

SWIMMING AGAINST THE TIDE: THE CONJUGAL EXPERIENCE OF GAY MEN AND HETERONORMATIVITY

Carolina de Campos Borges¹

Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados (UFGD), Dourados-MS, Brazil.

Andrea Seixas Magalhães

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brazil.

Terezinha Féres-Carneiro

Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), Rio de Janeiro-RJ, Brazil.

ABSTRACT. This article stems from a survey conducted with men living a conjugal relationship with partners of the same sex. It aimed at understanding the effects of the naturalization of heteronormative standards in homosexual conjugal experiences. For this study, the authors selected part of the results of the discourse analysis of nine interviews – middle-class homosexual men, aged 25 to 47, residents of the Brazilian city of Goiânia living with their partners. The authors discussed the results concerning two categories that emerged from the interview analysis process: their views of family and marriage; and their daily experiences regarding conjugality. The results show that those subjects have their views of family and marriage that are deeply influenced by the appreciation of affection and respect for the singularity of the individuals. In their everyday lives, they create a particular sharing of domestic chores that does not follow socially established gender distinction criteria. Although the participants feel free from the sexist norms in their spaces of intimate life, they suffer the effects of social heteronormativity in public spheres.

Keywords: Homosexual conjugality; heteronormativity; contemporaneity.

NADANDO CONTRA A CORRENTE: A VIVÊNCIA CONJUGAL DE HOMENS GAYS E A HETERONORMATIVIDADE

RESUMO. Este artigo deriva de uma pesquisa qualitativa realizada com homens que vivem uma relação conjugal com parceiros do mesmo sexo, cujo objetivo foi compreender os efeitos da naturalização de padrões heteronormativos nas vivências conjugais homoafetivas. Para este trabalho, foram selecionadas partes dos resultados das análises de discursos de nove entrevistados - homens homossexuais, com idades entre 25 e 47 anos, pertencentes ao segmento socioeconômico médio, moradores de Goiânia (GO), que coabitam com seus parceiros. Foram discutidos os resultados referentes a duas categorias que emergiram no processo de análise das entrevistas: suas visões de família e casamento; e suas experiências cotidianas a respeito de sua conjugalidade. Os resultados indicaram que esses sujeitos têm visões de família e casamento fortemente influenciadas pela valorização do afeto e do respeito à singularidade dos indivíduos. Em seus cotidianos, eles criam uma divisão de tarefas domésticas singular, a qual não segue critérios de distinção de gênero socialmente estabelecidos. Apesar de se sentirem livres da influência de normas sexistas em seus espaços de vida íntima, os participantes sofrem os efeitos da heteronormatividade social nas esferas públicas.

Palavras-chave: Conjugalidade homoafetiva; heteronormatividade; contemporaneidade.

NADANDO CONTRA LA CORRIENTE: LA VIVENCIA CONYUGAL DE HOMBRES GAYS Y LA HETERONORMATIVIDAD

RESUMEN. Este artículo se deriva de una encuesta cualitativa realizada con hombres que viven una relación conyugal con compañeros del mismo sexo, cuyo objetivo fue comprender los efectos de la naturalización de patrones heteronormativos en las experiencias conyugales homoafectivas. Para este trabajo, fueron seleccionadas parte de los

¹ E-mail: carolinacambor@gmail.com

resultados del análisis de discurso de nueve entrevistados – hombres homosexuales, con edades entre 25 y 47 años, pertenecientes al segmento socioeconómico medio, habitantes de la ciudad brasileña de Goiânia, que cohabitan con sus compañeros. Fueron discutidos los resultados referentes a dos categorías que emergieron en el proceso de análisis de las entrevistas: sus visiones de familia y matrimonio; y sus experiencias cotidianas en respecto a su conyugalidad. Los resultados indicaron que estos sujetos tienen visiones de familia y matrimonio fuertemente influenciadas por la valoración del afecto y del respeto a la singularidad de los individuos. En sus cotidianos ellos crean una división de tareas domésticas singular, la cual no sigue criterios de distinción de géneros socialmente establecidos. Aún que se sientan libres de la influencia de las normas sexistas en sus espacios de vida íntima, los participantes sufren los efectos de la heteronormatividad social en las esferas públicas.

