Gender, sexuality and home: Young non-heterosexual women and their experiences in domestic space rooms

Júlia Pascual-Bordas and Maria Rodó-Zárate

Abstract

Feminist critique has challenged the traditional conception of the home by turning it into a politicized space, such that its meanings and how it is experienced is linked to complex social processes and relations that render this space crucial for understanding some social practices and politics. However, home, and in particular the specific places within it, have not received much attention. Here we examine how ten young Catalan women with dissident sexualities experience different rooms of their family home, with the aim of analysing how they manage their gender and sexual orientation. We thus contribute to the development of geographies of home by focusing on both the restrictions and the resistances that configure and contest the gendered processes of heteronormalization and adultification of the home space, shedding light on the material and symbolic dimensions of home, as well as on its relations with public space, power and identity.

Keywords: Private Space, Family, Heteronormativity, Youth, Lesbian, Bisexual.

Introduction

The conception of home as a safe space of joy, protection and authenticity has been problematized across the social sciences, and home is also seen today as a place of conflict, struggle and negotiation (see Brickell, 2012). Blunt and Varley (2004) argue that this is a "space of belonging and alienation, intimacy and violence, desire and fear", and that it is "invested with meanings, emotions,

experiences and relationships that lie at the heart of human life." Private space is thus considered as a place that integrates both family and domesticity and it is defined by gender roles, emotionality, relationships and sexual lives (Cook, 2014). It is thus a politicized space where the meanings and the experiences in it are linked to complex social processes and relations that render homes crucial spaces for understanding social practices and politics (Blunt and Varley 2004; Massey 1994, 2005). However, this has traditionally been a neglected space, and specific places within the house have been especially disregarded by spatial disciplines such as geography (Johnson, 2006).

Focusing on what Brickell (2012) calls the "experiences of those living on the margins of home", we aim to explore how ten young Catalan women with dissident sexualities experience domestic space. The analysis of this specific group contributes to research on lesbian geographies, through the examination of how "gender and sexualities intertwine in the creation of social difference through inequitable relations of power", which is central for understanding the role of heteropatriarchy in the creation of spaces and places (Browne, 2021: 363). And by focusing on non-heterosexual women in general, we also contribute to research on bisexuality, which is often neglected due to "the sexual coding of space with the dominant sexual identity" (Maliepaard, 2015).

Building on geographies of sexualities that have focused on gendered and sexualized domestic cultures (see Brickell, 2012; Browne & Brown, 2016; Browne & Ferreira, 2015; Madigan, Munro, and Smith, 1990; Sheffiled, 2014; Valentine et al., 2003.), with our study, we contribute to the field by focusing on the specific experiences in different rooms, treating home as an heterogenous space where complex social and political processes and negotiations take place. In order to understand the intimacies of the private space and its connections with the public sphere, we analyse participants' experiences in their family home, to examine how they manage their gender and sexual orientation in relation to their

families, partners and themselves. Thus, we contribute to "critical geographies of home" (Blunt and Dowling, 2006), by focusing on both the restrictions and the resistances that configure and contest the gendered processes of heteronormalization and adultification of the home space, shedding light on the material and symbolic dimensions of home, as well as on its relations with public space, power and identity.

In the next section, we situate the debate on geographies of home regarding the public/private divide and its relation to gender, race, age and sexual orientation normativities, violence and resistances, specifically focusing on young LGTB people and their experiences at home. Then we present the qualitative methodology used and the context, a medium-sized city in Catalonia. The analysis of the results is organized according to the four rooms examined: the hall, the living room, the participant's bedroom and the bathroom. And both gender and sexual orientation (dis)comforts are considered, in order to explore their experiences and resistances. We end with some final remarks.

Domestic space, the public/private divide and normativities

Humanist geographers have traditionally approached home as a place of rootedness, attachment and rest (Tuan, 1977). However, this idea of home has been questioned by feminist geographers such Rose (1993), who points out that, for women, home can also be a place of abuse and violence, showing the importance of introducing a gender perspective in the analysis. Her works follow the path of many other feminist theorists (Beauvoir, 1949; Oakley, 1974; Walby, 1986), who have shown how homes are political places where women suffer various forms of violence, exploitation and oppression, which are also linked to the perception of domestic work as feminine and private, and thus devalued (Massey, 1994; McDowell, 1999).

As Carole Pateman (1995) argues, the separation between the public and the private is a key element of patriarchy, where the public is seen as political and the private is defined in opposition to it. However, as she states, "women's everyday experience confirms this separation yet, simultaneously, it denies it and affirms the integral connection between the two spheres" (Pateman, 1983: 131). This complex relation between the public and the private configures the home as a central space through which social processes and their lived experience can be analysed. Rita Laura Segato (2016) also links this perspective to processes of colonization, showing how the construction of the domestic sphere as apolitical is also evidence of how gender structures are built upon colonial processes, which are a condition of possibility for modernity and capitalism.

