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"Does Everybody Want the Hollywood Fairytale?" Same-Sex Couples Hinting at the Second Demographic Transition in Brazil

"¿Todos quieren el cuento de hadas de Hollywood?" Parejas del mismo sexo señalan la Segunda Transición Demográfica en Brasil

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Abstract

This article examines same-sex couples as a sign of the Second Demographic Transition, investigating how gay and lesbian couples living together in Brasília build their family, whether they intend to have children, and what challenges they face. We conducted semi-structured interviews online to investigate the family formation process and parenting intentions of 42 couples living together in Brasília in 2019, 20 lesbian and 22 gay couples. The organizing themes in the interviews were marriage, children, work, and stigma. This study advances existing scholarship on families by articulating points of connection between the legal institution of same-sex marriage in Brazil, changing social norms regarding family life, and parental gender expectations as signs of the Second Demographic Transition. Studying same-sex couples contribute to a more complex understanding of the family, the gendered division of labor, and the dimension of fertility and parenting intentions.

Keywords

Family
Parenting intentions
Same-sex marriage
Second Demographic Transition

Resumen

Este artículo observa a las parejas del mismo sexo como un signo de la Segunda Transición Demográfica, investigando cómo las parejas de gais y lesbianas que viven juntos en Brasilia construyen su familia, si tienen la intención de tener hijos y qué desafíos enfrentan. Realizamos entrevistas semiestructuradas en línea para investigar el proceso de formación familiar y las intenciones de parentalidad de 42 parejas que vivían juntas en Brasilia en 2019, 20 parejas de lesbianas y 22 parejas de gais. Los temas de las entrevistas fueron el matrimonio, los hijos, el trabajo y el estigma. Este artículo avanza en la investigación sobre las familias al articular puntos de conexión entre la institución legal del matrimonio y las personas del mismo sexo en Brasil, el cambio de las normas sociales con respecto a la vida familiar y a las expectativas de género como signos de la Segunda Transición Demográfica. El estudio de las parejas del mismo sexo contribuye a una comprensión más compleja de la familia, de la división del trabajo por género y de la dimensión de la fertilidad y las intenciones de parentalidad.

Palabras Clave

Familia

Intenciones de parentalidad

Matrimonio homosexual

Segunda Transición Demográfica

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Contextual background

This article aims to investigate the family formation processes of same-sex couples in Brasília and their parenting intentions. Same-sex unions have both the potential to subvert the existing social order and/or to preserve the conservatism of marriage. The hypothesis is that, although same-sex couples are an obvious break away from the classic family model, they value child-rearing, and they seek union stability and the social legitimacy it brings. In this sense, choosing to examine new demographic configurations challenges the heteronormative configuration of what family is and how fertility shapes it.

Analyzing same-sex couples with a gendered angle in the context of the Second Demographic Transition allows us to explore how their experiences, perceptions, and desires are contrasting or not to the traditional perspective of family formation. In this respect, we seek to identify which subject matters are structuring to their discourse about conjugality and parenting.

When it comes to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and sexual minorities (LGBT+) groups, Brazilian society can be discriminatory and intolerant,

reflecting persistent religious and moral conservatism (Itaborahy, 2014). After the reinstatement of democracy in 1988, all elected presidents, including Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Dilma Roussef from the Workers' Party, have sought the support of powerful Evangelical politicians in the Legislative branch during their mandate and, therefore, were not allies to the LGBT+ cause (Encarnación, 2018). The current president Jair Bolsonaro (2019-), internationally known for his misogynistic and homophobic remarks, ensures domestic and foreign policies on gender issues are based on confronting the so-called "gender ideology". His government favors homophobia, anti-gender policies, the naturalization of male/female binary categories, the divisibility of human rights, and a nationalist discourse (Martins, 2019).

Hitherto, no federal legislation has been approved regarding same-sex families and the progress in that area has taken place on the Judiciary front only. The Supremo Tribunal Federal (Supreme Federal Court) approved domestic partnerships between people of the same sex in 2011. The ruling gave same-sex couples in domestic partnerships the same financial and social rights of those in heterosexual relationships (Supremo Tribunal Federal, 2011). Later, in 2013, the Conselho Nacional de Justiça (National Judicial Council of Brazil) legalized same-sex marriage in the entire country, ruling that all civil registries must notarize same-sex marriages and convert previous domestic partnerships in marriage if the couples so wish (Conselho Nacional de Justiça, 2013). Hence, no law legitimates same-sex marriage, but it is a right guaranteed by jurisprudence.

It should be noted that the Federal Constitution mentions the union between a man and a woman as the basis for family formation. However, the Federal Supreme Court has an inclusive interpretation that considers individuals. In September 2019, the Supreme Court excluded from the Civil Code any interpretation that would prevent recognition of same-sex couples as a family entity, ruling all families should have access to family-oriented public policies.

The establishment of joint parenting by gays and lesbians using reproductive technology is recent in Brazil. To date, there is no specific legislation regarding assisted reproduction, only medical regulations. In Brazil, gamete donation cannot be commercially negotiated. Following its previous resolutions, the Conselho Federal de Medicina in Portuguese (Federal Medical Council) most up-to-date resolution on the matter (No. 2,294/2021) states uterine hosts must be up to fourth-degree relatives (mother, daughter, sister, grandmother, aunt, or cousin) of the genetic donor (Conselho Federal de Medicina, 2021).

Serviço Único de Saúde (SUS), the universal health care system in Brazil, offers a human reproduction program in twelve hospitals in the country, one of them in Brasília. Serviço de Reprodução Humana do Centro de Ensino e Pesquisa em Reprodução Assistida do Hospital Materno Infantil de Brasília, a public reproduction center, offers assisted reproduction procedures to infertile heterosexual couples and to lesbian couples. Although men cannot physically get pregnant and give birth, surrogacy as allowed by the Federal Medical Council, could also be offered to gay couples, but it is not.

