

SEX AND THE FAMILY: INTERSECTIONS BETWEEN FAMILY, GENDER, REPRODUCTION AND SAME-SEX SEXUALITY IN SPAIN

JOSÉ IGNACIO PICHARDO GALÁN

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Since the transition to democracy began in the second half of the seventies there have been many important legislative changes regarding familial and sexual relations in Spain. The approval of the Spanish Constitution of 1978 brought with it a battery of legislative reforms seeking to create more democratic and egalitarian concepts of the family in legislation: new divorce (1981), abortion (1985), adoption (1987) and assisted reproduction (1988) laws. Beginning in the late 1990s, and even more so during the years 2000, Spain has seen a second wave of legal reforms seeking to, once again, adjust the legal apparatus to the changes in familial, sexual, and gender relationships over the last decades of the twentieth century. Included in these reforms were the recognition of registered partnerships in different regions (1998–2005) and the legalisation of same-sex marriage nationally (2005).

This article reports the results of a qualitative research study, conducted from June 2004 to August 2005, the objective of which was to assess how the issues faced by and practices of queer people affect social conceptions of the family (Pichardo 2009). By “queer people” I mean homosexuals, non-heterosexual people or gays, lesbians and bisexuals. I will use these terms interchangeably throughout the text. This qualitative study consisted of an ethnographic approach based on the use of the following research methods:

- Review of printed and audiovisual materials (Bibliography, legal texts, media, and LGBTQ associations’ publications).
- Participatory observation in different activities, gatherings and family rituals (weddings and funerals, for example) in which the informants of this study were participating. I also attended gay and lesbian meeting places (clubs, associations, demonstrations, reunions, seminars and so on), including virtual meeting places on the internet (web pages, web fora, distribution lists, profiles pages ...).

- Analysis of statistical data from diverse sources, including the 2001 Census or the National Institute of Statistics database on marriages. Several reports published by the Spanish National Centre for Sociological Research (Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas - CIS) on the question of family in general and sexuality in particular were studied, too.
- Nonetheless, the main input for this research was the rich material gathered through 63 in-depth interviews with non-heterosexual participants. These interviews were made with 33 men and 30 women ranging from 19 to 78 years old. I have tried to cover as great a socio-demographic and geographic background as possible, having interviewed people throughout Spain who were living in villages, small towns, and large cities. These people were recruited for the study through distributions lists, emails, ads and reports on both LGBT oriented and general public media, posters at associations, bars, clubs and other LGBT gathering places and, ultimately, with the use of snowball sampling. More than 264 people who had same-sex sexual relations or defined themselves as homosexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian or queer responded to a questionnaire offering themselves to participate in an in-depth interview. During the interview a range of topics were covered, including identity, homophobia, family, kinship, sexuality, parenting, love, partners, friendship, economy, rights, gender and care among others.

The article begins by addressing the questioning of heteronormativity as the main novelty evoked by queer people within conceptions of family. When in June 2005 same-sex marriage was legalised, the idea of heterosexuality as the sole foundation of filiation was effectually debunked, thereby raising important issues and questions. Then some of the ways in which non-heterosexual people are taking advantage of this new legislation will be presented, followed by a section with an overview of the resulting changes that have been introduced by gays and lesbians in the sphere of familial relations, especially on issues of parenting, sexuality, and the division of domestic chores. The penultimate section reflects upon aspects in which there are continuities with the traditionally dominant conceptions of family and therein, the elements that reproduce the prevailing notions regarding the social institution of family: cohabitation, love, caretaking, and coupling. The article concludes by delving into some of the questions that remain open to reflection.

QUESTIONING HETERONORMATIVITY

When in the 1970s Gayle Rubin presented what she then called the *sex/gender system* she pointed out that “the social organization of sex rests upon gender, obligatory heterosexuality, and the constraint of female sexuality” (1975, 179). The social construction of gender differences between men and women is then inextricably tied to compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980). Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001, 41) used the term “heterosexual assumption” to refer to the all-embracing institutional invalidation of same-sex sexualities and identities and the constant reinforcement of heterosexuality as a norm, privileging and shoring up the heterosexual model.