At the same time, Black feminists such as bell hooks (1990) have shown that, looking at the meanings of home from the perspective of black people, home is a place of resistance too, a place of care that contrasts with the oppression suffered outside. Remembering her own childhood and her journey back home, she refers to home as a place of rest and safety, a place that belonged to women, not as property but as a shelter where women built care regimes in the face of racist oppression. Along these lines, the material culture of the house has also been explored as a space for negotiating identity and belonging. Research has shown how home has been materially and symbolically important in shaping the nation and empire, yet also as a space for the construction of memory and belonging (Blunt 2005; Datta 2008; Datta and Brickell 2009; Longhurst, Johnson, and Ho 2009; Tolia-Kelly 2004a, 2004b).

In relation to sexualities and gender identity, Browne and Brown (2016) state that the public/private divide is a key element by which geographers have analysed sexual politics in relation to both the role of the state in promoting heteronormativity, and the way in which the public/private binary is negotiated, questioning the binary in itself, as well as its use in regulating one's intimate life.

Also, queer geographers have contributed to the conceptualization of home as a space of materialization of heteronormativity and unequal power relations within the family (Barrett, 2015; Johnston & Valentine 1995; Valentine 1993). The relation between queer subjects and the home space is also controversial, as it has gone from an idea of "antidomesticity" to a source of identity (Vider, 2013). Specifically for lesbians, homes have been seen not only as places for the construction of new subjectivities and resisting gender norms, but also as sites of oppression (see Elwood, 2000). Johnson and Valentine (1995) showed how lesbians restrict their performance modifying their behaviour, but also how they subvert the heterosexual norm by covert acts of resistance at home. Rowntree and Zufferey (2017) also found that lesbians experience home as an internal journey towards "feeling okay in the world".

In relation to youth, Andrew Gorman-Murray (2015) argues that in the social sciences, the literature examining home in relation to young people is limited, since the literature in this field has instead focused on leisure activities in the outside world. In *Young People, Place and Identity*, Peter Hopkins (2010) shows how some studies have focused on the diverse experiences and meanings of home for youth, such as experiences in the familiar home, homeless youth, emancipation and the (re)construction of home away from the family house. Relating youth to other axes of oppression, some studies have also focused on young gay men, their processes of coming out of the closet, and the influence of belonging or alienation in the construction of their identity (Skelton & Valentine 2005; Gorman-Murray 2007, 2008a), as well as young Muslim men, miscegenation and competitive significances at home (Hopkins 2006; Ahmet 2010), the bedroom subcultures of migrant boys (Wilson 2012), the implications of gender identities and the meanings of home (Natalier 2003; Pink 2004; Pitt & Borland 2008), and heterosexual boys and their resistance to participating in domestic labour (Singleton & Maher 2004). Studies on young women have also examined the problematization of the home space through the analysis of how young Latin and

North American women change "public" street spaces into "private" refuge spaces, and change "private" spaces of their house into "public" exposure spaces, thus switching the meanings that are usually given to each such space (Hyams, 2003).

Specifically for young people with non-normative sexual orientations, while one's own home, when emancipated, is seen as a place of well-being and identification (see Elwood, 2000; Kentlyn, 2008; Gorman-Murray, 2007), the family home is usually a place where they may suffer rejection from family members (Valentine, Skelton & Butler, 2003) or restrict their performance under the surveillance of vigilant parents (Johnston and Valentine, 1995). Research has shown that LGB youth receive little support from family members when dealing with stressors related to their sexuality, in comparison to the support they receive from family members in relation to other issues, and the support they receive from friends in relation to sexuality issues (Doty et al., 2010). The social refusal to recognize equal rights for intimacies between same-sex people contributes to psychological and social inequality (Hatzenbuehler et al., 2010; Herdt & Kertzner, 2006; King & Bartlett, 2006). This also has a negative impact that creates a barrier to same-sex relationships achieving social and institutional support, thus increasing mental health disparities based on sexual orientation (Frost & LeBlanc, 2014). For lesbians who share the house with their parents, with a heterosexual family-based ideology, "home" can be perceived as a place of alienation and rejection (Valentine, 1993). LGB youth are likely to experience conflict at home and, consequently, they are over-represented in foster care, juvenile detention, and among homeless youth (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz and Sanchez, 2009 in Trussell, 2017). Homophobia is identified as a barrier to family members giving support to their children (Savin-Williams, 2001), but few studies focus on such issues, and there is thus also a lack of research on how families could support their LGB sons and daughters.

Methodology

The qualitative methodology used was based on semi-structured interviews and Relief Maps (see below) conducted with a group of ten young women living in Manresa. This is a medium-sized city with a population of 77,714 people, located at the geographical centre of Catalonia, outside the metropolitan area of the city of Barcelona. Manresa is the capital of the Bages region, which includes other municipalities with a population between 185 (Gaià) and 10.998 (Sant Joan de Vilatorrada) (IDESCAT). Medium-sized cities and small villages are often neglected in research on the LGTBI community (see Langarita et al, 2019; Myrdahl, 2015), and with this research we also aim to shed light on the experiences of young women with dissident sexualities living outside big metropolises.

