Female same-sex parenting: biological and affective bonds in family dynamics

Mônica Fortuna Pontes
Terezinha Féres-Carneiro*
Andrea Seixas Magalhães
Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio de Janeiro, Departamento de Psicologia. Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brasil

Abstract: This article aimed to study the dynamic of same-sex parenting families formed by two women with children who have a biological bond with only one of them. We interviewed nine women – eight of them formed four couples and one was divorced – with ages ranging between 33 and 45 years, with children aging from 2 to 8 years, who were middle-class residents of the state of Rio de Janeiro, and had planned motherhood together using new reproductive technologies with semen from an anonymous donor. The following evaluation categories were discussed: *kinship and affective relationship terminology*; *division of childcare related tasks*; and *the search for legitimacy*. We observed that in the family settings studied, the children, in fact, identified both women as mothers, when both assume the role, demonstrating that the affective bond fulfilled its binding role.

Keywords: same-sex parenting, assisted reproduction, mothers.

Present times have brought with them countless changes to our society, especially in regards to diverse families. Same-sex families, as this implies parenting by one or more people who define themselves as homosexuals, are inserted into our present social context, and are the cause of much controversy and debate. The term homoparentality (same-sex parenting), which was created by the Association of Gay and Lesbian Parents and Future Parents in France in 1997, is controversial. If on the one hand it gives visibility to this family arrangement, on the other it refers to the homosexuality of fathers/mothers (Gross, 2013) and reinforces the heterosexual/homosexual binary. However, for a certain category to exist, it needs to be named, and this ended up helping the construction of a social category across the world (Gross, 2015). Considering the importance the new term gained in regards to the meaning it acquired and the visibility it brings in itself, since it signals that homosexuality and parenting coexist, homoparentality is the term we will use in this study.

Brazil's 2010 census, which was conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE), was the first to include same-sex civil unions. Among the results found, there are 60,002 couples. However, this number is estimated to be higher today.

Still, such numbers portray that same-sex unions are a fact in Brazil. And this reality was recognized in 2011 by Brazil's Supreme Court, which extended homosexual couples the rights of heterosexual couples by allowing them to enter into civil unions. Two years later, Brazil's National Justice Council approved a regulation that ordered all notaries in the country to ratify same-sex marriages, which was characterized as a legal victory by civil unions.

In regards to Brazilian research, the quantity and quality of studies that examine the homoparental reality are expressive. Among these, the follwing can be highlighted: Tarnovski (2002, 2013) investigated Brazil's contemporary homoparental paternity and homoparental families under coparenting in France; Santos (2004) studied parenting in homoparental families with children; Medeiros (2004) studied women who acknowledged themselves as lesbians after becoming mothers; Farias and Maia (2009) investigated homoparental families from the perspective of judicial psychology; Zauli (2011) wrote a thesis on the reality of homoparental families in Brazil and Canada; Corrêa (2012) and Silva (2013) wrote a study on lesbians; Hernández (2013) conducted a study with children of lesbian couples.

The aim of this paper was to study some aspects of the dynamics of homoparental families with two women raising a child in the same household. More specifically, the study focuses on the dynamics in regards to the woman of the couple who did not physically give birth to the child. Thus, we were interested in investigating the possible implications based on the distinctions between the two women in the couple, concerning the biological bonds of only one of them with the child or children. Factors of interest were the implications from such a fact in family dynamics and how the children deal with these implications, in a society in which biological parenting is very valued and recognized as the "true" bond. It is important to point out that the findings set out here are in regards to the interviewed mothers' perspectives.

Families, homosexualities, and homoparentalities

Throughout Western history, families have undergone significant changes, and, from the 20th century onwards, these changes have become quicker and more intense. Family has been influenced by the major social,

* Corresponding address: teferca@puc-rio.br

political, cultural, and economic changes over the last century, mainly through the inclusion of women in the job market and the achievement of civil rights by the population in general, which challenges the sexual hierarchic order that is found in societal organizations governed by androcentrism (Mello, 2005).

Despite these countless changes, it seemed that compulsory heterocentrism was still unquestionable. Until homosexuals entered the political scene, mainly in the 1990s (Mello, 2005), the idea of a family was disturbed by the possibility of affective and sexual exchanges and by the marriage between two people of the same sex, and homoparentality.

Despite blended monoparental and homoparental families having existed side by side with nuclear families since the 1960s (Neirinck & Gross, 2014), the coexistence of these different configurations did not take place without conflict. Such conflict refers to the resistance a great deal of society still has to accepting homosexuals as something other than sick people. Contextualizing and raising questions about the notion of homosexuality is extremely important in order for us to reflect on homoparentalities and the resistance they encounter.