The participants of this study, all of whom either had been, or were actively, in same-sex relationships, clearly seemed to recognise this heterosexual assumption, as they were forced to face it their whole lives, whether by reproducing it, questioning it, or avoiding it. This model, whether challenged or followed, is ever-present and was even defined by some participants as “the path” that must be followed. This “path” includes having sexual and emotional heterosexual relationships, falling in love with a person of the opposite sex, marrying him/her, living together, maintaining sexual relations with that partner, being faithful to him/her, getting a good job, buying a house or a car, having children, raising them, and having the woman take care of the children (whether she works outside of the house or not). It is interesting to observe that this life timeline does not solely include aspects related to partnering, sexuality, or reproduction, but that it also includes material aspects, like gender-based division of labour, and consumerism. Some of the participants of the study reported having followed this family model by getting married or maintaining a stable heterosexual relationship, despite being attracted to members of the same sex. In some cases they simply repressed this desire, while in others they maintained sporadic or stable same-sex relationships at the same time as their heterosexual families. Other participants reported having opted for a life of religious service as a means of avoiding the social pressure to maintain a heterosexual relationship. Remaining single was also mentioned as another alternative to escape the socio-cultural pressure to form a heterosexual couple.

Nevertheless, the majority of the participants did report feeling like they should not continue on the path of this heterosexual assumption, at some moment in their lives. Some said that the same-sex desire they felt precluded them from meeting the expectations of heterosexuality. Others thought that they would never be happy if they could not pursue their

true feelings and attractions, and that acting otherwise would require them to deceive the person with whom they entered into a heterosexual relationship. When they reached this moment of truth, so to speak, many said that, although at first they saw no alternatives, eventually they discovered the existence of other possibilities. As a result homosexuality, as a lifestyle, became one of the viable options. However, deviating from heteronormativity certainly came at a price in the form of homophobia and persecution. As one 38 years old male participant from Madrid stated: *“I thought that I would be heterosexual and get married to stop being discriminated against and oppressed by society, friends, neighbours, or by schoolmates. (...) When I compared myself with a heterosexual, I realised that a heterosexual person was allowed to live in peace”*. Although some may think that these feelings and situations are no longer relevant currently in Spain, recent research affirms that homophobia is not only still present, but as strong as ever in certain contexts, such as schools (Pichardo, Molinuevo and Riley 2009).

Queers have developed both individual and collective strategies to overcome this homophobia, and by extension heteronormativity. Additionally, the efforts of feminism in challenging the gender division of labour allowed for the socially constructed “complementary nature” of the masculine and feminine to be overcome, and the sex/gender system to be dismantled.

One of the main tools that allowed for the cultural denial of the heterosexual assumption is the creation of identities based on same-sex relationships. However, since these identities tend to be problematic, fluid, changing, and strategic, the individuals seem to assume them in diverse ways. Oftentimes, especially in the case of women, they report not always feeling the need to identify themselves as lesbians, gays, or bisexuals at all (Pichardo 2008).

Once these identities based on same-sex practices are created and spread, those who assume them become more visible and recognisable by society. Queer people first face the challenge of turning their practices into an identity, and then making this identity public: *“There is an extra challenge for us: the fight to either hide, or come out. In both cases you need to fight”* (Julián, male 37 years old). In this sense, coming out, with its associated risks, can even be seen as an activist effort, a sentiment expressed by one participant when she said: *“I think of visibility as a political act”* (Laia, female, 30 years old).

The creation and visibility of interpersonal networks made up of people who share these queer identities helped found the lesbian, gay, bisexual,

and transgender (LGBT) liberation movement in the last part of the 20th Century, which ultimately achieved the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Spain. The next section will analyse how same-sex couples are utilising this legal institution.

SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

The legalisation of same-sex marriage provides some insight into the reality of same-sex couples in the form of official statistics, collected yearly through civil registries. However, obviously not all couples marry, whether hetero- or homosexual. The next census, in 2011 will provide statistics on the number of unmarried couples living together. The National Institute of Statistics reports that in the first four and a half years since the law was passed 15,381 same-sex couples have married. Of these marriages, 10,318 were between two men and 5,063 were between two women.

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGES BY YEAR

Year	Man+man marriages	Woman+woman marriages	Total same-sex marriages	Percentage of total marriages
2005	914	355	1,269	0.61 %
2006	3,000	1,313	4,313	2.08 %
2007	2,141	1,052	3,193	1.56 %
2008	2,051	1,143	3,194	1.62 %
2009	2,212	1,200	3,412	1.94 %
TOTAL	10,318	5,063	15,381	1.55 %

Source: Author's calculations based on data published on the National Statistics Institute's website (http://www.ine.es/inebmenu/mnu_mnp.htm).