Our sample, reached through the snowball sampling technique, consisted of a group of ten white young women aged between 18 and 29 years old, who each self-identified as cisgender. Eight of them self-identified as lesbians or bisexuals, while two participants preferred to not choose any category in relation to their sexual orientation. Six participants self-identified as atheists and four did not want to report their religion. Eight self-identified as middle-class and two did not define their social class. In relation to their cohabitation situation, there were a wide range of situations, but all of their families were based on woman-man couples. See Table 1 for more details.

Table 1. Participants' characteristics.

Pseudonym	Sexual orientation	Age	Cohabitant situation
Marta	Bisexual	26	Mother or father (each one in a different house)
Mireia	Lesbian	21	Mother, father and 17-year-old brother
Carla	Lesbian	25	Mother, father, 28-year-old and 31-year-old sisters
Anna	Lesbian	24	Mother and father

Bet	Bisexual	18	Mother, father, 14-year-old and 16-yeard-old sisters
Carol	She does not want to identify	25	Mother and father
Mònica	Lesbian	29	Mother
Jana	She does not want to identify	22	Mother, father, 15-year-old brother
Andrea	Bisexual	22	Mother, father, 19-year-old brother
Paula	Bisexual	25	Mother and father

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in places chosen by the participants, such as their homes—if they could speak in privacy—or cafeterias. The interviews were divided into a first part focused on a contextualization of their current situation and family relations at home, and a second part that dealt with their sexual orientation, their coming out process, and their sexuality at home.

In addition to the interviews, all participants filled in their own Relief Map via its digital version (www.reliefmaps.cat/en). The Relief Maps are a methodology that relates three dimensions: the *social*: gender, sexual orientation and age; the *psychological*: emotions and the lived experience; and the *geographical*: places of one's everyday life (see Rodó-De-Zárate, 2013). Participants were asked to fill in a form concerning how they felt in four different places of their family home in relation to their gender and their sexual orientation. The four places were the hall, the living room, the bedroom, and the bathroom. The hall was chosen as a transition space, a border between public and private space (Rosselin, 1999) that might inform us about the porosity of this binary separation. The living room was chosen as a meeting space, a crucial space for interacting with family members. In contrast, the bedroom could allow the expression of a more intimate space, even if contested when shared with siblings or controlled by other family members. Finally, the bathroom was chosen as a space that relates to the negotiation of intimacy, body and self-care. The kitchen was not specifically included as in many of the participant's homes the living room and the kitchen were not separated spaces. Moreover, other spaces were prioritized because of

their potential specific experiences in relation to sexual orientation. After qualitatively explaining their experiences in each of these places, in relation to their gender and sexual orientation, they had to choose between different emotions linked to them, and move a dot from comfort to discomfort. Finally, the participants classified the different rooms into the following four categories: places of oppression (places where there is significant discomfort), controversial places (where they feel comfortable along one specific axis, while experiencing significant discomfort along the other), neutral places (where there is no specific emotion), and places of relief (high-comfort sites where they feel relief from the discomfort they can feel elsewhere).

By asking the participants about their specific experiences and reflections about every room, Relief Maps allowed for a systematic comparison of their experiences, and contributed to a nuanced analysis of private spaces, taking into account the different meanings, experiences and resistances that occur in each room, and challenging homogenizing perspectives of home. In the following image (Figure 1), an example of a Relief Map can be seen.