It is not surprising, then, that most gay couples in Brazil choose to adopt. Adoption occurs through a judicial process and is regulated by the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (Statute of the Child and the Adolescent), under federal laws 8.069 (Presidência da República e Casa Civil, 1990) and 12.010 (Presidência da República e Casa Civil, 2009). It establishes that in order to adopt a child or adolescent, one must be at least 18 years old, and 16 years older than the adoptee, and not be a sibling or ascendant of the adoptee.

It is possible to adopt as a single person, but if two people choose to adopt together, they must be married or living under a domestic partnership, proving their family structure is stable (Presidência da República e Casa Civil, 2009). The Child and Adolescent Statute does not mention the gender or sexual orientation of the adoptive parents as requirements to be considered in the adoption process. If same-sex couples meet the requirements of age and stable familial context, there is no impediment for them to become adoptive parents.

As aforementioned, there are clear discrepancies between the paths to parenthood that are allowed to gays and to lesbians. Compared with the range of possibilities for women to access assisted reproductive technologies, the options available to men in same-sex relationships are certainly narrower, limiting to some extent the transformation of gender relations. In this sense, this study gives visibility to new family arrangements, bringing inclusion to groups that still suffer stigma in their processes of conjugality and parenting. Hence, the present study is of great importance to broaden the horizons of the demographic analysis related to fertility and family formation, especially in relation to gender perspectives.

Studies on family formation and desired fertility are mostly focused on the reproductive behaviour of heterosexual couples and the fertility intentions of women. Choosing to examine different configurations of families and of paths to parenthood is important to challenge the heteronormative configuration

of what family is and how fertility shapes it. Although the demographic literature tends to discuss gender and fertility based on naturalized precepts, the traditional family configuration defined by the heterosexual nuclear family has been increasingly changing around the world in the last fifty years (Mills & Blossfeld, 2013; Sobotka & Toulemon, 2008).

In addition to factors such as increasing divorce rates and decreasing fertility, one of the many variables that shape this transformation is the process of social, legal, and political acceptance of same-sex marriage. Zrenchik & Craft (2016) call for a collective shift inside the field of family studies to properly include and expand the experiences of the LGBT+ community. This study is a step in this direction.

The article consists of five sections. This introduction is followed by the theoretical framework, which outlines how the Second Demographic Transition Theory relates to the family formation and parenting intentions of same-sex couples. Then, we describe the qualitative methodology and the interviewed couples. Next, the interviews are analyzed according to the thematic analysis proposed by Attride-Stirling (2001). Finally, we present the final considerations about the alignment of same-sex families with the Second Demographic Transition in Brazil, considering their specificities as an urban middle-class educated group.

Theoretical framework

The weakening of patriarchal authority, and the resulting changes in gender relations, opened space for the diversification of household patterns and domestic arrangements. Same-sex relationships are fundamentally important to this transformation, ideally leading the way to more egalitarian forms of connections, democratizing intimate life, and transforming the day-to-day of families (Weeks, 2007). In this sense, same-sex couples are part of a historical move toward family as a site of emotional and sexual gratification. The separation of sexuality from reproduction results in the dissociation between reproduction and heterosexuality, revolutionizing the possibilities of organizing family life (Matos, 2000).

A fundamental conceptual framework regarding families, declining fertility, societal norms, and the ideational sphere is the theory of the Second Demographic Transition (SDT). Originally, Lesthaeghe & Van de Kaa (1986), and later Lesthaeghe (2010, 2014, 2020), characterize the SDT in the West based on the trends of fertility decline, secularization, a shift

of importance from the child to the couple, and the dissociation between sexuality and reproduction, due largely to the dissemination of hormonal methods of contraception. These transformations structure their argument for a new demographic era.

The authors argue that not only socioeconomic changes enabled all these transformations, but also ideational changes allowed individuals to have freedom of choice, to be more self-centered and focused on their higher-order needs, following the Maslowian preference drift (Maslow, 1954 as cited in Lesthaeghe, 2010). These changes are related to many different life events, such as older ages at first union and first child, higher divorce rates, higher educational attainment of women, and an increased number of same-sex partnerships. The SDT has diversified family life, displaying the wide variety of families that do not conform to the idealized traditional family (Carroll, 2018).

The SDT can develop in different societies as different combinations of characteristics. In that sense, demographic trends are likely outcomes, rather than determinants, of institutional changes in contemporary societies, reflecting a shift in gendered power hierarchies (Carlson, 2019). Institutions that used to have authority over and regulated domestic behaviors, such as religion, for instance, no longer have that much power to influence individuals' family decisions (Lesthaeghe, 2010). Although Verona et al. (2015) call attention to signs contrary to the SDT in Brazil, it is important to consider the SDT is overly complex and its indicators do not have the same onset nor follow the same rhythm (Lesthaeghe, 2020).

Lesthaeghe & Esteve (2016) explain the power of an "ethical revolution", which includes the acceptance of homosexuality over time and with advancing education. The trends of fertility postponement and the rise of cohabitation worldwide point out that part of the explanation about rising cohabitation comes from this ethical revolution that stands on strong individual autonomy over weakening traditional norms (Lesthaeghe, 2020).

Nonetheless, the concept of the SDT is not consensual among demographers. Coleman (2004) argues that the phenomenon is only secondary; it is neither a transition nor demographic, because it does not involve other demographic components. Notwithstanding, the author concedes the SDT is valuable in depicting new lifestyle choices and behavior preferences in modern societies.

