

# Love Under the Coloured Flag

Meaning and Expression of Love and Relationships in a Changing  
Socio-Cultural and Political Environment

A Case Study of self-defined Lesbians in Guadalajara

Lène Spee • 3375250

lene@inet.nl

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Tutor: Marike van Gijssel



**Para Alejandra y Martha quiénes dan esperanza, confianza y amor;  
una inspiración para muchos.**



## **Preface**

This thesis is the final product in completing my bachelor Cultural Anthropology at the University of Utrecht. It is the result of three months anthropological fieldwork in Guadalajara, in which issues of love between female homosexuals were investigated and explained from the changing socio-cultural and political context. I developed a personal interest in the topic of love and relationships during my three years of academic anthropological schooling. The different literature I read about the subject, in combination with several long during trips abroad, motivated my choice of this topic for this project. After four stays in México, I could not have guessed that this second time in the large and diverse city of Guadalajara was going to be such a special experience. It was not only another trip to my beloved country, but also an intense experience of self-exploration, taking part in other peoples lives and hearing impressive stories; a research of love in a country I love.

This thesis would not have been made possible without the help and support of many. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who in one way or another were (made) part of this bachelor project. First of all I want to thank my tutor Marike van Gijssel in theoretically and methodologically guiding me through this anthropological baptism of fire. Her constant critical eye and observation forced me to get the best out of this research and myself. Secondly, I want to say words of thanks to my dear parents who, for the last three years have understood and supported me in my often-controversial decisions. I also want to thank Gardien Steenbeek for being a human soundboard for me, and many, at the University of Utrecht; for being a professor with a heart, which so many students need(ed). Additionally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my participants Alejandra, Martha, Karina, Yudith and Lorena and all the other participants, for their openness, honesty and beautiful stories and moments. They, once again, made me see the beauty of México and its people, made me feel at home, and made my fifth time in México another unforgettable experience. Finally, special gratitude goes out to Toño and Kary, for hearing and letting me complain, their objective help and understanding; and for being the best friends and company I could have wished for. All those mentioned taught me much and hopefully I have been able to reflect some small part of what I have learned from them in this thesis.



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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

*“Some women, myself included, feel that the energy between two women is just different. Lesbian couples face sexism and homophobia as a regular part of life. If you're a lesbian of color, you encounter racism as well. Do factors such as these affect how we love, how we define love? I believe they do.”*

(Ta’Shia 1999: 22-24)

Social, cultural, economic and political change affects not only how people talk about love, but also how they enact love, how their bodies feel and express love, how they practice love in daily life (Rebhun 1999). Anthropological studies about love and relationships (Carrier 1976, Eliason & Morgan 1998, Rebhun 1999) are not unanimous on the question if and how socio-cultural and political factors influence relationships, even less so same-sex relationships. Ashanti Ta’Shia (1999: 22) states that the challenges lesbians face, for being women and lesbians, make them relate differently to each other than straight couples. Quoting some interviewed lesbian friends, Ta’Shia (1999) states that their love is not different because they are a lesbian couple; the differences are the challenges they have faced being a lesbian couple with issues such as homophobia, family rejection and non-acknowledgment by society of their coupleship. While the topics of homosexuality and same-sex relationships have received an incredible amount of academic attention over time and space, this attention has mainly focused on gender roles (Gutmann 2007), sexual behaviour among (male) homosexuals (Carrier 1976/2001) or influences of globalisation processes (Boelstorff 2003). Little research has been done regarding the meaning and expression of love in (female) same-sex relations. Therefore the focus within this research lies on the meaning and expression of love and relationships among female homosexuals. I began this research from the starting point of a constructionist view of the meaning of love. Situating this in the broader field of the anthropology of emotions (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990, Boellstorff & Lindquist 2004) and relationships, it became even more so a research with a socio-cultural focus. The theoretical approach of this thesis focuses on the interaction between the socio-cultural (and political) environment and the ways people - in this case homosexual females - relate to each other. This thesis is about (changing) socio-cultural and political factors, as religious beliefs, norms about gender roles, changing laws and family situations and the influence on the relationships young lesbian women construct; and what kind of meaning of emotion and love they attribute to these relationships. The central question that will be answered in this thesis is:

*How can the meaning and expression that young lesbians in Guadalajara attribute to love and relationships be explained from the experienced socio-cultural and political context regarding their sexual preferences?*

From the end of January to the end of April of this year, I conducted fieldwork for this research in the city of Guadalajara; capital of the Mideastern state of Jalisco, México (p.9). Homosexuality in México is not a new academic topic; several academic and non-academic studies are well known and read (f.e. Lumsden 1991, Carrier 1976, Gutmann 1997). Also on the more social level its appearance and importance keeps growing; the topic of homosexuality in relation to certain civil rights as marriage and adoption of children became one of the most talked about issues in México during the last two years. Especially in Guadalajara - México's second most important city - where there exists a booming gay-scene and community, these issues are part of daily news and live; newspapers are full of discussion about these topics and several marches, demonstrations and parties are held frequently. Homosexuality has never been explicitly banned in Mexico, and the Mexican Constitution in 1991 was amended to prohibit discrimination based on - among other factors - sexual orientation. However, several long-lasting visits to different parts of Mexico made me question the actual effect of these amendments. Especially during my half-year exchange in Guadalajara – during the first part of 2010 - I interpreted the ongoing heavily discussions and protests from different sides, as an ongoing struggle for homosexuals (among other groups as bisexuals, transgender etc.) with a rather inconvenient socio-cultural and political environment regarding their sexual preferences. It is this friction between the cumbersome context for homosexuals and the presence of many sexual diversity related people, groups and happenings that makes Guadalajara a perfect place to investigate the relationship between meaning and expression of love and relationships and the (changing) socio-cultural and political environment.

This is especially a struggle for a rather young population – especially girls in their (early) twenties - who finds itself in the middle of the changing Mexican socio-cultural and political (chapter 3, p. 24-28). In an attempt to control for variables as age, social class, difference of education level and economic independence, I chose all my participants to be bachelor students at the University of Guadalajara and economic dependent (which often meant living at home with their families). These two factors are cause and outcome of the socio-economic middle class my participants belong to. Their age does not vary more than five years, with the youngest participant being 21 and the oldest being 26, during my research period. To

minimize the impact of gender differences, all of my participants are self-defined lesbians. I chose this particular group because it is this population that struggles with both the more conservative view of their parents and other traditional influences around them, as with the constant attention for change and political active fellow students. I think that it is at this intersection that meaning and expression of love in their same-sex relationships is overthought and redefined constantly.

The goal of this thesis is to discover how the socio-cultural and political factors of - amongst others - uneven rights, a century old culture of *machismo* and conservative Catholicism, shape female same-sex relations. In other words: how do the challenges young lesbian women face, on different social levels, make them relate to each other? The contribution of this thesis can be seen as twofold. Firstly, it contributes to the theoretical debates around homosexuality by focusing on lesbian young women, something barely done in the academic sphere on homosexuality (in the region) until now. Moreover, it contributes to the broad field of studies on homosexuality on a more social interpersonal and emotional level. Secondly, it is certainly a contribution to a more social debate about homosexuality, relating to the current contextual events in the media and society (chapter 3, p. 24-28). That is to say: by asking for meaning and experiences from within, this thesis is an interesting contribution on the societal level in an attempt to come to a better mutual understanding in Guadalajara's society. The focus on experiences and meanings of emotion, love and relationships, makes the social conception of this complex issue more accessible. Additionally, I hope this thesis gives more socio-cultural insight in the growing dynamics and presence of (female) same-sex relationships in Guadalajara.

## **1.1 Methodology**

As stated above - and later explained more extendedly in the theoretical framework - this thesis is one about experiences, meaning and expression; on an interpersonal and social level. Anthropological qualitative research is the way *par excellence* to investigate this topic. Part of the lesbian/gay project in anthropology has been an effort to reshape anthropological research so that it engages the particulars of lesbian/gay experience more effectively (Lewin 2009: 3). Different methods are here to be named to come to this so-called ethnographic approach of studying homosexuality (Weston 1993: 342).

During my fieldwork I applied method- and data triangulation to give the most complete and objective information possible. The methods used for gathering data – apart from literature

research for the research proposal – were diverse and complementing. First of all I made use of (*participant*) *observation*. Participant observation was the prime method in familiarising myself with the contextual frame of my research; Guadalajara socio-cultural and political context regarding same-sex sexual preferences. By taking part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions and events of the group of people under study, one learns the explicit and tacit aspects of their life routines and their culture (De Walt & De Walt 2002: 1). That is why during my complete fieldwork period I observed and participated in spaces of social interaction like reunions of different lesbian activity groups, marches, parties, gay bars and discothèques and conferences. This did not only help in trying to gain understanding of the most fundamental processes of the social life of the population by focusing on non-verbal interaction and expressions, but also helped me to meet participants, establish frequent contact and build up trust by simply *being there* (Bradburd 1998).

In combination with participant observation - a constant status of the anthropologist - semi-structured interviews were an important method in gathering data. Although the group of participants was relatively small ( $\pm$  ten to fifteen young women), the contact established was profound and frequent. Among this participants were three *key informants* (Alejandra, Lorena and Karina). It is with them that I have spoken, lived and hanged around with very frequently, what made our contact more then profound. It were those participants with whom I got to a certain point of trust and friendship. Additionally, they functioned as so-called *gatekeepers* (De Walt & de Walt 2002: 36) by getting me in contact with more participants, places and organisations.

The above already mentioned *qualitative interviews* (Boeije 2010; De Walt & De Walt 2002) served to get more profound and specific information from my participants by asking more direct and in-depth questions based on the central – and sub questions; following a topic list. It was in this way that the categories of information could be gathered with particular responses by different participants. In this way differences and similarities between the participant's stories were made clear.

Following this strategy and in an attempt to come to some discussion between the different members of the research group, another method used was that of *focus groups* (Boeije 2010). I held three focus groups in which I gathered four to seven young lesbian – often a combination of key informants, participants and their friends. In these group conversations I gave the floor to the participants by *letting them talk*. However, I did give the focus points and led the conversation to certain topics. This method was probably one of the most useful ones; participants felt comfortable talking about shared topics and experiences

and the different and/or similar meanings and ideas on the discussed topics were seen and heard directly. While this research was one about the interaction with socio-cultural and political environment, these focus groups were like a small representation of society; they made clear what is and is not shared and talked about and in which way in this particular group.

In attribution to these methods, almost every participant that I interviewed gave a short version of her *life history*. This gave great insight into their process and development regarding their sexual preferences and was a contribution in recognising the different parts of the socio-cultural and political environment being of influence of their experience and meaning of love. Of course none of the above mentioned methods functioned in isolation, but in a constant interaction and complementation. For example, in combination with participant observation, informal conversations often were an essential extra.

The data used in this thesis is, thus, a product of method triangulation. But also the recording of the data was done in different ways. The data gathered during informal conversations and participant observation I mostly recorded using *jot notes* – words, phrases or sentences that are recorded during the course of a day's event, primarily as aids to memory (De Walt & De Walt 2002: 144) - in a small notebook and in some occasions in my cel phone. During interviews and focus group I mostly made *expanded notes* (De Walt & De Walt 2002: 145) on my laptop directly. These notes were a combination of describing, methodological and reflective ones, in a linguistic jumble of Spanish, English and Dutch.

Because the majority of my participants made it very clear that they did not want our conversations to be audio or video taped, I only audiotaped my interviews with Karina<sup>1</sup>, and one group conversation with Karina, Yudith and Alejandra. Recording those conversation made it possible to listen back exact quotes and information and is thus a good way in gathering the most complete data. Still, transcribing taped interviews is a time-consuming job, more so in this relative short fieldwork period.

Personal, oral reflection can be mentioned as a last method - of a more personal nature. Because fieldwork is also an emotional and personal experience, I expressed my experiences, reflections, feeling and frustrations. However, did was not done in a written form. An advantage of doing fieldwork in an already familiar place was that I kept a spoken diary by talking with my friends and roomies about the above-mentioned issues. This was a

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<sup>1</sup> Karina is used to being audio- and videotaped, while she is the founder, president and spokeswomen of the *Colectivo Lésbico Universitario*, and enjoys the media attention she has been giving in the last years.

good way to keep the academic and more personal and emotional sides apart; without neglecting the latter.

## **1.2 Structure and Order: The Story to be Told**

This thesis consists of seven chapters, with this introduction being the first. The second chapter consists of the theoretical framework in which I will analyze the central concepts of my research: emotions, love and same-sex relation. In this section I will explore academic writing regarding these themes in order to create an overview of what are the central elements to these concepts. This theoretical foundation is followed by a contextual chapter, which gives a brief introduction into the context of my research; Guadalajara, Jalisco (México). Chapter four to six are empirical chapters, based on the data gathered in this qualitative research. Chapter four gives insight into the social and cultural environment regarding their sexual preferences as experienced by young lesbian women in Guadalajara. Chapter five focuses on the expression of and meaning attributed to (romantic) relationships and love. The sixth chapter depicts the different ways young lesbian women in Guadalajara cope with the experienced environment and its influence on their relationships in an attempt to provoke political and social change. In the seventh and last chapter, I will present my general conclusions. I will give an answer to the earlier formulated main research question by connecting empirical perspectives with existing theories. In this conclusion the meaning and expression of love and relationships among young lesbian women in Guadalajara is explained from the experienced changing social, cultural and political environment.

## **Chapter 2 - Theoretical Framework**

### **Interpreting Emotions: Meaning of Love in Same-Sex Relations**

*“Love, however, is always a fundamentally ironic topic, as deeply comic as it is profoundly serious, as mysteriously enigmatic as it is transparently obvious”*

(Rebhun 1999: 87)

This chapter forms the theoretical foundation for my thesis. I link the personal brew of ideas and questions to the so-called *bigger stories* in anthropology by focusing on academic (anthropological) literature about emotions, love and relationships. First of all, I will place the subject in the broader frame of the Anthropology of Emotions. I will discuss the academic debate and development of studying emotions in anthropology and elaborate on its consequences for my research focus and personal view. Secondly, I will narrow down the topic of anthropology of emotions to the concepts of love and relationships as studied and perceived in anthropology. I will discuss different authors and their theories regarding love and relationships and how this can be seen in the light of emotional meaning. Thirdly, the topic of emotional meaning of love will be linked to same-sex relations, which is the particular focus of this research. In all three parts, an anthropological focus will be present, paying special attention to socio-cultural influences and constructions. In sum: this theoretical framework is dominated by a relativistic, constructivist approach to the interpretation of emotions, the expression of and the attribution of meaning of love in same-sex relationships.

#### **2.1 Anthropology of Emotions: Constructing and Interpreting Emotion**

In the debate on practising anthropology of emotion, Abu-Lughod and Lutz (1990) distinguish various approaches. First of all, there is the overall essentialistic approach (Spiro 1965, Scheff 1977, Robarchek 1979, Hiatt 1984) with a basis in earlier Culture and Personality<sup>2</sup> work, but also with a resonance in contemporary psychological anthropology - an interdisciplinary subfield of anthropology that studies the interaction of cultural and mental processes - . This essentialistic view argues that the amount and kinds of emotions that people experience are assumed to be predictable outcomes of universal psychobiological processes. However, this approach has the disadvantage of deflecting attention from social life and the role of emotional discourses in social interactions (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990: 2). Wierzbicka, (1999: 4) in this context, distinguishes between ‘feelings’ and ‘emotions’, arguing that the concept of feeling is universal and can be safely used in the investigation of human

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<sup>2</sup> An offshoot of historical particularism, with Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) as a leading figure. Benedict thought that each culture promoted a distinct personality type, and that there was a high degree of consistency between cultural type and patterns of emotion (Barrett 1996: 57)

experience and human nature, but that the concept of emotions is culture-bound and cannot be similarly relied on. I, therefore, interpret emotions as feelings in a specific socio-cultural environment. It is partly because of their interpersonal, social basis that many anthropologists prefer to talk about emotions rather than feelings (Wiezbicka 1999: 1). Then, which socio-cultural focused alternatives can be named in studying emotion? An example that can be named is the so called relativizing strategy (Myers 1979;1986, Rosaldo 1980). This more interactional focused approach of emotions stresses not what culturally variable ideas about emotion can tell us about other “deeper” psychological processes, but rather what implications these ideas have for social behavior and social relations (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990: 4). Linked to the above, is another approach that stresses *social discourse* (Foucault 1978), beginning with the assumption that emotion is a socio-cultural construct. One of the groundbreaking works in this context is that of Clifford Geertz (1973), who states that not only ideas, but emotions too, are cultural artifacts. This interpretive approach (Stearns and Stearns 1986, Cancian 1987) is of special importance in my research, as it focuses on the many ways emotion gets its meaning and force from its location and performance in the public realm (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990: 7). In more concrete words: how are emotions affected by and interact with social life<sup>3</sup>?

Consequently, the concept of emotion and sentiment, and - more importantly - the meaning attributed to this, is not only related to personal or individual experiences, but provides a broader view on (patterns of) social interaction. In this context of meaning of emotion in a socio-cultural environment, Abu-Lughod and Lutz in *Language and the Politics of Emotions* (1990) argue for the key focus of emotion to be the politics of social life, rather than the psychology of the individual. According to this, we surely have to bear in mind that emotion is tied to the politics of everyday life. However, does this approach contain the total exclusion of the (psychological) individual level in favor of the anthropological social life? Answering this question negatively by stating that a more relativizing solution has to be found, a certain balance would be the best respond. In this context, Boellstorff and Linquist (2004) argue for analyses that treat emotions as cultural – and culturally specific - without ontologizing either the individual or the social side. In other words, emotions are not to be analyzed outside of the social and cultural context in which they are experienced, understood and discussed (Boellstorff & Lindquist 2004: 438-439).

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<sup>3</sup> In this research I labeled this the socio-cultural (and political) environment.