It is important to point out that sexual practices between same-sex people started as a psychological, psychiatric, and medical category from the 1870s (Miskolci, 2005). According to Foucault (1988), homosexuality then arose more as a figure of sexuality, rather than just a sexual practice as it was previously.

Psychiatry, sexology, and psychoanalysis collaborated in the regulation of sexuality, by helping define the acceptable forms to express it, thus classifying sexuality in a hegemonic heterosexual model as being opposed to a homosexual model, which referred to all sorts of undesirable, pathological behavior. The arguments from specialists created "truths", validated knowledge, and allowed for regulation and a power system to be exercised on behalf of the current norm, which operates to maintain the heterosexual, reproductive family institution.

Foucault (1988) discussed sexuality as a social and historic construction, and by doing so examined it in more depth. He thusly built a critical analysis on the discourse of sexuality and its intersection with knowledge and power mechanisms. Knowledge, power, and subjectivity would become intertwined, constituting a web formed by several discourses and practices that produced "truths". Such constructions of "truths" produced arguments contrary to homosexual parenting and reinforced doubts in regards to the development of children who are raised by two women or two men.

Some studies conducted with children of homosexuals have been concerned with four types of questions for decades: sexual identity, personal development, their social relationships with peers and adults; and the risk of sexual abuse (Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008; Golombock et al., 2003; MacCallum & Golombock, 2004). Such studies showed that there are no significant differences in regards to the four main topics studied between children raised in heterosexual households and those raised by same-sex parents (Gross, 2013)

The studies mentioned and their public dissemination were and are greatly important. However, it is important not to belittle the relevance of these studies that aim to prove that children of homosexuals are no different than those of heterosexuals, as if there were a standard to be followed.

The mothers

Depending on how a homoparental family is constituted, there are families in which one of the women in the couple has a biological bond with the children, while the other's bond is a legal one; families in which both women have legal bonds with the children, but no biological bonds with them; and also families in which one of the women in the couple has no biological or legal bond with the children.

Regardless of this, when motherhood is planned by two women together, they often consider themselves mothers of these children, and that the children belong to two-mother families. In the cases in which a child was given birth to by one of the two women of the couple, namely the cases studied here, there are a series of questions that arise ranging from the way in which these mothers will be addressed by their children, to how these mother positions are constructed and to the lack of rights of the "non-biological mother", which is a reflex from a society where an ideal family model containing a man, a woman, and biologically-conceived children dominates. The biological bonds between fathers, mothers, and children have an important meaning: the type of bond that is considered to be "the true one". According to Luna (2005), the definitions of biological, "natural", good, and true are supposedly associated.

With the biological bond being the one that governs the "true" parental relationship in a society that is marked by social regulations of all kinds, there are specific issues that arise at the core of the homoparental family, with there being two women and one of whom possessing a biological bond with their children. How do homoparental families within this configuration deal with the forces the "truth" that the biological bond exercises on them, and which means are built for this? More specifically, how do the partners of "biological mothers" deal with this?

The various definitions themselves of the mother who has not physically given birth to the children reveal something "new" that has no predetermined place, as these depend on negotiations and are built within the relationship between the mothers and their relationship with their children. According to Grossi (2003), there is no agreement among homoparental families in regards to giving names to their members. In some cases, according to the author, the children of lesbian couples refer to them as "*mãe*" or "*mãinha*" (mom, or mommy), or the like. In other cases, they use the mothers' first names after these terms when they call them, as we do to call our grandparents in our

culture, which indicates that, in their family networks, more than one individual is accepted to occupy a single place. The author also explains that such phrases refer to the space in which the family network exists, which is in regards to the social status of a certain person.

According to Cadoret (2014), these family terms reveal a kind of framework that classifies individuals in different structural positions, according to each society that builds its system and classification principles for relatives, which range from the closest to the most distant ones. According to the author, some terms may correspond to only one person, as they do in our vocabulary, the term mother; all other terms comprise several people: grandparents, for example. Besides this, the less precise the terms are, the more easily their meanings deviate from their original meanings.

In the literature, the partner of the "biological mother" is referred to in several ways, with variations of the terms used to designate them: *les mères non statutaires* and *coparent* (Descoutures, 2010) and *social mother* (Almack, 2005). In this study we will use terms "biological mother" and "non-biological mother", since this study is concerned the implications that arise from the differences between having or not having biological bonds with the children.