Palabras-clave: Conyugalidad homoafectiva; heteronormatividad; contemporaneidad.

Introduction

This study discusses the experience of people who are in a conjugal relationship with partners of the same sex, from a research carried out with homosexual men; it is particularly interested in debating the effects that the naturalization of heteronormative standards may have on conjugal experiences.

Heteronormativity is a term frequently used to refer to practices and institutions that legitimate and privilege the heterosexuality and the heterosexual relationships as being fundamental and natural in society. When heterosexuality is defined as a social standard, in heteronormativity societies, a set of prescriptions directed to all the individuals can be verified, even towards the ones who do not have sexual relationships with people of the opposite sex, making their lives be organized from a model supposedly coherent, superior and “natural” of heterosexuality (Miskolci, 2009).

The marginalization of the homosexuals, a reflex of the instituted heteronormativity, has influenced the social and the legal recognition processes of the homoaffective relationships in Brazil. In many countries, such as Holland, Switzerland, the United States, Uruguay and Argentina, the marriage between people of the same sex has already been regulated. In Brazil, the first Law Project that regulates the civil union between people of the same sex was presented in 1995, causing a lot of controversy and political articulation against its validation; although the law has suffered many alterations, it has not been approved yet (Uziel et al, Ferreira, Medeiros, Antônio, Tavares, Moraes, Andrade, & Machado, 2006).

Nevertheless, important advances for the legal recognition of homoaffective relationships have been reached, especially by means of actions stemming from juridical instances independent from the Legislative Power. Nowadays, people of the same sex are able to marry by means of the conversion of stable union into marriage (Resolution 175/2013).

The peculiarity of the Brazilian process of juridical recognition of the homoaffective relationship lies on the fact that, in Brazil, the homoaffective marriage is only allowed in cases that do not interfere with the conception of officially instituted family, which is defined as the result of the union of a man and a woman, or of one of the parents with their children. Surely, in the last decades, the society's individualization and the de-standardization of the individuals' life courses have favored the emergence of a variety of new family configurations, which boosts the increase of ways of conceiving a family. However, the rupture of the “peripheral” character of homoaffective relationships in heteronormative societies remains as a process that is more difficult to be accomplished.

According to Singly (2007) and Elias (1994), what characterizes an individualistic society is the fact that the individual is a central value in social life, which makes the relations become less determined by socially established standards and that causes the existence of more individualization possibilities. In them, the family is conceived as a place that embraces different “I(s)” and the relations that are established among its members tend to allow the emergence of each one's singularity and reject all kinds of embarrassment imposed to the individuals. It is then possible to construct a type of interpersonal articulation that favors the affective exchanges, the liberty and the respect to individual differences; those dimensions are considered fundamental for the framing of personal identities.

With that, this configuration of values has made family relations more flexible and sensitive to the individual's issues. They embody the spirit of individualistic relations, characterized by Singly (2007) as a form of humanism, for they favor the shift of the “I” from static references and promote more freedom for the individuals to become themselves. Because of that, one can notice the enlargement not only of

the family models, but also of the feeling of what a family is, which comprehends diverse family configurations: monoparental families, families constituted by the re-marriage of the parents and with children from different relationships, etc. It can be affirmed that the contemporary family is presented as one that is able to adapt according to the individuals' necessities.

Even within this scenario, the families composed of homoaffective couples have faced more resistance to obtain recognition as a contemporary family configuration. The gender issues have been able to evolve mainly due to social movements' militant actions.

The resistance to the affirmation of the homoaffective couples is caused by the fact that the homoaffective relationships suffer a kind of depreciation, which stems from the historically-built meaning for homosexuality, which is defined from heteronormative standards. Because of that, it acquires a sense of deviation, abnormality. This causes the homoaffective relationships to be marked by a social stigma. Stigma, according to Goffman (2012), is based upon a "theory", or a "discourse", ideologically constructed in relation to an attribute considered inferior, depreciating, which ends up placing the individual who has such attribute in a position of social discredit. The one who is stigmatized hardly escapes from the inferiorization that is attributed to them, for the stigmatizing attribute ends up imposing itself on their social identity in such way that all of their other qualities become incomprehensible.