The percentage of same-sex marriages between two women has increased slightly to just over 35% of the total number of same-sex marriages in 2008 and 2009, from 28% in 2005. This means that, although they remain only a third of the total, the percentage increase has been sustained.

Table 1 shows that in 2007 there was a slight decrease in the number of same-sex couples who married. This could be explained by the fact that most of the people who had been waiting their whole lives to be able to marry probably did so immediately after the law was passed, thereby causing the initial figures to be unrepresentatively high. In 2009 the number of same-sex marriages increased slightly, reaching 3,412 couples and in that year same-sex marriages accounted for 2% of the total. The Ministry of Justice reported 382 divorces of same-sex couples in the first five

years of same-sex marriage, but as this figure is only from computerised civil registries, it can be expected to represent incomplete data.

According to the statistics only 0.064% (approximately 30,000 people) of the Spanish population is in a same-sex marriage, which suggests a minimum impact of the law in quantitative terms. On the other hand, the legalisation of same-sex marriage has certainly had a huge impact in cultural, legal, and political terms.

Access to rights and marriage are two intertwined ideas, the latter of which is often associated with the assurance of full rights to minorities. Paternotte (2008) summarises marriage's role for gays and lesbian in Belgium as such, while recalling the following paradox: the institution which had been considered as one of the pillars of oppression has been converted into a battlefield, and a potential way to gain access to citizenship, meaning inclusion. The idea of marriage as a question of citizenship and equality was constantly repeated by the participants of the study as well. Vita, a 41 years old female, from a small town in the Mediterranean said: *"It's a right which any citizen, queer or not, should have. Once they deny it to you, you are discriminated against"*.

Despite these sentiments the majority of gays and lesbians in the general population have not gotten married, which was also true of the participants of the study. The common trends among those participants who had gotten married were:

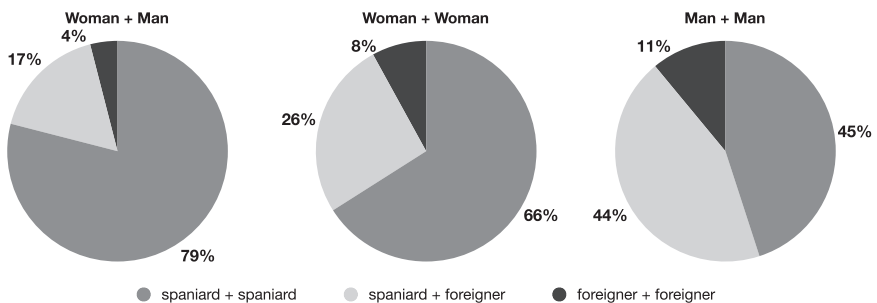
- being in a long-term relationship with common possessions;
- couples in which one of the members was sick or near death, so as to secure rights of succession for the other partner and widow/widower pension;
- having children, so that one member of the couple could adopt the children of the other, since in most of the Spanish regions a couple must be married in order to adopt together; also because the child is less protected in many cases when the other member of the couple is not legally recognised as a parent;
- couples in which one of the partners was an immigrant and needed to obtain a visa, a residence- or work permit, or Spanish citizenship;
- couples who married as an activist effort (Arancha, 35 years old from a small village on the Mediterranean coast, for example, commented that she never considered marriage with her heterosexual partner, but now that she is with a woman, she is considering it in order to vindicate their relationship);
- couples who wanted to get the social recognition they don't get as a same-sex couple due to homophobic prejudices (Monica, 30 years old from Valencia, planned to marry her girlfriend hoping it would garner

them recognition as a couple, because even though they are open about their relationship, their family and friends still insist on treating them as if they were “friends”).

Though the first motives listed could be common to any heterosexual couple, the last two are certainly particular to same-sex couples. In addition to the legal consequences of marriage, it also has a ritual and symbolic value. The commitment of a couple and the public presentation of it to the community imply recognition and social acceptance that is often lacking otherwise for same-sex couples.