The multiple terms and the diversity of possible bonds reflect the very face of non-traditional families, with what they bring being revealing and transgressive. The very notion that a couple should comprise of a man and a woman with each being responsible for specific tasks, according to their genders, corresponds to a notion of linearity between biological sex and gender, which is culturally produced. Such linearity, according to Butler (2003), is in regards to a cultural matrix that heterosexualizes desire and "institutes the production of discriminated and asymmetric oppositions between 'female' and 'male', in that these are understood as attributes that are expressive of 'males' and 'females'" (p. 39). Homosexual couples do not correspond to this linearity right from the start, which thus demonstrates an incoherence according to such a linear perspective.

According to Zambrano (2006), parental tasks are performed according to each person's preferences, as he found no strict division of tasks among homosexual couples according to gender roles. In regards to the partner of a "biological mother", there are no predefined roles. She may take different levels of responsibility and distinct roles in her relationship with the children, and, inasmuch as there are two women in the couple, the distribution of tasks and child care do not correspond to the traditional division of genders either (Herrera, 2007).

In regards to a non-traditional distribution of tasks, it is important to point out that, in the average layers of the Brazilian population, some values are present, such as the ideal of equality, the search for self-fulfillment through work, and the valuation of individuality. This idea of equality is supposedly the clear expression of "an egalitarian ideology that has gained momentum in our present Brazilian society (Heilborn, 2004, p. 107). Fairly sharing household tasks is considered to be fundamental

from modern couples from the average layers of the population. Thus, according to the author, in homosexual couples, the idea of an equal division of finances and financial independence for each person is prevalent.

Specifically in the case of the "non-biological mothers" in lesbian couples, this division of tasks may help build a place in the kinship network. A study by Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) indicated that lesbian couples seek to divide tasks related to their children in such a way that tasks such as feeding, bathing, taking the children to a walk and other kinds of child-related care are administered by the "non-biological mother", so she can get closer to the children and that such experiences support the construction of her motherly identity.

Biological mothers would play an important role in the construction of bonds between the "non-biological mother" and their children, which is also demonstrated by how these tasks are shared. According to reports obtained by Herrera (2007), emphasized childcare serves to reduce the weight of the biological bond in this search to recognize the "non-biological mother".

Souza (2005), in a field study conducted in São Paulo and Canada, showed that "non-biological mothers" who adopted the biological children of their partner, albeit with a legal bond established with the children, leave their professions in order to take full-time care of their children. This demonstrates, according to the author, a search for equality with the "biological mother" through dedication to child-related tasks.

Another important element in regards to the status of "non-biological mothers" is the consequent lack of legal recognition between them and the children, which generates implications at different levels. According to Butler (2003), the lack of legitimacy for non-heterosexual couples by the government has contributed to them remaining invisible, which has caused these people to become "disempowered".

Also, according to this same bias, Hernández, Silva, and Uziel (2012) exposed the tensions between those in favor of the rights for same-sex couples and those who believe heteronormativity is still reproduced, and that there is a heterosexist movement of domestication.

However, one of the ways through which "non-biological mothers" seek to tackle situations such as a lack of legitimacy is by filing to adopt the child, namely the so-called unilateral adoption. Such adoption supposedly preserves the "biological mother" rights and creates a legally-recognized parental status for the "non-biological mother", which thus constitutes double maternity.

Adoption supposedly serves to fill the gap that the lack of biological bonds causes and, with the legal bond ensured, the emphasis on biology is minimized in the relationship with the remaining family members (Hequembourg, 2004). Unilateral adoptions may cause a different attitude from the relatives of the "non-biological mother", since the bonds between the "non-biological mother" and their children would be legally valid, and the mother's partner can actually be seen as a mother.

Method

Subjects

This study included nine women, eight of whom were in four couples and one being a separated woman; with ages between 33 and 45 years; with children aged between 2 and 8 years; with full university education; belonging to the middle class; living in different cities in Rio de Janeiro; with professions such as; public defender, physician, psychologist, businesswoman; flight attendant; lawyer; and prosecutor. The subjects planned their motherhood together through the use of new reproductive technologies.

Among the nine subjects, eight referred to themselves as mothers (five being "biological mothers" and three "non-biological mothers", with one reporting she was the children's "godmother". Thus, in Table 1, in which the mothers' names are fictitious, we have the homoparental family settings studied herein: "biological mother/non-biological mother/children" and "mother/"godmother"/son".