Bernhardt (2004) questions the lack of gender perspective in the SDT. In this sense, Goldscheider, Bernhardt, & Lappegård (2015) defend that the family

trends analyzed in the SDT framework are products of a gender revolution that will be complete when men participate in the domestic sphere as women have done in the public arena. In this scenario, fertility will become stable at the replacement level. However, their article reduces gender to a proxy of the heterosexual nuclear family in developed countries.

The inclusion of same-sex relationships in the field of fertility studies is a crucial step to broaden the discussion on family, fertility, and gender. Demographers usually interpret fertility intentions as a proximate determinant for actual fertility or as a variable to determine the gap between intended and actual fertility as a driver of low fertility. For same-sex couples, fertility intentions are not only predictors but determining factors for fertility behavior. They reliably represent the case of intentional and reasoned action when it comes to having children.

Fertility intentions and parenting intentions

Much has been written about fertility intentions (Ajzen & Klobas, 2013; Bongaarts, 1992; Morgan & Taylor, 2006; Quesnel-Vallée & Morgan, 2003; Schoen et al., 1999). Fertility intentions theories, however, do not explicitly address gender identity or sexuality issues. One can assume non-heterosexual women will probably never face an unwanted pregnancy and the challenges they face to achieve their desired fertility are different than those of heterosexual women. Hence, it is crucial to bring to light the impact of sexuality on fertility intentions.

Deciding to be a parent is a highly intentional life transition for someone who falls out of the cis-heteronormative world. The planned nature of their parenthood means their parental timing is deliberate. Gato, Santos & Fontaine (2017) found a cohort effect for lesbians' and gay men's parental aspirations—younger people come out earlier and include parenthood in their life plans. In previous decades, having children in a heterosexual relationship before getting involved in a same-sex relationship was the most common route to parenthood.

Nonetheless, same-sex couples are increasingly choosing different pathways nowadays (Moore & Stambolis-Ruhstorfer, 2013). They include surrogacy, adoption, the biological child of one partner from a previous relationship, and they vary by age and cohort, gender, race, and socioeconomic status, all variables that impact parenting experiences (Gato et al., 2017; Umberson et al. 2015).

Kazyak et al. (2016) found that sexual minority women have a broad notion of motherhood, distinguishing between having and raising children. The authors argue that survey research in fertility could be improved by changing the wording of questions and by addressing the sexuality of participants, to reflect the variety of experiences all individuals can have. Likewise, Stewart (2002) asserts that parity should be conceptualized to reflect the parentage of children.

Given demographers are essential for analyzing the relationship between sexual identity, family formation, reproductive behaviors, and their population consequences (D'Lane & Baumle, 2018), rather than focusing exclusively on predicting live births, demographers could explore intentions from a different perspective, emphasizing the role of parenting to the creation of families. The post-modern family, as defined by Roudinesco (2003), is comprised of two individuals seeking intimacy and sexual satisfaction. In this sense, grounding kinship in love is what determines identity and unity (Weston, 1997). In this scenario, parenthood is considered more an affection bond than a biological one. However, parenting is traditionally considered a heterosexual feminine feature of gender role identity (Kranz, Busch & Niepel, 2018). As social and parental roles are conventionally defined by the male/female dichotomy, the family formation process of same-sex couples challenges the sexual dimorphism upon which the traditional family is based.

Same-sex families

We present here a brief overview of studies on same-sex marriage and the pathways gay and lesbian couples take to parenthood. It is noteworthy that internalized homophobia and the perceived need to hide one's sexual orientation are big obstacles to having children. According to Meyer (2013), internalized homophobia is defined as the assimilation of societal homophobic attitudes related to poor psychological well-being and lower relationship quality among same-sex couples. In this sense, family disapproval of same-sex couples has been shown to be associated with increased relationship strain and lower social network support (Reczek, 2016).

It is known marriage benefits men and women in heterosexual relationships—they are healthier and happier than single individuals (Grover & Helliwell, 2019). Studies about the benefits of same-sex marriage show marital advantages for same-sex couples as well (Chen & Van Ours, 2018). Carpenter et al. (2018) found that being married increased healthcare

access and care among sexual minority men in the United States. Moreover, Boertien & Vignoli (2019) show that after the legalization of same-sex marriage in England and Wales, and the consequent reduction of social stigma, there was an increase in subjective well-being for individuals in same-sex relationships.

Befriending queer parents and meeting a partner who is also motivated to parent can be important turning points of the parental pathways gays and lesbians experience, especially if they previously suffered from lack of support and internalized homophobia (Goldberg, 2010). An imbalance of parenting intentions between the partners can lead to the end of the relationship unless one grows into the idea of parenthood and both partners become equally motivated (Gato et al., 2017).

Studies on same-sex family formation and parenting intentions have emerged in many countries. Bowling et al. (2019) in India; in Greece, Voultsos et al. (2019) analyzed how low social acceptance influences lesbian parenthood; Baiocco & Laghi (2013) show gays and lesbians without children in Italy were less likely than heterosexual individuals to express parenting desires and intentions; Costa & Bidell (2017) found younger participants in their study were more likely to express intent to parent in Portugal; in contrast, young gay men in Germany were less likely than their heterosexual counterparts to report the desire to become fathers (Kranz, Busch & Niepel, 2018); in the United States Tate, Patterson & Levy (2019) also found that in comparison to heterosexual individuals, fewer lesbians and gays intended to become parents and they reported wanting smaller family sizes than their heterosexual peers.

In Brazil, research in Psychology shows qualitative case studies of same-sex couples, such as Meletti & Scorsolini-Comin (2015), Borges, Magalhães & Féres-Carneiro (2017), Tombolato et al. (2018), and Gurgel & Uziel (2019). They discuss the concern of participants with conjugal dynamics, societal norms regarding children's well-being, and the stigma of having same-sex parents.