Thus, anthropologists studying emotions, first of all focus on and expose the cultural variability of emotional meaning. Frequent attention for emotion as a cultural and social construct - that can vary and change over time and space, and between cultures - is established. It is in this context that the *Culture and Personality* approach should be mentioned again. Representatives of this approach - Mead, Benedict and Bateson -, go even further than stating that cultural difference produce local variants of universal sentiments, by claiming that the sentiments described in the vocabularies of various languages differ fundamentally from one another (Rebhun 1999: 19). Nonetheless, maintaining the idea of universal sentiments - although with local variants in vocabulary - can be an impeding factor in the contemporary anthropological approach of studying emotions. Therefore, I will position my research on emotions of love and relationships in a socio-cultural context and follow the more interpretive lead that the concept of emotion is formed and imbued with meaning within the socio-cultural context. Placing my subject of investigation in a direct relationship with the socio-cultural environment, makes this research one of the relationship between emotions, society and cultural meaning; one of the relationship between emotions and social life. If the meaning of emotion differs cross-culturally and the applications to social organization of emotional practice are variable, then certainties about universals are undermined (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990: 4).

Consequently, not only the manner in which people experience, label (attribute meaning) and communicate (express) sentiments vary, but also the very concept of emotion itself is not universal. If the meaning and experience of the concept of sentiments and emotions (of love) differ between societies and/or cultures, then the question arises if this is also the case for different social 'groups'. In other words: does the concept of emotion also vary between people or 'subgroups' within a certain society, selected by religion, ethnicity or - in this case – sexual preferences. As Rebhun (1999: 2) states:

*“The complexity of the combination of biological states, cultural constructs, social roles, internal experience, and interpersonal interactions that make up emotion, shifts not only from one setting to another but also among social classes and individual roles within particular cultures”*

Then, a last step is to narrow the still broad topic of emotion down to a more scale-down concept. After all, the topic of emotions in interpersonal interactions or social life is still too general. As briefly mentioned above I will focus on emotion(s) of love. Or, as stated by Rebhun (1990: 16), love as a type of emotion; a related cluster of sentiments. If love is

considered a kind of emotion, and emotions as being constructed, changed and transformed in a constant socio-cultural dialogue, then, as Lindholm (2006) argues, (romantic) love is a prime area to gain a better insight into the social and cultural construction of emotions and how individuals relate to this.

## **2.2 Emotions of Love: Relationships in a Socio-Cultural Environment**

Love is one of these concepts which are easy to recognize, but hard to define. Although love is all around us and it has an important place in social life, I was surprised to find relatively few studies about issues of love in the anthropological field. I earlier stated that I consciously placed my research in the realm of emotions and love, because I think anthropology is more than suitable to investigate this kind of rather abstract subjects. Lindholm (2006: 3) puts this in very nice words, questioning if:

*“...the way that people relate to each other, creat bonds, break-up and make-up, was not one of anthropology’s central concerns?”*

Then, how exactly can love be studied in an anthropological sense? Anthropologists writing about love endured some epistemological developments to gain a better understanding of studying questions of love. First of all, the idea that romantic love was unique to Euro-American culture and that it was a European contribution to the world, had to be abandoned (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 149). Secondly, also the idea of romantic love being a non-dynamic human universal (Buss 1988, Fischer 1987 & Tennov 1984) had to be left behind. Additionally, anthropologists studying romantic love could not hold on to the idea that romantic love only had its role and importance in marriage (Stearns and Stearns 1985). It became important to explore the *emic* manifestation of (romantic) love, within a variety of cultural settings to come to an understanding of the cross-cultural variation in the styles of romantic expression (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 153). Writing within the 1960s functionalist milieu, Paul Rosenblatt (1966; 1967) correlated modes of cultural transmission and social organization to the emergence of romantic love. He assumed that the social construction of reality had a corresponding impact on the construction and expression of private sentiment/emotion. Thus, cultural traditions bind the individual emotionally into a web of dependency with others, thereby rechanneling or defusing the intensity of an individual's emotional experience (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 149).

Leaving behind the universal premises and bear in mind its socio-cultural construction, how can we define love? Jankowiak and Fischer (1992: 149-150) understand (romantic) love as:

*“An intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time into the future. Romantic love stands in sharp contrast to the companionship phase of love (sometimes referred to as attachment) which is characterized by the growth of a more peaceful, comfortable, and fulfilling relationship; it is a strong and enduring affection built upon long term association”*

Lindholm (2006: 5) argues more concretely that Westerners generally understand romantic love as a compelling emotional attraction to an idealized other. In the definitions above, physical closeness and emotional committedness are the key factors. In this context, Cancian (1986) argues that love can be identified with emotional expression (f.e. talking about feelings), but that we also should bear in mind the instrumental and physical aspects (f.e. providing help; having sex) of love. Consequently, another balance has to be found between love and relationships being a part of human interaction as well as being a more individual psychological affair. It requires the assistance of ethnographers who, in drawing a distinction between private experience and cultural expression of that experience, are able to enhance our understanding of the interplay between, on the one hand, the biopsychological factors that affect the perception of stimuli and, on the other hand, the culturally patterned attitudes that structure the framework for social action (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 154). Then, it is possible to challenge the common distinction between inner emotions and public representations, examining junctions and disjunctions between globally circulating images, narratives and idea(l)s of (romantic) love and the ways in which love is lived, practiced and often contested in specific social and cultural contexts (Lindholm 2006: 4).

Defining love with such an approach, makes it possible to study it in a more broader perspective; as subject to the socio-cultural environment. Or as Rebhun (1999: 17) argues:

*“The bonds of sexual love create a miniature society between lovers that mirrors issues in the broader society”*

Changes in marital ceremonies and relationships in local areas and the way in which they reflect the economic and cultural transformations of the world economy of the late twentieth century, were topics of previous studies (Rebhun 1999: 1). Social and economic change affects not only how people talk about love but also how they enact love, how their bodies feel and express love, how they practice love in daily life. A same question as above now arises on a more specific level. If there can be found a cross-cultural variety of emic manifestation and meanings of (romantic) love and its expression and if this expression of private sentiment is yet another social construct, then, what does this mean for the attribution

of meaning and expression to/of love for different social ‘groups’. What does this socio-cultural character mean for the concept of (romantic) love between people or ‘subgroups’? In her book on love in Brasil, Rebhun (1999) focuses on a combination of factors that (trans)form ideas and language of love and how this can vary among different groups/people. In this study, this combination of factors will consist of the different levels of the experienced social and cultural context of the particular research location, that affect the expression and meaning of love and relationships.

This research has, then, to be expanded in discovering if the concept of emotion, and therefore love, not only varies cross-culturally, or as we read in Cancian (1986) between men and women; but if this is also true for different people or subgroups within a certain society, selected by religion, ethnicity or - in this case - sexual preferences. In other words: what is the local and specific, social organization of the understandings of love, bonding and relationships? (Lindholm 2006: 4) By including the factor of *relating* in the theoretical startingpoint about emotions and love, there is room for a more instrumental approach of love, being a concept that can be formed and transformed by and to the socio-cultural environment of a certain group (or individual). It is in this way that I try to carry out Cancian’s (1986: 692) argument that love is both instrumental and expressive. Different kinds of socio-cultural environments, political acts, religious backgrounds and cultural inheritance, produce different forms of relationships and different meanings of love;

*“Anywhere poverty, discrimination, bureaucracy, and government control get in people’s way [...] Often the way around rules is to manipulate friendship, and kinship networks to circumvent legal restrictions and economic shortfalls”* (Rebhun 1999: 71)

This is what makes loves, and therefore the corresponding relationships, a twofold concept. The meaning and expression of love, and the kind of relationships formed, are subject to the socio-cultural and political environment. But at the same time love and different kinds of (alternative) relationships can be used in an active way to cope with certain factors in society and simply ‘make things work’. This is why love is a kind of *social glue* that makes it possible for society to cohere (Rebhun 1999: 59). A good example of such alternative coping relationships, is that of Lindholm (1982/1988) writing about the Swat Pukhtun (Pakistan) social organization that promotes fragmented and agonistic social relations, thwarting the need for love in most contexts, but particularly in adult males. The result is that the institution of friendship must bear, virtually alone, the heavy burden of fulfilling that need; because love

cannot be expressed in other arenas, friendships become intense and voracious (Abu-Lughod & Lutz 1990: 2). Can something similar be said about love and relationships among other groups who face certain socio-cultural challenges?

It is in trying to answer this question, that another step in the theoretical level has to be made; specifying in connection to what kind of relationships emotion and love is studied in this research. With connecting the meaning of love and the forms of relationships to social and cultural factors, it is possible to link it to the topic of same-sex relations. In the following and last part of this theoretical framework, I will explain why and how this connection comes to show.

### **2.3 Love in Same-Sex Relationships: A Socio-Cultural and Political Challenge**

In this last part of my theoretical framework I elaborate on the theoretical debates about homosexuality and same-sex relationships. In anthropology - and other disciplines (sociology, psychology, socio-biology) - there has been written a lot on homosexuality, in the broadest sense of the concept. Of special importance in this research is the topic of homosexuality in relation to partnership, networks and love affected by and interacting with socio-cultural and political factors. Above the debate on emotions and love - socio-culturally constructed -, made clear that interpreting these concepts regarding relationships can be problematic. Yet, another difficulty arises in discussing these concepts regarding same-sex relationships, since most of the (anthropological) literature on (romantic) love, focuses on those between men and women (Cancian 1986, Rebhun 1999, Fischer 2006). Subjects that are being explored in relation to same-sex relationships, are mostly topics of desire (Dennis 2000), identity (Eliaison & Morgan 1998), sexuality (Carrillo 2002,2007) or sexual behaviour (Carrier 1976). There has to be found a way to study same-sex relations from the starting point of emotional meaning and love as not only a concept that is constructed differently among different societies, groups and people, but also as both an expressive and instrumental factor because;

*“Lesbian identity is not solely dependent on sexual feelings and activities; it is also a response to emotional feelings, psychological responses, social expectations and pressures, or the individual’s own choice in identity formation”* (Lockard 2010: 84-85)

It are exactly these social expectations and pressures, and its emotional feelings and responses to it, that are subject of this research. If emotions and love are under socio-cultural influence, then what does this mean for these concepts regarding the themes of same-sex relations and homosexuality, which themselves are subject to the socio-cultural and political environment?

The topic of same-sex relations in the context of the theoretical focus of my research can be explored in different ways. Although an identity and gender focus was not a priority, it is not possible to totally exclude it in discussing love and same-sex relations. Not only could this lead to an uncomplete theoretical approach, but it could also bring with some problems in defining the research group and other methodological decisions. Therefore, first of all, some attention has to be paid to the difference between homosexual behaviour and homosexual identity. It is the definition of homosexuality that is questioned here. Within the past decades the adjective *queer* has been used in increasing frequency as a substitute for gay and lesbian – also including others whose sexuality and/or gender places them outside of society’s idea of ‘normal’: bisexuals and transgendered people (Warner 1993, Rhoads 1994 & Penn 1995 in Dilley 1999: 458). Queer, as operationally defined by Doty (1993: xv), is “a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non-, or anti-straight” (Dilley 1999: 458). It is around the importance of the concept of expression in this definition that the *queer theory* is formed. To understand queer theory, one must make distinctions between queer as a quality (essentialism) and queer as an attribute (constructionism); the former posits sexual orientation (not necessarily identity) as immutable and unchanged across time and culture, while the latter defines sexuality as a product of social relations and thereby suggests the history of sexuality to be the history of the subject whose meaning and content are in a continual process of change (Dilley 1999: 460). The construction of those meanings and contents, which lays at the heart of queer theory, represents a change from how and why the experiences of non-heterosexual people are studied, a shifting theory away from its present grounding in identity concepts to a cultural or epistemological centering (Seidman 1995, Dilley 1999). In other words: there exists a difference in the interpretation of homosexuality as something to do or something to be. Queer theory is less a matter of explaining the repression or expression of a homosexual minority than an analysis of the hetero/homosexual figure as a power/knowledge regime that shapes the ordering of desires, behaviors, and social institutions, and social relations; the constitution of the self and society (Seidman 1995: 128). In this context, also in the focus on lesbianism, several studies (Chapman & Brannock 1987; Wilton 1995; Eliason & Morgan 1998 etc) showed that the concept of lesbianism is a social and cultural construction, and thus can have different meanings to different people. Also within lesbians self-definitions exists a profound dissensus;

*“...with essentialistic and constructionist theories of varying kinds and degrees giving rise to contradictory and often competing performances of "lesbian". Lesbianness is a product of the shifting relationships among individual subjectivity, the body and the*

*social (including kinship networks, sub-cultural groups, etc.), and of meanings constituted by/within those relationships. Such relationships are characterized by activity and rapid change, with the result that "lesbian" is a word in constant flux"* (Wilton 1995 in Eliason & Morgan 1998: 49)

Eliason & Morgan (1998) describe different interpretations of the concept of lesbianism; lesbianism as personal fulfillment, lesbianism as a deliberate choice (political lesbians), being in love with a person, not a gender (no-label lesbians), lesbianism as a cross to bear (the born lesbians) etc. If queer theory questions what is so normal, natural, predictable or assumable about heterosexuality (Nagel 2002: 115), the same question could be asked regarding the essence of (female) homosexuality. If male and female genitalia do not automatically result in predictable types of sexual men and women, in particular forms of sexual behavior or practices or in specific kinds of sexual desire (Nagel 2000: 114), then why should this be true in case of homosexuality. If early work of anthropologists unveiled as many different sexual practices and sexualities as there are cultures to inspect (Nagel 2000: 114-115), I dare to argue that - regarding female homosexuality - having sexual relations with other women does not per definition make a woman a lesbian, and that not all (self)defined lesbians have (sexual) relations with mere women. Bearing this in mind, a sub-note can be made: if there is no unambiguous interpretation of what a lesbian is or does, then also the difference and/or the interplay between sex and love has to be understood. Because, if Nagel (2000: 116) is right about the gender/sexual landscape pointed by queer theory being a scenario of sexualities in social flux, then, same-sex sexual relations do not necessarily have to be love relations and not every homosexual love relation has to include sexual relations with (only) the same sex.

From the above I conclude that homosexuality and therefore lesbianism is interpreted as as something actively done and assumed, as well as something passively experienced and ascribed. In other words: there is a difference between homosexual behaviour - acted out by homosexual activities – and homosexual identity. While this research focuses on experience, meaning and expression of emotions of love, I will elaborate a little more on this topic, in the search of the important aspects of emotions and/of love in this identifying process. Identifying as (in this case) a lesbian is making her lesbianism an important aspect of her identity and integrating it into the core of the self concept (Whitman, Cormier & Boyd 2000:3). This integration process is achieved through greater self-disclosure of her lesbian identity (Berzon 1992, Cass 1979, Spaulding 1982 in Whitman, Cormier & Boyd 2000). Probably the most famous approach of this process of identity formation among lesbians and gay men has been provided by Vivienne Cass (1979). In the 1970s she formulated what has become a widely

accepted theory of how lesbians and gay men come to identify as such (Edwards 2005: 3); following six stages from ‘wondering’ if one might be homosexual, to ‘identity synthesis’, during which they integrate their homosexuality with other important parts of their identity (Cass 1979)<sup>4</sup>. Two important notes have to be made concerning Cass’ model: first of all it is doubtful that all people pass through all stages identified by Cass, and - even more important in this research – secondly, the model does not take account of the age nor the social and historical context in which individuals begin exploring an identity as gay or lesbian (Edwards 2005: 3). The latter is problematic because, throughout a lesbian’s lifetime, she is faced with situations and people that require her to make decisions with regard to exposing herself as lesbian (Whitman, Cormier & Boyd 2000: 3). In other words: (female) homosexual identity is constructed under the interplay of the individual and the environment. It is at this intersection that challenges can arise, while revealing her lesbianism – commonly termed ‘coming out’ – allows a lesbian to connect her private and public lives, but this may not always be in the best interest of her ‘survival’ (Whitman, Cormier & Boyd 2000: 4);

*“Because of the stigmatized nature of a lesbian preference and societal homophobia, the potential lesbian woman must mediate her internal view of herself with the perceived external view of her same-sex preference”* (Nemeyer 1980 in Whitman, Cormier & Boyd 2000: 4).

It is this struggle between the internal and external view that can have consequences for not only homosexual identification, but also for the construction of relationships. It is this dialectic relation between the internal and the external view, between the individual and the environment – in more anthropological words: between structure and agency - that is of importance in this research of love in same-sex relationships as being socio-culturally and politically constructed. It is here where the concept of ‘public opinion’ (Adamczyk & Pitt 2009) - or as earlier mentioned the socio-cultural environment - plays an important role. This environment that exists of, among others, cultural, social and political factors, shapes the public opinion about homosexuality and same-sex relations. And more so, public opinion is an important factor in developing laws and policies (Adamczyk & Pitt 2009: 338), as the legalization of same-sex marriage. Thus, it works both ways; socio-cultural ideas, interpretations and norms shape public opinion, public opinion shape laws and policies, laws and policies are in themselves a part of the socio-cultural environment, while they are a representation of that what can and can not be done in society;

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<sup>4</sup> Although this approach will not literally come back or be tested in this thesis, it forms an important foundation in understanding identity processes in relation to the social and cultural context, as examined in chapter 4 (p. 29-39).



*“Across the globe, the debate over homosexuality continues, with great variation in public opinion about the acceptability of homosexuality, laws regulating same-sex unions and penalties for homosexual sex behaviors” (Adamczyk & Pitt 2009: 338)*

It is thus in the context of this socio-cultural and political environment and public opinion that possible challenges for love in/and same-sex relations can emerge. To finish, let me elaborate on these different socio-cultural and political factors that can be experienced as challenging same-sex relationships.