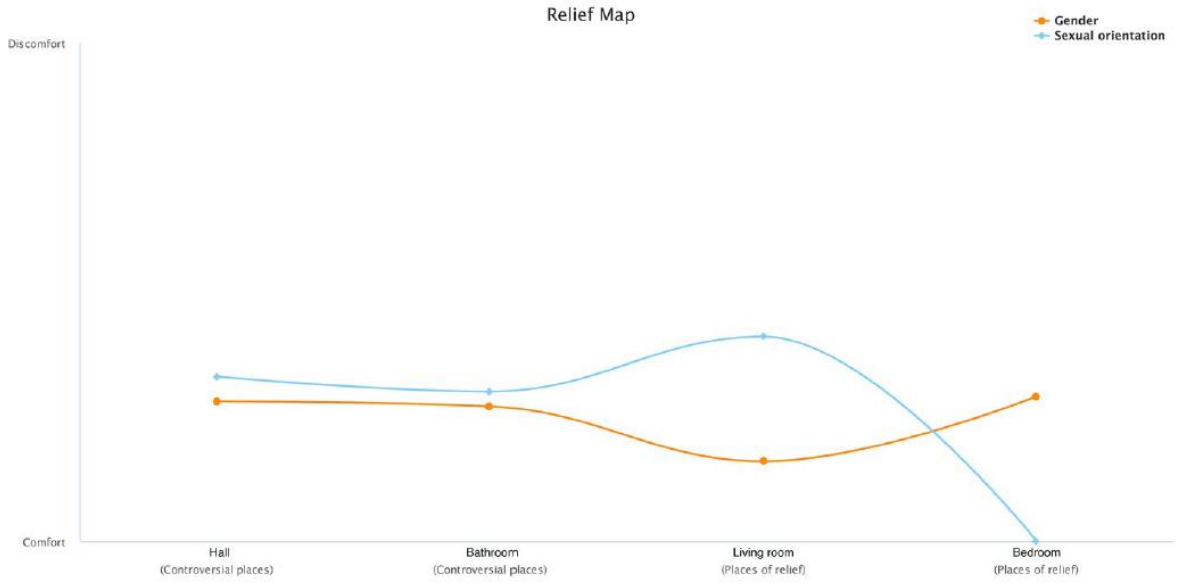

Figure 1: Bet's Relief Map

Rooms, social relations and emotions

In the following section, we analyse the participants' experiences in the hall, living room, bedroom and bathroom. Through this nuanced analysis of different rooms, we investigate how age, gender and sexual orientation intersect, leading to specific levels of comfort/discomfort, experiential narratives and feelings in the family house.

According to the sample, the home space with the most average discomfort indicated by the participants was the living room, followed by the bathroom, the bedroom and, finally the hall. Discomfort was higher according to sexual orientation in the hall, living room and bedroom. In the bathroom, on the other hand, the participants indicated higher levels of discomfort according to gender.

The hall: a border zone between private and public space

The hall was seen by the participants as a transition zone between private and public space, however their classification varied enormously: three of them indicated that it was a neutral space, and three that it was a controversial space, while two perceived it as a space of oppression, and two participants indicated that it represented a space of relief. For all of them, discomforts related to sexual orientation were higher than those related to gender.

In relation to sexual orientation, many of the participants related negative emotions to this place, specifically linked to the control they suffered. While the hall has been seen as a place of protection that eases the transition from the public to the private world (see Rosselin, 1999), it is also seen as a place of surveillance for young non-heterosexual women. As Carol argues, the hall is "the

worst space in the house" because this is where control takes place, in the form of asking where one is going or arriving from. It was also linked to farewell moments with their partners, where they felt limits to showing affection, because of the possibility of being seen by their family members. For instance, Andrea indicates high discomfort levels in her Relief Map (see Figure 2) in relation to her sexual orientation in the hall, and explains:

> When I say goodbye to my girlfriend, which usually happens in the hall, I feel frustrated that I can't kiss or hug her for the fear that someone from my family will pass through there and I'll feel ashamed. (Andrea – RM hall/sexual orientation)

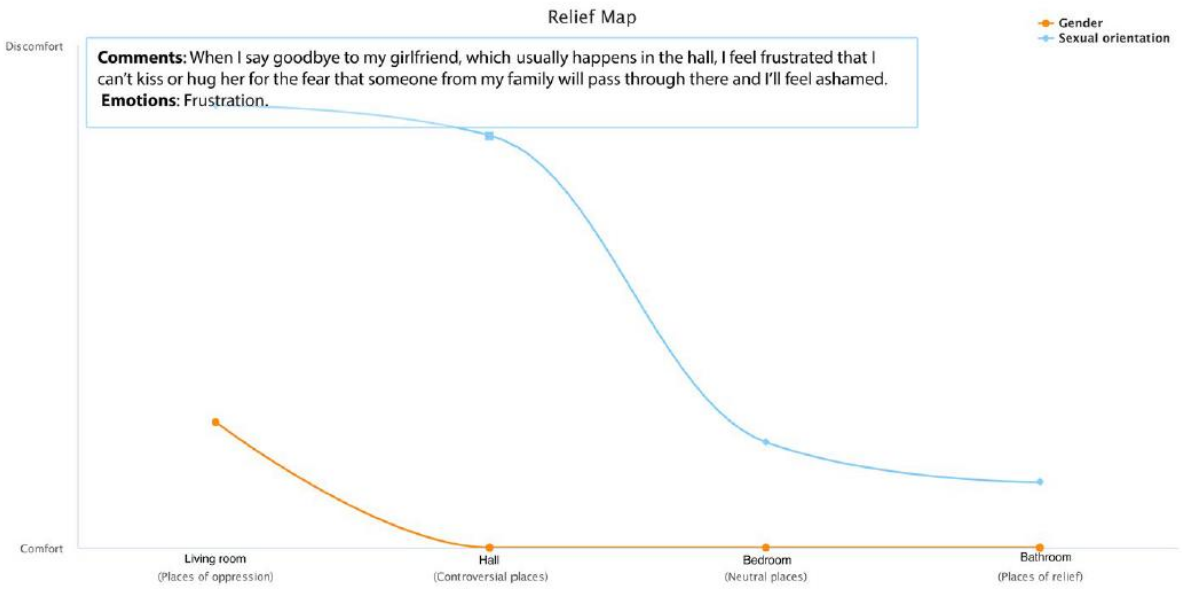

Figure 2: Andrea's Relief Map

The modification of her behaviour to hide the sexual nature of her relations is part of the normative construction of the family home as a heterosexual space (Johnson and Valentine, 1995). However, for other participants with more supportive families, the hall was seen as a place of comfort, indicating that their sexual orientation was an issue that they could openly talk about with their

families, thus disrupting the assumption of the homophobic family home (Gorman-Murray, 2008b). It is also interesting how, for other participants, such as Anna, this borderline space and the concealment it required was seen as an erotic moment. As she argues:

