

13th Conference
of the European
Sociological Association

(Un)Making Europe:
Capitalism, Solidarities,
Subjectivities

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ABSTRACT BOOK

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RN23 | Session 03a Sexuality Studies in Southern Europe

Are you good enough to be a parent? Gay and lesbian parents negotiating identity and rights in Italy

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In Southern Europe, Italy represents a paradigmatic example in relation to the social and legal recognition of non-heterosexual relational claims. Public and political discourses are occupied by a notion of the natural family fostered by Catholic ideology and defended by political parties across the spectrum. The perception of an unbreakable link between procreating and parenting keeps homo-parenting families as “unthinkable” and the absence of complementary gender roles in the parental couple is perceived as tempering the well-being of the child. The law mirrors these socio-cultural models: while in 2016 same sex unions have been finally recognized, the step-child adoption was stripped from the bill leaving the social parent without any form of recognition. Given this scenario LGB parents have to go through trial, case by case, to prove they are as “good” as straight parents are and be eventually recognized as parents. In such circumstances the legal arena becomes a very peculiar context of subjectification.

Drawing on the ongoing multi-method qualitative study FamilyLives - involving 11 lesbian couples and 3 gay couples – aim of this paper is to explore the trope of the “good parent” as a widespread and powerful narrative both within the homophobic rhetoric and the LGB parents community. I will account for its use in the process of negotiating parenthood against the social context by analyzing how the traditional narrative about family and parenting is both a tool against the public recognition of LGB parents and a frame in which these families reconfigure children and partners’ belongings in the social context.

Unsexing reproduction: narratives of lesbian and bisexual parents in Portugal

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In the aftermath of the sexual revolution of the 1960s, sexuality and reproduction seemed to be, finally, two separate categories. The democratized access to contraceptives, most especially the pill, parallel to the right to safe abortions upon request, granted women the power to choose when and if they would become mothers, regardless of sexual practice. However, when the topic is same-sex parenting, the link between sexuality and reproduction seems to retain much cultural significance. The recent history of medically assisted reproduction in Portugal offers a striking example of how sexuality and reproduction remain bounded in Southern Europe.

Drawing on original empirical material gathered in

2016 within the ERC funded INTIMATE Research Project, in this paper I challenge the assumption that sexuality and reproduction are culturally disentangled. The paper is divided into three main sections. First, it explores the cultural context in which motherhood is embedded in Portugal. Having repronormativity as its backdrop, this section dialogues with the legal framework that removed most obstacles to same-sex parenting in December 2016. The second section considers biographic narrative interviews conducted with lesbian and bisexual mothers in Lisbon between April and July 2016, with a particular focus on examples of cultural entanglement of sexuality and reproduction, on one hand, and participants’ unsexed reproductive choices, on the other hand. Finally, I suggest a reading of queer that can be used in future reproductive studies. In Southern Europe, a context in which reproduction and parenting have been historically constrained by strict rules around gender and sexuality, failing to be a particular kind of (heteronormative, cisonormative, mononormative) mother may offer a fruitful way for decolonizing reproduction.

Breaking through the heteronormative framework of parenting. Lesbian mothers accessing ARTs in Italy

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In Italy, access to ART is neglected to single, not married and lesbian women. Notwithstanding this premise, interviewees realize that it is possible for them to access motherhood when meeting other lesbian women who became mothers through ARTs. This paper will focus on the process undertaken by non-heterosexual women in order to become mothers. It is developed within the European research project ‘INTIMATE. Citizenship, care and choice: the micropolitics of intimacy in Southern Europe’. The main aim of the research is rethinking the concepts of citizenship, care and choice through a study designed to explore LGBT experiences of partnering, parenting, and friendship in three Southern European countries: Italy, Portugal and Spain. Concerning ART, in 2016 the Italian fieldwork included qualitative interviews conducted to five self-defined lesbian or bisexual mothers who got pregnant through ARTs accessed abroad. The empirical data presented will take into consideration narratives linked with health issues, exacerbated by Italian restrictive laws on medical assisted reproduction: relationships with clinics and doctors both in Italy and abroad; economic costs of reproductive exile; good and bad practices by health professionals; the burden of hormone therapies; relationships with doctors during and after giving birth. Finally, it will be discussed how this process influenced their intimate relationships, and where they found support in order to break through the heteronormative Italian framework of parenting.