First of all the cultural ideas about partnership, roles, families and bonding are of importance in this debate. That is to say, cultural perspectives on love and relationships, and therefore cultural tolerance, acceptance and place of homosexuality and same-sex relations. Something not only debated in society at large, but also within the ‘homosexual world’. Carrington (1999: 4) states that the debate over the cultural place of lesbian and gay families rages not only among the predominantly heterosexual, mostly male, affluent European Americans in the centers of economic and political power, but within the various lesbian, bisexual, and gay communities as well. Next to these cultural perspectives on sexual and gender norms (Mc Ginn 1966; Carrier 1976; Carrington 1999; Vaid 2001; Prieur in Melhuus & Stolen 1997), religion is also often seen as an important predictor of attitudes about homosexuality (Adamczyk & Pitt 2009: 338). These religious convictions, shared and personal, in many places are directly related to public opinion on different levels of so called non-conventional groups and ideas (Adamczyk & Pitt 2009); among them homosexuality. Secondly, social factors as family influence (Brown & Trevethan 2010; Bernstein 1995) and processes of social in- and exclusion - for example discrimination and homophobia<sup>5</sup> - (Vaid 2001, McNaron 1997), are present in the interaction with homosexual relationships and the meaning of emotions of love within them. The already mentioned laws and regulations make the third factor a political one. It is important to realize that those factors have to be seen as tightened to each other; to function not only parallel, but also crosswise:

*“However, just [...] political stability brings more tolerance for non-normative ideas and groups, it also presents a greater opportunity for personal religious beliefs to direct attitudes. Conversely, when a nation is regularly faced with political [...] uncertainty and insecurity, people are more likely to support values and norms that emphasize the familiar” (Adamczyk & Pitt 2009: 340)*

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<sup>5</sup> An individual response of fear or hatred toward lesbian or gay people, based on personal insecurities and cultural conditioning (McNaron 1997: x).

Do lesbian women relate to each other in a certain way because of the challenges they face? Academic writing on (female) homosexual relationships concentrates on sexuality and gender (Prieur in Melhuus & Stolen 1997), sexual practices (Carrier 1976/1995; Blyth & Straker 1996), power relations (Peplau & Caldwell 1984) or the distribution of (domestic) tasks (Solomon & Rothblum & Balsam 2005). All these factors are part of processes of relationship construction. De Poy and Noble (1992: 49) argue that there exists a connection between the oppression experienced by lesbian couples and the way they respond to this within the structure of their relationships. However - in the anthropological academic field - little is known about how (female) same-sex relationships are actually constructed, or how these factors come together in the kind of same-sex relationships that are established in discriminatory settings (De Poy & Noble 1992) - as described above. Less is known about how the way that same-sex relations are embedded in this socio-cultural context affect the meaning of love in these relationships? Hopefully this thesis will form a valuable contribution to this academic debate by answering the question how the socio-cultural and political environment influences, affects and interacts with the ways people - in this case young lesbians- relate to each other?

## **Chapter 3 - Context**

### **Emotions of Love and Same-Sex Relations in Mexico**

As discussed above, concepts of emotions and love are situated in a socio-cultural and political environment. Changes in attitudes towards these concepts, then, do not take place in a vacuum, but have to be interpreted culturally and contextualized socially. In this chapter, I will place this research about meaning and expression of emotions of love in same-sex relationships, in the broader context of the country and place that it has been conducted. Firstly, I will elaborate on the topic of homosexuality in Mexico as a country on a balance board between tradition and modernity. Secondly, I will sketch the – for this research relevant - socio-cultural and political characteristics of the specific research location: Guadalajara.

#### **3.1 Homosexuality in Mexico: Between Tradition and Modernity**

Under the specific cultural, political and religious imperatives of Mexican society, ideas of sexuality – and thus homosexuality – are shaped in a particular way (Carrier 1976/2002, Carrillo 1999/2007). Studying meanings of love in same-sex relations in Mexico cannot be done without mentioning the importance of Mexico's struggle on the way between tradition and modernity. This balance board between tradition and modernity makes it that Mexico encounters itself in what Garcia Canclini (1995: 1) calls a state of *multi-temporal heterogeneity*; caught between traditions that have not yet gone and a modernity that has not yet arrived. A constant negotiation between 'old' en 'new' takes place (Carrier 1995, Carrillo 2002) with the sexual moral being one of the most important features. Sexuality and sex-related issues in Mexico frequently acquire enormous symbolic meaning as representations of the degree to which the country maintains a national identity, modernizes or progresses, or participates in the global cultural arena; they are indicators of Mexico's status as modern or, alternatively, of the maintenance of so-called Mexican traditions (Carrillo 2007: 74).

According to Rodriguez (2001: 1), if there is something that characterizes Mexico – and other Latin-American countries – it is the continuation of very conservative regulations about sexuality. In the Mexican context, the struggle for sexual rights has been related to processes of citizenship construction or seen as defenders of the Mexican moral and 'good habits' (Rodriguez 2001: 2). This takes place in the broader 'conservative' traditional context of Mexico's history of explicit gender roles – *machismo* -, economic necessities, political tensions and the severe Catholic religious regulations. Carrier (1976) argues the that these - by him called - cultural factors play an important role in the kind of life styles and sex

practices of (male) individuals involved in homosexual behaviour by naming the following factors of being of influence: the sharp dichotomization of gender roles, dual categorization of females as good or bad, separate social networks maintained by males before and after marriage, proportion of unmarried males, and distribution of income. These socio-cultural and political dimensions interact to come to particular gender premises in which the masculine hegemony feeds certain practices of power, including female exploitation by men and the subordination and denigration of men by other men (Rodriguez 2001: 10). Prieur (in Melhuus & Stolen 1997: 99) argues that the homosexual occupies a central role in the definition of masculinity: in many societies, he is a cultural symbol for the opposite of the masculine man. A strong feeling of homophobia in society is then not an illogical consequence, while it not only concerns homosexuality, but is also grounded in a deeper debate of what it means to be a man or a woman. Homophobia serves, then, not only to discriminate against homosexuals, but also to keep everybody – men and women – gay and straight alike – firmly in their place (Castañeda 2003). This is why machismo and homophobia go so well together (Prieur in Melhuus & Stolen 1997: 100). All these factors contribute to a socio-cultural and political sphere that is not all too convenient for homosexuals or other sexual diversities. And it are these factors that form challenges faced by male and female homosexuals, which influence emotions of love and relationships.

Nevertheless, following the constructionist view on emotion of love and relationships – as seen in the theoretical framework – this traditional sphere is not a static fact without room for change or variations;

*“In spite of cultural imperatives (and expectations), however, individual preferences stemming from other variables such as personality needs, sexual gratification, desires of wanted partners, and amount of involvement may override the imperatives with resulting variations in sexual behavior patterns”* (Carriers 1976: 103)

In other words: the interpretation of and meaning attributed to these cultural imperatives can be dynamic and changed. This leads to the other, more ‘liberal’ site of modernity in which Mexico is a place of significant recent change in relation to sexuality-related attitudes and policies. Changes toward increasingly ‘liberal’ attitudes and policies about sexuality and gender, sexual behaviour and sexual diversity are spreading throughout the whole country. These changes are often justified by their proponents on the basis of the modernizing discourses of public health, social inequality and the fight against discrimination (Carrillo 2007: 75). According to Rodriguez (2001: 5) the new generations are *blanco* regarding a

composition of conservative regulations, which form a treat to practising their sexual rights; [...] the sexual practices of young Mexicans, are dissociating from the religious ideal, to adjust to a more and more pragmatic rationalization;

*“While the Church had a great influence on the patterns of peoples sexual lives, today there is talk of a dissociation of the religious regulation [...]. The plurality of the twenty-first century Mexican society shows complex cultural configurations, in which new moral themes are formed” (Rodriguez 2001: 7)*

In addition to this religious dissociation, also a political opening was achieved under influence of the new social movements in Latin America. After the first Mexican gay movement – *Grupo Lambda de Liberación Homosexual* – was founded in Mexico-City in the 1970's, Mexican gay and lesbian activist approached the electoral arena for the first time in 1982 (De la Dehesa 2007: 29)<sup>6</sup>. This political opening continues. As we read in Carrillo (2007), several significant policies are enacted in Mexico since 2005. Two of the most relevant ones in this context are a national anti-homophobia campaign that derived from a federal antidiscrimination law; and civil unions law in Mexico City that includes gay and lesbian couples. But not only the political level of policies and laws are of importance. As stated in the theoretical framework, it is the broader socio-cultural and political environment that shape perspectives on homosexuality and the way love is experienced and expressed in same-sex relations. Carrillo (1999/2007) in this context emphasizes the role of the Mexican state, the Catholic Church, the mass media and liberal and conservative social actors in shaping public opinion and government policy on sexuality and especially on homosexuality.

Now that we have seen that both Carrier (1976/2005) and Carrillo (1999/2007) indicate that a variety of players at all levels of Mexican society - including individuals living their personal sexual lives, social actors who promote or resist specific kinds of change, and, similarly, organized groups and public and private institutions – participate regularly in reflection and debates that destabilize the status quo in regard to sexuality and same-sex related matters (Carrier 1976/2005, Carrillo 1999/2001, Rodriguez 2001), lets turn to this topic in the context of the specific research location: Guadalajara.

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<sup>6</sup> Because the dimension of this context does not allow a more precise and profound history of gay movements in Mexico, I will limit it to the contemporary development of attitudes towards homosexuality in the socio-cultural context.

### 3.2 Guadalajara: City of a Double Moral

Guadalajara (see maps, p.5), an agglomeration of more than four million residents, is one of the biggest and second most important cities of Mexico. It is also the capital of the Midwestern state of Jalisco, which is known as one of - if not the - most conservative states of the country. Andrea Covarrubias, one of the members of the academic *Collectivo Lesbico* of the University of Guadalajara characterizes the city as religious, *machista* and reserved<sup>7</sup>. Different social actors make it almost an impossible mission to normalize homosexuality and the wellbeing of sexual diversities in Jalisco (Rinkema 2009). First of all the majority of the inhabitants' strong Catholic belief contributes to the conservative character of the state and its capital. Juan Sandoval Íñiguez, since 1994 archbishop and cardinal of Guadalajara, is known for his conservative ideas and controversial statements in the media. Researcher Renée de la Torre states in one of Guadalajara's newspaper that cardinal Sandoval is not only an ultra-conservative Catholic, but also an old-fashioned shepherd; a traditional priest with fixed and rigid ideas, for whom it is hard to understand the changes of the era the society is in<sup>8</sup>. The fact that Sandoval in 2008 received ninety million Mexican pesos for the construction of a new church - donated by Emilio González Márquez; governor of Jalisco -, shows that there is a close relationship between the religious and political leaders in Guadalajara in which both sides are influenced by each other. With the current right wing PAN (Partido Acción Nacional) government, laws regarding gay marriage and gay adoptions, as amended or in process in Mexico City, are still not approved in Guadalajara. Culturally, Jalisco is known as the 'most Mexican state', with typical Mexican features as mariachi music and tequila finding its origins in and around the state's capital. This is why the state and its capital are seen as the defenders (Carrier 1976/2002; Rodríguez 2001; Carrillo 2007) of the 'real and authentic' Mexican habits and moral. Consequently, cultural imperatives seen as good habits (Rodríguez 2001) - like strong divided gender roles, machismo and love relationships being exclusively for heterosexual couples - are still well preserved.

All these factors do not seem to make Guadalajara a gay paradise. Paradoxically, the city has a special reputation regarding homosexuality, as Mexico's *ciudad más gay* – Mexico's gayest city. Homosexuality became visible in Guadalajara since the 1970's and is anno 2011 part of daily life (Rinkema 2009: 10). During the 1990's, the city was frequently visited by

<sup>7</sup> 'Marcha por la diversidad: El Colectivo Lésbico Universitario convoca a una marcha para defender la diversidad, que partirá de la Rectoría general', *La Gaceta* #648, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011

<sup>8</sup> La Jornada, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2008; <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2008/04/02/index.php?section=opinion&article=018a1pol>

homosexual inhabitants of surrounding villages searching for sexual contacts (Carrier 1995). There exists a lively gay *ambiente* in the center of the city, and every June a *Marcha de la Diversidad Sexual* is held, which attracts homosexuals and other sexual diversities from all over the country. But the visibility of homosexuality does not per definition make it accepted. During a small-scale survey by the *Subconsejo de Prevención COESIDA Jalisco* during their ‘Day of Love, Respect and Acceptance’ on the 14<sup>th</sup> of February of this year in the centre of Guadalajara, comments regarding gays getting married by bystanders varied from ‘we all were born with the same rights’ to ‘God created the man and the woman, and it looks wrong’<sup>9</sup>. It is precisely the field of tension between having an everything but gay-friendly environment and - at the same moment - being the gay center of the country, that makes Guadalajara a perfect place to study love among same-sex relations and the way it is affected by the socio-cultural and political context regarding sexual preferences. More so, because little to nothing is known about the meaning and expression attributed to (female) same-sex love and relationships, nor the construction of (female) same-sex relationships in Guadalajara, or México as a whole.

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<sup>9</sup> Presentation *Matrimonio y Adopción Homoparental* by Maricela Sánchez Eguiarte (Subconsejo de Prevención COESIDA Jalisco) – 1<sup>st</sup> Conference of Sexual Diversity: Psycho-social Perspectives, 12-04-2011





## **Chapter 4 – The Socio-Cultural Environment** *Sobre Casas, Chicas y el Cardenal*<sup>10</sup>

*“If, in a very utopic future, the exterior attitudes regarding homosexuality change, the perception of love as an essence will probably not change...it will be solidified, because there will be more possibilities for relationships to be rooted”*

(Yudith, 6<sup>th</sup> April 2011)

The quote above illustrates a connection between perspectives of love and relationships and the environment. Young lesbian women in Guadalajara live in a socio-cultural environment, often seen as everything but ideal. In this chapter I will elaborate on the social and cultural factors regarding their sexual preferences as mentioned, experienced and observed by my participants. In other words: based on and using the stories told by them, I will set forth how the social and cultural context in Guadalajara is explained and experienced by young lesbian women and which aspects within are of special importance. Following the order of my participant’s histories, I will firstly show the direct experienced personal level of the family environment and the home and living situation. Secondly, I will elaborate on gender and sexual norms in Mexican society and how these are encountered and experienced by young lesbian women. A third factor of major importance in the specific context of Guadalajara (Jalisco), is religion. In showing the religious notions regarding same-sex sexual preferences and the experiences of my participants in this context, I can explain how this factor leads to an ungoing relatively traditional view on the level of all the previous aspects. In other words: I will show how these factors intertwine and make Guadalajara a multi conservative maze for homosexuals.

### **4.1 Family Environment and Home Situation: Every Family a World**

*“My mother told me that she would throw herself for the 380<sup>11</sup>, because, me, or my sister, being a lesbian, would be the biggest shame of her life”*

(Alejandra, 23th February 2011)

I am going to meet Alejandra - a history bachelor student coming from the lowest levels of the middle-class - for my first interview at the entrance of the patio, which is the home base for anthropology, philosophy and history students at the faculty of social and human sciences of the University of Guadalajara. When I am on my way to the subway my cell phone rings; it is Alejandra giving me notice of her ten minutes delay. Fifteen minutes later we run into each

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<sup>10</sup> ‘About homes, girls and the cardinal’

<sup>11</sup> Number of the bus trajectory that crosses Guadalajara via *el periferico*; often related to small-scale criminality and (sexual) harassment of women.

other at the traffic lights of the crossing before arriving at the History entrance of the faculty. As always, Alejandra carries her blue-white cool box with her, full of *bolly's*; a typical Guadalajara style ice cream, which is much like frozen flavoured water. She sells these *bolly's* at the faculty for five pesos each; “*next to my part-time job as a call centre employee, I still sell those. You know about my ice cream's reputation*”<sup>12</sup>, she says laughing carefully. “*Today there was some work, calling clients that they still have to pay us money, but I am not assured of a concrete number of hours per week or month. Also, they only pay me hundred twenty pesos for four hours. I wish I was economically independent, but I am not. That is why I will not tell my parents, and less so my mother*”<sup>13</sup>; *although I think that all mothers always know everything. Maybe it is not that big of a deal, and she will say that she knew already, but it is possible that she and my father will kick me out of the house. In that case I would not like to abuse the trust and hospitality of friends or other relatives, who I know for sure will help me. I better put myself to work, so that I can leave the house....if necessary. That is why I am trying to establish more economic, and other sorts of stability, to stand on my own feet and, of course, in the most ideal case, go and live together with Martha*”<sup>14</sup>.

Lockard (2010: 84-85) states that lesbian identity is not solely dependent on sexual feelings and activities, but that it is also a response to emotional feelings, psychological responses, social expectations and pressures, and the individual's own choice in identity formation. As shown in the example of Alejandra, these social expectations and pressures make young lesbian women in Guadalajara carefully choose their responses. Although almost all participants define themselves as lesbian, they do not express this identity at all social levels. The family sphere and home situation are often places of non-expression of their sexual preferences, because of a still present conservatism and traditional view within homes and families. As seen in the example above, the decision to not express their sexual preferences to their parents or other relatives is often based on feelings of fear, shame (Brown & Trevethan 2010)<sup>15</sup> and (economic) impotence. Fear of disappointing and not being accepted by their parents, awareness of the possible shame that can be felt by the concerning individual and the family as a whole, and the impotence of finding alternatives in worst case scenario's - getting kicked out of the house; a possible violent response -, made a couple of my participants<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>13</sup> 'That is why I will not tell my parents; about my sexual preferences'.

<sup>14</sup> Martha is Alejandra's girlfriend and also one of the participants in this research.

<sup>15</sup> Although this is a quantitative research about homosexual men in Australia, my qualitative data regarding homosexual women/girls in Mexico corresponded with the general outcomes.