Biblarz & Stacey (2010) defend the strengths typically associated with hetero-sexual married parents appear to the same extent in same-sex parents. Because parenting skills are not dichotomous or exclusive, the gender of parents is not determinant for children's psychological adjustment and social success. It has been shown the role of sexual orientation is not a signif-icant variable for children's well-being (Araldi & Serralta, 2016; Boertien & Bernardi, 2019; Farr, Forssell & Patterson, 2010).

However, that is not to say that socially prescribed gender norms do not impact same-sex parents. Herrera et al. (2018) affirm gay fatherhood is structured upon assimilation rather than differentiation. Consonantly, Pineda & Jaramillo (2020) found similarities in the perceptions of bisexual and homosexual families in Colombia with the traditional family model. Webb, Chonody & Kavanagh (2017) researched attitudes toward same-sex parenting in Australia and found a more positive attitude about lesbians parenting than about gays.

In the United States, same-sex parents are more likely to be female than male and they tend to have less income than same-sex couples without children (Gates, 2013). According to Schneebaum & Lee Badgett (2019), in comparison to heterosexual married couples, same-sex couples are more likely to be poor. Simon et al. (2018) found that lesbian women reported wanting to work full-time and have a permanent position before parenthood more so than heterosexual women. Nonetheless, lesbians' household incomes usually are lower than those of heterosexual and gay households. Ahmed, Andersson & Hammarstedt (2011) and Aksoy, Carpenter & Frank (2018) show similar results for Sweden and for the United Kingdom, respectively.

Regarding domestic work, same-sex couples tend to embody a more egalitarian structure of household and childcare tasks, dividing them more equally between partners in comparison to heterosexual couples (Bauer, 2016; Giddings et al., 2014; Patterson, Sutfin & Fulcher, 2004). However, gay couples in comparison to lesbian couples are more prone to have problems when allocating chores, because men are generally disinclined to do what has always been considered women's work (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Brewster, 2017; Kurdek, 2007). Gay and lesbians couples have different experiences due to mainstream gender roles and heteronormativity (Libson, 2012). According to Aguirre (2015), the public/private sphere dualism is the essential variable to analyze the similarities and differences among various family arrangements.

The theoretical framework segment outlined the most relevant contributions in the demographic literature to pinpoint what paradigms are in place when we study the family dynamics and parenting intentions of same-sex couples. The following section explains the methodology employed in this study to examine the family formation of same-sex couples residing in Brasília.

The methodological path

Issues surrounding intentions and desires are, in their nature, subjective and could not be adequately understood with the use of quantitative surveys. Thus, a qualitative methodological approach based on semi-structured interviews is best suited to analyze same-sex couples' family formation and parenting intentions. One of the main advantages of this technique is that it allows the researcher to obtain information that is not accessible through structured questionnaires. Such information helps to understand the behavior of the interviewees, as well as the representations he or she has about his or her life experiences (May, 2004).

We chose interviews because we are not only interested in the families' life experiences, but also in the meanings they attach to those experiences, seeking to analyze how individuals interpret and narrate the events in their lives they see as important to understand their families' formation and parenting intentions.

The invitation to take part in the study emphasized the interview was a talk about same-sex couples who live together in Brasília. Most couples demanded some persistence and flexibility in (re)scheduling to have their participation. The semi-structured interviews allowed the gathering of conversational narratives about the couple's history and plans, encouraging rich descriptions from participating couples and ensuring some degree of comparison across interviews. The question guide used in the interviews is attached to the appendix.

Although there are advantages and disadvantages to a joint interview, it can bring forward rich dialogues not only between the participants and the interviewer, but also between the partners. It is important to emphasize that in joint interviews couples might minimize disagreements, which increases the chance of producing positive and consensual narratives.

The interviews were conducted online and were convenient both for the researcher and for the couples. There was no need for transportation, scheduling was flexible, and the absence of a formal presence created a relaxed and friendly environment, allowing the couples to be home without any physical interference to their daily dynamics, usually during a calm and private moment that allowed the couples to speak for as long as they wanted. Interviews happened from April to September 2019 and were audio-recorded, typically ranging from 45 to 55 minutes, although several extended beyond that time because couples with children and/or familial

difficulties tended to talk more. Informed consent was obtained from all participants. The project was approved by the ethics board, and it is registered in *Plataforma Brasil*, under number 14914619.0.0000.5149, respecting all the precepts and norms regarding research with human subjects in Brazil.

Requirements for participation in the study were self-identification as a same-sex couple living together in Brasília at the time of the interview. The choice of the city of Brasília stems from the fact that the country's capital is considered modern and has relatively high development indexes, which, in theory, facilitates recognition and access to the rights of same-sex couples, generating less taboo and social discrimination around this group. Besides, Brasília is a young city that welcomes many migrants from all Brazilian regions since its early years, making the population diverse in terms of familial background.

At the end of the interviews, we asked participants if they could recommend other couples to participate in the study. Thus, the selection of the studied population was not random, since the participants of the research were selected by colleagues' referrals and new referrals came from the participants themselves, generating a network of participants. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic characteristics. They all belong to a middle-class urban group.

Table 1. Summary of participants' characteristics

Characteristics	Sample	
	Women	Men
Total number of individuals	40	44
Born and raised in Brasília	22	22
Tertiary educational attainment	36	44
White	23	32
Brown	12	11
Black	5	1
Mean age	31.8	33.1

Source: Answers from interviewees.

