers.

The relation with Carmen offers a provisional suspension of this calculation. Junior can dance without checking whether he is on mined ground. Sedgwick (1993) would say that this space is epistemologically rare, a domain in which meanings do not need to coincide with the norm in order to be received. It is this rarity that makes Carmen a theoretically necessary figure and that differentiates grandmotherhood from motherhood, within the film's space, as distinct positions in the field of queer kinship.

This analysis of *Pelo Malo* takes place as an exercise in experimentation within the elective course "Touching Films with Sedgwick," offered to undergraduate students in Communication at Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ) in the first term of 2026, as part of the research project "Intimate Methodologies," developed in conjunction with the Graduate Program in Film and Audiovisual Studies

3 Sedgwick (2003) draws on Melanie Klein and her studies on positions and forms of organizing emotions, using throughout the text reading, practice, and reparative position as synonyms. These formulations are adopted in this article.

(*Programa de Pós-Graduação em Cinema e Audiovisual* – PPGCINE) at Universidade Federal Fluminense. This research is dedicated to Brazilian epistemologies of the queer within Communication, Film, and Audiovisual Studies, and it articulates references such as carnal resonance in Susanna Paasonen (2011), affective orientations in Sara Ahmed (2019), embodied vision in Vivian Sobchack (2004), and haptic visuality in Laura Marks (2000).

The analytical work is constructed in the very unfolding of the research. Students and the instructor produce readings and critiques from Sedgwick's (1990; 1993; 2003) theoretical repertoire in direct contact with the films. The choice of scenes itself is already part of the method. The sequences selected are those in which distinct modes of reading can be recognized, and within them the paranoid position and the reparative position become visible in the very unfolding of the analysis. This approach takes spectatorship as a site of analytical production. The one who writes is not separate from the one who experiences the act of watching, and the position of an adult who was once an effeminate child interferes with the way the film reverberates.

Kinship as a regime of intelligibility

Drawing on the studies of Fred Moten and Nathaniel Mackey on the relation between the trauma of slavery and kinship, Judith Butler (2002) underscores what they name "kinship as a wound." Family arrangements recognized as legitimate produce, by exclusion, zones of illegitimacy, and when the racial event is added, we are faced with what Butler (2002, p. 15) recovers from a conversation with Saidiya Hartman: "slavery is the ghost in the machine of kinship." To be legitimated by the State implies accepting the terms of that legitimation and the public sense of personhood inscribed in that lexicon. The delimitation of what is legitimate is drawn by a dividing line that intensifies different zones of respectability, rendering certain bodies and bonds recognizable as real and others incapable of accessing social reality. Butler (2002) points to a space

situated outside the dichotomy between what is legitimate and what is illegitimate, to practices of kinship and affection without acceptability as a point of reference or desired horizon. This is what she names the not yet thought within the terms of the norms of recognition.

The question Butler (2002) formulates asks what is lost when the expansion of the circle of recognition becomes the only political horizon in sight. In analyzing the French debates on the *Pacte Civil de Solidarité*, the author demonstrates how the figure of the child becomes a dense site for the transfer of anxieties about cultural reproduction. The child, summoned as an argument against the rights of homosexuals, appears as an artifact that guarantees the naturalization of the heterosexual adult as the only viable destiny. The real child, with its plasticity and openness to multiple forms of identification, is replaced by a child-artifact whose future heterosexuality must be protected in the present.

Paul B. Preciado (2020, p. 46) names this mechanism with precision: "biopolitics is viviparous and pedophilic." The child protected by demonstrators against marriage equality was already, from the outset, constituted as heterosexual, and its protection was the protection of this prior constitution. Preciado (2020) writes about his childhood in Francoist Spain. His father and mother did not secure his right to free gender self-determination. What they defended were the sexual and gender norms they had internalized as a condition for social existence.