Table 1. Homoparental family settings of the subjects

Names	Constitution of the couple		Bond with the children		
	Cohabiting		Mother		Other
	Yes	*No*	*"biological"*	*"non-biological"*	
Gabriela	Valentina		ü		
Valentina	Gabriela			ü	
Cláudia	Flávia		ü		
Flávia	Cláudia			ü	
Bianca		Separated	ü		
Joana	Paula		ü		
Paula	Joana				"godmother"
Olívia	Patrícia		ü		
Patrícia	Olívia			ü	

Procedures

This investigation was approved by the Research Ethics Committee of the institution where it was conducted. All interviewed mothers signed consent forms (*termo de consentimento livre e esclarecido*) and were ensured confidentiality regarding their identities and names, with fictitious names being used for purposes of disclosing results.

The subjects were interviewed individually, with the exception of two individuals who were interviewed together as they lived in the countryside of the state and were visiting the city for a medical appointment, one of whom who was eight months pregnant. The interviews lasted between fifty-four minutes and one hour, with an average of thirty-two minutes. Five interviews were conducted at the interviewed women's home, one was conducted at the subject's office, and another subject was interviewed in the first author of this study's office. The interview with the couple, in turn, lasted one hour and fifty minutes and took place in a restaurant. All interviews were conducted between November 2009 and May 2010.

We must consider some peculiarities in regards to the interview of the couple. What they said in front of their partner would possibly not be the same had each been alone with the interviewer. We know there is an interaction, but we could not identify what had an influence on their narratives.

The sample was selected using snowball sampling. In order to obtain the sample, two subjects were introduced from the people in the first author of this study's social network profile. From that point on, the interviewed women themselves introduced the remaining subjects. Ten interviews were conducted in total. However, we chose to include nine subjects in our analysis, since these nine had similar profiles, i.e., cohabiting women who planned their motherhood together. In regards to the number of subjects, we chose the saturation technique to establish the number of subjects.

When each subject was called we initially explained what the study's goal and how important it was for the interview to be recorded. The subjects were asked to choose the location when we scheduled the appointments. They all signed consent forms authorizing the recording and utilization of the material for research and publication purposes, while we made it clear that we were committed to protect their identities at all costs. The interviews were then recorded and fully transcribed.

Instrument

We conducted individual semi-structured interviews with questions regarding the interviewed women's history, especially concerning their maternity topic. The women were allowed time to talk about whatever they thought was important.

Analysis and discussion of results

The interviews were analyzed according to Nicolaci-da-Costa's Underlying Discourse Explicitation Method (*Método de Explicitação do Discurso Subjacente* – Nicolaci-da-Costa, 2007). The following analysis categories arose from the interviews: 1) maternities: naturalized wish for children; 2) how to effectively do it?; 3) biological maternities and the topic of reproductive technologies; 4) lack of legitimacy/legal protection; 5) search for legitimacy; 6) mothers, "godmother", and the children; 7) sharing of childcare-related tasks; 8) sharing of household-related tasks and expenses; 9) opinions from biological family members in regards to the "non-biological mother".

In order to present the issues and discuss them in this study, we only chose categories "mothers", "godmother", and the "children" and its sub-category "kinship terms and affective relationships"; "sharing of childcare-related tasks"; and "search for legitimacy". Such categories were thusly chosen so from them we could explore the possible implications from different bonds, be it biological or otherwise, among mothers and their children; and the ways found by these families to deal with it. It is important to point out that all data regarding the children must be relativized, since they concern the perceptions from the mothers as well as those from their children.

Mothers, "godmother", and the children: kinship terms and affective relationships

Perceiving motherhood concretization through biological bonds appeared to be a priority for the mothers who were interviewed, even if this meant they had to face difficulties with several frustrated artificial insemination and/or in-vitro fertilization attempts, which represents a heavy financial and emotional burden. This may somehow be the reproduction of an idealized and traditional family model, even though motherhood beside another woman gives rise to a controversial family setting, which is necessarily innovative (Pontes, Féres-Carneiro, & Magalhães, 2015). Choosing reproductive technologies is not just a Brazilian trend. A study by Gross, Courduriès, and Federico (2014) conducted in 2012 in France with 405 lesbian mothers and 139 gay fathers indicated an increased number of homoparental families both with women and men, who became parents through the new reproductive techniques, even though such procedures are illegal in France.

In Brazil, recent studies conducted with lesbian couples show that they lean towards choosing motherhood through reproductive techniques (Corrêa, 2012; Silva, 2013). Other studies (Machin & Couto, 2014; Vitule, Couto, & Machin, 2015) also show a frequent demand for egg donation from partners (reciprocal IVF).