On the other hand, the participants hardly ever mentioned love as one of the motivations to marry. Instead they named and explained various practical and material issues, for example, one participant said: *“After 29 years together, my wedding just slipped by. I mean, we didn’t do it for the wedding; we just did it for the papers. Nothing else”* (Esteban, male, 60 years old). Abel, male, 29 years old, married his partner, an immigrant, in order to resolve his legal situation in Spain. He asserted that without that necessity, they would not have gotten married, or at least not when they did. However, at the same time he was sure to say: *“I married him because I love him, if I didn’t love him, even if he needed a visa, I wouldn’t marry him”*. The distribution of the nationalities of the members of couples married in 2009 is shown in the following figure:

FIGURE 1: PERCENTAGE OF MARRIAGES PERFORMED IN 2009 BY SEX AND NATIONALITY OF THE SPOUSES.



Source: Author’s calculations based on data published on the National Statistics Institute’s website.

Revealingly, and similar to the numbers from preceding years, the percentage of marriages between a Spaniard and a foreigner in 2009 was much higher within same-sex marriages, especially between men, com-

pared with the figures for heterosexual marriages. The number of same-sex marriages between one Spanish man and one foreigner was equal to the number of same-sex marriages between two Spanish men. These statistics could represent a necessity to resolve visa or residential issues, or perhaps reflect a lowered sense of xenophobia among queers. Additionally, one in ten same-sex marriages between men took place between two non-Spaniards, which would only make sense if they both lived in Spain, unless they did it for symbolic reasons, as these marriages would not be recognised in the majority of their native countries.

Homophobia reportedly acts as a virulent force when it comes to same-sex couples deciding whether or not to marry. In that vein, numerous same-sex weddings were celebrated without the presence of family members, like Javier and Gerardo's, (both males from Madrid) where the only guests were two friends who served as the witnesses and four neighbours. Esteban reported that although there were over 200 guests at his wedding, including many members of both families, he was very hurt that neither his father-in-law nor one of his brothers came, despite being invited. Another participant, Abel, said that absolutely none of his husband's family members attended their wedding because none of them know he is gay.

The very public nature of marriage makes the same-sex relationship visible in many less obvious contexts, like for example, on legal documents. This increased visibility causes a lot of couples to decide not to marry, since they do not want to or cannot assume the costs of universally and uniformly coming out. An example of how costly this procedure can in fact be is the case of those who come from countries where homosexuality is avidly persecuted. If these individuals marry a person of the same sex, and that is indicated on their visas or passports, they are put at risk when crossing the border into their home countries. Also some couples who were planning to adopt children in foreign nations reported postponing their decision to wed until after doing so because the majority of the countries that allow adoption by single individuals would not give a child to a same-sex couple.

Finally there are same-sex couples who reported preferring not to marry because, just like some heterosexual couples, they simply do not share the values, or the legal rights, and duties that accompany marriage.

Ultimately the individual and collective actions of gays and lesbians and their demands for both legal and social recognition have brought about new models for organising coupling, reproduction and intimate

life. With these models come new meanings of family and marriage, which may result in the questioning of heteronormativity. These changes have allowed homosexuals to challenge the heterosexual assumption, and have effectually spawned even more transformations, which will be analysed in the next section.

CHANGES

After the questioning of the heterosexual foundation of marriage and family, other specific challenges to these institutions follow. These new possibilities, although not particular to gays and lesbians, have found an opportune field for development in same-sex couples. The breaking of the coitus/alliance/filiation continuum becomes official when the filiation of children with same-sex parents is legalised. In Spain, the heterosexual married couple is no longer the privileged locus for the reproduction of persons, and more precisely of citizens (Graham 2004, 27). Individuals and same-sex couples are now also recognised as agents of biological and social reproduction of citizens as a result of more inclusive laws of adoption and the development of assisted reproduction methods (Pichardo 2011).

One result of the social debate over same-sex marriage is that it is now common knowledge that gays and lesbians can have children, and that they already do in fact have them. This revelation allows all non-heterosexual people to envision a future with children if they so desire. Being queer no longer means being excluded from the possibility of being a mother or father. The statistics from the Spanish census of 2001 show that one in four female couples (28%) and one in ten male couples (9%) had children.¹ Also in 2001, long before the discussion of filiation by same-sex couples had really taken seed in either the public arena or in Parliament, more than 2,785 children were already living with same-sex couples. Although ultimately access to maternity and paternity is a right afforded to both hetero- and homosexual people (see Figure 2), a large disparity still exists in that the process of becoming a parent proves to be rather meditated for same-sex couples (except for individuals with children from a previous heterosexual relationship). Since these couples cannot have children through sexual intercourse within the couple, they must invariably seek the assistance of an outside party.