<sup>16</sup> Alejandra, Lorena, Diana

decide to not directly express their sexual preferences to their relatives. Especially hearing reactions during *coming out* stories of (girl) friends, make girls aloof to tell their parents or siblings about their sexuality. Lorena, a twenty-one year old social work student, explains that the terrible reactions of her girl friend's mother at the fact that her daughter told her she was having a relationship with a girl, made her overthink once again telling or not telling her own parents; “*reactions like ‘you are going to hell’, ‘this is just a phase’ and ‘what did I do to deserve this?’ are not really the ones that make me decide to tell my own mom about me being a lesbian*”<sup>17</sup>.

However, in the light of the transition Mexico is in (Carrier 1995, Carillo 2002), not all young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience this impossibility to directly express their sexual preferences to family and at home. Most of my participants did *come out* in the family spheres. Although many gays experience non-acceptance of their sexuality when they first come out in the family sphere (Brown & Trevethan 2010: 271), analyzing my empirical data about young lesbians in Guadalajara, a couple of nuances have to be made. First of all a simple division can be made between respectively a *positive* experience and a *negative* experience of the familiar coming-out. The positive experience group includes Brown & Trevethan's (2010: 271) response categories of ‘non-accepting to accepting’ and ‘not being surprised’. “*Your parents know you, obviously they know who and how you are. I did not have boy friends, I always just had female friends*”, tells Valeria<sup>18</sup>, a twenty-four year old history student. When she started dating her first partner she only talked about her, in more width and length. And finally she told her family that this friend ‘*ya no era tan mi amiga*’<sup>19</sup>. Although she never wanted to tell me more expanded what happened exactly, she said that her parents took ‘the news’ well. Also Katia's family, which according to her is not really conservative, was only a little surprised when she told them she had a girlfriend and that they were going to live together, more or less four years ago; “*at first they were ‘sacados de onda*’<sup>20</sup>, *but now it is fine*”<sup>21</sup>. The negative experience group includes responses of ‘shock and disbelief’, ‘non-acceptance’, ‘not talking about it’ and ‘indifference’. The last two are illustrated when Lorena<sup>22</sup> - half nonchalant, half uncomfortable for not being understood – tells me; “*when I just randomly spoke to my mom about my doubts regarding my sexual preferences I think she*

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<sup>17</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

<sup>18</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>19</sup> “[...] was not so much only a friend anymore”

<sup>20</sup> “[...] flabbergasted/surprised”

<sup>21</sup> In-depth interview 30-03-2011

<sup>22</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

*was shocked and disappointed at first. But that did not last long...she just ignores it; for years she just acts like ‘nothing is going on’”.*

The earlier mentioned feelings of shame and fear for *coming out* in the family sphere are not unreasonable. The fragment of one of my interviews<sup>23</sup> with Karina – a twenty-six years old almost law graduate – beneath, stresses experiences of fear, impotence, restraint and anger:

*“After assuring my father that I was not a lesbian, he did not believe me. He was left with the doubt. And you know, around that age – I was like sixteen years old – I really had my rebellion period; I was not going to school, just hanging out with the girls, going out for breakfast, that kind of things. And well, when my father found out that I was not attending school, there he goes de ‘mala copia’<sup>24</sup>, sending a personal detective after me. I did not know! I did not know that there was someone following me the whole day, from the moment I left the house to the moment I returned. Until one day, when I went to grab some lunch with my friends, I saw someone in front of me taking a picture...I saw the flash. But of course I never suspected that someone had been following me, why would I thought of that, right? Then, one day I come home and I find an envelope full of pictures of me with my ‘prospect’; you see there was this girl, she was not my girlfriend, but we did kiss and hug. And then it all made sense! So, I was mad, I did not understand why they just not could have asked me instead of doing something like this. After three months of fighting and troubles, one of my aunts found it necessary to function as an arbitrator and she called us all together and sat me down with my parents. That is when I first told them: I am gay. My mother started crying and yelling; what did she do to make her deserve this? She, who always had been so religious and full of faith, asked why...why? She did not understand what she did wrong, that she now was paying it in the form of a gay daughter. All of this made me very mad and sad. My father told me that although they now knew he did not want that anyone of the family, not even my own sisters, would come to know. So, for a while, only my parents and I knew it, and my mother started with her comments that it was only a phase, that I would find a boy and that I would fall in love with him and finally marry him. This for me was a phase, a very difficult one...it was my phase of acceptance. I told myself that I was gay and that I could not change it, and I decided that it did not matter to me anymore what anyone had to say about it, not even my*

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<sup>23</sup> In-depth interview; 05-04-2011

<sup>24</sup> “[...] with bad intentions/nasty”

*parents. It was simply my kind of life style. Until one day, I was searching for my discs of the L-Word<sup>25</sup>, and I discovered that my mom had thrown them all away. All six of them, originals, in the garbage! Oh I was so mad! When I asked my father what had happened, he just said: why are you watching those obscenities? I got even more mad, because it were not obscenities, it were just lesbians. Then I got so mad that I published it on Facebook; that was the day that my whole family found out I was gay!”*

Within those different responses, the relationship with the mother and father is in most cases experienced differently. Most participants - especially Lorena, Alejandra and Yudith - emphasized the strong relationship with their mothers; not so much on the sentimental front, as well that in daily life there is more direct contact, living and communication with their mothers. Lorena explains that possible reactions or answers are various times overthought, and having the feeling of maybe disappointing or making sad their mothers, is a feeling stronger than the need to be fully honest with them about her sexual preferences. Regarding her mother, Lorena explains: *“she already suffered a lot you know, for that my father is an alcoholic”*<sup>26</sup>. Alejandra clarifies that not telling her mother about her sexual preferences does not only have to do with her mom being conservative and a rather quarrelsome person, but also with the fact that she has been sick her whole life; *“I can not put her to another physical test”*<sup>27</sup>. Participants rarely spoke about their fathers. Lorena and Alejandra explained to me that, in many cases, telling or expressing their (doubts about their) sexual preferences to their fathers is a *no-go area*. As seen above in Alejandra’s case, even the fact that she could be kicked out of her own house was a possibility, if talking to her father about her personal relations and sexual life. This no-go area was something almost considered and experienced as a vast factor, that made *dad’s opinion* sometimes not even important; *“the opinion of my dad is not important to me; my mother has more authority at home”*, Alejandra<sup>28</sup> states nonchalantly. The explanations for the different experienced understandings - regarding their sexual preferences - of the parents of young lesbians in Guadalajara, are, thus, mostly of a practical (presence of mother in home situation due to labor division) and very individual nature (specific characteristics of different families; health and addiction issues, economic situation etc); as my gay roomy told me: *‘cada familia es un mundo’*<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> American drama series about a group lesbian friends and couples in Los Angeles.

<sup>26</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

<sup>27</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>28</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>29</sup> “[...] every family is a different world”

Additionally, although Brown & Trevethan (2010: 271) state that, compared to parents' responses, there is relative little non-acceptance among siblings, this idea is not completely representative for my research group. Although Alejandra<sup>30</sup> tells me that her sister is 'one of the new generation of sexual acceptance and experimenting', and Diana<sup>31</sup> tells me that she found more trust and easiness in telling her brothers about her sexual preferences, the cases of, for example, Karina, Marlen and Katia show that the generation of (younger) brothers and sisters is not *per se* considered a more liberal and open-minded one. "*My mom maybe would understand, but I am sure that my brothers would not. They are the typical guys<sup>32</sup>, you know; machos and mothers children. I would not put up with their judgments, comments or stupid jokes. So why risk that and tell them?*", Marlen<sup>33</sup> tells me a little annoyed that I ask her for this *logical* explanation. This shows young lesbian's fear for and assumption of a traditional response to their coming out, among (mainly male) siblings. Obviously, there is a difference between fear for and an actual negative response.

However, the above mentioned and experienced different responses within families reflect the specific gender relations employed in them. The stories told by my participants illustrate a division in the male public realm and the female private sphere, an emphasis on the mother's responsibility for the socialization of her daughters, and a still present *machismo* among male relatives (fathers, brothers, or others). The broader experienced gender roles and sexual norms in Mexican society, are discussed in the next paragraph.

## 4.2 Gender Roles and Sexual Norms: Beyond Normality

*"Being a woman and a lesbian is not a favourable combination for who wishes to be treated with dignity [...]"*

(Claudia Solano, OCIO<sup>34</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> March 2011)

Another level on which young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience the already named conservatism and traditionalism, expresses itself in the experienced gender roles and sexual norms. One of the salient features of the Mexican society is a sharp delimitation between the roles played by males and females; Mexican culture places a high value on manliness (Carrier 1976: 105). McGinn (1966: 305) argues that the effects of culturally defined male and female roles are perhaps most clearly seen in traditional values, which apply to middle-class

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<sup>30</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>31</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>32</sup> In addition, being a man does probably play a important role here.

<sup>33</sup> Formal conversation; 11-04-2011

<sup>34</sup> This magazine – published by newspaper *El Publico* - appears every Friday and is a guide for the city and the events of the corresponding week. Zona Diversa is the part/column on sexual diversity.

courtship practices in Mexico. Within those practices, there still exists a romantic concept of heterosexual marriage and childrearing practices. My data supports this idea, while young lesbian women in Guadalajara still face the reality of those *normative ideals* (Mc Ginn 1966: 305); during their whole lives, and mostly during childhood and adolescence, women in Mexico face a conscious and unconscious emphasis on marriage. Women have to marry and have to get children, a woman has to become someone's wife and mother; *"in my family, and mostly according to my mom, we have to end up in Church, dressed in white, next to a man"*, Alejandra<sup>35</sup> tells me. *"But I knew on a very young age that there was something different about me; I always had rather strange contact with girls, I considered them as tarts who only played with Barbie's and other dolls. I had some Barbie's, but I never played with them. When I was in secondary school, and people around me started to get boyfriends, I thought I was asexual because I was not interested in boys. Later, when I was around thirteen or fourteen years I started thinking that maybe girls were lo mio<sup>36</sup>, but still I went looking for boyfriends, because that was simply the way that it had to be. I had some imaginary and made-up boyfriends, who not lived in Guadalajara, but in other places, far away. During preparatorio<sup>37</sup> I did have a boyfriend for like three months, but we did not have any intimacy"*.

If the concept of gender roles refers to the expected attitudes and behaviour that distinguish males from females, and sexual norms are defined as typical sexual performance (Carrier 1976: 104), young lesbian women in Guadalajara do not meet any of these characteristics as expected and considered normal in society. Valeria<sup>38</sup> - a tall, quiet and shy history student - very beautifully puts this in words: *"to be hetero- or homosexual is a condition in which apparently the homosexuals 'salen de las reglas; de la normalidad'<sup>39</sup>*. This fits the concept of *queer* as explained by Doty (1993: xv) and Dilley (1999: 458) to be used not only as a substitute for gay and lesbian, but also including others, whose sexuality and/or gender places them outside of society's ideas of 'normal'; a quality related to any expression that can be marked as contra-, non- or anti-straight. As already seen in Alejandra's example, this often is accompanied by a great ignorance within society about possible roles and norms which do not meet up with these ideas about normality and normative ideals. Lorena<sup>40</sup> tells a very similar story about her finding out that she was 'different'; *"when I was in secondary school I did*

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<sup>35</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>36</sup> "[...] my thing"

<sup>37</sup> "[...] high school"

<sup>38</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>39</sup> "[...] do not conform to the rules/normality"

<sup>40</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

*noticed that girls drew my attention, but I was not aware of the fact that actually ‘me gustaban’<sup>41</sup>. I just figured it had to do something with friendship, being together as company. I was not conscious of the fact that I really, really liked them. I did not have any idea of homosexuality back then, I did not know that something like that existed. Then I met a girl who was lesbian, and people started telling me that I was a lesbian as well. That is when I started thinking about it...”*

Next to this ignorance, young lesbian women also experience rather reserved and negatory attitudes towards their sexual preferences. One of Katia’s comments during our interview<sup>42</sup>, illustrates this idea. Although stated above that her parents support her and her girlfriend in everything, and there are not any big problems regarding her sexual preferences, they did warn Katia; *“they told me that it was my decision, but that I had to be very aware of the fact that life could get hard for me. They told me that I would encounter difficulties along the road, while society was not designed for that kind of relationships. They wanted other things for me, like marriage and children, you know? They just saw and expected another future for me.”* Especially one of her sisters found it hard to accept, while she wanted Katia to have the same – by society seen as *normal* – future as her. *“But she is just trying to idealise her life for me to want it too”*, Katia tells me self-confidently. This supports Candance Gingrich’s<sup>43</sup> explanation, that it is no secret that parents have expectations for their children and finding out that a child is gay often crushes them (in Bernstein 1995/1999).

Therefore, young lesbians in Guadalajara often try to puzzle for alternatives or compromises in an attempt to - in some way - do meet those expected attitudes and behaviour, to prevent above named possible consequences. This meets Nemeyer’s (1980) idea that the potential lesbian woman must mediate her internal view of herself with the perceived external view of her same-sex preference, because of the stigmatized nature of a lesbian preference and societal homophobia (in Whitman, Cormier & Boyd 2000: 4). Karina’s history is an example: *“when I was sixteen, one of my cousins came out of the closet. He accepted he was gay and decided to tell our family. At this point my father started thinking and he found it weird that I had not told my parents about or presented them to a boyfriend. So, one day he just came up to me and asked me que onda con tus preferencias sexuales<sup>44</sup>? And well, I was not completely sure at that moment, and I think I was scared as well, so I told him that nothing was going on, that everything was ‘normal’”*. Trying to adjust to the expected

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<sup>41</sup> “[...] I liked them physically”

<sup>42</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>43</sup> Candance Gingrich is an American LGBT rights activist at the Human Rights Campaign.

<sup>44</sup> “[...] what’s up/going on with/what about your sexual preferences”



attitudes, behaviour and performances can be a difficult task and a personal and emotional battle; “yes, I got myself two boy friends, when I was between seventeen and twenty-one years old. But it was the most terrible time of my life. Having to pretend something that you are not, and doing things you do not want to...just because of the stereotype or the appearance you give to the rest”, Karina<sup>45</sup> assures me with a more serious look and tone than what I am used of here.

#### 4.2.1 Lesbian Gender Roles and Sexual Norms

“The essence of being lesbian is ‘una mujer a quien le gustan otras mujeres’<sup>46</sup>” responds Lorena<sup>47</sup>, when I ask her to define what it means to be a lesbian. A couple of days earlier, I heard a very similar comment, during a group conversation<sup>48</sup> with five other participants. Talking about the same topic of definition, Diana, a rather small history student with a casual but *fresa*<sup>49</sup> look, responds that “more and first than anything you feel like a woman; and you like other women”. Affirmatively shaking her head, Yudith adds: “I feel more like a woman, when I am with a woman, than when I am with a man”. These comments show a sharp contrast with the traditional gender roles and sexual norms in Guadalajara as mentioned above. Still it does not mean that all lesbians meet up to these specific other expectations and ideas. The same problem of normative ideals and the by Margaret Mead called social *desplazados*<sup>50</sup>, also arises within the ideals and norms of lesbians themselves. To a certain point, the traditional meaning attributed to what it means to be a woman and to be a man – the rigid division between gender in Mexico – are being maintained by my participants; “if a woman likes women who look like men, than she is not lesbian, because the latter already looks, behaves and thinks of herself as a man. In that case she is not a lesbian anymore, because she does not like women”, says Lorena<sup>51</sup> firmly. In this case, Katia would not be considered a (real) lesbian, while her girlfriend Laura<sup>52</sup> looks and behaves according to the traditional roles of a man; “Lucy does not care if you think she is a man, or refer to her as *wey* or *cabron*, that is what she appears to be. But I respect her as a woman; I am not with her

<sup>45</sup> In-depth interview; 05-04-2011

<sup>46</sup> “[...] a woman who likes other women”

<sup>47</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

<sup>48</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>49</sup> The word *fresa* (=strawberry) is used in Mexico to describe a certain style of clothing, living or behaving; comparable with a rather posh lifestyle

<sup>50</sup> “[...] dislocated”; Mead (1935) uses this word for the individuals who are not able to internalize the culturally described norms and/or perform behaviour having those norms in mind

<sup>51</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

<sup>52</sup> Because of privacy considerations, in this case a fictive name is used

*because she looks like a man. I respect her and accept her*”, Katia<sup>53</sup> explains. However, all participants emphasised that the prevailing idea of a woman and a man in every homosexual couple is a big misconception; both on the gender as the sexual level. As an example Katia<sup>54</sup> stresses that *“we are just women with other preferences, but we are already two women, it is not a woman and a man. Neither on the sexual front; we both – two women – like to experience and feel, you know...”*. Lorena<sup>55</sup> affirms: *“what I do not like about homosexuality in society is that we apparently have to play a certain role. Because at the end, what matters is that you are a woman who loves another woman.”*

All of the above stated supports Gutmann’s (2003: 90) theory that social and cultural norms - about gender and sexuality- are dynamic and of different meaning to each individual. These dynamics are also found in other levels of the experienced socio-cultural environment by young lesbian women in Guadalajara; as is shown in the last paragraph below.