Despite all subjects having chosen to use the new reproductive technologies without however using or showing interest in reciprocal IVF, which differs from the data presented by Vitule, Couto, and Machin (2015) and Machin and Couto (2014), they have different kinds of bonds with their children: five of them had biological bonds; two had legal bonds; and two had neither biological or legal bonds with their children.

As regards the terms used by the children to refer to those who raise them, according to their mothers' reports, they include:

> *They both call me mom and her, mommy. We let them choose.* (Bianca)

> *We thought that because he had no father two mothers were too much, but we knew it was just a term: "godmother". If I were not here, she would be the "godmother" mom.* (Joana)

Most of the interviewed women reported using "mother" with few variations to talk both about the "biological mothers" and the "non-biological mothers". According to most of them, the way they chose to be called was established by the children, but among the members of the couple there was a previously established wish that both women occupied motherly places with no hierarchy between the mothers based on who gave birth to the children and those who did not. The exception was found in the case of Paula and Joana, in which the former is the "godmother" and the latter is the mother: the main relationship is the one established between the mother and the child.

It is worth remembering that the place and the term for the "biological mother" leave no doubts in a legal sense or by society in general, since the individual who carries and conceives a child is considered to be the mother under a "logical" nature. In turn, in regards to their partners, who do not have their social place recognized or term of reference defined (Almack, 2005; Descoutures, 2010), the same does not hold true. Even though their motherhood was planned together, as was the case for the interviewed subjects, the role of the "biological mother's" partner and his/her recognition are not very clear, and at times uncertain.

According to Paula and Joana, who chose the term "godmother" for the "biological mother's" partner, such term does not mean much, it is a noun that defines no roles. However, the members of this couple actually play different roles in regards to the child, namely those of first and second mother. Thus, by reporting that the terms made no difference, this does not seem to correspond to real experiences, especially because Joana is very clear when she says "if I were not here, she would be the mother", "the closest possible to a second mother", or that "after me, she is the one".

For Grossi (2003), the terms refer to the social place and status of a certain person in the kinship network, and the term chosen for this was greatly relevant. That is "godmother" is not just a name chosen among many, but

rather the closest one to the family reality. Such a choice is related to the very history of the couple concerning their wish for motherhood, since Joana had always wished to give birth to a baby; Paula, in turn, had agreed to accompany her partner in this process.

The place of a "biological mother's partner" is not predefined. Incidentally, such a place does not exist in a traditional family model; it is a subversion of the rules. This model is constituted in the everyday routines of families, in the dynamics of the relationship between each women and between them and their children, and it may be constituted through negotiations.

Some reports from the interviewed women showed that the bond established with the "biological mother" or the "non-biological mother" made no difference to the children:

> *Being borne by me made no difference to him. We think this bond comes from the pregnancy . . . as he and she ['non-biological mother'] are together all the time.* (Gabriela)

> *It seems it makes no difference for him. Of course, there are some times that we know who he wants* (Valentina)

> *There is no preference. He sometimes has his own preferences, sometimes he absolutely refuses to come to me, he just wants her.* (Olívia)

We observed situations in which the mothers notice no differences in their children's needs concerning them. It is important to point out that, in these cases, the time these mothers have dedicated and still dedicate to their children is equivalent.

Distinct data are presented by Gabb (2004) in his study of lesbian mothers and their children. The author showed that, in many cases, the biological mothers are those who figuratively and literally "hold the baby"; that is, they are responsible for the main childcare activities. He also showed that the "non-biological mother" sometimes feels excluded. Some interviewed children even reported their "other mother" was not directly related to them, and they were thusly excluded from whom the children considered to be their closest family members.

In the narratives below, from interviewed women, Flávia and Cláudia, who are a couple in which one of them spends most of the time working outside the home, there are some differences found in their children's requests in regards to one or the other:

> *They know she will work. They cry because they want to be with her.* [When] *she is with them for a longer time, it gets more balanced.* (Flávia)

The reports from Flávia ("non-biological mother") and Cláudia ("biological mother") show that Cláudia was requested by the children more often. She is the one who leaves our home in the morning every day, and only returns at night. When Cláudia is at home, the children call her all the time. This was their main explanation for their boys asking for one of them more than the other. However, they also observed that, as Cláudia spends more time with them, they tend to need each mother equally on holidays and vacations.

In turn, Goldberg, Downing, and Sauck (2008) point out that, in a study with sixty women, their children of almost 4 years of age preferred their "biological mothers" because they breastfeed them and spent more time with them. Despite this initial preference, most of them noticed changes throughout time, in a way that the children started liking both mothers equally.