> It's a private moment space that marks the entry or exit and separates what's visible from the invisible. This "forced" or "lack of" freedom generates eroticism for me. It's like an exclusion, but it's a fun point […]. (Anna – RM hall/sexual orientation)

In relation to gender, the hall was seen as a safe place linked to emotions such as freedom, calm and tranquillity. Participants expressed these feelings in relation to the fear and insecurity they felt outside, as a result of the gendered construction of women as vulnerable in public spaces. Many of them also expressed the idea that the hall was a place for controlling their movements, where they had to give explanations for their activities, and where their parents expressed anxiety for their security. As Bet argues:

> The hall is the place that allows my parents to know when I leave and when I come back home. […] It's the tool that always helps them to keep me under control. I think that being a woman gives them a greater need to know that I already came back home.' (Bet – RM hall/gender)

Here again, the relation between the public and the private influences their experiences and the meanings that are attributed to each space. Research on women's fear and their perception and use of public space has shown that it is socially constructed, and that it significantly conditions their experiences and freedom of movement (Pain, 2001; Koskela, 1997; Ruddick, 1996; Valentine, 1992). Fear is a product of systematic structural violence (Pain, 2001), which also works as a reminder of women's vulnerability (Koskela, 1997), and parents have an important role in this social construction of women's risk in public spaces, as illustrated by Bet's example. However, the perception of the hall as a safe space reproduces the public/private dichotomy, where the public is seen as political

(and unsafe) and the private as non-political (and safe). As Mireia argues: "It's inherent in the sensation of being a woman, but it's as if such oppression becomes less evident in areas of passage and security". (Mireia – RM hall/gender)

The reinforcement of these meanings is not only an effect of the dichotomy. At the same time, it reproduces unequal gendered relations. Women's fear in public space limits their mobility and freedom, and at the same time presents home as a space that is free of violence, which implies an invisibilization of the violence that happens in private spaces, as conducted by relatives or partners (Rodó-De-Zárate et al., 2019).

In conclusion, the hall appears to be an intermediate space of negotiation between the public and the private, where control and surveillance play an important role. In this sense, the emotions associated with the hall show the "contingent nature of space constituted and contested as private and public" (Hyams, 2003: 121). The hall as a border that controls and limits the separation between the public and the private; but also the border that reveals the political nature of both spaces and the efforts made to maintain such control, or alternatively, to subvert their norms.

The living room: a common space in the family home

The living room represents a shared space with the rest of the family, as well as the room where the relational power dynamics operative at home are made explicit. Participants also variously classified this space very differently: three of them indicated that it was a controversial space, and three saw it as a space of oppression, while two perceived it as a neutral space, and the remaining two indicated that it was a place of relief. In the living room, participants registered higher discomfort levels in relation to sexual orientation than in relation to gender.

In relation to sexual orientation, higher discomforts were related to parental control, and participants specifically stated that they avoided this room at home, for instance Carol, who stated:

> […] I experience a certain tension when something comes up that challenges my freedom: "Where are you going?", "What are you doing?"; "Where and why?" These are spaces that I usually avoid because I prefer not to share them with my parents, for the fear of having certain conversations […]. (Carol – RM living room/sexual orientation).

This fear of the effects of interacting with her parents relates to adultist relations where power dynamics function to control young people, not only at home but also regarding the restriction of their activities and their mobility outside it. Along the same lines, Mònica narrates her experience of self-vigilance behaviours and control in the living room, affirming:

> […] there is a difference, because I pay more attention to my movements, to my words, and I perhaps also avoid saying or doing things that I would do when there's complete confidentiality. (Mònica – RM living room/sexual orientation)

For Mònica, such control over her body and her thoughts relates to her feeling out of place in a heteronormative place where specific movements, words or bodies do not belong.

> […] it's very important that when it happens to you [coming out of the closet], you have a place which is actually "home", because […] in my house I have my bedroom and so on […] but I don't feel at home […]. My mum doesn't really know me, because outside the house I'm a totally different person […]. So this is what's most important to me: having a place. (Carol – I)

The symbolic meaning of home as a safe place, where one can be oneself, is seen as "what's most important" when coming out of the closet, and this is

precisely what Carol experiences as lacking in her relation with her parents. Holliday (1999: 481) argues that comfort derives from being 'recognisably' queer, from 'expressing externally that which one feels inside' And this is precisely the kind of comfort that is missing in the living room. Such behaviours and feelings are also experienced by young lesbians in Manresa's public spaces, where fear, caution and passing strategies condition how they inhabit heteronormative public spaces (Rodó-De-Zárate, 2014). Another important element that arose in the narratives of various participants was the television, which was mainly seen as a source of discomfort when something related to LGBTI people appeared:

> […] I feel a certain tension, due to internalized homophobic behaviour and comments, especially coming from my father. (Paula – RM living room/sexual orientation)
>
> The way that [LGBTI+ people] are depicted on television doesn't match my own experience, and it gives my parents a misleading picture of things. (Anna – RM living room/sexual orientation)

Unchosen representations and information about the LGBTI+ community enter the home in a shared space and imply an unwanted interaction that may cause discomfort when homophobic opinions are made explicit.