In *Pelo Malo*, this regime of intelligibility reaches Junior through its extension into the domestic and communal spaces. The neighbors of the housing complex are instances of diffuse control, and the pressure on Marta is produced by the social order to which she belongs and by which she is constituted. What Butler (2002) calls derealization, the impossibility of certain bodies being recognized as real and viable, acts upon Junior before any identity is formed. The child's hair and his effeminate posture inscribe his nine-year-old body within a register of meanings capable of depriving him of social viability. Marta acts upon her son's body to protect him from the risk of becoming a homosexual. This is what Preciado (2020) unveils: she protects the child-artifact, the idea of the son as viable

only as heterosexual, and it is precisely this contradictory protection that constitutes the threat to Junior.

Butler (2002) proposes that kinship can operate as an intensifier of communal bonds irreducible to the nuclear family, as in relations between former lovers, friends, and members of a community. These bonds open onto forms that escape the conjugal model. This proposition is decisive for the analysis of Carmen. She inhabits a space of kinship situated outside the frame of legitimacy and illegitimacy. Carmen's apartment corresponds to the domestic equivalent of what Judith Butler (2002) describes as the not yet thought within the terms of the norms of recognition, harboring practices of care that the apparatus for shaping the compliant subject has not reached. Grandmothers may remain outside the focus of the hunting season described by Sedgwick (1993), and it is precisely this position, in another temporality, that opens the possibility of offering something the apparatus has not administered.

The paranoid structure of Marta's gaze

Sedgwick (2003) conceives the paranoid position as an epistemology, a way of organizing knowledge and one's relation to the world. In her words:

> Paranoia is anticipatory.
>
> Paranoia is reflexive and mimetic.
>
> Paranoia is a strong theory.
>
> Paranoia is a theory of negative affects.
>
> Paranoia places its faith in exposure (SEDGWICK, 2003, p. 129).

Paranoia is constitutively anticipatory, since it demands that no bad surprise be possible. Reflexive and mimetic, it tends to build in others the same epistemological structure, requiring any adequate reading of the situation to also be paranoid. Sedgwick (2003) describes it as a strong theory of negative affects, organized around the anticipation of shame

and humiliation. Tomkins, as taken up by Sedgwick (2003), specifies that the strong theory of negative affect grows more robust through its failures. Every disaster not prevented demonstrates the insufficiency of vigilance, and the theory expands to cover more territory. The paranoid position is confirmed by its failures and grows stronger in the same movement through which it fails.

Marta acts upon Junior according to this model. She intervenes in the boy's body because the "effeminate" is already taken as a certainty of the future, and all paranoid energy is invested in intercepting this future before its arrival. Her anticipation is born of a survival competence directed at another person's body. In a housing complex in Caracas, under economic crisis and with militarized masculinity as a public ideal, anticipating the worst is a skill forged under continuous pressure, necessary to navigate a hostile world.

The problem identified by Sedgwick (2003) is that the paranoid position systematically intercepts the possibility of seeking positive affect. It dilutes such affect, since it always finds itself facing imminent humiliation, transforming the highest expression of filial love into preventive correction. Marta's love for Junior is real, and the paranoid structure determines its most intense manifestation in the form of correction. Nonetheless, Sedgwick (2003, p. 136) reminds us that: "in most practices — in most lives — there are small and subtle (though cumulatively powerful) negotiations." And as I have observed previously:

> the queer child is exiled in her own home, a foreigner in the cis/heterosexual world. She is expelled by the gazes of the family, by the imperatives of school, by the norms of society. It is a silent and permanent separation, an essential sorrow difficult to recover from. Your exile, your withdrawal, our withdrawal, however much I try to draw near. The nonrecognition, your gaze of contempt. Madrecita Marta, your little Junior is an outcast from your heart, alone on the periphery of Caracas, living an existential dispersion.
>
> *Pelo Malo* is a photograph of this exile. Does this boy, orphaned of his father, make your heart bleed? Is my curly hair a sign of your lack of love?