In the reports below, in turn, from Paula ("godmother") and Joana (mother), we observed a more significant difference in regards to the child's needs: "*There are certain situations in which he just wants to be with Joana, but I can . . . think of him as my son*" (Paula).

We noticed a clear difference between the child's requests in regards to Joana and Paula. Besides the fact that Joana quit her job in order to take care of her son full-time, she is the main figure in the relationship with the child; her "godmother" comes next. The relationship between the "godmother" and the boy is reported as very good and they are becoming even closer to each other.

The findings from this study, based on the mothers' perspectives, indicate that there are no differences in the children in regards to the affective bonds that are established with the mothers, except in the case where the main childcare activities were performed by the "biological mother" in the first years of the child's life, as was observed in Joana's case. In the remaining cases, the basic and main childcare activities were performed by both mothers and the children were not reported to prefer one or the other, which in itself already indicates a deconstruction of the "truth" that is related to what should be viewed as a family.

However, some studies show differences (Gabb, 2004; Goldberg, Downing, & Sauck, 2008). We may consider that when the interviewed mothers planned their motherhood, both defined themselves as mothers, with the exception of Joana and Paula. It is important that we take such an aspect into account when questioning how the children themselves view equality in regards to the bond established with the mothers.

Sharing of childcare-related tasks

In most of the cases analyzed in this study, both women in the couple were active parents, even when one of them had worked outside the home and the other did not. According to our findings, this sharing of tasks was not based on predetermined criteria or gender roles, but rather on the individual skills and talents regarding the childcare-related tasks. We also noticed the women were satisfied with how the work was shared.

In some cases, both women in the couple had jobs. The interviewed women Gabriela/Valentina, and Patrícia/Olívia all had jobs outside the home and also shared their childcare-related tasks.

> *Valentina is in charge of all these playing activities. I nurse them, change diapers, take care of their food, take them to the doctor, we both take them to school.* (Gabriela)

In other cases with the interviewed women Cláudia/Flávia and Joana/Paula, only one of the women in the couple worked outside the home, while the other dedicated most of her time to child-care related tasks, which did not mean an uneven sharing of tasks related to the children:

> *Until 10:30 AM I am with them; I help them change clothes, brush their teeth. Then I leave and Flávia spends the rest of the time with them. They have lunch before going to school. When I arrive they are already asleep.* (Cláudia)

Even the women who had jobs outside the home had to do childcare-related tasks.

It is important to highlight the interviewed women's context, who belong to the average layers of the population. Such layers have been going through some quick transformations in big cities for some decades: "a reduction of families in terms of size and meaning, an increase in third-level education, the rise of feminism, and an insufficient movement of homosexual liberation, among others (Heilborn, 2004, p. 107). Thus, certain values such as the ideal of equality in the average layers of the Brazilian population have now become widely present. In addition, in homosexual couples, in which gender divisions are not established beforehand, the idea of egalitarian division is prevalent. The interviewed women's reports corroborate some studies which point out the existence of egalitarianism among women in lesbian couples in regards to sharing maternal care tasks (Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2008; Patterson, Sutfin & Fulcher, 2004).

Among the nine women interviewed, three are "non-biological mothers". However, only one of them (Flávia) dedicates herself to the children full-time. It is interesting to point out that Flávia has no legal bonds with the children. We could mention the hypothesis that this lack of legal bonds between the "non-biological mother" and her children might result in inequalities between the "biological mother" and the "non-biological mother", in such a way that the latter feels the need to reduce this distance and be more present in the children's everyday lives, according to data demonstrated by Souza (2005), which would help in the appropriation of their place.

According to Hequembourg and Farrell (1999), the child-care related tasks are shared in such a way that tasks such as feeding, bathing, taking the children for a walk, and other kinds of child-related care are administered by the

"non-biological mother". Thus, such experiences could also help build their motherly identities. According to Herrera (2007), for these tasks to be shared, it is fundamental for the "biological mothers" to recognize the "non-biological mother's" place as a mother and allow her to occupy this pace.

> *Cláudia stays with her a little in the morning, then she goes to work and I take over. It is normal. They have lunch and I take them to school. Then I pick them up later.* (Flávia)

Souza (2005) highlights that many "non-biological mothers" who adopt the biological children of their partners, even with legal bonds established with the children, quit their jobs to dedicate themselves full-time to the children. This demonstrates, according to the author, a search for equality with the "biological mother". Thus, childcare-related tasks also play a role of supporting the construction of spaces for the "non-biological mothers" in their families.