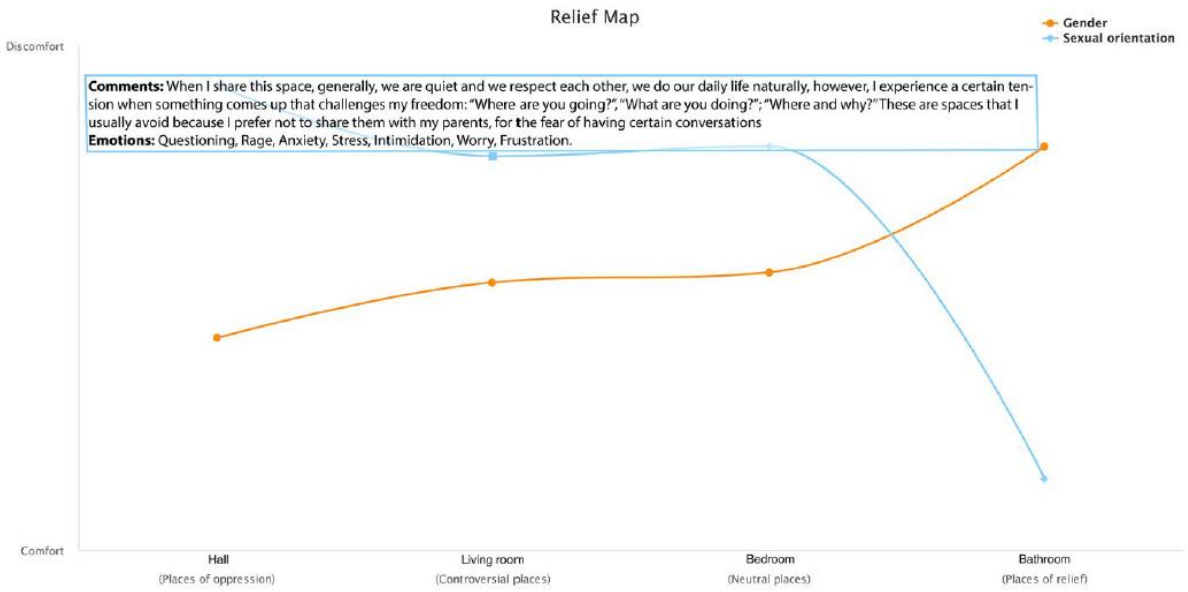

Figure 3: Carol's Relief Map

In relation to gender and the living room, six participants identified this as a positive space, associating it with emotions such as calm and tranquillity. The close relationship with some family members that took place in the living room was seen as a source of comfort and belonging, a place where supportive relations were established, especially with their mothers, as Mònica stated: "It's a space of great comfort and support; it's quiet, and it's a place for meeting with my mother, a place for sharing […]." (Mònica – RM living room/gender).

On the other hand, the burden of household labour still falls to women in the domestic sphere (Darke, 1994; Treas and Tai, 2016), and the unequal gender relations thus perceived were identified by some participants as a significant source of discomfort.

> When the time comes to prepare meals and lay the table, it drives me berserk that my father lies on the couch watching TV—football or whatever—while my mother prepares the meal […]. I feel that my parents

> have markedly different roles, and this feels unfair to me […]. (Paula – RM living room/gender)

Discomfort caused by the unequal distribution of domestic labour was mainly generated by the perception of a hierarchical relationship between their parents, and the work overload that their mothers endured. This shows how home is also a place of entangled relations of social reproduction, which are based on exploitation and also imply spatial injustice for those who experience this as an "unfair" situation, as Paula does. At the same time, however, alliances between women allow a distribution of work, and contribute to generating a comfortable space, as Bet argues when she says:

> We are four women at home, and I think this is another reason why I feel very comfortable in all the house's shared spaces (the living room, the kitchen, etc.).

The notion of the living room as a "public" space within the home challenges, but at the same time reproduces, the public/private division itself. Surveillance, social interaction, support, passing and labour relations configure the living room as a contested space with a central role in the social processes of heternormalization, adultification and gendered power relations.

The bedroom: an intimate space at the expense of self-vigilance

The bedroom is seen as a personal space, where the participants indicated that they feel comfortable expressing themselves, beyond their parents' gaze. Specifically, seven young women classified the bedroom as a place of relief and indicated high levels of comfort in relation to both gender and sexual orientation. One of the participants assessed the bedroom as a neutral space, and two of the participants classified it as controversial, indicating a high level of discomfort in relation to their sexual orientation.