### **4.3 Religion: Life Under the Shadow of the Crucifix**

Another factor, mentioned by young lesbian women in Guadalajara as being of special importance in the social and cultural context regarding their sexual preferences, is the presence of religious thoughts, ideas, norms and traditions, still integrated in all levels of society. A religious conservatism is probably one of the most present in Guadalajara families<sup>56</sup> and homes. Alejandra<sup>57</sup> tells that it was hard to define herself as a lesbian because of her religious conservative mother, who made Alejandra part of the church choir and a student of bible school for years; *“that are not really the places to even think about being homosexual; it is not referred to as something good or acceptable. My mom is from a village, you know, she thinks that times do not change; she thinks that it is still like she knew, saw and was thought things.”* However, not only in the family spheres is religion still the underlying guide for conceptions, ideas, attitudes and behaviour. My participants state that the Catholic religion is interwoven with all levels of society<sup>58</sup>; socially (family), culturally (morality) and politically (parties and laws). An interview with Yudith and Karina<sup>59</sup> best represents this idea: *“it has everything to do with the Mexican context and the culture of its people”*, orates Karina, becoming more and more irritated. *“People, the world, look(s) at Mexico and what do they*

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<sup>53</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>54</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>55</sup> In-depth interview; 01-03-2011

<sup>56</sup> This research consists of participants from different levels of middle-class families; (introduction –methodology, p. 7)

<sup>57</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>58</sup> Although most of my participants theoretically were Catholics (Communion, etc), none of them emphasized problems with their personal experience of religion; from the interviews, conversations and participant observation it became clear that my participants were non-practising Catholics, or of no religion (f.e. Katia)

<sup>59</sup> In-depth interview; 05-04-2011

see...? They see an immense image of the ‘Virgen de Guadalupe’<sup>60</sup>; it is the religion that is all over this country, in every part of it, that does not let people and society evolve. People criticize everything and everyone, almost holding the Bible in their hands; ‘that girls sexuality is a sin’, ‘poor children who have to grow up with two fathers and without a mother’, she sarcastically imitates some comments. “All of this kind of prejudiced issues does not let them develop”, Karina concludes. Yudith approvingly states that religion is something implicit in the (foundation of the) Mexican culture; “here we experience some barricades, which probably in other countries like yours are not present in this way. We carry a big weight...an enormous shadow of a crucifix, which is above all of us and if you move or you yell to it, it will fall down on you. Basta! It is a shadow, just a shadow....but it is this shadow that we have to move with our mentalities and will power.”

Although the exact numbers<sup>61</sup> will probably be different than when Ai Camp published them in his book *Crossing Swords: Politics and Religion in Mexico* (1997), these quotes do still support his conclusion that the attitudes of Mexican people towards religion provide a strong basis for church involvement in public issues, with critical moral choice and value dimensions (in Smith 1999: 990). The data gathered in my research also support the idea that the Church in Mexico enjoys the highest degree of credibility of any private or political institution in the country (Ai Camp 1997). There is more mutual support and links between the Church and the government in Guadalajara than often thought. Ai Camp (1997 in Smith 1999: 989) stated that, despite some shared ideological concerns and some isolated public endorsements by individual clerics, the Church has no clear ties to the PAN. The young lesbian women I interviewed did see this political party – ruling in Guadalajara – as meeting its image of being the Church’s political arm (Ai Camp 1997); “wey<sup>62</sup>, no mames<sup>63</sup>...then they want to change something politically, like innovate some law regarding homosexuality, and the government still goes and asks permission of the cardinal”, Karina<sup>64</sup> says angry and puzzled at the same time. And although for example Alejandra and Martha<sup>65</sup> emphasize that the cardinal is not the same or representative for ‘The Church’ as a whole, this close connection can be explained by most of Mexican society’s opinion that Church leaders

<sup>60</sup> Celebrated Catholic icon of the Virgin Mary and Mexico's most popular religious and cultural image

<sup>61</sup> Roderic Ai Camp’s (1997) statistics were that back then still the half of Mexican people saw the Church’s role being more than a spiritual one; almost three-fifth wanted it to discuss issues of public morality; and around 84% valued religion as important in their lives (in Smith 1990: 989=990)

<sup>62</sup> Wey is a typical Mexican word, used almost in every spoken sentence; it can be compared with dude/mate; it is rarely used by girls to address other girls.

<sup>63</sup> Mexican slang that has different meanings; it is a rather vulgar way of saying ‘you’re kidding’/‘stop messing around’/‘no way’/‘damn’ (www.urbandictionary.com; 31-05-2011)

<sup>64</sup> In-depth interview; 05-04-2011

<sup>65</sup> In-depth interview; 12-03-2011

are often far more representative of the general population and closer to the felt concerns of average citizens than are national political elites<sup>66</sup> (Ai Camp 1997).

In this chapter I showed that young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience a still conservative and traditional attitude towards their sexual preferences within society. Attitudes of closeness, restraint and ignorance manifest itself on different levels of Mexico's and Guadalajara's society (the social family sphere; cultural ideas about gender and sexuality) that are still subject to a Catholic social doctrine (Ai Camp 1997 in Smith 1999: 990). The indirect and direct links of religious thoughts, ideas, norms and attitudes to other social and cultural levels of society, make young lesbians in Guadalajara experience incomprehension, negativity and rejection regarding their sexual preferences.

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<sup>66</sup> This comes to show at the intersection of politics, religion and class, while bishops and other Church leaders are often more class-related than government and party leaders who tend to come from upper-middle-class families (Ai Camp 1997 in Smith 1990: 989)

## Chapter 5 - Love and Relationships

### *Sobre Alianzas, Alegría y Amor*<sup>67</sup>

During my fieldwork period, almost all of my participants<sup>68</sup> were in a (romantic) relationship. No relationship was experienced or described the same; from long-during love relationships to fresh and new flings. In the academic history of love it became important to explore the emic manifestation of (romantic) love, within a variety of cultural settings, to come to an understanding of the cross-cultural variation in the styles of romantic expression (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 153). In this chapter I argue that such cultural settings influence not only romantic expressions, but also definitions and meanings attributed to love and relationships. Firstly, I elaborate on the romantic relationships among young lesbian women in Guadalajara by focusing on three questions; which difficulties are experienced within these relationships, what are the consequences of these challenges to how relationships are being shaped and which meaning is, thus, attributed to their relationships by my participants? Secondly, I show the emic definition, perspective and meaning of love, as experienced and expressed by young lesbian women in Guadalajara.

#### 5.1 Female Same-Sex Romantic Relationships: Challenge or Safety Zone?

I remember that Lorena<sup>69</sup> proudly told me about her new girlfriend; “*she is a ‘buga’<sup>70</sup>, you know? I am her first girlfriend!*”. That was some time ago; this evening<sup>71</sup> I see them kissing passionately on one of the coloured *hockers* surrounding the low black tables in *Diecinueve*<sup>88</sup>. I accompanied Yudith to this gay-friendly bar, to celebrate one of her friend’s birthday. Seeing Liz, the birthday girl, I remember her to be a classmate and close friend of Lorena. The latter only lets go of her girlfriend for a moment to greet and hug me, and then quickly puts her arm back around her; “*wey, this is Ana*<sup>72</sup>”, Lorena proudly presents me her girlfriend. That evening, everything seems fine between the young couple; they do not leave each other’s side, they go to the bathroom together for way too much time, they intimately kiss and embrace each other and they seem to have a good time. But later on, when we all decide

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<sup>67</sup> ‘About alliances, happiness and love’

<sup>68</sup> With the exception of Diana and Valeria

<sup>69</sup> 01-02-2011

<sup>70</sup> *Buga* is the Mexican word most commonly used by homosexuals, bisexuals and people of other sexual diversities to refer to heterosexuals. My participants were not unanimous about the origin of this word. A plausible explanation came from Yudith (25-02-2011); *buga* comes from *Bugambillas*, a rather prosperous community in the south of Guadalajara. This place was the gather point for rich and white people; the stereotype of what is the so-called best social norm in society. In this way, a *buga* meets the social profile claimed by normality rules.

<sup>71</sup> 26-02-2011

<sup>72</sup> Because of privacy considerations, in this case a fictive name is used

to continue the party dancing in *Equilibrio* – one of the many *antros gay*<sup>73</sup> in Guadalajara – I see the mood between the two lovebirds change, and somewhere around one o'clock, Ana suddenly disappears. A couple of days later, Lorena<sup>74</sup> tells me that Ana's parents drastically came to pick her up; *"her parents do not approve...especially not her mother. She only told her mother that she likes a girl, which whom she kissed, but she did not tell at home that we are having an actual relationship. Still, her mother was very disappointed and furious. We normally went out on Sundays, but her mother does not let her anymore. Now Ana has to go out with boys all the time to fool her mother. Now she is trapped in a double lie, while she has to pretend that she is not seeing me anymore, and that she is really going out with those boys. And I have to endure the fact that she is going out with those guys just to feign to her mother."* During our first interview<sup>75</sup>, Lorena manages to keep calm regarding this situation: *"Friends say I should be worried. They think it is a rather dangerous situation...because those boys want more from Ana. And how long can she manage not to respond to that? But I am not jealous...yet...because I trust her. It is something that her mom provokes in this situation."* But three weeks later, during a follow-up interview<sup>76</sup>, I see a more disappointed and worried Lorena, who quite irritated and desperate tells me: *"and then she wants me to go out with her, when she is with them and other friends, so we can still be together...but she is ashamed, you know, ... to tell them. Because one time, she tried and then her friends were all semi joking like: 'que asco'<sup>77</sup> or 'hazte por ahá'<sup>78</sup>. But words do hurt, you know?! These kinds of comments made Ana decide to only tell them she kissed a girl onces. So we cannot even really be together when we are among her friends, and I do not want to pretend; the more you pretend, the more exaggerated it becomes, the more people notice it...it works contrarily."*

This story is only one example of the problems and difficulties dealt with in the participant's relationships. It can be argued that my participants are confronted with a double layer of problems. As one layer, my participants mentioned experiencing average relationship problems, or as the quite sober Katia<sup>79</sup> states it: *"the same problems as every other couple, independently of their sexuality"*. In this context, feelings of jealousy, moments of incomprehension and economical problems were mentioned by her and other participants.

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<sup>73</sup> Gay disco

<sup>74</sup> 01-03-2011

<sup>75</sup> 01-03-2011

<sup>76</sup> 23-03-2011

<sup>77</sup> Expression of gruel/aversion/reluctance

<sup>78</sup> "[...] don't you come close"

<sup>79</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

The worried Alejandra<sup>80</sup> emphasises the economic part; *“the social conditions regarding money are also really important in a relationship. The difference between poor and rich will always cause conflicts, and in a certain way causes different kinds of friendships and relationships”*. Martha adds sensitively and with a quite guilty tone: *“that is what Alej<sup>81</sup> worries the most at the moment, because she is not doing so well lately<sup>82</sup> and she wants to offer me the same as I offer her.”* A couple of weeks later, when Alejandra joins one of my interviews with Karina and Yudith, it becomes clear that this is really something that bothers her within her relationship with Martha. When we reach the topic of love and relationships, she again emphasises the difficulty in not being on the same economic and social class foot as your partner. Getting more and more upset and emotional, the normally so tough, Alejandra starts crying. Katia<sup>83</sup> simply concludes: *“these problems depend on the person you encounter”*.

Additionally, young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience sexuality-related relationships challenges. Broadening Carrillo’s (2002; 2007) work on same-sex relationships and sexuality, and Carrier’s (1976) studies among sexual behaviour in male same-sex relationships, I argue that my participants are confronted with relationship difficulties due to the fact that these relationships are (female) same-sex relationships. Very beautifully put in words by Lorena<sup>84</sup>, young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience certain *‘cuestiones ideológicas que intervienen en una relación’*<sup>85</sup>. These ideological issues manifest themselves on different levels of society. My participants mentioned different factors to be of influence and challenging in their relationships. As in the example of Lorena and her girlfriend, the family does often pose a challenge to the romantic relationships of my participants. When I speak with Yudith<sup>86</sup>, a couple of weeks before I travel to Guadalajara for my fieldwork, and I try to explain the goal of my research and my hypothesis about a certain link between one’s context and her relationships, she confirmly explains: *“it is common that the family has a certain influence in this. But obviously it has to do with the type of family, the age of the girl’s coming out in the family sphere and the circumstances under which this happens....are there already family problems or not...?! It has to do with the kind of people she lives with.”* In close relationships with the family, also the more general cultural context plays a role within

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<sup>80</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

<sup>81</sup> Abbreviation and nickname of Alejandra

<sup>82</sup> Here Martha refers to the economic aspect

<sup>83</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>84</sup> 23-03-2011

<sup>85</sup> “[...] ideological issues which interfere in a relationship”

<sup>86</sup> Internet interview; 02-01-2011

the relationships of and the meaning attributed to them by young lesbian women in Guadalajara. These challenges can arise externally and internally. External critics out of society are one of the main challenges encountered by (young) lesbian couples in Guadalajara - as became clear in the anecdote at the beginning of this chapter. Katia explains<sup>87</sup>: *“people...society make you doubt, you know?! They tell you that such a relationship never can be stable and secure and that it will face a lot of obstacles.”* Such criticism or doubts can also come from within, and sometimes it takes time to change one’s own internal perspectives. Alejandra and Martha<sup>88</sup> state: *“it is all about the cultural context, what you learned....your education. That what you have learned is not easily forgotten”*. As also can be drawn from Lorena’s story above, those private and cultural implications mainly bring with feelings of insecurity and incomfortableness; girls not feeling comfortable regarding expressing their sexuality by engaging in same-sex romantic relationships, experience problems and feelings as described above.

However, the often romantic and philosophical Yudith<sup>89</sup> puts this in a more positive light. The following fragment illustrates the vision of more participants that living the prohibited – in this case having a (female) same-sex relationship – can also be experienced as something exciting or as a strengthening factor:

*“When people know about a relationship, things change. Sometimes it is the best if at least the parents do not know about it...things can go great, even if the relationship is not made public. I think that feelings and emotions ‘se aferran’<sup>90</sup> more when a relationship is lived in secret....; there is more passion and adrenaline. When the relationship is known it becomes more about ‘ternura’<sup>91</sup> and emotional responsibility. Because it is not a secret anymore, and you get to know the in laws and they know that you have something about which they care that it is healthy of mind and heart. Things change if parents, or other people find out, because when they do not know, in some way you are living the prohibited. But from the moment they find out, the relationship converts into a common relation in which you adjust to conceptions of for example fidelity as applied to heterosexual relationships. Often they want to adapt ‘lo hetero a lo homo’<sup>92</sup>, [...] this is horrible! I think that among heterosexuals exists a problem of the concept of the age-old relationship that has been present in heterosexual*

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<sup>87</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>88</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

<sup>89</sup> Internet interview; 02-01-2011

<sup>90</sup> “[...] cling to something/someone”

<sup>91</sup> “[...] kind-heartedness”

<sup>92</sup> “[...] that associated with hetero(s)(sexuality) to that associated with homo(s)(sexuality)”



*mentality. The possession...the dominant macho and the subordinate 'hembra'<sup>93</sup>...the role of the active and the passive one, the man in the streets and the woman at home. All of these factors contributed to the fact that relationships exterior to those with the partner, are interpreted and labeled as infidelity. Peculiar to Guadalajara, it is funny how a lot of married partners have homosexual relationships to escape the social pressure and explicit roles. I went out with a married woman, and one of my friends invites me to go out with his wife, because he says that she really likes me". Returning to, and relativizing her first comment, Yudith concludes: "in every type of relationships there comes a moment that the couple ask itself to make public or not their relationship. This has greatly to do with the social commitment the couple is willing to face to legitimize their relationship."*

The third and fourth factor mentioned to be of influence in lesbian romantic relationships in Guadalajara, and seen as the foundation of the difficulties and challenges as described above, are respectively the political and religious context. Regarding the political context Lorena<sup>94</sup> states: *"politics has the media on its side, they go hand in hand, and influence peoples thoughts and perspectives. On their turn, people are really 'retrograda'<sup>95</sup> ...ignorant; they just belief and copy all what is said and thought in politics and the media. At the moment we find ourselves in an even more difficult situation, while the ruling PAN is quite conservative."* The shy but smart Valeria tells: *"do we experience all the liberty to express ourselves? There are some couples who do so, but we experience no security at all...not even by the police; they take away your money or they call you names"*. About religion having an influence on lesbian relationships Lorena<sup>96</sup> explains: *"religion make people not accept other people, who have different taste or preferences. Because that is what it is actually, it is a preference, nothing more. It is like you like green and I like blue better."*

There are three important issues to be mentioned in this context. First of all, the factors mentioned as posing challenges or being of influence in relationships are consistent with those mentioned in the other empirical chapters; being the main factors in the experienced social, cultural and political context. This shows a direct link between this context and not only the experienced challenges within, but also – as to be made clear here under - the shape of and the meaning attributed to their relationships by young lesbian women in Guadalajara.

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<sup>93</sup> "[...] woman"

<sup>94</sup> In-depth follow up interview; 23-03-2011

<sup>95</sup> In the context of politics this refers to an ideology opposed to progressivism.

<sup>96</sup> In-depth follow up interview; 23-03-2011

This is in line with Rosenblatt's (1966; 1967) assumption, that the social construction of reality has a corresponding impact on the construction and expression of private sentiment or emotion; in this case of female same-sex romantic relationships. Second, these factors do not only influence the content of relationships, but also have their consequences for the way and which relationships are shaped. In other words: the kinds and nature of female same-sex relationships in Guadalajara can be explained from the social, cultural and political context. Supporting the argument that there exists a connection between the experienced context and the expression or shape of lesbian relationships, Alejandra and Martha<sup>97</sup> explain: *“when relationships, like ours, are not accepted socially, culturally nor politically, they are often way faster, more exagerada<sup>98</sup>. Then it becomes about rebellion and resistance. They want to get married right away, and get tattoos and piercings together. Then after one month everything ends and they break up. That is what they call a relationship to be like a ‘llamarada de petate’”*. Seeing the questioning look on my face, Martha explains: *“you know, the woven rugs? The threads of which those rugs are made come from the petate<sup>99</sup> plant, and are lightly inflammable. They use it as a metaphor...to describe these kinds of relationships; so fast as it burns, so fast it is put out”*. This context also has implications for the participant's sexual life (within relationships). While total openness of their sexuality is often still limited to gay zones in the city - discoteques, bars, among other homosexual friends etc. – intimacy and sexual practices cannot be experienced in the more private spheres. Lorena<sup>100</sup> tells me about her sexual experiences with her girlfriend Ana: *“so, this day we all went to play billiards...Ana, Marlen and some other friends. Afterwards we went to Equilibrio, and Ana gets...you know...excited when she has been drinking. So, that was the second time we tried to have sex, but it did not go so well...It just goes in the wrong sequence; normally you first get to know each other better and you find out who likes what...and then one of the last stops is doing it in public places. But we do not have another option, because in neither of our houses it is possible to do it...maybe we should rent a room in a motel or something”*. Third, a last connection exists, between the experienced context and the meaning young lesbian women in Guadalajara attribute to their romantic relationships. Remarkable is that my participants did not only experience their relationships as a possible space in which their encounter difficulties and problems, whether of a relational nature or as a direct result of being in a same-sex relationship, but also as a place of security, understanding and happiness. Yudith even turns the

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<sup>97</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

<sup>98</sup> [...] ‘exagerated’

<sup>99</sup> Mexican Spanish word for the Nahuatl word *Petlatl*

<sup>100</sup> 23-03-2011

experienced difficulties into a advantage, stating positively: *“of course sometimes we encounter serious problems, but in many cases relationships in which such problems exists are more united...I do not know....they are more solid”*. A strong emphasis layed on the experienced equality within the participants relationships. Alejandra<sup>101</sup> - heavily in love - tells me happily and proudly about her relationship with Martha: *“we see the world and perceive things in the same way, we both do not like to go to ‘antros’. Although I am not the most feminine person, I neither want to be a man; there is not an active or a passive one in our relationship”*. Similarly Katia<sup>102</sup> explains: *“maybe we are not a normal couple, like ‘buga’ relationships in which the woman stays at home and the man goes out to work. Although Laura supports me economically I am not obliged to do housework in case I have a lot of homework for example. We both live in the same house, so we both have the same responsibilities”*.