Tables 2 and 3 present the couples' characteristics. The "current number of children" column shows how many kids the couple raises together, independently of biological ties. In the appendix, the reader can find a brief history of each couple. Here, lesbian couples are presented first, and gay couples are listed next. To protect the participants' identities, all names are fictitious.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of lesbian couples

	Name	Age	Born in	Ethnicity	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Couple's monthly income (R$)	Living arrangement	First conjugal union	Current number of children	Desired number of children
1	Tatiana	28	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	White	Some college	Cooking chef	4-6k	Marriage	Yes	0	1
	Marcela	33	Parelhas (RN)	Black	Bachelor	Historian			Yes	0	2
2	Diane	28	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Public servant	4-6k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	2
	Daniela	27	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Some college	Public servant			Yes	0	2
3	Lara	29	Brasília (DF)	White	Some college	Realtor	>10k	Cohabitation	Yes	4	4
	Larissa	34	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Advertiser			No	4	4
4	Juliana	27	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Master student	4-6k	Marriage	Yes	0	2
	Clarice	35	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Advertiser			Yes	0	2
5	Mirela	30	Brasília (DF)	Brown	High school	Beautician	4-6k	Marriage	Yes	2	2
	Elis	31	Ceres (GO)	Brown	Bachelor	Realtor			Yes	2	2
6	Renata	45	Teresina (PI)	Brown	Bachelor	Public servant	4-6k	Marriage	No	1	2
	Priscila	31	Picos (PI)	Brown	Some college	Saleswoman			Yes	1	1
7	Adriana	33	Dores do Indaiá (MG)	White	Bachelor	Saleswoman	8-10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	1	2
	Carla	38	Brasília (DF)	White	Master	Physiotherapist			Yes	1	2
8	Lorena	37	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Gym teacher	6-8k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	2
	Cristina	46	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Some college	Driver			No	0	2
9	Antonia	30	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Elementary teacher	8-10k	Marriage	Yes	1	2
	Denise	32	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	White	Bachelor	Elementary teacher			Yes	1	2
10	Alícia	25	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Artist	2-4k	Domestic partnership	Yes	1	3
	Rebeca	27	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Some college	Masseuse			No	1	2
11	Bruna	31	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Public servant	2-4k	Marriage	Yes	0	2
	Bianca	31	Brasília (DF)	Black	Some college	French teacher			No	0	2
12	Letícia	27	Brasília (DF)	Black	Bachelor	Social worker	2-4k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	2
	Rafaela	22	Brasília (DF)	Brown	High school	Telemarketer			Yes	0	2

(continues)

Table 2 (continuation)

	Name	Age	Born in	Ethnicity	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Couple's monthly income (R$)	Living arrangement	First conjugal union	Current number of children	Desired number of children
13	Silvana	39	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	White	Bachelor	Nurse	6-8k	Cohabitation	No	2	2
	Meire	33	Mãe do Rio (PA)	Brown	Some college	Saleswoman			No	2	2
14	Natália	23	Floriano (PI)	Black	High school	Youtuber	4-6k	Cohabitation	Yes	1	1
	Joana	22	Brasília (DF)	White	High school	Unemployed			Yes	1	1
15	Fabiana	35	Goianésia (GO)	White	Bachelor	Psychologist	8-10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	0	0
	Flora	36	Teresina (PI)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	0
16	Érica	30	São Paulo (SP)	Brown	Bachelor	Photographer	8-10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	2	3
	Verônica	36	Uberlândia (MG)	White	Doctorate	Professor of Anthropology			No	2	2
17	Maria Clara	31	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Educator	6-8k	Marriage	Yes	0	3
	Paola	33	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Logistics specialist			Yes	0	3
18	Sandra	29	Brasília (DF)	Black	Bachelor	Physiotherapist	>10k	Marriage	No	1	2
	Tânia	42	Santos (SP)	White	Doctorate	Professor of Public Health			No	1	2
19	Flávia	36	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Psychologist	>10k	Marriage	No	0	3
	Fernanda	35	Anápolis (GO)	White	Bachelor	Businesswoman			Yes	0	3
20	Helena	28	Rio Grande (RS)	White	Bachelor	Bank clerk	>10k	Marriage	Yes	0	2
	Marta	30	Vilhena (RO)	White	Bachelor	Pet shop owner			Yes	0	2

Source: Answers from interviewees.

Table 3. Socio-demographic characteristics of gay couples

	Name	Age	Born in	Ethnicity	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Couple's monthly income (R$)	Living arrangement	First conjugal union	Current number of children	Desired number of children
1	Tomás	30	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Public servant	6-8k	Marriage	Yes	0	0
	Ronaldo	32	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	0
2	Rafael	30	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	White	Bachelor	English teacher	6-8k	Marriage	Yes	0	0
	Leandro	28	Belford Roxo (RJ)	White	Master	Historian			Yes	0	0
3	Túlio	36	Belo Horizonte (MG)	Brown	Bachelor	Public relations	4-6k	Domestic partnership	Yes	0	0
	Gabriel	29	S. José dos Campos (SP)	White	Bachelor	Architect			No	0	0
4	Márcio	30	Brasília (DF)	White	Master	Economist	>10k	Cohabitation	No	0	1
	Paulo	25	Goiânia (GO)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	1
5	Danilo	32	Nazaré da Mata (PE)	White	Bachelor	Personal trainer	>10k	Marriage	Yes	2	3
	Renan	42	Fortaleza (CE)	White	Bachelor	Sales rep			Yes	2	3
6	Ivan	33	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Journalist	8-10k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	1
	Samuel	29	Medellin (Colômbia)	White	Master	PhD student			Yes	0	1
7	Iago	27	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Art director	6-8k	Marriage	Yes	0	0
	Luiz	25	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Theater teacher			Yes	0	0
8	Gael	29	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Psychologist	6-8k	Domestic partnership	Yes	0	2
	Jorge	29	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Realtor			Yes	0	1
9	Roberto	48	Araxá (MG)	White	Bachelor	Engineer	>10k	Marriage	No	0	0
	Adriano	28	Canindé de São Francisco (SE)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	0
10	Davi	27	Machado (MG)	White	Bachelor	Lawyer	>10k	Marriage	Yes	0	2
	Vinícius	30	Montes Claros (MG)	Brown	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	2
11	Bernardo	31	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Bridal designer	4-6k	Marriage	Yes	0	2
	Júlio	39	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Financial Analyst			No	0	0