In relation to sexual orientation, the privacy of the bedroom is exemplified by the existence of doors that can be closed, thereby deciding who enters and who does not. As Andrea argues:

> Normally, when I'm with my girlfriend in the bedroom, I feel great, because it's a space where we can share with each other, and be 100% of what we do and what we are (for example, kisses or hugs, which you might not do in the living room or in other shared spaces). (Andrea – RM bedroom/sexual orientation)

As Andrea argues, the privacy and freedom that she acquires with her partner, when they close the door, contrasts with the discomfort that she experiences when they have to expose themselves to the gaze of others in a shared space, making the bedroom a place where it is easier to perform a lesbian identity (Johnson and Valentine, 1995). However, for others, such as Carol, doors are not enough to make her room a private space:

> I feel like they invade my space, I have no privacy. My parents decide they have the right to go in and out of my room. They don't knock on the door, so I can never be 100% of my essence. I'm usually shy because if I have to make a call, I know my mum's always aware of who I'm talking to and what I'm saying. (Carol – RM bedroom/sexual orientation)

As can be seen, it is not only the physical boundary (consisting of the walls and doors) that matters, but also the norms and social relations established within the family home. For Andrea, a closed door allows her to have intimate moments with her partner. And the creation of this space of intimacy also allows for intimate conversations about sexuality with one's family members. Thus Anna states:

> It's the only space where I've been able to have a few conversations with my mother about my sexual orientation. (Anna – RM bedroom/sexual orientation)

However, this privacy is not always perceived as such, as in Carol's case. For her, the possibility of the doors being opened acts as a panoptic (Foucault, 1975) by which means she can always be seen or heard. So a form of social control operates within the private bedroom, even when she is alone. Her reference to the phone is also related to the porosity between the private and the public, as her relations with other people also occur within the private space of the bedroom. Petra L. Doan (2010) discusses how the telephone can act as significant invasion of privacy, and also as a channel through which discriminatory actors can intrude even behind closed doors, thus showing how a tyranny of gender is experienced in both public and private spaces. In this case, the telephone could also be a way of transgressing heteronormative relations at home; but control by family members cannot be prevented by physical barriers alone.

Other participants also expressed their discomfort concerning the impossibility of sleeping with their girlfriends, because they could not even enter the home space. As Carol states:

> There's no place where we can be intimate. It's so hard, and it's a problem in our relationship. My parents never leave the home, and we have no freedom. (Carol, interview)

This lack of a private space where they can have intimate relations is in itself a form of discrimination linked to affective inequality (Rodó-De-Zárate, 2017): the impossibility of having relations of care and affection, in this case due to homophobic norms.

Another relevant aspect that arose was the decoration of one's room, and the objects that were present in it. According to Andrucki and Kaplan (2018), decorative and household objects such as photographs and other meaningful objects play a central role in the construction of trans subjectivities, contributing to both grounding and disidentification processes. Rowntree and Zuffrey (2017), by discussing lesbian women's emotional expressions as prompted by artefacts, also show how domestic objects are strongly connected to one's understanding

of home and to one's personal history and identity. The emotions involved in displaying or hiding objects were seen by the participants as part of a negotiation within the heteronormative family home. While the bedroom is a private space where they can decide what to show or not to show, these everyday resistances are seen as transgressions, and feelings of fear and discomfort appear once one is faced with the possibility of homophobic comments. Some participants explained that their strategies for passing also had to do with hanging up normative posters of bands and films, as a way of performing a heteronormative identity that could serve to hide their sexual orientation, when their parents were unaware of it, showing how the privacy of the bedroom is also subject to the gaze of family members (Johnson and Valentine, 1995). However, even after coming out of the closet, the negotiation continues. As Paula states:

> I have my pictures with my friends and with my girlfriend, although I was too embarrassed and uncomfortable to display a picture of us kissing […] I suppose for the fear of non-acceptance or discomfort on the part of anyone who might see it. (Paula – RM bedroom/sexual orientation)

As Paula says here, the decision of what can be displayed or not is consciously taken after an assessment of the heteronormative space that home represents. These image-objects (Tolia-Kelly, 2004b) are therefore seen as transgressive practices that disrupt the normativities of the domestic space. Also, attributing feelings of discomfort to someone who might see a photo of her kissing her girlfriend is evidence of a homophobic home environment, but also evidence of the emotional bonds that she has with her parents. She understands that such an image could hurt her family members' feelings and hence chooses not to display it, thus reproducing and internalizing this homophobic environment. It is also important to note that the bedroom is the only room where the participants had chosen or had thought of choosing which kind of photographs were to be displayed; which shows the heteronormative, but also the adultist power relations at home, where only one's parents are allowed to decide what does and does

not belong in shared spaces. Such practices play a central role in the materialization of asymmetric power relations within the family, and are thus crucial for understanding processes of heternormalization of private spaces (see Johnson and Valentine, 1995).