> *Pelo Malo*? You know, mamãe, in the many comings and goings across our city, getting on and off buses, feeling and living these displacements, I think of petro-affect (Montenegro, 2019), that invisible mark of oil: it builds asphalt, moves machines, integrates the city for some, while segregates and isolates it for us. I used the oil to slide toward you, but I slipped and ended up further away. Our eyewitness, Mariana Rondón, films this failed encounter with a rare patience and delicacy, makes visible the unsayable, amplifies what was tacit and implied. Her tender gaze frames our lives through the gaps, the bars, the small apartment, mirrors. She intercuts this with wide shots of our oil-rich nation. This country that asks us, the people, to keep vigil for our leader, who suffers. The intimate, personal story is also part of this geopolitically exiled country: Venezuela as the specter that haunts the Western capitalist world.
>
> The camera draws near to my small body, it follows my tireless gestures: this effort to straighten the curls (today I know how beautiful my hair is, madrecita!). When the lens draws near to you, it is your exhaustion that impregnates the filmic body. You survive alone, with two small children. You care for, you cradle, you embrace the younger child. And I do not reach that tenderness. This contradiction without explanation: my mother loves me, she makes the fried bananas that I like so much and, sometimes, agrees to dance with me. And yet, this love wounds. "Cut your hair, don't sing, don't visit grandma Carmen." This is your way of reproducing social control over a body that, left to its own fate, would be in danger. I need your protection (RIBEIRO, in press).

As discussed in the passage above, Rondón's camera makes visible Junior's world through the composition of the shots and through the precision of a gaze of rejection as perceived by the son. Marta occupies the visual field and extends her watchful presence into the home. Open confrontations are rare and brief. The conflict settles into everyday interdictions, into the presence of a gaze that Junior learns to anticipate before doing anything. The closet begins to be built from within, with a scarce vocabulary for naming the process. The bathroom scene presents, with economy, the structure of the film. The boy tries to straighten his hair in front of the mirror while his mother knocks on the door. A body rehearses an image of itself and is interrupted before completing the

experimentation. The child comes to inspect his own image through the other's gaze before presenting it to the world.

Sedgwick (2003) observes that the paranoid position is eminently teachable because it is mimetic. Whoever practices it tends to produce it in others as the adequate response to the same situation. Marta was constituted by this gaze before exercising it upon her son. She was taught to anticipate, to correct, to manage the visible as a survival strategy within an environment that punishes deviation. She reproduces upon Junior the apparatus by which she was formed. This recognition situates Marta's action within a broader heteronormative field, in which individual cruelty is always also the transmission of a cultural competence, the passage of a way of existing in the world that finds in the child's body its most fragile support.

The expression of the paranoid form of love coincides with the logic that to protect the child is to correct him, before the world straightens him out with greater violence. This is the imperative that Sedgwick (1993) identified in the clinical discourses surrounding the effeminate boy, in which the mother who lets her son be as he is will be held responsible for his future suffering. Love is transformed into an argument for correction, and rectitude presents itself as a form of love. Marta believes this.

Carmen, Care, and the Reparative Position

Bell hooks (2006) sought to understand, within the U.S. context, how the inheritance of slavery's trauma shaped, across generations, Black women's relation to love. The repression of emotions, adopted as a survival strategy, became, according to the author, a culturally valued trait. Love came to be treated as a luxury in the face of material urgency. hooks (2006) notes, however, a persistent exception. It was the elders, grandmothers and great-grandmothers, who were devoted to the art of loving. They cared for and affirmed the need for pleasure and happiness. The parents' generation had learned to treat love as a waste of time in the face of the demands of social ascension. The grandmothers' generation had

preserved another temporality of care, less organized around the urgency of producing a viable subject and more oriented toward being together.

Carmen is a Black woman, and her presence in the film carries this historical memory. She lost her son, a young Black man, to police violence, a fate imposed on so many young Black men in Caracas, as in many Brazilian cities. She lets her grandson dance, listens to records with him, and combs his hair with care and gentleness. Carmen practices love as expansion and does not subordinate her grandson's upbringing to a demand for conformity. Sedgwick (1993, p. 2) records the slogan propagated until very recently: "I've heard of many people who claim they'd as soon their children were dead as gay". The phrase resonates in the film. Marta, who still has her son alive, could think something along these lines. Carmen, who buried her own, recognizes in Junior's life a blessing. Having been confronted with actual death is perhaps what releases her from the corrective project. Carmen knows what is lost in the death of a child, and she will not allow herself to experience that absence again.