Search for legitimacy

The topic of legal provisions to ensure the rights of the families of the interviewed mothers was mentioned by all subjects. This was mentioned by both the mothers who sought alternatives in court to legitimize their status (four women) and those who did not seek to obtain official parental status (five women). The way around this lack of legal protection for some of the mothers was unilateral adoption.

The reports from the subjects showed that seeking legal status through unilateral adoption has legitimized a reality that had already existed among "non-biological mothers" and children, and this has enabled the legal existence of an affective relationship that had previosuly been established. Such a fact, according to the interviewed women, has provided coherence between what the children experienced at home, the fact that they had two mothers, the fact they were affectively attached to both, and what they experienced outside their homes.

> *Both children have two mothers listed on their birth certificates and when Ricardo* [the son] *was asked about this at juvenile court, he made it very clear that having Valentina's name on his birth certificate was actually just officializing something that was already a fact as far as he was concerned.* (Gabriela)

> *How can he have two mothers at home and just one on the street? Both things are interconnected for me. Filing for this adoption was something that was already on our minds.* (Patrícia)

The rights gained by the interviewed women that were mentioned in regards to filing for adoption were also possible due to the fact they had financial resources for

such purpose. Because this is not a right that is granted, but rather achieved, people in homoparental families need financial and emotional investment and also have to engage in judicial battles.

Adoptions by "non-biological mothers" are important because they enable a series of important rights for them and their children: custody or visitation rights, in case of separations; permission to take medical decisions; benefits such as inheritance in the children's name, in case the "non-biological mother" passes away; permission for including the children in their health care plan; among others; besides granting legal rights and privileges to the "non-biological mother's" relatives. The purpose of all this aims to entitle mothers with equal rights, regardless of blood ties:

> *I wonder if something happens, the child goes to a hospital, I have no rights whatsoever* (Paula/"godmother")

> *The worst thing of all is being in somebody's hands to sort your life out. I went to register* [the children] *but I could not. Only relatives, siblings, their father can. I had all the documents there, it made me crazy that I could not do it.* (Flávia)

Data presented by Gartrell, Rodas, Deck, Peyser, and Banks (2006) showed the importance and consequences of having legal status in a study with 78 families with lesbian parents in the United States. Among the 30 separated couples who took part, it was more likely that the women had shared custody of the children if the "non-biological mother" had previously legalized her affective bonds with the children, which was achieved by adopting them. According to the authors, the adoptive mothers intensely felt their legalized relationship with the children ensured that they could have shared custody of the children after a separation, while those who lost custody resented this fact.

Even though legalization is not known to bring recognition, it may support the construction process of a "non-biological mother's" place in the family, and consequently her inclusion in the kinship network. According to Descoutures (2010), the hardship of having a family life without being recognized as part of the family causes feelings of injustice, which reveals the importance of legal legitimacy of a "biological mother's" partner in order to construct these subjects' parental identities.

According to Butler (2003), life without legal statuses leads to a series of losses. However, it is vital that we keep a critical view in regards to what is either considered or not state-recognized, understandable kinship; otherwise, we will be seeking legitimacy without questioning the rules for recognition. Could there be "no other . . . understandable or even real measures besides government recognition?" (p. 239). From our point of view, having recognized parental bonds is woven into the interface of psychological, socio-cultural, and legal dimensions.

Final considerations

The children in the families analyzed during this study were planned and raised by two women, one of whom who gave birth to them, in a society where the value of biological bonds is very strong and a reinforcer of "truths". In this context, even if both women in these cases consider themselves to be mothers, there is nonetheless a difference between them. The "biological mother" has all her rights and duties as a mother legitimized by the government and recognized by society, while "non-biological mothers" are made invisible by the state and frequently by society in general.

However, when we asked the mothers about the possible implications of what distinctions of the biological bonds between mothers and children could lead to and how they deal with this, they reported that their children identified with both of them as mothers, when both identified themselves as such. Thus, we found that affective bonds play a connecting role. On the other hand, we also found a family arrangement in which one of the women was the mother and her partner was the "godmother", which shows that homoparental families can have multiple settings.

Legitimacy of the "non-biological mothers'" positions in these families is built around the dynamics of family negotiations between their members, which is achievd by sharing childcare-related tasks. Doing such tasks may be used to support a woman who bore no children in taking over her place as a mother inside the family environment itself. We also observed that the sharing of these tasks was based on the abilities of each of the family members, which followed no pre-established condition that corresponded to gender roles.

Another important point in the fight for visibility and recognition by these "non-biological mothers" was their efforts towards legal regulation. The difficulty in the everyday lives of families who are not recognized or supported by the state is clear, which leaves some of their members in a vulnerable situation. Thus, some of the interviewed women filed for unilateral adoption and managed to have the legal bonds between them and their children legally recognized.