(continues)

Table 3 (continuation)

	Name	Age	Born in	Ethnicity	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Couple's monthly income (R$)	Living arrangement	First conjugal union	Current number of children	Desired number of children
12	Heitor	32	Paraíso do Tocantins (TO)	White	Bachelor	Social Worker	>10k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	1
	Hugo	29	Patos de Minas (MG)	White	Bachelor	Lawyer			Yes	0	1
13	Nicolas	30	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Graphic designer	>10k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	0
	Miguel	34	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Medical doctor			Yes	0	0
14	Sérgio	31	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Some college	English teacher	4-6k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	0
	Anderson	31	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Architect			Yes	0	0
15	Maurício	29	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Lawyer	>10k	Domestic partnership	No	0	1
	Cláudio	42	Fortaleza (CE)	White	Bachelor	Accountant			No	0	1
16	Fernando	30	Brasília (DF)	Brown	Bachelor	Bank clerk	>10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	0	2
	Otávio	34	Ubajara (CE)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	2
17	Alexandre	30	Brasília (DF)	White	Some college	Public servant	>10k	Cohabitation	Yes	0	2
	Caio	27	Brasília (DF)	Black	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	0	2
18	Jonas	40	Tupanciretã (RS)	White	Bachelor	Public servant	>10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	1	3
	Alberto	55	Caxias do Sul (RS)	White	Bachelor	Lawyer			Yes	1	3
19	Vicente	38	São Paulo (SP)	Brown	Bachelor	Bank clerk	>10k	Marriage	Yes	2	2
	Diego	44	Goiânia (GO)	White	Bachelor	Bank clerk			Yes	2	2
20	Marcelo	36	Juiz de Fora (MG)	White	Bachelor	Public servant	>10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	0	0
	Felipe	37	Além Paraíba (MG)	White	Bachelor	Medical doctor			Yes	0	0
21	Pablo	41	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Public servant	>10k	Marriage	Yes	1	1
	Francisco	42	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	1	2
22	Fábio	30	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Elementary teacher	>10k	Domestic partnership	Yes	1	2
	Augusto	28	Brasília (DF)	White	Bachelor	Public servant			Yes	1	2

Source: Answers from interviewees.

In this sample, women are more inclined to parenthood than men: 19 lesbian couples out of 20 reported wanting children; ten of them already had children, but only 5 had realized their desired number of children. For men, 8 out of 22 gay couples want children, 5 already have children, and 9 have realized their desired number of children, considering the couples who do not want children.

After the interviews, the material was examined according to the analytical proposition of Attride-Stirling (2001), denominated thematic networks. It organizes qualitative data by categorizing the main themes that appear at different levels and it includes six basic steps: i) the coding of the material; ii) the identification of themes; iii) the construction of the thematic network; iv) the description and exploring of the thematic network; v) summarizing the themes and their patterns, and finally; vi) interpreting the described patterns in light of the research question and the literature review. The next section presents the thematic network we constructed.

Results

Labeling the discourse according to their content, based on keywords and sentence structures used by the couples, allowed us to summarize and highlight the most important and reoccurring themes in their narratives. The central theme of the interviews was family formation. From the couples' perspectives, the organizing themes to family formation were marriage (broadly used to refer to a coresidential committed relationship), children, work and stigma. Each organizing theme was framed by basic themes, creating a thematic network as shown in Figure 1. The central theme and organizing themes are represented by blue circles, and basic themes by purple ones. Figure 1 does not aim to establish causal relationships among themes but to illustrate the main topics discussed during the interview. Here, "tying the knot" is an umbrella term to encompass cohabitation, domestic partnership, and legal marriage.

The concept of being a family reflected the interviewees' experiences of conjugality and parenting, reinforcing the notion of kinship based on affection. The couples discussed the conventionality of their living arrangements and the changing social perceptions they were subjected to upon the arrival of children. In this sense, being a family, the central theme of the thematic network, and its organizing themes (marriage, children, work, and stigma) are not isolated constructs. Sexual orientation stigma and the workload the couples bear, inside and outside the home, per pass their decisions to live together, to become parents, and to manage their family life.

Figure 1: Thematic network of same-sex couples in Brasília

Source: Answers from interviewees.

It is important to emphasize that the interviews happened during the first months of President Bolsonaro's mandate. His victory represented a rightward shift in the country and a win for the far-right, which made many of them apprehensive about the future, scared to lose their acquired rights. That was the case for seven couples in the sample, including Bruna and her wife.

> *We decided to get married because of the 2018 elections. We didn't really plan it; we were just so afraid of what was going to happen. Everybody panicked—I know of two people who committed suicide in Brasília. The elections were a horrific period for the LGBT community in Brazil. (Bruna, 31)*

Besides the political reasons for tying the knot, couples have decided to live together and get married due to romantic, spiritual, and pragmatic motives, such as health insurance. Although all interviewed couples were in committed relationships, some participants had never talked to a family member about their sexual orientation, living in a form of glass closet (Sedgwick, 1990). Although some individuals had growing support

from relatives before getting married and some perceived higher acceptance after getting married, the marriage did not bring support or acceptance from family members for all participants.