Then, what exactly can be stated about the construction of relationships by young lesbian women in Guadalajara? As became clear above, my participants faced possible challenges in different extents, and attributed different amounts of importance to these difficulties. Therefore, also consequences for the shape of and meaning attributed to their relationships differed. Different constructions and types of relationships are, then, to be expected. In general, I encountered<sup>103</sup> three main types of relationships among my participants; beginning and still uncomfortable relationships, longdoring and frequent relationships and relative short but intense relationships. Lorena’s relationship with Ana can be labeled as a beginning and still uncomfortable relationship. Such relationships are characterised by a relative short period of being partners (up to six months) and a relative low frequency of personal and physical contact moments. Adittionally, these relationships are generally monogamous. The relative low frequence of actually seeing and being with each other, can be explained from their still uneasy position towards their social, cultural and political context; ways of coping with or manoeuver themselves trough the often challenging context, are not yet found. This, I associate with the relative young age of the girls participating in this type of relationship. The general presence of monogamy can be explained by the relative short duration of these relationships, in which everything is still new and nice, and a mutual trust is still present. However, due to the fresh and searching character of these relationships, long-term future plans - regarding cohabiting, marriage or children - had not a high priority. A second type of relationship is the longdoring and frequent relationship. As this label does suggest, these

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<sup>101</sup> In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>102</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>103</sup> Participant observation; interviews; conversations; focus groups (February 2011- April 2011)

relationships are characterised by a relative long duration (more than six months, up to several years) and a high frequency of seeing each other, being with each other and doing things together<sup>104</sup>. Alejandra and Martha's relationships and Katia's relationship with Laura can be named as examples. An important feature of these relationships is the experienced understanding and equality within them - as mentioned above. The challenging environment is often of minor importance, while compensating factors and feelings for the inequality and difficulties as experienced within society, are encountered in their own romantic and sexual relationships<sup>105</sup>. The latter factor comes to show in the high monogamous character of this kind of relationship. These relationships often include serious future plans of cohabiting and spending their lives together. Although my participants generally did not have any marriage or childrearing plans (see chapter 6, p. 58), long-term future plans are found high on their relation curriculum. We have to bear in mind that the absence of marriage or childrearing wishes – in all of the three relationships – can be explained from the age (see introduction, p. 7) of my particular research group. A third type of relationship is that of the relative short but intense relationships. This type includes the remaining relationships I encountered among my participants, in a summarized label. This type of relationships can express itself in very intense, heavy and emotionally heavy loaded relationships - in which a partner is totally idealised and seen as the perfect match and a emotional soulmate -, which, however, are temporary (maximal six months), due to a certain (mutual) rotation<sup>106</sup>. However, this is often an emotional, and not a physical devotion. This division, between the emotional and the sexual, in this kind of relationships, is often used to justify polygamy. Observations and Yudit's comments and stories about her relationships, make her relationship(s) a good example in this context. However, such relationships can also come to expression in a same personal and emotional devotion to a partner, but of a temporal duration due to other facts. For example, Karina's relationships can be labeled an intense, but relative short one, due to difficulties experienced by the distance between her and her girlfriend. It is not surprising that, within these relationships, long-term future plans are not high on the relational list. Additionally, it was only in this last group that significant age-differences between partners were found (5 up to 10 years of difference)<sup>107</sup>. Differences in construction, expression and attributed meaning, are not restricted to relationships, but also to love.

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<sup>104</sup> Katia and Laura even live together.

<sup>105</sup> In-depth couple interview Alejandra & Martha; 12-03-2011

<sup>106</sup> Observation and informal conversations (Yudit, Karina)

<sup>107</sup> Informal conversation Katia & Yudit; 02-02-2011 / In-depth interview Karina; 05-04-2011

## 5.2 When a Woman Loves a Woman: Definitions and Meanings of Love

*“Love with a woman is way much intimidating, in the beginning; because no one questions you if you feel something for a man, it is already something pre-established. But if something happens that makes you think of and remember a woman, that is totally strange and sometimes even you enforce yourself to ignore it or not to think it anymore; in the beginning not even one self manages to comprehend what a woman makes her feel”*

(Yudith, 2nd January 2011)

Wide open eyes of surprise, followed by a frowned forehead producing a pensative and questioning look, accompanied by a comment like ‘that is a hard one’ or ‘let me think about it’. That was the general response of my participants when I asked them to define love. Nevertheless, all of them accomplished to gather their ideas, feelings, thoughts about and experiences with love into their personal definitions of this, often used but hard to define, concept. Lorena<sup>108</sup>, my youngest participant and heavily in love during my research period, states that it is an emotion or feeling that should be the world’s motor; *“it should be the most important factor within society”*. Although Lorena points out that she thinks she has never really loved someone and she is of the opinion that love can not be the theorized, her explanation of love that follows partly contradicts this meaning; *“love in relationships consists of different stages. First of all there is the physical attraction, the drawing attention. Next, you get to know her a little more, and you fall in love and make yourself illusions; it is about idealising this person to be what you need, you romanticise and glorify her. Then, you get to know her even better, like...you really get to know her, you get to know the good and the bad characteristics, that is who she really is. The family here in plays an important role, you know....to get to know your partner, you have to know her family. It is at this stage that a certain affection arises; ‘I like to be with her, I want to be with her’ .....’un querer’<sup>109</sup>. After this, the last stage is that of ‘amar’, to really love someone; you are willing to give yourself for this person, it is saying ‘I enter your world, and you enter mine’. This is when my life, my context and environment become part of her life and context and environment”*. Increasingly moved, Lorena concludes: *“it is respecting and accepting this person just as she is, giving her space and be with her when she needs it”<sup>110</sup>*.

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<sup>108</sup> 23-03-2011

<sup>109</sup> The Spanish verb *querer* is often translated in English as ‘to love’. But to *querer* (adore/have one’s heart set on/desire/be fond of) someone is something different and less powerful than to *amar* (to love) someone.

<sup>110</sup> 23-03-2011

A couple of weeks earlier, in retro bar-restaurant Madoka, one block from my house, Alejandra and Martha<sup>111</sup> explained their definitions of love in a very similar way. They both reduced love to consist of two main phases. The open and always present Alejandra states: *“first you fall in love, you are ‘enamorada’<sup>112</sup>; this is physical, you feel nervous, you like someone’s company. The second stages is that of really ‘amar’, this is where there is trust, you get to know the person better. It is more than the outside, it is about what this person says or thinks. This is the moment you think that you want to be with this person every day of your life”*. Nodding her head affirmatively Martha adds: *“when you are enamorada, you idealise a person. But when you really love someone, you also know of the ‘defectos’<sup>113</sup> of this person”*. Looking seriously she explains: *“sometimes you can love someone, without being in love....that is ‘cabron’<sup>114</sup>, that happened to me once”*. These definitions are in line with Jankowiak and Fischer’s (1992: 149-150) definition of (romantic) love (see p. 16).

Probably a more emotional and social perspective on the concept of love is the explanation the modest and - to me - shy Katia<sup>115</sup> gives me: *“sometimes people confuse love with obsession. It is not so much about you being with her in search of ‘un bien’<sup>116</sup>, but it is about making her feel good; ‘I am with her and I want to make her happy’. It is like sexual relationships, you know? If you see her having pleasure, it gives you pleasure...Of course it has to be mutual...not everything can come from one side, neither you are going to be a martyr.”* Karina<sup>117</sup>, my oldest participant, states: *“I think that love is an emotion, a relationship or bond that connects you to a certain person. Of course there are a lot of emotions and sentiments that can connect or attach you to a person, no? But love is like....I do not know, like the total expression of devotion, tenderness...Obviously it has to be reciprocal, no? Because if it comes from one side, then it can not be love. But...I do not know, like...love is an emotion for a certain person...independently of a friendship, it is something ‘más allá’<sup>118</sup>. It is like a complicity”*. Looking questioning to Yudith, who in the meanwhile joined us, she asks her: *“I do not know what you think...?”*. The always a little mysterious Yudith adds: *“love is about accepting who she is, she with who I am. The acceptance of the person with who I am towards who and how I am....and we share a certain respect and a moment together. It is indeed a complicity.”* At this point a rather awkward silence makes us

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<sup>111</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

<sup>112</sup> [...] to be in love, to like someone very much

<sup>113</sup> [...] ‘shortages/failures/bad habits’

<sup>114</sup> [...] ‘shitty’/really difficult’

<sup>115</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>116</sup> [...] ‘something good/gain/earnings’

<sup>117</sup> 06-04-2011

<sup>118</sup> [...] ‘even further/deeper’

all three reflect on these comments for an instant. Then we all burst into laughter and sarcastically start joking about love not existing. Yudith jokes: *“it is an invention of men to create a structure of social dependence of one group to another”*. Turning more serious again she adds: *“no, ‘netamente’<sup>119</sup>...love I do think exists. But the important thing is to find it and to take care of it. It is the care for another person.”* Karina more lightly adds: *“it is like a little plant, if you do not water it....death!”* But I return to the same...it has to be mutual. If it is unilateral...it dies.”

Attributing meaning to love often goes hand in hand with intimacy, sexuality and sexual feelings and practices; the following fragment is an example. Describing the emotions between two women loving each other Yudith<sup>120</sup> explains:

*“mmm...being a woman I know how the soft hands of a woman feel, and I know how she feels when she touches me. But I will never know how a man feels touching me, because I do not have his sensorial instinct...this to begin with. Maybe it is not so much about something sexual, but in just as in any heterosexual relationship you have to touch your partner at least to give a hug or give attention in a lovely way. It is simple, between women love is very strong, it is based on a much more energetic point....while between heterosexuals it is more biological. I, a woman, can feel attraction to a man from a point of procreation; ‘how would my children look like is he would be the father?’. But with a woman it has to be something way more powerful than this...You melt into shared sentiments [...] it is something more intense, it is enterprising and leaving her every moment you see her....knowing that she has her period and that you have felt exactly the same for example”*. During a group interview during one of the first weeks of my research<sup>121</sup> Valeria tells something very similar: *“the shape, the body...the delicacy of women, that is what I love about them. The way in which she moves, the strokings of a woman....it is of another level. All facets of a woman are adorable”*.

This chapter showed the emic manifestations of female same-sex relationships and their perspectives of love in Guadalajara. Next to experiencing average relations problems, lesbians face additional problems dependent on their sexual preferences. Experienced difficulties in the public expression and maintenance of their relationships are direct consequences of the

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<sup>119</sup> “[...] genuinely/seriously”

<sup>120</sup> Internet interview; 02-01-2011

<sup>121</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

context they live in. This has not only effect on how and if such relationships are shaped – in mainly three types of relationships -, but also on the attributed meaning. In a societal context of constant challenges, incomprehension, and inequality, young lesbian women in Guadalajara attribute positive meaning of hapiness, understandance and equality to their loving relationships. Therefore, emic definitions of love often entail concepts of trust, equality and reciprocity; fundamentals missing in the socio-cultural and political environment regarding their sexual preferences and pratices.



## Chapter 6 – Political Action and Social Change

### *Sobre Marchas, mismos Derechos y más Respeto*<sup>122</sup>

Finally it is the fifth of March. For weeks I read announcements and other articles about it in academic, local and national journals. The attended meetings of the *Colectivo Lésbico Universitario*<sup>123</sup> (CLU) and the *Red Universitaria de la Diversidad Sexual*<sup>124</sup> and the advertisement poster – a gift of Karina – on my bedroom wall, even made me more curious. Finally, it is the day of the *Primera Marcha por la Visibilidad Lesbica*<sup>125</sup>. I am going to meet Valeria and Diana and arrive at five o'clock sharp at the rectorial building of the University of Guadalajara; the place of departure. Karina and other members of the *Colectivo* and *la Red* are accompanied by a still small, but colourful group of people of all ages and sexes. The majority are lesbian girls in their twenties, with their male and female homosexual and heterosexual friends – most of them dressed in purple. Looking around, I also see adult women – some with children – and other sexual diversity organisations – among them mainly males - with banners and megaphones. Also present is a representative of the *Homo Souvenirs* shop wearing a coloured flag t-shirt and on of their own bags and Silvia Garcia - the self-defined oldest lesbian of Guadalajara - covered in badges and bracelets with the coloured stripes. Various local, regional and national media manoeuvre themselves through this crowd for taking pictures, filming and interviewing. While I wait for Valeria and Diana, I decide to take a picture of the enormous, shining rainbow flag that is artistically draped on the sidewalk of Avenida Vallarta; one of the central avenues of the city's centre. When I see Karina nervously light a cigarette after finishing one of her interviews with a national tv-station, I decide to greet her. “*Aaah, mi Lencha*<sup>126</sup>, *my favourite groupie!*”, she illustriously greets me, while embracing me strongly but hastily. After pushing her purse in my hands when asked to give a couple of other interviews, and some complaints about not having the time to smoke a cigarette, Karina passes me one of the small rainbowflags on a stick to participate in the group picture. There we are, a multi-coloured group behind the white-pink banner of the March

<sup>122</sup> 'About marches, equal rights and more respect'

<sup>123</sup> This collective, initiated by Karina Velasco Michel, is a group of women (students), convinced that sexuality is not limited to the social or political prescriptions which dictates certain groups of power. Therefore they practice their way of living and loving in jointly and revolutionary ideas. The collective pretends to create the necessary conditions for lesbians, bisexuals, gays, transgenders, and transsexuals not being subject to discrimination anymore. ([www.facebook.com/colectivolesbicouniversitario](http://www.facebook.com/colectivolesbicouniversitario))

<sup>124</sup>This network consists of students, academics and administratives of the University of Guadalajara, voluntary united for their wish to generate a culture of respect and acceptance of sexual and affective diversity. Its starting point is that homosexuality, bisexuality or transexuality are not margins, diseases or conditions. Therefore they are convinced that no one should discriminate people for their orientation or identity. ([reundisex.blogspot.com](http://reundisex.blogspot.com))

<sup>125</sup> “[...] First March for Lesbian Visibility”

<sup>126</sup> Lencha is my Mexican nickname

posing for about ten foto and video camaras, quivering to pick up the immense rainbow flag and go marching in Guadalajara. After finally finding Valeria, Diana and their friends – who’s colours of clothes together form the rainbow flag– we slowly join the already leaving group. During the walk – that does not take longer then fourty-five minutes – I try to talk with girls participating. However, this is hard between all the observing and participation by getting in line to carry the coloured flag. Moreover, I try to hear comments from the sidewalks, take pictures and repeatedly shout the slogans the leader of *la Red* yells trough his megaphone. Arriving at the end of the March, we form a coloured crowd on the Plaza Guadalajara, in front of the symbolically chosen main Cathedral. There, Karina – proudly standing between the two famous actresses of *Las Aparicio*<sup>127</sup> – begins to orate her discourse: *“it is a pleasure and an honour for me to talk about lesbian visibility today, in this city in which you have seen me being born and raised. As an activist, I am filled with deep satisfaction seeing so much united women today, free women, visible valiant women and women willing to show that they are not afraid!”*.

Next to, and as a result of, the experienced environment (chapter 4, p. 29-40), (young) lesbians in Guadalajara experience cultural, social and political invisibility and non-existence; *“no-existimos*<sup>128</sup>!”*”, Martha*<sup>129</sup> states firmly. Alejandra<sup>130</sup> clarifies: *“there are almost no governmental programmes regarding female homosexuality...in public live there are no lesbians. Sometimes in the media they do show homosexuality, but then these characters are posed to be really good but asexual gays; or it are really problematic sexual gays...they finally die of Aids or something”*. That weekend, when I meet up with Alejandra, Martha and Valeria to watch movies with a homosexual theme, this negative existence and presence of homosexuality in, for example, movies is emphasized once again. After watching a quite dramatic movie<sup>131</sup> about a lesbian relationship during World War II, Alejandra<sup>132</sup> concludes: *“the way in which we are represented in movies, series and other media it is like lesbians and lesbian relationships are doomed to fail anyway”*. Within in the same LGBT<sup>133</sup> community, my participants mentioned to be more invisible then homosexual men. The explanation is

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<sup>127</sup> *Las Aparicio* is a Mexican tv-serie about the Aparicio women. A quite rich family, which consists of only women who are not the Mexican stereotype: single women (with children), feminist women, lesbian women etc. My participants frequently mentioned this serie – until now only broadcasted in the Federal District – as being of importance of showing topics which for decades were taboo in the Mexican society. Two actresses, in the serie lesbians, were willing to participate in the March.