¹ See: <<http://www.ine.es/censo/es/inicio.jsp>> (15 September 2011).

FIGURE 2: MODES OF ACCESS TO MATERNITY AND PATERNITY

PROCEDURE*		WOMEN	MEN
Heterosexual genital sexual intercourse (coitus)		Previous heterosexual relation	
		Agreement with someone of the opposite sex	
		Getting pregnant from a sexual partner without his consent or knowledge	
Insemination	Clinically Assisted Reproductive Techniques	Anonymous sperm donation	Pregnancy with a known woman.
		Known sperm donation	Egg donor and surrogacy (same woman)**
		Surrogate pregnancy with couple***	Egg donor and surrogacy (different women)**
	Home insemination	Known sperm donation	Donate sperm
Adoption		Individual or joint adoption	
		Step adoption	
Fostering		Fostering individually or jointly	
*These options can be explored individually, in couples, or within the framework of parenting by more than two individuals.			
**Illegal in Spain, but people travel abroad to access it.			
***As a result of a legal loophole, performed in Spain only within married, lesbian couples.			

There is a whole array of options for non-heterosexual people who decide to pursue reproduction. They have to face a series of important decisions: if they will seek reproduction individually or as a couple; if the child will be biological or adopted; if it is biological, will it be conceived through coitus, insemination in a clinic, or self-insemination (“home-insemination”); whether the donor will be anonymous or someone the would-be parents know and, in either case, if the legal and social paternity of the third person will be recognised or not.

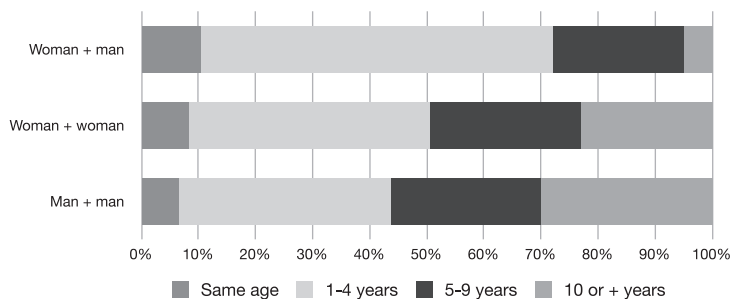
Herein, arises the possibility of participating in a co-parenting project between more than two people, which highlights the glaring distinctions between biological, legal, and social maternity or paternity (Descoutures 2010). The social aspect of parenting is thereby acknowledged, despite the fact that the biological nature of the topic never completely disappears, even in many queer people’s conceptions of family.

Accordingly, the participants of the study consistently made reference to the question of biology within reproduction and parenting. Some of them reported overwhelming interest in having biogenetic connections

with their children and were often completely willing to dedicate considerable economic and personal efforts to creating them. For example, Marlén, a 40 years old female from Galicia, remarked one of the huge advantages of using self-insemination to conceive her two children. In case the children ever fall sick and they need to know their genetic lineage, the situation could be easily resolved, as the donor was her wife's brother.

Same-sex couples are also expected to contribute certain innovations to the field of sexuality. For the majority of gays and lesbians, reproduction has to be achieved without sex. Therefore, sex is here inextricably no longer linked to reproduction but rather to pleasure, love, and communication. Rubin (1984) places non-heterosexual people down near the bottom of the hierarchies of sexuality. As they are already marginalised in terms of sexual norms, this position could enable them to potentially overcome the constraints of a normative sexuality centred on procreation and restricted by characterisations like coitus-centrality, ageism, coupling, monogamy, and others. Nevertheless, same-sex relationships do not necessarily escape the social pressures to imitate the more prevalent norms of sex: heterosexual, coital, in partner relationships, monogamous, performed at home, non-commercial, for love, and between members of the same generation (Rubin 1984). However, some new patterns can be found among the participants of the study. For example, there appears to be a greater age difference between homosexual partners than between heterosexual ones (see Figure 3). This variation could be explained by the fact that the main aim of sexual relations within homosexual relationships is not reproduction. Therefore the age constrictions related to fertility that are placed on heterosexual relationships are not relevant to non-heterosexual pairs.