> *I have never talked to my parents about my relationships. When my mother visited me, she saw my husband and I sleep together in the same bed, but the official narrative in the family is still that I share the apartment with a friend. (Cláudio, 42)*

As Finch (2007) affirmed, parenthood is built with meaningful practices that generate social legibility. To some couples, the establishment of the family was marked by the arrival of children. The couples with children said they were perceived and legitimized as family units only after having kids.

> *For a long time, my mom referred to my husband as my friend, even though she knew the truth about us. It was just after we got married and adopted our children that she began to see him as her son-in-law. (Renan, 42)*

In this context, family formation and parenting intentions are inevitably shaped by the discriminatory discourse homosexual individuals have been subjected throughout their lives, which impacts their well-being and feelings of self-worth. Young people suffered homophobic bullying and discrimination through discourse and verbal harassment, in addition to physical and psychological violence, sometimes from their own parents and religious leaders. As adults, gays and lesbians reported to be under widespread psychological distress, subject to real and virtual attacks. Many lesbian and gay parents said they feel troubled by the possibility that their children might be harassed or teased because of their family structure.

For same-sex couples, parenthood is a matter of individual choice and self-realization rather than a social imperative. About their pathway to parenthood, male couples focused their narrative almost entirely on adoption since commercial surrogacy is not allowed in Brazil. Female couples had broader discussions: most women talked about home insemination and/or the SUS program, in addition to adoption.

> *We tried the insemination at the SUS program twice, but they were not successful. During that same time, we started gathering the documentation to try for adoption. But, finally, we decided to go to a private clinic, and I did get pregnant. (Priscila, 31)*

In twenty interviews with lesbian couples, only one couple did not express intent to have children. The most discussed challenges among women were the high costs of private treatments and the possibilities to find a reliable semen donor. Ten of them already had children using different pathways: in vitro fertilization (IVF) through the SUS program, IVF through private clinics, adoption, home insemination, and previous heterosexual relationships. Women who had a known donor, a friend or acquaintance, expressed mixed reactions to his involvement with the baby.

> *It doesn't make sense to us to pay a lot of money for something that's so purely natural. So, we have asked a friend if he would be our donor. It's important to have that reference of a father. (Alícia, 25)*

> *Why not have our own baby if we can? We researched home insemination and found a donor who agreed to give up all parental rights. We made sure he is not a part of our lives. (Natália, 23)*

In twenty-two interviews with gay men, eight of them did not intend to have children. In total, five couples already had children and they all decided on adoption. The most discussed challenges among gay couples were the restrictive regulations on surrogacy in Brazil and the long wait for adoption.

> *When we registered for adoption, we were told that we would need to wait at least 3 years for our child. In the end, it took almost 5 years. It is so difficult to wait all this time...It's pregnancy without a due date. Your child can come at any moment, but you have no idea when that is going to happen. (Jonas, 40)*

Besides their differences on the pathways to parenthood, men and women also differ on what they consider to be the right time to have children. Most women seemed affected by the biological limit between age and fertility to make decisions about getting pregnant. Men's concerns about age were not related to their reproductive capacities, but to an internal sense of readiness, related to their own youth and mortality.

> *When I was 25, I imagined having children at 35. But, now, I can't picture myself having children in two years. I don't think I have the emotional or financial stability for that. Since we plan to adopt, I don't think we have to worry about our age. But, at the same time, I wouldn't want to be an old dad. (Ivan, 33)*

Regarding domestic work, gender is also considered a driving predictor of relationship experiences. Following the literature (Blumstein, & Schwartz, 1983; Brewster, 2017; Kurdek, 2007) gay couples reported difficulties to

allocate chores and men without children were the group most dissatisfied with the fairness of their division, while the lesbian couples described dividing household chores equally.

> *In lesbian relationships, nobody can use the excuse of being a man. We must talk and understand each other. Men are not trained to discuss their thoughts and their feelings. We, on the other hand, talk about our daily routine and about our household, how to balance and organize everything. That generates dialogues that most families don't have. In a way, it is a privilege for us to relate to each other as individuals, outside of the heterosexual binary of man and woman. (Paola, 33)*

The necessary workload to maintain a household comprises domestic labor and paid labor. Within the workplace, labor regulations and good work conditions are influence lesbians' and gay men's decisions to become parents. Besides children being costly, there is the need to pursue jobs that provide both financial security and flexible schedules to accommodate personal priorities and parental responsibilities. Workplace policies that prohibit discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity, explicitly promoting a tolerant and inclusive labor culture, seem to minimize the stress homosexual parents might face.

Differently from fatherhood, motherhood was divided by the perspectives of biological and nonbiological mothers, because lesbian couples who conceive using donor insemination have asymmetric genetic ties to their children. The nonbiological mother's role is less defined, less recognized, and less protected, creating legitimacy struggles when society regards her as less of a parent or not really a mother. The nonbiological mothers reported feeling invisible during the pregnancy, emphasizing their status as an expectant and actual parent was often unrecognized by friends and family members.

> *It is as if there could be only one mother. Whoever has seen my wife pregnant, or breastfeeding, dissociates me from the situation. I can understand the confusion, but I feel hurt. (Mirela, 30)*

Besides biological constraints and corporeal possibilities that drive decisions and behavioral differences, families are exposed to a heteronormative ideal that prioritizes feminine caregiving and other gender stereotypes that influence parental decisions and family life in same-sex households. Parents' initial reaction to their offspring's nonheterosexuality typically reflects loss or grief of their heteronormative expectations. Hence, when same-sex couples

portray a lifestyle that follows conventional middle-class standards, parents seemed to react favorably, giving the couple feelings of legitimacy, pride, and privilege because of their family support, leaving room to interpretation as to how many social structures must be maintained in order for heterosexuality to be subverted.