Sedgwick (2003), drawing on Melanie Klein, describes the reparative position as a mode of relation that seeks positive affect and remains open to the unforeseen. Negative affect is acknowledged, without concentrating all attention on anticipating it. Carmen approaches this register. This knowledge does not become a program of correction. As Paul B. Preciado (2020) writes about his own childhood, whoever defends the queer child refuses to turn the child's body into a problem. For Junior, this place takes shape alongside his grandmother. There, the closet loses its force for a few hours. When this opening appears, guilt does not disappear. Seeing himself dancing, dressed by his grandmother in the performer's costume she sewed for him, Junior feels shame. Freedom and shame draw close together in this moment (Figure 2).

Concluding remarks, or the recipe for how to bring up gay children

The title of Sedgwick's essay (1993) is meant as a provocation against the very impossibility it describes. To bring up gay children indicates

the pursuit of a viable destiny for their existence. Institutions are forged precisely to hinder "becoming gay," as are the discourses in circulation aimed at preventing this development. The mother who is affectionate toward her effeminate son is diagnosed as the cause of the problem; the corrective parent is presented as the therapeutic solution. Sedgwick (1993) writes that, for the effeminate boy, identifying with masculinity may entail a disidentification, and that the skills of survival and acceptance might emerge instead from identification with the maternal figure.

Figure 2 – Junior is having fun and singing with his grandmother when he looks in the mirror and notices that his clothes are too loose, making them look like a dress.



Source: screenshot by the author.

Grandmotherhood occupies a distinct place within the field of kinship. Unlike the mother, the grandmother does not have her social prestige tied to the heterosexualization of her grandchild, nor does she carry the primary responsibility for the child's identity correction. This relative distance from the normative apparatus opens a leeway that motherhood, under the pressures described by Sedgwick (1993) and Cornejo (2011), rarely possesses. Generational discontinuity, characteristic of many queer forms of life, produces identifications that leap over the linear chain and find anchorage in figures outside the direct genealogy.

The film ends with Junior at school, in silence, while everyone sings the national anthem (Figure 3). He appears sad, his head shaved. Sedgwick (2003) points out that reparative reading does not let the ending consume what came before. Carmen flourished. Her apartment existed. Junior danced. The grandmother straightened half his hair with the blow-dryer and pointed to the white costume in the drawer. They listened to a record together. Junior's declaration to his mother that he does not love her, and hearing the same in return, inscribes a refusal in the film (Figure 4). What remains in *Pelo Malo* includes the fact that Carmen existed for Junior, and the fact that Mariana Rondón recorded this with precision, even as the boy chooses to live with his mother and still seeks her love and acceptance. Cinema can safeguard this permanence and give shape to what survives.

Figure 3 – Junior remains silent while his classmates sing the Venezuelan national anthem.



Source: screenshot by the author.

Grandmotherhood, as a specific position within the field of queer kinship, is less invested in the project of producing a compliant subject, and this lesser exposure to the normative premise creates a leeway for experimenting with love. The grandmother's position resonates with the cultural memory identified by hooks (2006) in older generations of Black

women, the memory of a care that preceded the complete subordination of love to the logic of survival. Carmen embodies in the film a space where all the elements that the family monolith demands to coincide can be provisionally disarticulated. Little or no normative project regarding the grandson takes hold there.

Figure 4 – Junior tells his mother that he does not love her.



Source: screenshot by the author.

The epistemological regime of the closet, analyzed by Sedgwick (1990), precedes the individual closet. It begins with the constitution of the child as a sign to be interpreted and with the distribution of knowledge and non-knowledge around him, fabricated as a deliberate institutional effect. Junior finds himself immersed in this apparatus and does not yet possess a language capable of naming it with precision.

Carmen existed in his life. She combed his hair and let the boy dance. In a country where curly hair is "*pelo malo*" and the effeminate figure threatens the integrity of the national ideal, Junior is an intimate disobedience. This disobedience precedes militancy. The queer child thrives when they find care and bonds that recognize their existence in the present. They live, nourished by the love of the gay lives that preceded them and that accompany them.

Conflict of interest: none to declare.

Funding source: none.

Data availability statement: The entire dataset supporting the results of this study has been published within the article itself.

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Received: March 10, 2026
Accepted: May 27, 2026