Besides the stigmatization, the marginalization of homoaffective relationships is the reflex of the "symbolic violence" that the homosexuals suffer. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2008), the "symbolic violence" is carried out by means of a consensual discourse on the "natural" character of the inferiority of certain social groups. By means of this process, the different is turned into inferior, "naturalizing" an inferiority that is of the order of the socially built; a violence, as Bourdieu (1982) points out, that is legitimated by the society, performed silently. As a consequence of that, the homosexuals are excluded and disqualified, suffering violence resulting from a system that legitimates inequality as well as discrimination practices, making those ways of violence become inescapable.

The perception of mismatch in relation to the heterosexist social standard may cause a feeling of inadequacy on the homosexuals; that feeling causes specific forms of psychic suffering, and affects directly the living of the conjugality, as Borges and Rocha-Coutinho (2015) point out. Before it, it is commonly noticed a self-questioning process on the nature of the impulses and of the homosexual relationships; this questioning process would not occur if their experience were not socially considered pejorative and abnormal.

Despite of the stigmatizations and discriminations that they suffer, many homosexual people start having the awareness of the "symbolic violence" that they were subjected to and, thus, produce a critical discourse about the stigma that lies on them, refusing the marginality that the society imposes to them. Therefore, they produce for themselves a new conception of homosexuality as something "normal", in opposition to the homosexuality as a deviation. This movement is absolutely necessary for them to find a new internal balance and to be able to build a new course of life.

This process of re-signification of the homosexuality by the homosexuals, by means of which the partners acquire a new level of acceptance, is highlighted by França (2009) as being fundamental for the establishment of a love bond with somebody else. We also believe that this re-signification is fundamental for the consolidation of the conjugal identity among the homoaffective couples, with the internalization of a belonging feeling, an important factor for a fulfilling conjugality. However, once the conjugality is established, how do the heteronormative standards, which mark the homosexual individuals so much, influence on their life as a couple?

In Brazil, the interest of the scientific community in studying homoaffective relationships, in comparison to other countries, is relatively small, like Santos, Scorsolini-Comin and Santos (2013), Nascimento, Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine and Santos (2015) highlight. Possibly, because of the social illegitimacy attributed to the homoaffective relationships, this subject was generally dealt with in genre studies groups. Outside of those groups, however, even though the new family configurations had already been discussed for decades, until a short time ago, there were few studies on that topic. When those studies were carried out, they were generally based upon theories that had heterocentric references, which ended up reinforcing pathologized representations of homoaffective relationships, allowing interpretations that, in some way, justified the segregation and the marginalization of the homosexuals.

Only recently, after the first advances on the legal recognition of the homoaffective union, new researches on families composed of same-sex couples started being produced more frequently, from a focus that takes into consideration the ideological issues that are intrinsic to homoaffective relations. The important contribution that the most recent studies on that topic have provided refers to the problematization of the influence that the heteronormative culture has on the homoaffective conjugal life. Those studies promote discussions on the way that homoaffective couples celebrate their marriage, on the importance of the social networks for their relationships, on the expectation to become a parent, on the invisibility that those couples suffer, among other topics, which have led to a reflection on the ideological clash within those relationships as a consequence of the naturalization of heteronormative standards in our society (Lomando, Wagner, & Gonçalves, 2011; Hernández, Silva, & Uziel, 2012; Luz & Gonçalves, 2014; Meletti & Scorsolini-Comin, 2015; Pontes, Féres-Carneiro, & Magalhães, 2015; Machin, 2016; Gross, Courduriès, & Federico, 2014; Rosa, Melo, Boris, & Santos, 2016).