FIGURE 3: AGE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MEMBERS OF A COUPLE BY SEX OF THE MEMBERS



Source: Graphic based on the data of the 2001 Census published on the website of the National Institute of Statistics

Cea, a Spanish sociologist, asserts that sexual monogamy continues characterising the life of Spanish heterosexual couples, married or not, young or old, and that sexual relationships outside the couple remains the most censured sexual practice, as it is only accepted by 5% of the population (2007, 55–57). Faithfulness, on the other hand, is not mandatory in coupling among the majority of queer people who participated in the study. This condition is usually agreed upon in the establishment or development of the relationship. That, however, does not mean that all gays and lesbians have sexual relationships outside the couple, just that, for the majority, it is a topic open to negotiation. Some couples establish a promise of sexual fidelity, while others opt for a whole array of possibilities that range from tolerance of occasional instances of sexual infidelity to so-called “open relationships”, in which each partner maintains sexual relations with other people.

Sexuality has appeared in a veiled form within the discussions of the legalisation of same-sex marriage in Spain because sex is still thought of as an aspect of private life, not an issue that should be reflected in debates and public life. However, opposition to the recognition of non-normative sexualities fuelled most of the arguments against the legalisation of gay marriage. “What infuriates the opponents of same-sex marriage is the state’s (and by implication, the nation’s) approval, among other things, of fellatio and anal intercourse between males, and of cunnilingus and use of dildos by women” (Graham 2004, 25).

In order to avoid references to same-sex sexuality that could generate resistance, the concept of love was often used to legitimise same-sex relationships and queer families. It was meant to counterbalance the image of queer people as exclusively and insatiably sexual, and as a strategy to establish equivalencies between hetero- and homosexuals (Villaamil 2004, 69). Although never mentioned in the legal texts, love has been one of the main supports of the legalisation of gay marriage, as it is much less controversial to think of two men or two women loving each other, rather than two men or two women having sex (Graham 2004, 26).

The legalisation of same-sex marriage and filiation not only questions the heteronormativity of family, but also gender differences, the complementarity of the sexes, and the sexual division of labour. On a symbolic level it shakes the very foundations of the main system of discrimination and subordination in our society: the sex/gender system. Since gay marriage has been legalised, the idea that every family should be made up of a man and a woman is obviously being negated, along with the radical division of all of society into two genders.

In a same-sex couple, the enactment of gender roles are being reshaped, as either two men or two women are responsible for nurturing, showing affection and all of the domestic duties like, working out of the house, cleaning, cooking, and shopping. This trend debunks cultural constructs such as the idea that women are more apt to caretaking. In these non-heterosexual couples, gender is not relevant to the question of who should stop working temporarily in order to take charge of raising a child. For example, Marlén gave birth to her first daughter, but it was her wife, Manoli, who left work afterwards to care for the child so that Marlén could continue her professional career, which she says *“is a less likely outcome with a man”*.

However, just because there are no power struggles based on gender, it does not imply that there is complete equality within same-sex couples. Instead these disparities are based on other elements such as age, economic power, symbolic capital, and shared possession of the house, amongst others: *“I was 36 years old, but she was 22. Therefore we were not very equal. Let’s just say she did what I said, because I was older”* (Valentina, female, 65 years old).

In any case, none of these changes are lineal or unidirectional. Since they seem to bypass the structural, metaphorical, symbolic, and ideological elements that have historically maintained the hegemonic models, they also serve to maintain the systems of inequality. Gays and lesbians do not escape gender socialisation; therefore they too reproduce it. Although within the same-sex couple there can hardly be gender-based division of household duties and chores, outside of it, they tend to replicate the same gender roles as in the rest of society. For instance, within their families usually the women, like grandmothers or sometimes hired help, take on the role of caregivers and are responsible for many domestic chores.

The main elements of change that have occurred in the sexual and familial relationships of the participants of the study have been reviewed. However, within these changes there are certain continuities that will be discussed in the following section.

CONTINUITIES

Kinship reflects the need of human groups to guarantee their own survival. The different systems of kinship result from the various manners in which each culture structures biological and social reproduction, sexual division of labour, and the organisation of residence, amongst other

aspects. Therefore, analysing the material conditions in which people find themselves becomes one of the crucial elements for studying the changes and continuities that gays and lesbians are producing in relation to the family. It is precisely within these conditions that even more continuities with the pre-existing conceptions of family can be found. The family remains a basic residential, financial and consumer unit, and above all, the foundation of biological reproduction, the nucleus of enduring material solidarity, that is, care giving and receiving. That is to say that the family remains the locus of reproduction of the material conditions essential to the survival of individuals and social life.