<sup>128</sup> “[...] we do not exist”

<sup>129</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>130</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>131</sup> Aimee & Jaguar (1999)

<sup>132</sup> 27-02-2011

<sup>133</sup> Initialism used to self-designation to collectively refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people.

often of a gender-related nature. In her oration, Karina<sup>134</sup> explains: *“we are women, that makes us fundamentally more invisible. Women throughout history have been invisible. They have not been existent for who makes up the course of societies [...], we have been subject to their patriarchal structures, subject to live in the private sphere and not the public one”*. Regarding the invisibility and non-existence of lesbian women, she orates: *“our reality is still slightly known. We need more resources, more research about the theme. That would be positive for whole society, but it is also very important that we know it ourselves. Because in that way we can obtain the elements necessary to make a mix of liberty and visibility, which can result in respect, tolerance, unity, protection and free options!”*. According to my participants, female homosexuals were more invisible, but (therefore) also less criticised. An explanation is often found in culturally determined sharp dichotomization of gender roles; a strong division between what is male and female (Carrier 1976). Crossing those rigid lines – by behaviour or identity – can be problematic. Valeria<sup>135</sup> explains: *“because with a man being gay and calling him names, his masculinity is taken away....it is all about machismo!”*. Lorena<sup>136</sup> has a similar and more sober view: *“it is obvious that people know that there exists lesbians, only we are less criticised probably. Lesbianism is often less notorious, homosexual men often want to attract more attention by being more feminine. If a woman dresses really manly then she is also criticised a lot...”*.

As the different ideas and explanations of this cultural, social and political invisibility and non-existence makes us presume, there exist different perspectives in approaching this and all the other contextual factors as discussed in the other empirical chapters. In other words: my participants employ different ways of coping with and bearing the experienced social and cultural context. In this chapter, I will highlight two main approaches to cope with and try to change their situation; the political activist approach<sup>137</sup> and the social change approach. The first one can be split up in the, what I shall call, strict action (homosexual rights and visibility) and moderate activism (general civil rights). It is the interpretation, goal and method that distinguish the severe action from the moderate activism. The latter is often a forerunner or direct colleague of the second main approach; social change *beyond homosexuality* in society at large, based on opening up minds and increasing mutual respect.

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<sup>134</sup> 05-03-2011

<sup>135</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

<sup>136</sup> In-depth interview; 23-03-2011

<sup>137</sup> Although organisations, groups and individuals within this approach also desire social change, I label it political activism, while they are of the opinion that changes in legislation and rights are a priority and necessary for a changing society.

## 6.1 Political Change: a Legal Battle

There are many activist organisations and groups in Guadalajara, Jalisco and Mexico as a whole. However, in my research, the academic factions of the UdG were the most mentioned, present and important<sup>138</sup>. The academic character of much of the political action gives this activism a special dimension. Paulina Flores<sup>139</sup>, a member of the CLU, states in the university paper *La Gaceta*: “universities do not need closets; the academic collective is important because we are in a public university. It is here where professionals are born, where historians leave, politicians, lawyers. They are born here because it is the CUCSH<sup>140</sup>, it is humanities, here social warriors and the people who are going to steer the wheel of our state and country are born. It is relevant that we expose ourselves as lesbian women.” The interpretation of the environment by many of the political strict activist is strikingly put into words by Karina<sup>141</sup>: “we, lesbians, still are invisible, hidden, camouflaged...all to protect ourselves from a voracious, lesbophobic and misogynic society”. The goal of the by Karina initiated CLU is a simple and collective one: fighting against discrimination and conflict by starting with legal changes<sup>142</sup>. The importance of legal changes, for this group, becomes clear in one of Karina’s<sup>143</sup> comments; “if I want to get married, I only want to have to think about with whom and not if it is possible at all”. Young lesbian women with a strict action principle, often chose for a direct and active method to achieve their wished changes. The most common method is that of making lesbianism public and demand rights and equality, by taking the streets. “It is clear that lesbophobia is still a frequent present dish on our tables, it is therefore that we decided to go outside and take the streets. Not requesting but demanding respect and tolerance of this ‘tonto’<sup>144</sup> government, ‘panista’<sup>145</sup>, lesbophobic and ‘machista’; of those religious leaders to whom terms as tolerances, inclusion and respect are still not clear; of the tapatia<sup>146</sup> society full of prejudice and double moral”, Karina<sup>147</sup> explains.

Not all young lesbian women in Guadalajara participate in this kind of activism. Martha<sup>148</sup> understandingly says: “I think that mostly younger girls participating in activist groups and marches have the idea of belonging to something...a certain group, certain people, certain

<sup>138</sup> This is probably, amongst others, a direct consequence of the chosen research population.

<sup>139</sup> *La Gaceta*, 28-02-2011

<sup>140</sup> Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (Faculty of Social and Humanity Sciences)

<sup>141</sup> Discourse Marcha Lesbica; 05-03-2011

<sup>142</sup> In-depth interview; 05-04-2011

<sup>143</sup> Informal conversation; 02-02-2011

<sup>144</sup> “[...] foolish”

<sup>145</sup> “[...] ruled by the PAN (Partido Acción Nacional)”

<sup>146</sup> “[...] Guadalajara’s”

<sup>147</sup> Discourse Marcha Lesbica; 05-03-2011

<sup>148</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

*purposes.*” But most of my participants found to big a gap between the legal, activist side and their personal experienced context. Alejandra<sup>149</sup> confirms this experienced legal-social gap by telling: *“my dad has a general problem with jotos<sup>150</sup>; he worked for the seguro social, Mexico’s biggest medical organisation. When in the 1980’s a lot of cases of AIDS/HIV presented themselves, he gave all responsibility and guilt to gays. The latter getting married, for my father, is a ridiculous idea. His opinion is that, if two men or two women have the right to get married, then it will not take long until an ant can marry a rooster. My mom does not matter about the fact that homosexual partners can or cannot marry or adopt, as long as it does not take place in her own family. One time she told me that whatever they do, they do, but not in her house”*. Thus, possible legal changes do not per se mean mentality changes in the direct experienced context of my participants. Yudith<sup>151</sup> explains: *“it depends on the family. In the case of Guadalajara you know that there is a lot of corruption....a lot of people make up their own justice. Many parents do not care if something is legal or not, they only care for how their family might look to society. Family-related problems are common, or critics about the atrevimiento<sup>152</sup> to hold another woman’s hand in a park. The legal part ‘nos lo pasamos por el culo;<sup>153</sup>; [...] it is not that important.”* In accordance to these quotes, many participants do not see any solution in being or becoming a severe political activistic lesbian. They are of the opinion that the experienced differences between homo- and heterosexuals and between female and male homosexuals will only be marked and emphasized more. Participants supporting this idea mention that certain activism does more wrong than right; while their inequality and *otherness* will be even more emphasized and an even bigger gap will arise.

When, during a group interview<sup>154</sup>, I ask if the present participants see themselves as (political) activists, a straight and collective ‘no’ is the response. Martha explains: *“I am an activist in some way, but activism as participating in marches and yell ‘I am a lesbian’....no!”* Yudith affirms: *“this only marks the difference even more”*. On her turn, Alejandra adds: *“then such activistic girls are invited to talkshows or so...but it also comes down to the cliché stories about respect and do I know what more. Or there are being interviewed by an interviewer who is really machista....or they just give the answers that people want to hear.*

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<sup>149</sup> In-depth interview; In-depth interview; 23-02-2011

<sup>150</sup> Nickname for homosexuals, mostly used for males and often with a negative ‘bijklank’.

<sup>151</sup> Internet interview; 02-01-2011

<sup>152</sup> “[...] impudence/rudeness”

<sup>153</sup> Rather vulgar way of saying “[...] does not matter/is not important”

<sup>154</sup> Focus group; 25-02-2011

*Being in the streets of this city and being confronted with society and the people, that is activism*". A couple of weeks later, this becomes more than clear; *"they yelled something at us just now in the street! Some man yelled pinches mugrusas<sup>155</sup>"*, Martha<sup>156</sup> tells me when she and Alejandra sit down in the restaurant we are having our interview. After seeing my look of astonishment she adds: *"this city is already really ugly...it is radicalising. It is like it is the gays versus everyone else....it is very polarised."* Regarding her girlfriend's comments and as an example of this polarisation Alejandra states: *"for example la Marcha....I do not know...We have to unite all women, we could hold a march for all the women all around the world"*. This shows the reluctance of these more moderate activists towards mere lesbian or homosexual activism, while it only stimulates the already high-polarised society of Guadalajara. Then, it can be argued that this moderate active group does not link their desires directly to their homosexuality, but wishes for more general civil rights. Lorena<sup>157</sup> explains: *"it is not so much about me being a lesbian....but me being a woman – who likes women - and I have the same rights as every other individual. 'Derechos' gays<sup>158</sup> do not exist, it are human rights in general"*. A good example of this approach to liberty and rights, are the perspectives on same-sex marriage.

Most of my participants do and did not have a marriage wish, and some have found symbolic alternatives. However, they did see the importance of legalising same-sex marriage in more places in Mexico<sup>159</sup>. In other words: the symbolic motive (romantic view, marriage wish) for legalising same-sex marriage is inferior to more practical considerations. The rather young Lorena<sup>160</sup> tells with a disapproving tone: *"the essence of the marriage goes to waste in the current debate...people just want gay-marriage to get approved for the rest of the rights it can give them. I think it is about the liberty for every person to chose how to live his or her life, and there should not be any limits posed by the government to have the relationship you decide"*. Alejandra<sup>161</sup> romantically states: *"The commitment... we have it her and her"*, respectively pointing to her head and heart." *"Still, ofcourse it is a pro for legal reasons"*, she relativises, *"in case of death, money or to open a shared bank account. It can help in not taking away your rights and liberty."* Then, moderate activism is about establishing general

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<sup>155</sup> "[...] fucking dirty girls"

<sup>156</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

<sup>157</sup> In-depth follow up interview; 23-03-2011

<sup>158</sup> "[...] gay rights"

<sup>159</sup> Until now same-sex marriage is only legal in the Federal District of Mexico-City.

<sup>160</sup> In-depth follow up Interview; 23-03-2011

<sup>161</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

civil and human rights and norms, which for example make it possible that any individual can marry and adopt children, independently of their sex, gender or sexual preference.

Those perspectives are still labeled being of a political nature, while legal change is often thought to be a first step in the right direction. Alejandra<sup>162</sup> sees a direct link between a legal and a more socio-cultural change: *“A juridic and legal change can bring with a change in consciencias<sup>163</sup>. The adoption of gay-marriage can lead to less prejudices about all homosexuals and their relationships being perverse and promiscuous; it can show that it is possible and wanted to form and maintain a stable relationship.”* Legal changes are, then, thought about and hoped for being a fundamental first change in mentality change.

## 6.2 Social Change: Opening up Society

When at the end of an interview or conversation I asked them what they would like to change in their environment and situation regarding their sexual preferences, most of my participants did not have to think long about their responses. Strictly active or not, most of the girls I interviewed had future wishes beyond legal and political changes. The almost angry Lorena<sup>164</sup> states: *“If I could change things, it would be the respect and love towards other people. Because we stop being human by only being concerned to satisfy the necessities of our own ...me, me, me....People do not love or want to help others. I would also remove the idea of power; the ‘I am better than you’...! I would change it for love as the motor of the world. Even the concept of love we all operate just as we want, to get what we want...this are all people’s problems”*. This shows that some of my participants think a more profound change is necessary; a change from within. The factors out of the socio-cultural and political context that are often experienced as challenges to young lesbian women in Guadalajara, can serve as the foundation of change; *“religion has some things which are really ‘chidas<sup>165</sup>’, sometimes there is a lot of truth in religion. Some parts are fundamental to reside in harmony...for example ‘deal by others as you wish to be dealt with’”*, Lorena<sup>166</sup> opinions. A similar perspective is that of Katia<sup>167</sup>: *“the gay parade is like a circus! It is not about asking for rights or equality...it is ‘cottage cultural<sup>168</sup>’. If we had to held a march for every group, it would never stop...we should better just all respect eachother! We are closed...we simply have to open up our minds. Like our neighbours, who after three years finally smile at me and Laura*

<sup>162</sup> In-depth couple interview; 12-03-2011

<sup>163</sup> “[...] awareness/consciousness”

<sup>164</sup> In-depth follow up interview; 23-03-2011

<sup>165</sup> “[...] cool/nice”

<sup>166</sup> In-depth follow up interview; 23-03-2011

<sup>167</sup> In-depth interview; 30-03-2011

<sup>168</sup> “[...] a cultural hustle and bustle”

*when we see them. It is not so much about rights, it is about values. We all have to respect and understand each other; there is a lack of respect, tolerance and acceptance.”*

These participants call for a change *beyond homosexuality*; society has to open up. Legal or political changes or in this context not a priority, or even not seen as something fundamental. A broader mentality change is necessary to change their environment and situation in society, in which opened up minds, respect for each other and an overall idea of mutual love within society, are the main contributions.

In this chapter, different ways of coping with and changing the experienced environment by young lesbian women in Guadalajara are formulated. Although there are different opinions on how to achieve it, a major change in societal mentality is wanted. In other words: there are different ways of bearing the socio, cultural and political context regarding their sexual preferences and its implications for the meaning and expression of love and relationships. A change from within and beyond the societal mentality towards homosexuality should provide more mutual respect and love in society at large. This should contribute to extend the experienced equality and feelings of love within my participants relationship, to an overall loving society.



## Chapter 7 - Conclusion

*“Oh, yes...it is totally different, the love between two women, than between a woman and a man. It is a difference of heaven and earth.”*

(Yudith, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2011)

In this thesis, I formulated a theoretical, contextual and empirical explanation for the connection between the socio-cultural and political context and the expression of and meaning attributed to female same-sex love and relationships. Broadening Ta’Shia’s (1999) argument, - as mentioned in the introduction (p. 11) - my expectation was that certain factors, regarding their sexual preferences, experienced on the social, cultural and political level influence not only how lesbians define love, but also which meaning is attributed to their love and relationships. This thesis focuses on this issue in the direct context of Guadalajara. The following central research question was employed: *‘how can the meaning and expression that young lesbians in Guadalajara attribute to love and relationships, be explained from the experienced socio-cultural and political context regarding their sexual preferences?’*.

In the introduction of chapter four (p. 35), I labeled Guadalajara a multi conservative maze for homosexuals. Defining maze as *‘a complex network of paths or passages, especially one with high hedges in a garden, designed to puzzle those walking through’*<sup>169</sup>, I will use this as a guideline through this conclusion. The encountered dead ends of high hedges are a plausible metaphor for the experienced context by young lesbian women in Guadalajara. As stated in the contextual chapter (p. 32) Andrea Covarrubias - member of the *CLU* - characterizes Guadalajara as religious, *machista* and reserved<sup>170</sup>. Those features accurately reflect the high hedges young lesbian women in Guadalajara encounter in their environment. These, on their turn, represent the levels of experienced difficulties within female same-sex relationships.

The social *reservedness* is the first point where young lesbian women’s journey through the maze comes to a dead end. The family sphere and home situation are often places of non-expression of homosexual preferences. Fear of disappointment or non-acceptance, awareness of possible individual or family shame and (economic) impotence – the latter a direct consequence of the specific socio-economic position of my research population -, are feelings of mayor influence in young lesbian’s decision to not directly express their sexual preferences to relatives. Experienced differences between maternal and paternal responses can

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<sup>169</sup> Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers (1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003)

<sup>170</sup> ‘Marcha por la diversidad: El Colectivo Lésbico Universitario convoca a una marcha para defender la diversidad, que partirá de la Rectoría general’, *La Gaceta* #648, 28<sup>th</sup> February 2011

be explained in practical (more frequent presence of mothers in home situations) and individual (specific characteristics of different families; health and addiction issues, economic situation etc) terms. However, feelings of responsibility and failure regarding their daughter's sexuality were a generality in mother's responses. Regarding responses and non-acceptance among siblings, sex and age difference are of mayor importance. These differences within responses in the family, reflect specific gender relations; not only within the corresponding families, but also within the Guadalajara middle-class society as a whole. The stories told by my participants illustrate a division in the male public realm and the female private sphere, an emphasis on the mother's responsibility for the socialization of her daughters, and a still present *machismo* among male relatives (fathers, brothers, or others). This social area of non-expression has direct (practical) implications for relationships among young lesbian women in Guadalajara. Ignorance or disapproval of relationships can result in prohibited communication and therefore secret contact. In this context, side effects, as lying to relatives or the own partner, are not rare. In other words: difficulties in public expression and maintenance of their relationships can be explained from the closed and reserved private and public sphere of non-expression regarding their sexual preferences experienced by young lesbian women in Guadalajara.

Conservatism and a traditional view are not only present in the social family realm. The already named cultural ideas on gender roles and sexual norms form a second point of return in the puzzling route of young lesbian women in Guadalajara. The latter often do not meet the characteristics as expected and considered normal in society; *normative ideals* (Mc Ginn 1966: 305) of a strongly present *machismo*, a culturally defined sharp delimitation between and rigidly defined male and female roles and a romantic concept of heterosexual marriage and childrearing within Mexican courtship practices. In other words: their sexuality and gender – marked as contra- non- or anti-straight - places them outside of society's ideas of 'normal' (Doty 1993; Dilley 1999). Young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience internal and external ignorance, reserved positions and negatory attitudes towards their sexual preferences. In sum, – following Gingrich's (in Bernstein 1995/1999) perspective - Mexican society has certain expectations regarding gender roles and sexual norms for their members, and them being homosexual often crushes those expectations with consequences as homophobia, discrimination and exclusion. This has direct consequences for the relationships formed and the meaning attributed to this by young lesbian women in Guadalajara. The latter experience a great –religion based - social, cultural and institutional pressure regarding heterosexual courtship practices, which they do not meet. Feelings of insecurity and

incomfortableness are direct consequences of the encountered doubts and critics regarding gender and sexuality in (connection to) relationships. This, then, pose challenges to if and how my participants shape (their) relationships.