Like those most recent studies, this one is concerned with the contribution for the enlargement of knowledge about homoaffective relationships in a way that is aware of the effects of the heteronormativity on the socially-built meanings of homosexuality. Based upon a qualitative research carried out to understand the homoaffective relationships from the perspective of homosexual men, the proposal of this paper is constituted; it is one of discussing: 1) the views of family and marriage of homosexual men, analyzing the values that cross their discourses; and 2) how the routine of a homoaffective couple is structured, comprehending the influence of the heteronormative standards on the daily conjugality experience.

Therefore, there is a question to be answered: What do family and marriage mean to them? When living a life as a couple, sharing the same home and the daily experiences, do they introduce, paradoxically, in their relationships, the heteronormative references that cause the marginalization of the homoaffective relationships? Do they mirror on a conjugality model characterized by the distinction of genre roles to organize their daily life? Or, on the contrary, do those relationships allow the verification that they overcome the standards that traditionally regulate the relationships of people of different sexes and the creation of a new logic? Finally, how do those men feel the effects of heteronormativity in their relationships?

Method

An interview was carried out with nine men, dwellers of the Brazilian city of Goiânia, Goiás State; they belong to the medium socioeconomic class, and are aged from 25 to 47 years old. All of them had been living a conjugal relationship with their same-sex partners, living in the same home, for at least 2 years. When the interview was carried out, all of them claimed to be homosexual, not bisexual or heterosexual, even though some of them had already had previous relationships with women. None of them had been married before, neither had children.

The interviewees were reached by means of the researcher's personal acquaintances; later, the interviewees themselves indicated other participants. This strategy was adopted because it allows approaching people who share a similar representation of the world, when the target is a very broad and varied segment, difficult to be defined, such as the case of medium socioeconomic classes, enabling the comparison of their discourses.

The interviews were based on a flexible questionnaire, previously prepared, composed of open questions that approached issues such as the process of "discovery" and "acceptance" of their homosexuality, the daily routine of their conjugal relationships, the juridical recognition of homoaffective relationships and the family relations as a whole. The questions were individually made, at times and places that were more convenient to the interviewees. The interviews were similar to a spontaneous talk, i.e., in a way that made the subjects feel comfortable and relaxed, by means of an empathic interaction established between the interviewer and the interviewees, according to the model of Comprehensive Interview (Ramos, 2015).

The participants of this research:

Table 1

Name	Age	Job	How long has been in a conjugal relationship
1. João	25 years old	University student	2 years
2. Leandro	30 years old	Geographer and university professor	11 years
3. Bernardo	30 years old	University student and shop manager	13 years
4. Augusto	33 years old	Actor and drama teacher	4 years
5. Evandro	33 years old	Engineer	7 years
6. Flávio	34 years old	Actor and teacher of drama and history	5 years
7. Carlos	37 years old	Public servant	7 years
8. Giorgio	41 years old	Public servant and lawyer	5 years
9. Helder	47 years old	Journalist	2 years

All the interviews were audio-recorded, and, after that, they were thoroughly transcribed. Once the interviews were transcribed, the resulting texts were subjected to a Discourse Analysis (Rocha-Coutinho, 1998; Fairclough & Melo, 2012). The interpretation of the material collected started with the identification of the topics that emerged spontaneously from the speeches, according to the conversation flow, or under the influence of the questionnaire used. Those topics resulted in four analysis category: *being gay; the impact of the juridical recognition of the homoaffective relationship; conceptions of family and marriage; and the daily life of the homoaffective conjugality*. In view of the aims of this study, only the two last ones are discussed in the present work. It is also important to highlight that all the interviews, their transcriptions and this paper itself were carried out and written, originally, in Brazilian Portuguese language. The paper, together with the interview excerpts presented in it, was translated into English language only after it had completely been finished.

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the institution where it was developed, and, in order to assure the anonymity of the participants, fictional names are used for them.