According to Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan (2001, 43), marginalised individuals, in this case, non-heterosexual people, try to create viable ways of living, feasible in their specific circumstances. Everyday practical concerns, like sharing a house, the expenses, travels or rituals, define familial relationships to such a degree that they can sometimes even be responsible for the dissolution of the couple or family. In order to detect emerging life experiments and new familial practices, diverse ways of reproducing domestic life were analysed. Commonplace problems such as “Should we live together?”, “Should we get married?”, “Should we register ourselves as a couple?”, “How do we deal with the issue of property ownership?” were closely examined. The participants of the study did not report intentionally living or re-organising their lives to “redefine the family” or to question “the heteronormativity of marriage”. However, they did remark that the heterosexual nuclear family model (“the path”) has some practical aspects that inherently exclude most queers, therefore forcing them to seek out their own alternatives to organise their everyday lives. Nevertheless, this sentiment did not prevent these dominant conceptions of the family from influencing the way they actually arranged and interpreted their own lives in the end.

Living together has been, and continues to be one of the basic elements of the Western definition of familial relationships. It appears to be expressly linked to marriage, as it remains a prevailing condition of the Mediterranean socio-cultural tradition and is even a requirement under Spanish law (Bestard 1998, 180–182; Alberdi 1999, 60–61). Cohabitation is also required for the legal recognition of registered partnerships, either as a pre-existing condition before registration or as a stipulation they are expected to comply with after registering. However, emerging changes have been noted in the Basque Country’s registered partnership law (Law 2/2003, May 7th) where a shared residence is no longer required in order to register.

The participants of the study also assigned living together a leading role in determining what is and is not a family: “*I understand a family to be a couple. [...] You should still be considered a family whether you do or don't have children, or if you are the same or opposite sex. We live under the same roof, we share. I mean, we are a family*” (Arancha, female, 35 years old). Living together, however, does not become a requirement *sine qua non* to be considered a family. Marina considers herself, her girlfriend, and her girlfriend's daughter to be a family because, even though the daughter does not live with them, they share a lot of expenses related to her. Similarly, Julián and José, despite not living together, do consider themselves not only a couple, but also a family: “*José, my sister, my father and my mother are my family. They are the people I live with, in distinct spaces and times*” (Julián). In fact, Julián lives in three different cities and spaces, depending on the proximity to his work. Some days he sleeps and eats in his hometown at his parent's house, other days he spends at his own apartment in the capital city of his region, and then he spends weekends or short periods of time at his boyfriend's house in Madrid. This arrangement allows him to maintain his partner relationship without their living together, and while living in multiple houses and cities.

Some of the participants chose, in spite of material conditions or maybe even because of them, to maintain stable partner relationships living in different spaces. Various couples who participated in the study did not live together despite having been in a long-term relationship for years. Some of them lived in different cities and expressed no intentions of living together in the near future. They fall into the category of those who consider partnership or family to be independent of a shared dwelling, also known as “living apart together”. A similar, yet different situation is that of Juantxo (38 years old) and his daughter Eleuteria, who have never lived in the same house, but maintain a parent-child relationship in which he even has the keys to the house where Eleuteria lives with her mother in Madrid. These types of situations are common in reconstructed families, both homosexual and heterosexual, and highlight the symbolic importance of the home and cohabitation as the spaces in which family relations are built.

People in same-sex relationships usually prefer to live together, make a single consumer unit, and above all, form units of enduring solidarity in which mutual care is one of the main expressions not just of love, but also of the existence of a familial bond. Participants consistently reported in their interviews and during participant observations that they thought

of their family as the people who “are there” when you need them and for whom you are always available when they need you.

By examining the economical organisation of these families, again both continuity and change can be found. Not all same-sex couples form a single financial unit where the two members have a single, common economy with joint income and expenses, as is more commonly the case with heterosexual couples in Spain (Cea 2007, 312–313). Instead, they manage personal and shared expenses in a variety of different ways. Some partners maintain entirely separate accounts; others share some expenses, like rent; others prefer to have both shared and separate accounts; and still others share all expenses and accounts. On the other hand, as time passes queer couples and family units seem to move towards a common economy, especially when joint possessions are acquired or there are underage members of the family.