The above named expectations and normative ideals do not only create social and cultural *dislocation* within society as a whole, but also within the ideals and norms of lesbians themselves. The puzzled alternatives and compromises in an attempt to do meet those expected attitudes and behaviours, and individual colouring of their gender roles and sexuality, show an empirical example of Gutmann's (2003: 90) theory that social and cultural norms – about gender and sexuality – are dynamic and of different meaning to each individual.

Through the leaves of the maze's hedges shines a constant religious light, which lightens all levels of the pathways for young lesbian women in Guadalajara with strong Catholic thoughts, ideas, norms and traditions. Although my participants protect themselves from this light with an umbrella of absent personal religious issues – they mainly believed in love -, my research data support Ai Camp's (1997) conclusion that the attitudes of Mexican people towards religion provide a strong basis for church involvement in public issues with critical moral choice and value dimensions (in Smith 1999: 990). In other words: young lesbian women in Guadalajara experience this religious light as interwoven with all levels of society – socially, culturally and politically. All of the above has direct consequences on the relationship level. It makes young lesbian women in Guadalajara not only experience average relationship problems of jealousy and economic problems, but also relational problems due to their sexual preferences, as secret communication, prohibited relationships and reversed order sexual experiences. In sum: difficulties of public expression of (romantic) relationships are a direct consequence of the social and cultural norms about homosexuality, deeply influenced by the strongly present religious undertone in Mexico's and Guadalajara's society. The latter not only forms social and cultural, but also political opinion and the institutional context. Rapidly formed superficial relationships shaped out of rebellion and resistance, were mentioned as a consequence of this impeding social, cultural and political context. However, within, and due to the age of, my specific research group, three different kinds of relationships were formed: short relationships which were rather uncomfortable with the experienced socio-cultural and political context, longlasting relationships in which equality and emotional peace is encountered, in which the socio-cultural and political difficulties are compensated with positive feelings experienced within these relationships, and relative short but intense relationships.

After a certain pathway – of curves, twist and rotations – has been wandered about, in which the encountered hedges explained the posed challenges and created difficulties in shaping young lesbian women's relationships in Guadalajara, an exit is coming closer. During the puzzling journey, and more so approaching an end, meaning is attributed to love and their relationships. Within the social, cultural and political difficulties experienced for being lesbian and in a same-sex relationship, the presence of a partner often made traversing the puzzling route of Guadalajara's maze less burdensome. The experienced equality – sexually, gender-related, emotional, physiological etc - in female same-sex relationships, form a stinging contrast with the social, cultural and political contextual inequality as experienced by young lesbian women in Guadalajara. Consequently, the concept of love in this context is influenced, while cultural traditions bind the individual emotionally into a web of dependency with others (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 149). However, instead of thereby rechanneling or defusing the intensity of an individual's emotional experience (Jankowiak & Fischer 1992: 149), relationships, for enduring the burdensome environment, are by my participants experienced as stronger and love as even deeper.

The maze metaphor also leaves places for change, while it is built on the earlier named balance board between tradition and modernity (Canclini 1995; Carrier 1995; Carrillo 2007); every maze always has an exit that, after variable spans of time, is found. This comes to expression in the exceptions mentioned in almost every chapter and paragraph, in the empirical part of this thesis. On every level - socially, culturally and politically – steps in a more liberal and open-minded direction can be and are taken by my (academic schooled) participants and other LGBT members and organisations. This made it possible that some young lesbians in Guadalajara did not experience feelings of fear and anger within the family sphere, that they could live up to their own ideas and norms regarding gender and sexuality, and did not experienced the darkness of living in the shadow of the crucifix. However, exceptions confirm the rule, being: 'anything excluded from or not in conformance with a general rule, principle, class'<sup>171</sup>. As seen in the contextual chapter Mc Gin (1996: 305) in his time was already right, stating that 'Mexico is definitely a country in transition'. Nonetheless, he was probably even more right when he determined that 'traditional values were still dominant, and predicted clearly and true that the middle class being formed under this system would be the source of values for future generations of Mexicans' (Mc Ginn 1996: 305).

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<sup>171</sup> Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers (1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003)

Therefore, most participants wished for a major change, although the opinions on how to achieve this change – via legal or more social ways - varied. Remarkable is that in the definitions and meaning of love - as imbued by young lesbian women in Guadalajara - a foundation for a societal change is found. Their definitions of love expand to a more social and cultural level than only the personal and direct sphere of their own (romantic) relationships. Trust, sincerity and communication, by my participants mentioned as fundamental parts of love, are by them believed to be fundamental factors in changing their own cultural, social and political setting; and in society at large.

This thesis functions as a contribution to the academic sphere on homosexuality, while it focuses on female homosexuality among a rather young population. Concentrating on women or a young population – or a specific combination of this - is something barely done within this academic arena, less so within the particular region. Additionally, this thesis contributes to the broad field of studies on homosexuality in a more social, interpersonal and emotional level; topics of meaning and expression of love and relationships – focused on emic experiences and emotions – are academically underrepresented in anthropology and the further social sciences. On the social level, this thesis can form a contribution to a more social debate about homosexuality, relating to the current contextual events in the media and society (chapter 3, p. 29-33). By asking for meaning and experiences from within, this thesis is an interesting contribution on the societal level, in an attempt to come to a better mutual understanding of and in Guadalajara's society. The focus on experiences and meanings of emotion, love and relationships, makes the social conception of this complex issue more accessible, which gives more socio-cultural insight in the growing dynamics and presence of (female) same-sex relationships in Guadalajara.



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## Appendix I – Reflection

This thesis is the product of my first anthropological fieldwork; three valuable months of conducting research in México. I choose the adjective *valuable* to define my fieldwork period, because it was worthful not only as an experience, but also as an academic and personal learning process. In this reflection report I would like to contemplate on three levels of the research process: the field (the research environment), the researcher (roles and relationships) and the science (technical problems and challenges).

During three years of bachelor education in Cultural Anthropology, a strong emphasis layed on the anthropologist conducting research in a foreign, unknown context. Also during the lectures directly prior to my three months, the culture shock, homesickness and amazement when arriving at the field were stressed; preparing us to enter a new and mysterious space and place by giving several coping strategies to get used to and integrate into our fields. Unfortunately, there was minor attention for the few students, who would carry out research in already known contexts. Being one of these few, I experienced some difficulties conducting research in Mexico, a country I have known for more then three years, which I visited five times and of which I knew the language and people. Obviously, finding participants and suitable places to *hang out* and observe, were being simplified due to my previous long during stay in Guadalajara, a year ago. Holding interviews and informal conversations in Spanish and understanding my participants Mexican or Guadalajara style expressions and slang were also advantages of doing research in a familiar context. However, entering the field was not only an arrival, but also a coming back; coming back to old friends and places, old habits and memories. Social pressure and personal craving to visit old acquaintances and hang out with friends were permanently present. *Being there*, as key factor of anthropological fieldwork, suddenly became *being there again*. Consequently, I found myself on a constant balance board between interviewing, observing and participating with my participants or talking, spotting and being with my friends. This division also emphasizes that there exists a *field beyond research*; next to the direct context of your research and participants, there is always a lot more going on in the country, regio or city/village in which an anthropologist conducts fieldwork. Next to living in the participants world of *Marchas Lesbicas*, religious pessimism and lesbian birthday parties I found myself also living in the Mexican world of *narcobloqueos*, bars attacked by grenades and threatened roomies. Nevertheless, these different relations - the more academic contact with my participants within the direct field and the personal relationships with know companions beyond my

research – were not only conflictive, but also complementary. Indeed, I think the whole research process would have been much more difficult if, during one of my academic or personal crises, I could not have counted on the occasional moral support of or a temporary flight away from fieldwork; into typical Mexican *fiestas* with my non-research friends. The intense discipline, necessary to find the right balance between conducting valuable research and experiencing and enjoying the personal foreign journey to a maximum degree, was not always present in the same extent.

Another level, on which these difficulties expressed themselves, was in the experience of my role as researcher or fieldworker. After three years of theoretical education, it was hard to actually carry out fieldwork as we had read and heard about. The process, phases and difficulties as told us about by several teachers and - among others - written down by De Walt and De Walt (2002), proved to be only guidelines and possible examples of how ones role as researcher could be filled in, carried out and experienced. Before and especially during my fieldwork period, I felt that I was well prepared for the role as researcher to the extent that, – except for two weeks of sickness –, I did not experienced any ramp scenarios (ethical questions, difficult context, money offering etc). However, questions and doubts about authority did come to mind and were almost constantly present. Among other factors, the above described known context sometimes made me feel very uncomfortable to suddenly return as a researcher to a place in which the last three years I had just been an *extranjera*<sup>172</sup>; volantaring, travelling or studying. Consequently, positioning myself in a more informal manner, to a certain extent weakened my role as a researcher. In an attempt to balance my academic and more personal role, I always clarified the purpose of the conversations, interviews and occasions to my participants, but tried to informalize the methods and techniques of our liaisons. In case of the group conversations and interviews, this meant that participants were aware of the subject, goal and use of my research, but that I did not formally led the conversation using a direct topiclist or audio-taper – although I did sometimes made notes on my laptop. This made the contact with my participants easy and light, but on the same time of sufficient depth; participants – some of them, which I already knew or had seen before my fieldwork period – felt comfortable talking about themselves and their lives in my presence. Sometimes they even experienced feelings of proudness and importance about the fact that I was registering this<sup>173</sup>. My opinion is that this approach was a right one in coming to in-depth communication and information about my research topics; relationships and love.

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<sup>172</sup> [...] 'foreigner/stranger'

<sup>173</sup> Some participants even offered their time and participation several times.

Regarding these topics, a last comment has to be made in relationships with the more technical side of my fieldwork period. The already mentioned focus on theory during the bachelor education, made it hard to constantly shift between the theoretical level of my research (theoretical framework, methods and techniques as read, writing reports etc) and the actual experienced social, personal and more abstract level of stories of relationships and love. Although I tried my best I still have not figured out how I could better manage this part of anthropology, while it is as much an academic field as – how they told us during one of the first lectures – a field about people, with people, for people and among them. If it turns out that in the future I have to do another research in the form of anthropological fieldwork, I would certainly pick an unknown context. However, it would still be an urban environment in Latin America, while this continent and urban anthropology are my favorites. But, I hope to integrate more as a researcher in a new context, having no distractions other than getting to know the people and their context, observing nothing but new things and therefore have a more academic and research focus. All this experienced difficulties, learning moments, points of improvement and beautiful memories, contributed to a special academic and personal valuable experience in my beloved Mexico.

## Appendix II – Summary (Spanish)

En esa tesis he formulado una explicación teórica, contextual y empírica para la conexión entre el contexto socio-cultural y político, y la expresión y significación atribuido al amor y relaciones homosexuales femeninas. La siguiente pregunta de investigación principal fue aplicado: *"¿cómo se puede explicar la significación y expresión del amor y las relaciones, atribuidase entre jóvenes lesbianas en Guadalajara, dentro de su contexto experimentado socio-cultural y político?"*

Dentro del amplio ámbito de estudios sobre homosexualidad, pocas investigaciones llevan al cabo el tema de la significación y expresión del amor en relaciones homosexuales (femeninas). Estudios antropológicos sobre amor y relaciones (Carrier 1976, Eliason & Morgan 1998, Rebhun 1999) no coinciden sobre la cuestión si y como elementos socio-culturales y políticos influyen en relaciones, menos en relaciones homosexuales. Sin embargo, desde un ángulo constructivista, se puede argumentar que cambios sociales, culturales y políticos, no únicamente afectan como gente habla sobre el amor, sino también como representa el amor, como sus cuerpos sienten y expresan el amor y como se ejerce el amor en la vida cotidiana (Rebhun 1999). Si el amor es un tipo de emociones - un trozo de sentimientos relatados (Rebhun 1999: 16) - y las emociones son construido, cambiado y transformado en un diálogo socio-cultural constante, el amor (romántico), según Lindholm (2006), es una materia principal para obtener mejor comprensión de la construcción social y cultural de las emociones y como individuos se relacionan a eso. Si se encuentra una variedad intercultural en las *emic* manifestaciones y significaciones del amor (romántico), y si esa expresión del sentimiento privado es otra construcción social todavía, ¿qué significa eso, entonces, para la atribución de significación y expresión del amor para diferentes grupos? Ese estudio trata de extender esos descubrimientos en investigar si el concepto de la emoción - y por eso el amor - no solamente vacila interculturalmente o entre mujeres y hombres (Cancian 1986), sino también entre diferente gente de subgrupos dentro de una sociedad, seleccionado por religión, etnicidad o - en ese caso - preferencias sexuales. Ashanti Ta'Shia (1999:22) opina que los desafíos que lesbianas afrontan - por ser mujer y lesbiana - les hace relacionar diferente que parejas heterosexuales. Ta'Shia (1999) proclama que su amor no es diferente, por el hecho que es una pareja lésbica; sino que las diferencias son los desafíos confrontados por parejas lésbicas, como cuestiones de homofobia, desaprobación familiar y el no ser reconocido de sus conexiones en la sociedad. Como afecta la forma, in cual relaciones homosexuales son integrados en el contexto socio-cultural, la significación atribuido al amor?



Es decir: como influye, afecta y interactúa el contexto socio-cultural y político en/con la manera en cual gente – en ese caso lesbianas jóvenes – se relacionan?

Ejecuté mis investigaciones antropológicas en Guadalajara, Jalisco. Siendo el capital del estado conocido como el más conservador de todo México, no se espere que Guadalajara tenga un entorno socio-cultural y político conveniente respecto a preferencias homosexuales. Sin embargo, se da un ambiente gay enorme y constantemente en desarrollo y movimiento, cual toma un papel ineludible en la vida cotidiana; discusiones sociales y políticas en periódicos y revistas, una atención creciendo para la diversidad sexual en otros medios de comunicación y marchas, manifestaciones y festividades. Es esa fricción, entre el contexto pesado para homosexuales y la presencia de tanto gente, grupos y sucesos relatados a la diversidad sexual, que hace que Guadalajara es un lugar adecuado para investigar la relación entre significación y expresión del amor y relaciones, y el contexto socio-cultural y político (tambaleante). Escogiendo una población académica y relativamente joven, procura otra intersección interesante para investigar el tema como elaborado arriba; es esa población cual se encuentra en un combate con tanto las perspectivas conservadoras de sus padres y otros influencias tradicionales en su alrededor, así como con la atención constante para cambios y colegas estudiantes políticamente activos. Argumento que es en esa intersección que significación y expresión del amor, in sus relaciones homosexuales, son constantemente reflexionadas y redefinidas.

Mi tesis demuestra que lesbianas jóvenes in la sociedad de Guadalajara experimentan actitudes todavía conservativas y tradicionales a través sus preferencias sexuales. Actitudes de angustia, incomodidad y ignorancia se manifiestan en diferentes niveles (el ámbito familiar; ideas culturales sobre género y sexualidad) de la sociedad mexicana y guadalajaraense, cuyos son todavía dominados por una doctrina social católica (Ai Camp 1997 en Smith 1990: 990). Los enlaces directos e indirectos de pensamientos, ideas, pautas y actitudes religiosas con otros niveles sociales y culturales en la sociedad, hace lesbianas jóvenes in Guadalajara experimentar incompreensión, negatividad y desaprobación a través de sus preferencias sexuales. Esa área social de *non-expresión* lleva implicaciones directas para las relaciones entre lesbianas jóvenes in Guadalajara.

Aparte de problemas relacionales regulares (celos; problemas económicos), lesbianas jóvenes in Guadalajara experimentan problemas adicionales, dependiente de sus preferencias sexuales. Dificultades experimentadas por la expresión privado y público, y el mantenimiento de sus relaciones, son consecuencias directas del contexto vivido. Es decir: dificultades de

expresión pública y mantenimiento de sus relaciones, se dejan explicar del ámbito cerrado y reservado personal y público a respeto de sus preferencias sexuales, experimentado por lesbianas jóvenes en Guadalajara. Eso no solamente tiene influencia en cómo y si relaciones semejantes son construidas, sino también en la significación atribuida; en un contexto de desafíos constantes, incompreensión y desigualdad, lesbianas jóvenes en Guadalajara atribuyen significaciones positivas de alegría, comprensión y igualdad a sus relaciones amorosas. Consiguientemente, *emic* definiciones del amor habitualmente implican concepciones de confianza, igualdad y reciprocidad; elementos fundamentales ausentes en el contexto socio-cultural y político a través de sus preferencias sexuales. Ignorancia o desaprobación de relaciones, puede resultar en comunicación prohibida y por lo tanto contacto secreto. En suma: dificultades experimentadas a respeto de las relaciones de mis participantes, son consecuencias directas de las normas sociales y culturales a través de homosexualidad, cuyas son influidas por un matiz fuertemente religioso en la sociedad Mexicana y Guadalaquaraense. El último no solamente forma opiniones social, cultural y político, sino también el contexto institucional.

Entre mis participantes, se encuentran diferentes maneras para manejar, moverse en y cambiar el contexto experimentado. Aunque hay diferentes maneras de lograrlo, un cambio esencial en la mentalidad de la sociedad es deseado. Es decir: hay diferentes maneras de soportar el contexto social, cultural y político a través de sus preferencias sexuales y las implicaciones para la significación y expresión del amor y relaciones. Un cambio desde adentro y más allá de la mentalidad social, a través de homosexualidad, debería que facilitar más respeto mutuo y amor en toda la amplitud de la sociedad. La mayoría de mis participantes suponen que confianza, sinceridad y comunicación - mencionado como elementos fundamentales del amor - son los factores fundamentales para realizar cambios esenciales en su propio contexto social, cultural y político; y en toda la amplitud de su sociedad. Eso debería que contribuir en extender la igualdad y los sentimientos del amor, experimentados en las relaciones de mis participantes, a una sociedad amorosa total.