Discussion of the results

Conceptions of family and marriage

This category embraces the excerpts of the interviews concerning the interviewees' conceptions of family, and the importance that they attribute to marriage. Family is defined by the interviewees as something strictly connected to the affection that stems from the experiences that people share. It is characterized as a "feeling", linked to the idea of love, respect to the individuality and to the personal liberty, mutual care, security/confidence and common aims:

For me, it is... a person who... for example, who you live with, who you have some affection for, a bonding with. For example, your dog can be your family... One who is there with you at sad and happy moments, who is your companion. ... So, for me, family represents that, uh? Looove, uuh... (João)

We have just joked that friends turn out to be a family that you choose. Compatible... For me, this is family. A group of people who share affectivity... (Leandro)

So I think family is this continuous joint construction with respect, with care for one another. (Giorgio)

In addition, the respect to individuality, i.e., the possibility for one to affirm him/herself as a singular person, was highlighted by the interviewees as an important quality of the family relationships:

Because you have to respect each person's individuality, don't you? But we obviously have an idea in common... it's by respecting the individuality, having aims in common, this is family. (Augusto)

It's a... a place where you are yourself, maybe, uh? And, I don't know, you have people who help you somehow, live with you, I don't know... want the best for you, uh? (...) (Carlos)

In their views about marriage, affective aspects were also highlighted as an important element in the conjugal relationships, as can be noticed in:

Well, having someone to share life, share the experiences. Having someone to travel with you. Having someone to talk about how your day was, and... those things. (Carlos)

Well, having someone to share life, share the experiences. Having someone to travel with you. Having someone to talk about how your day was, and... those things. (Carlos)

I think that being married is being loved, being corresponded, and having this safety of having someone by my side, who, if I need, will support me, if I have an accident, will take care of me. (Giorgio)

The interviewees' discourses point out the valorization of affect and respect to the individuals' singularity, which demonstrates the strong influence of individualistic values in their ways of conceiving family and marriage. As Singly (2005; 2007), highlights, in individualistic societies, the relationships that are established in the family are centered in the individual, and, in them, issues such as affectivity, singularity and liberty are affirmed as fundamental references.

In this study, one could question whether the participants' use of expressions such as affectivity, safety, respect to individuality and companionship, cannot acquire another meaning, more specific, as it refers to stigmatized subjects. If they highlight those elements as being fundamental on their family conceptions, emphasizing the importance of people who make them feel completely accepted, it may mean that they are somehow reminding of the history of judgement and prejudice that they have experienced. Thus, we can understand that the prejudice that many of them have suffered in various social contexts, including their original family, may make them more willing to consider as family people of a social circle in which they feel accepted, loved and respected.

The interviewees also emphasized repressions that the fact of living with their partners imposes to them, such as: having to be responsible and loyal and having to give up on certain things to conciliate the individualities, the necessities and the wishes of each part, as the following speeches suggest:

It's sharing, really. You arrive, tell him your things... I think that actually is not even... it's sharing yourself. Because you have to think about yourself and think about another one, it means, it's sharing yourself. It's knowing that you have your individuality, and that this individuality is necessarily the right one... (Augusto)

Of course, I'll be honest, there are moments that you... you feel like being free, you feel like being free in the sense that you don't need to give explanations. Because this is a relationship: compromise. And sometimes you feel kinda stuck. (Bernardo)

Being married? Well I think that it's this compromise of having with another person, this compromise, I think that, really affective, of being together, of living together, of planning things together, and, I think mainly of rights. (Evandro)

Well, it's having more responsibility, isn't it? ... So people must be very prepared to understand that, from then on, what we used to call individual liberty starts being reduced. It starts being a shared liberty. (Helder)

In the difficult conciliation of conjugality with liberty (Féres-Carneiro, 1998), the autonomy and the individual satisfaction of the spouse may be in conflict with dependence bonds. The emphasis given to the individuality represents a tension in the process of constitution and maintenance of the conjugal life, for the conjugal life depends on the creation of a “common interaction zone”, of construction of the conjugal identity, and of conciliation of those dimensions with the individuality dimension of each spouse. The construction of this conjugal bond is threatened by a deep fear, which, in the contemporary context, the individual who is in a love relationship has of losing their liberty and independence. This is, according to Singly (2005), a paradox that the contemporary individualism brings to the couples’ universe. When it is a constituting part of a couple, the subject dreams of being able to be free in order to recover his/her independence. Nevertheless, when he/she is alone, they feel free, but are afraid of being alone forever and not being able to recover their state of being with someone.