The participants put a high premium on coupling and expressed very little doubt or issue with coupling. Most of them considered having a partner to be a vital objective. Being single was identified with loneliness, which appeared to be one of the greatest fears of the participants. Similarly, there is no general discourse among queer individuals or LGBTQ associations as to the ways in which single life could be seen positively or as an enriching or positive way of living.

Finding participants who were in a stable sexual and affective relationship comprised of more than two people proved to be a challenge. In several ethnographic spaces, various people commented that they knew three males or three females living together or in a threesome relationship, but when these people were asked to join the study, most of them not only refused to, but also became upset with the person who had shared the information about their relationship. Eventually three people in such a relationship were interviewed, and they made it abundantly clear that relationships such as theirs remain, in their own words, “in the closet”.

Overall, both the couple and the family, continue to be a reference point for the organisation of sexuality, biological reproduction, and the everyday life of many queers. The concept of family remains steadfast, as reflected in the fact that many ritualistic and family events and celebrations have become spaces for confrontation and discussion of the familial status of non-heterosexual relationships. Christmas, first communions, baptisms, weddings, funerals, and hospitalisations were very often mentioned throughout the study as such spaces. When the recognition of a queer family was a point of contention, these situations tended to become tense. The question of who is and is not considered family often is

at the helm of these situations. For example, one of the participating couples reported fighting every Christmas, sometimes even almost reaching the point of breaking up because, while one of the two wanted to spend the holidays with his biological family, the other did not since he was not recognised as his partner's boyfriend by them. For him, Christmas is meant to be spent with family, and since they were each other's family, they would have been better off spending it alone together.

Within Spanish culture a radical rupture from the biological family is generally uncommon, as is the dichotomy between biological and chosen family that is portrayed in Anglo-Saxon literature on kinship of gays and lesbians (Weston 1991). The participants of this study reported attempting to integrate into the biological family, while seeking recognition of their homosexual identities and relationships. In a society like Spain's, where the family has such an important role in the economical, material, and affective support networks, most queers cannot afford to be ostracised from their families, just as these families cannot afford to exclude them. This is likely one of the main factors in the acceptance of same-sex relationships within families in Spain.

The debate over "new families" or the existence of "rainbow families" in Spain is certainly relevant in this nation. There, LGBTQ people and associations were able to appropriate the concept of family, which enabled the legalisation of gay marriage. However, challenges certainly remain for these "rainbow families", which are addressed in the concluding epigraph.

CONCLUSION

Although LGBT organisations constantly assert that same-sex marriage assures legal equality between homosexual and heterosexual people, this is often not completely true, especially in the context of kinship. For instance, if a baby is born to a married, lesbian couple, the wife of the biological mother is not automatically recognised as a parent, as is the case in heterosexual marriages. Instead, the non-biological mother has to file paperwork before the baby is born, or adopt him/her afterwards. Similarly, gay couples who use surrogate pregnancy outside of Spain (since it is not legally permitted in the country) eventually must face the obstacle of registering their children in the civil registry with two male parents.

Some of these legal problems would disappear if the presumption of paternity were eliminated and if the voluntary registration of the filial

relationship of both parents were always mandatory in the case of all married or unmarried couples, heterosexuals included. This would imply that if a baby were born to a married couple, both the biological mother and her spouse would have to legally recognise that child as their own. The ideology that filiation relies on the existence of biogenetic link would be broken down, effectively highlighting the social and voluntary nature of this bond.

However, all of these issues are clearly based on the prevailing symbolic connection between filiation, heterosexual intercourse, and marriage, which, although disputed, remains a popular tenet upheld, not just by society at large, but also in the legal and judicial systems. Despite the changes that have taken place recently in the sexual and familial relationships of LGBT people, heterosexism still exists at both a legal and a social level.

Ultimately the legalisation of gay marriage has opened up new possibilities, serving as an example of the way historically dominant ideologies can be successfully overthrown by the action of social actors. However, these social changes show certain continuities with the prevailing hegemonic models and also run the risk of discriminating those who prefer not to become a couple or marry. Although no change is ever complete and continuities are always to be expected, the transformations created by the social and legal recognition of queer families in Spain that have been explored here have certainly proven to be very significant in the socio-cultural landscape of that nation.

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