Regarding the future, most couples wish to make certain material acquisitions throughout their life, but the dreams and plans they mentioned were different depending on whether they envisioned becoming parents or not. Those who have/desire children plan their family life around them, while those who do not want children focus on their individual satisfaction, as Tomás and his husband.

> *Deep down, I think everybody wants the Hollywood fairytale of a perfect family, with two children and a dog, but today that is not something we want. We just want to be happy together, whether we have children or not. (Tomás, 30)*

Same-sex couples who do not want children seek to protect their time together and their freedom. Participants showed attitudinal patterns of career-oriented individuals, who look for personal fulfillment in the quality of their spousal relationship, demonstrating individualistic values associated with childlessness.

> *Our plan for the future is to stay together, happily married, taking care of each other. I don't think we'll have children. I'm sure my parents would love to become grandparents, they have that idea that you get married, have kids and your kids take care of you when you're old. Their life plan is quite different from ours. I like to follow my happiness and not a script of how life should be. (Marcelo, 36)*

Being a family, the central theme of the thematic network, encompasses the totality and the intersections of work, marriage, parenthood, and the stigma around them. Each step of the family formation process—choosing a partner, deciding to live together, and having children, despite the amount of workload and stigma—functions as mechanisms for constructing relatedness, connection, and social legitimacy.

Whether or not they are reinforcing family ideology, their unions display unique dynamics of individual and collective living. The existence of the couples in the public realm shows that a process of de-stigmatization of homosexuality and weakening of the traditional paradigm of the classic family model is in course. Even though family relationships are complex, and all familial relationships do not conform to one specific pattern,

the experiences of same-sex couples in the sample give meaning to a construction of affective bonds beyond the heteronormative family ideal, suggesting that although some of the interviewees would like the "Hollywood fairytale", and some would not, same-sex couples can be seen as a sign of the SDT in Brazil.

Final considerations

We investigated how the couples engage in the struggles of meaning, recognition, and fulfillment with family life; and through them, see how they enact, confront, and renegotiate normative family ideologies. This study represents one of the first explorations on parenting intentions of same-sex couples in Brazil, which limits comparisons with previous findings.

The results fill a gap for qualitative demographic research about same-sex couples in the Brazilian context. The article contributes to the literature by presenting a thematic network that illustrates the structuring themes for the lives of same-sex families, highlighting important dimensions to the family formation process of same-sex couples in Brazil.

Having a willing and supportive partner surely facilitates the transition to parenthood—given the interviewed couples were already living together, they were more likely to have the intention to parent than single individuals. There was variation among gay men, lesbian women, and between the two groups, in regard to the importance they place on parenthood; proportionally, more women reported parenting intentions than men.

The thematic network showed the social locations that influence the paths same-sex couples take to enact their parenting intentions. Gender and sexual identity interact in a way in which same-sex couples have the potential to challenge dominant practices of heteronormative masculinity and femininity, therefore, also of parenthood. The social meanings ascribed to parenthood and kinship, and how legislation and biomedical sciences shape those meanings, are all important for demographic analyzes and projections.

To examine the particular challenges same-sex couples face regarding their parenting intentions and incorporate a gender perspective to demographic studies, one must consider the hierarchical complexity of the relationships between masculinity and femininity, in a multidimensional and intersectional fashion, to establish an integrative understanding of diverse cultural practices and demographic outcomes.

The work on gender, families, and identity is developed and expanded by studying experiences and everyday practices. Many couples consider parenthood to be rewarding: they mentioned their appreciation for their children, family ties, and a home environment of tolerance and love. Nonetheless, it is complex to define to which extent same-sex couples are living an alternative lifestyle and to which extent they have been incorporating the hegemonic family model. Whether in same-sex or different-sex relationships, couples are still figuring out how to change conservative marriage rules to balance them with individual modern values characteristic of the SDT. The initial hypothesis that, although the same-sex couples interviewed are an obvious break away from the classic family model, they value child-rearing and union stability, seems to be valid in the context of committed couples who already live together in Brasília.

Future research could explore larger samples of same-sex couples in different Brazilian cities, especially small municipalities, and rural locations, considering cohort, racial and educational differences, in pathways to and probability of parenthood for same-sex partners. A nationally representative study, carried out with careful queer-aware wording, would be valuable to draw broader conclusions. Researchers will greatly benefit from more qualitative and quantitative sources and investment in future data collections to advance knowledge on same-sex couples. It is likely the experiences out of urban scenarios, or even in other urban scenarios, are different from the ones discussed here. Moreover, future research in the field ought to consider investigating the family formation process and parenting experiences of queer individuals and sexual and gender minorities, beyond same-sex couples.

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Appendix

Guiding questions used for interviewing the couples

1) How did your relationship start? How did you meet and how did you decide to start dating?
2) How long have you been together? How did you decide to live together?
3) How was the reaction of your families and close friends to this decision to live together?
4) How is your daily routine? How do you organize household chores? Is there some specific reason for who is responsible for each activity inside and outside the house?
5) How does your professional life interfere with your marital life?
6) What did each of you imagine about the future when you got together?
7) Have plans changed since then? Why?
8) Do you intend to have children? Why or why not? If so, how many children? What are your plans regarding parenthood?
9) For those who want children—Do you think your life will change when you have children? If so, in what way? Do you think the division of household chores will change? How so?
10) Are you frequently around kids? Neighbors, relatives, children of friends?
11) Do you believe that the social perception in relation to you as a couple would be different if you had (or did not have) children?
12) Is there anything that would make you change your mind regarding the decision to have children or not?
13) As a kid, which family structure did you imagine having in the future? Did you expect to be a parent and have a family arrangement similar to that of your family of origin?
14) What does fatherhood/motherhood represent for you?
15) Would you like to add or share anything else?