Therefore, similarities can be noticed between the conjugal experience of homoaffective couples and heteroaffective couples concerning subjective issues related to loving involvement. The society’s individualization introduces in the experience of those couples the same romantic expectancies and the same necessity of conciliating the individualities that are found among couples of same-sex people.

The daily life of the homoaffective conjugality

Most of the interviewees claim that, in their daily life, the housework is shared between them and their partner, although this division is not established following traditional standards, according to what some tasks are feminine and other masculine, as commonly seen in heteroaffective relationships. Regardless of the activities that they carry out, they do not consider that someone is playing a “female” or a “male” work. “Partnership”, “sharing”, “helping”, “doing what one likes”, are references that permeate the organization of the domestic space:

Yes, there is a division. A real partnership. (Bernardo)

There is [task division], but they’re not that inflexible. (...) So there isn’t a definite role. It’s like this here, we share our lives. Happiness and sadness. (Leandro)

I can notice, by observing the relationships of my heterosexual siblings, that there are things that only the woman can do. If my brother-in-law does it, it’s like the end of the world. Not here. (Evandro)

That is an interesting data regarding the questions about the effects of the heteronormativity in the daily life of homoaffective couples. The egalitarian social ideas find, in the homoaffective conjugal relationships, a very propitious ground to de-construct concepts and standards that generally frame heteroaffective relationships. That was also confirmed in other studies (Meletti & Scorsolini-Comin, 2015; Shechory & Ziv, 2007). Those relationships subvert more easily all the social order established around the genders hierarchy, which, according to Bourdieu (1998), legitimates the perpetuation of gender inequality and of the “male domination”.

In heteroaffective families, the introduction of individualistic values in family relations originated a tension stemming from the paradoxical combination of hierarchic and individualistic references (Peixoto, Singly, & Cicchelli, 2000; Singly, 2005), which is mainly explicit in genres relations. In them, even if the relationship man-woman has become more egalitarian, the logic of genre distinction is still being operated: the male and the female roles remain very well delimited. Certain activities continue to be seen as male or female ones, leading, for example, to extra work for females to do, or to the existence of salary differences for men and women who have the same job in the working market, like some researches point out. In homoaffective relationships, this hierarchy of genre seems to break more easily, so the sharing of tasks to be done is based upon personal criteria, not on the genre.

The interviewees are critical in relation to the fact that, for many couples, the traditional male/female standards for sharing chores based on sexual roles persists. As one can observe on the speech excerpts below, they believe that, in the current context, all the stereotypes, including those ones related to genre identity, are being de-constructed, in a way that the individuals have more liberty to live the way they like:

I think it's the end of the stereotypes. Of all of them, uh? As we keep those thoughts of... functions specifically for males or females, behavior... Men don't cross their legs like this (makes a gesture), they cross their legs like this... I think this stuff is like a kind of a waste of time. It is a mechanism for domination, actually, isn't it? (...) So in our relationship we have never been stuck to those... Those conventions, you know? We've always let it happen, and so on. (Carlos)

Traditionally, for some gay couples, this is almost automatic, this machismo thing, uh? Of identifying the one who identifies more with the female genre and will be the one who carries out activities that are said to be, quotations, "female", and the one who identifies more with the male genre, more masculine, becomes the one who does the "male activities". But between us we don't have this rule of conduct. We don't have uhhh, genre for the activities... So there is not such binary male-female stuff. (Helder)

We don't have such thing of male and female roles. (...) it doesn't make a difference to me. But it does for some couples. I think this is outdated. (Leandro)

I think those roles are inverted even in the heterosexual world. (Flávio)

I think there isn't such thing anymore, activities only for men and activities only for women. We're two men, doing the work of a normal house, like any man does. (João)

When they highlight that they do not establish their relationships according to heteronormative standards, that they have not been playing defined roles as "female" or "male", even when they carry out functions usually attributed to women, such as cooking, cleaning or organizing the house, and being radically against the idea that some member of the couple is considered less masculine for having another man as a partner, the interviewees adopt a more egalitarian way of conceiving the idea of family. It is possible to affirm then, that they organize their lives from standards different from the traditional socially-produced ones, without much influence of the heteronormative instituted standards.