These are some of the ways that were found by these women to find acceptance and legitimacy in the construction of a family setting that does not correspond to traditional models, notwithstanding, most of the interviewed women made it clear that their affective bonds with their children did not depend on whether they were "biological mothers" or "non-biological mothers"; on legal recognition; or on social recognition.

Also, in regards to their search for legal recognition, we may not turn a blind eye to the mechanisms that select whether something is legitimized or not by the state, and

which feelings will be considered understandable or not (Butler, 2003), without even considering the implications of these. There is a whole view that was built and is reinforced in regards to homosexuality, through knowledge and power mechanisms that move the wheel that establishes recognition rules.

There is a great challenge for homoparental families, especially in regards to the tension between demanding rights and maintaining multiple forms of existence. Otherwise this would just be a new classification (Butler, 2003). This study is expected to contribute towards broadening how the non-traditional family settings (other than just the ones including female homoparentality) are viewed by society. Studies like theis, which get us closer to the everyday realities of non-heterosexual family arrangements, are also intended to provide couples and families of different settings with clinical subsidies, thus contributing to them being seen in their complexity.

Homoparentalidade feminina: laço biológico e laço afetivo na dinâmica familiar

Resumo: Este trabalho teve como objetivo estudar a dinâmica de famílias homoparentais compostas por duas mulheres com filhos que possuem vínculo biológico com somente uma delas. Foram entrevistadas nove mulheres, oito delas formando quatro casais e uma separada, com idades entre 33 e 45 anos, com filhos com idade entre 2 e 8 anos, pertencentes à camada média da população do estado do Rio de Janeiro, que fizeram conjuntamente o planejamento da maternidade por meio das novas tecnologias reprodutivas com sêmen de doador anônimo. As seguintes categorias de análise foram discutidas: *terminologia de parentesco e relações afetivas; divisão de tarefas relacionadas aos cuidados com as crianças* e *busca por legitimidade.* Verificou-se que nas constituições familiares estudadas, as crianças, de fato, identificam as duas mulheres como mães, quando ambas assim se assumem, demonstrando que o laço afetivo cumpriu o papel de vincular.

Palavras-chave: homoparentalidade, reprodução assistida, mães.

Homoparentalité féminine : lien biologique et lien affectif dans la dynamique de la famille

Résumé: Notre but dans ce travail est d'étudier la dynamique des familles homoparentales composées de deux femmes avec des enfants qui n'ont lien biologique qu'avec une d'entre elles. Neuf femmes, dont huit formant quatre couples et une séparée, âgées entre 33 et 45 ans, avec des enfants âgés entre 2 et 8 ans, appartenant aux classes moyennes de la population de Rio de Janeiro et qui ont fait ensemble la planification de la maternité par le moyen de nouvelles technologies de reproduction avec le sperme de donneurs anonymes, ont été *interviewées*. Les catégories d'analyse suivantes ont été discutées: *terminologie de parenté et relations affectives*; *répartition des tâches liées aux soins des enfants* et *recherche de légitimité*. Il a été constaté que dans les configurations familiales étudiées les enfants ont, en fait, identifié les deux femmes en tant que mères, quand toutes deux s'assument comme telles, ce qui démontre que le lien affectif a accompli le rôle d'agent de liaison.

Mots-clés: homoparentalité, reproduction assistée, mères.

Homoparentalidad femenina: lazo biológico y lazo afectivo en la dinámica familiar

Resumen: En este trabajo se propuso estudiar la dinámica de familias homoparentales compuestas por dos mujeres con hijos que poseen vínculo biológico con solamente una de ellas. Fueron entrevistadas nueve mujeres, ocho de ellas formando cuatro parejas y una separada, con edades entre 33 y 45 años que tienen hijos de 2 a 8 años de edad, son pertenecientes a la clase media de la población del estado de Rio de Janeiro y que hicieron conjuntamente la planificación de la maternidad mediante las nuevas tecnologías reproductivas con semen donante anónimo. Las siguientes categorías de análisis fueron discutidas: *terminología de parentesco y relaciones afectivas*; *división de tareas relacionadas a los cuidados de los niños*; y *búsqueda de legitimidad*. Se verificó que en las constituciones familiares estudiadas, los niños, de hecho, identifican las dos mujeres como madres, cuando ambas así se asumen, lo que demuestra que el lazo afectivo cumplió su papel de vincularlos.

Palabras clave: homoparentalidad, reproducción asistida, madres.

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