Despite they constantly try not to reproduce a heterosexual relationship standard, which they try to break, this study evidences that homoaffective couples suffer the effects of the culture instituted around the heteronormative ideal. The results found show that, in their social contacts, homoaffective couples continue to be subjected to social judgment, based upon heterocentric principles, which inspire them to live in a marginalized way in the society.

As the excerpts below show, those couples do not have the same liberty that the heteroaffected couples have to express their affection in public places or in social events:

I'm tired of this, of wanting to have certain mobility in the society itself that doesn't depend on that, but you can't have because of the standards. (...) For example, there'll be a party at my company, let's say. I go with E., we enjoy, so on. Is this something that can happen? Yes, it can. But it's gonna be abnormal, uh? (Carlos)

The difference is that we can't hold hands on the street, I can't kiss my partner in a mall, I can't express my affectivity. It's not forbidden, but... you may be assaulted, you may be hit... (Leandro)

They have to deal all the time with the idea of being "abnormal" and suffer the consequences of the prejudice:

It's like swimming against the tide, all day long. It's swimming against the tide. It's the same thing as being a socialist in a capitalist country. I mean, there is a dominant ideology that proclaims, all the time, that it's something natural... If you don't fit in to that, you're abnormal, you're sick, you're perverse. (Helder)

It's hard, because there's a lot of prejudice. The society is very prejudicial. Very... It's a cross. After the exposure I had... in the press... I was fired from the company I worked for. It's too hard. (João)

At work, I don't mention anything about my private life. (...) As I'm at the beginning of a career, I keep thinking: if I say I'm gay, will I ever be on a leadership position? So I keep it to myself at the company, too. (Giorgio)

The interviewees consider themselves invisible at the statistics that record the conjugal unions, as society established its standards without considering the homoaffective marriages, and, because of that, the public policies are insensitive to the necessities of homosexual couples:

I mean, what I've been meaning to say is that we enter the official statistics as a percentage, , 60 thousand couples, but it's much more (...) This is very bad, because we end up not being worth for the political policies. If you don't say that you exist, people won't worry about you. If you don't exist, you don't need anything. You don't need any tax benefits, any social benefits, anything. (...) Invisibility. This term is wonderful. The policy of invisibility. (Leandro)

They are not what their family would like them to be:

Our family respects us very much, but I'm sure they'd prefer it wasn't like that. It's obvious, of course. So, I think it's bad, but I think that what really matters is our feelings, indeed. (Carlos)

Besides that, the fact that they are stigmatized in the society hampers the bonding to other relatives, which can turn into something that makes the conjugal relationships more difficult, as the belonging to the family group is perceived as being more fragile, as we can notice in:

In a heterosexual relationship, I think the family bonding is much stronger. To your blood family. So, even though I have a good relationship with the families of both sides, mine and his, it's not the same. In the homosexual relationship, we don't have to go to the mother-in-law's house every weekend. (...) The children, I think they can connect people a bit more. And we don't have kids. So, I think it's an advantage of the heterosexual relationship... I don't know, I think it's something I miss a little. (Evandro)

The feelings are very similar for every couple, hetero or homosexual, etc. what links us. But the way of expressing, I think it's very different. Of course it's different, uh? That's why we're talking about it... you don't have the children from this relationship. Sometimes, there isn't that... that completely harmonic context... Like I said, we manage, somehow, to establish some room in this cell, the one called family. But when it's a common, heterosexual relationship, it's much easier, much more explicit, much more celebrated. So, it makes the couple's life much easier, uh? (Carlos)

It's different, but... In the homosexual relationship, there's more liberty, even because you don't have this family's interference, sometimes. In a heterosexual relationship, there's so much interference, sometimes from the parents, from closer people, siblings, whoever. And sometimes, independently of being accepted or not by the relatives, I think they interfere much less. It ends up like "live your life". (Bernardo)

Despite the homoaffective conjugal life is established with its bases on heteroaffective relationships, it could be noticed that the conjugal experience of the heterosexuals is different from the homosexuals. The heteronormative standards impose restrictions to the public expression of the homo-affectivity, what confirms the thesis of Aboim (2012), according to which more individualization, sentimentalization and deinstitutionalization of society does not lead directly to the assurance of social equality. The gender equality and the recognition of the homo-affective relationships depend on a deeper transformation of the logic and of the forms of expressing of male domination, mainly operated in the political scope.

Final considerations

"Swimming against the tide", homoaffective couples make their conjugal life possible in a society where the heterosexuality rules, dealing daily with conflicts that emerge, inevitably, within this conjuncture due to the fact that they are considered absurd. One of the specificity of the conjugal experience of same-

sex people lies on the fact that, despite they de-construct certain references that support the distinction of the genres roles on the dynamics of the heteroffective couple, they continue subjected to the effects of the social heteronormativity.

Differently from the couples composed of people of distinct sexes, who have to manage their relationship internally, i.e., in the relationship between the spouses, the contradictions that the egalitarianism brings to the relationships man-woman, according to the interviewees' point of view, couples of people of the same sex seem not to suffer that tension within their internal dynamics in such significant way. This situation can be explained, considering that heteroffective relationships, even if the introduction of democratic discourses place men and women in equality conditions, paradoxically usually persist ways to distinguish the genres that perpetuate the power asymmetry among them. In the homoffective relationships, the fact that it is a relationship between two people of the same sex makes the sexist logic subversion of distinctions of spaces and activities less conflicting, in a way that they can create more easily another division, non-sexist, to base their daily living. However, couples of people of the same sex live conflicts that are not evidenced in the way that they share the housework, but, on the fact that, when they are out of the limits of their houses and of the living with social groups more open to the sexual diversity, they face a world ruled by sexist standards and end up being pressured to adapt to the heteronormativity.

Before that, it can be concluded that, despite some feelings, such as love and willingness to be together, are present for homo and for heterosexual couples, as the interviewees point out, the way how the relationships are established is also different. Homoffective couples have to face some difficulties that are not imposed to heteroffective couples, such as: avoiding the social exposure as naturally as heteroffective couples; having to deal with socially produced stigma and suffering the consequences of prejudice regarding the sexual orientation; frustrating, many times, the expectancies of their relatives in relation to the establishment of a heteroffective conjugality, what hampers the linking to other relatives and ends up becoming a difficulty for the homoffective conjugal relationships; suffering limitations concerning the procreation of biological children of the couple; not being visible at the statistics and the country's political policies.

Besides that, they deal with the lack of support from the family network, which can also be understood as a form of social recognition. This is a vulnerability to those couples, for, without the support of relatives, and unless they are able to build a social network that can fulfill this role frequently played by the family network, the support of the conjugal relationship falls on the capacity of each partner to manage the relationship, dealing with the instabilities inherent to the love bond, possibly aggravated by an environment of social hostility.

Before that, it must be confirmed, by means of the analysis of the results of this research, the necessity of new studies on the homoffective conjugality with a focus on the specificity of the experience of those couples before the instituted heteronormativity and its family consequences. The deepening of knowledge into this topic is indispensable for the improvement of actions of psychosocial orientation and of the health field focused on the homosexual public, as for contributing to the demystification of homohomoffective relationships.

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Carolina de Campos Borges: Doctor in Psychology from PUC-Rio. Doctor in Psychology from PUC-Rio. Adjunct Professor of Psychology at Universidade Federal da Grande Dourados. <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2481-0596>.

Andrea Seixas Magalhães: Doctor in Psychology from PUC-Rio. Adjunct Professor of the Psychology Department of PUC-Rio. <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2992-9844>.

Terezinha Féres-Carneiro: Doctor in Psychology from PUC -SP. Professor at the Psychology Department of PUC-Rio. <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0564-7810>.