Figure 4: Paula's Relief Map

In relation to gender, the room's distribution, elements and colours are also related to the construction of the participants' identity, and their negotiations with their parents' authority. In this sense, the ability to decide on the decoration of one's room significantly influences the participants' feelings (Valentine, 1993). As Paula and Jana state:

> I feel comfortable in my room, because I can keep it as I want, and decorate it as I like. (Paula – RM bedroom/gender)
>
> My bedroom is influenced by my past self, and also by my father and my mother in its configuration and distribution. I could say that the aesthetic of the room is matched to my female gender, which makes me feel less free. (Jana – RM bedroom/gender)

For Paula, deciding on the decoration of her room is a central element in her feeling comfortable there, which is linked to her sense of autonomy and the possibility of constructing her own identity. In contrast, the aesthetic choices made by Jana's parents, in accordance with what is socially attributed to women, was seen as a source of discomfort that serves as a reminder of the fragile control that they have in this space.

The bedroom is thus perceived as an intimate space within the family home, where negotiations about one's gender and sexual orientation are performed through everyday practices and resistances. The fragility of such intimacy depends on the social relations at home, but it also shows the porosity of physical separations, as well as the implications of adultist power relations for controlling their lives.

The bathroom: doing gender

The bathroom is seen as an intimate safe space for most of the participants, and they associate it with physical appearances, aesthetic pressure, menstruation, chores, personal care and privacy. Half of the participants classified the bathroom as a controversial place, four of them perceived it as a place of relief, and one saw it as a neutral place. Unlike the other rooms, the level of discomfort experienced is higher in relation to gender than in relation to sexual orientation.

Geographers have focused on the importance of public bathrooms for issues related to gender identity (Browne, 2007) or, more generally, on the importance of bathrooms for access to public spaces (Cooper et al., 2000; Kitchin and Law, 2001). However, private domestic bathrooms are underrepresented spaces, despite their relevance as places of privacy in everyday life.

In relation to sexual orientation, most of the participants had trouble relating emotions specifically to this place, as the privacy that it implies makes it a place where they do not have to hide or negotiate their sexual orientation. Only in some

cases is it seen as a possible space for having some kind of affective relation with one's partner. As Anna states:

> It hasn't been the case, but the bathroom could be a place where one could hide and quickly show affection to one's partner. (Anna, RM)

And those who, at some point, share the family home, indicate how the bathroom is also a contested space, where the limits of expressing their sexuality are revealed:

> When it comes to showering together [with my partner], I question myself and feel an internal rejection. So I don't feel as comfortable and secure as I do in her house, and I feel the need to hurry up, get out before her; or silly things like that which don't happen at her house […]. (Paula – RM bathroom/sexual orientation)

Paula also explained how brushing their teeth together or talking together while one of them uses the bathroom is not seen as problematic, but she perceives the idea of showering together as a limit. The sexualization that intermingled naked bodies imply, and the discomfort attributed to this, is linked to the acceptance that a lesbian relation is permitted only as long as its sexual nature is not made explicit. This is related to taboos concerning sexuality in general, but in this case homophobia plays an important role in the rejection of sexuality as part of a lesbian relationship.

In relation to gender, although closely linked to sexual orientation and gender expression, the bathroom also appears to be a space for the materialization of one's gender performance. The mirrors and the processes that take place in a bathroom, such as getting dressed, making oneself up, or doing one's hair make this specific room a factory for performing one's gender. And this is experienced with discomfort by many of the participants:

> My sisters have always applied make-up to themselves since they were little, and I've never wanted to do so […] I have felt judged for my way of

> dressing, and for not wearing any make-up. (Bet – RM bathroom/sexual orientation)
>
> I feel some pressure because as a woman, society requires you to come out of the bathroom more groomed, made up with one's hair done, and that creates some pressure. (Carla – RM bathroom/gender)

As Bet and Carla state, gender norms and social pressure are associated with the bathroom, seen as a place where they have to negotiate such normativities, by assessing how they want to be identified and treated, and what kinds of transgressions they can enact. Their decisions and performances are diverse and, while Bet and Carla express discomfort as a result of being judged for their gender expression nonconformity, Jana in contrast says:

> I feel very comfortable about it, and the fact that I hear negative comments […] doesn't affect my sense of happiness and self-satisfaction in this space. (RM bathroom/gender)

This situation concerns the interaction of gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation and, as Andrea explains, this negotiation also has to do with stereotypes linked to homonormativity. In her case, she struggles with the idea "that a bisexual or a lesbian shouldn't be groomed!". Even if she ends up arguing that this shouldn't affect her decisions about how to dress, it causes questioning and acts as a limitation on herself.

Gender is also experienced with discomfort in relation to domestic work and hygiene, where some participants feel humiliation and anger due to men's uncleanliness in this space. In relation to this, one of the most salient topics was the politics of menstruation, which led to gendering even the bathroom within the home space. As Bet explains:

> Inside the house, we have two toilets, and I use both except for when I have my period. Then I use one for comfort, and my father always uses the other

one. So I think we've unconsciously put gender labels on the two toilets as well. (Bet – RM bathroom/gender)

Hiding menstruation is linked to the stigmatization process that is transmitted through the socializing agents of popular culture, and has significant negative consequences on the health, sexuality and well-being of menstruant people (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2011). In this sense, the stigma of menstruation is clearly linked to gender norms and relations that are reproduced in private spaces, but which have clear consequences in public spaces too.

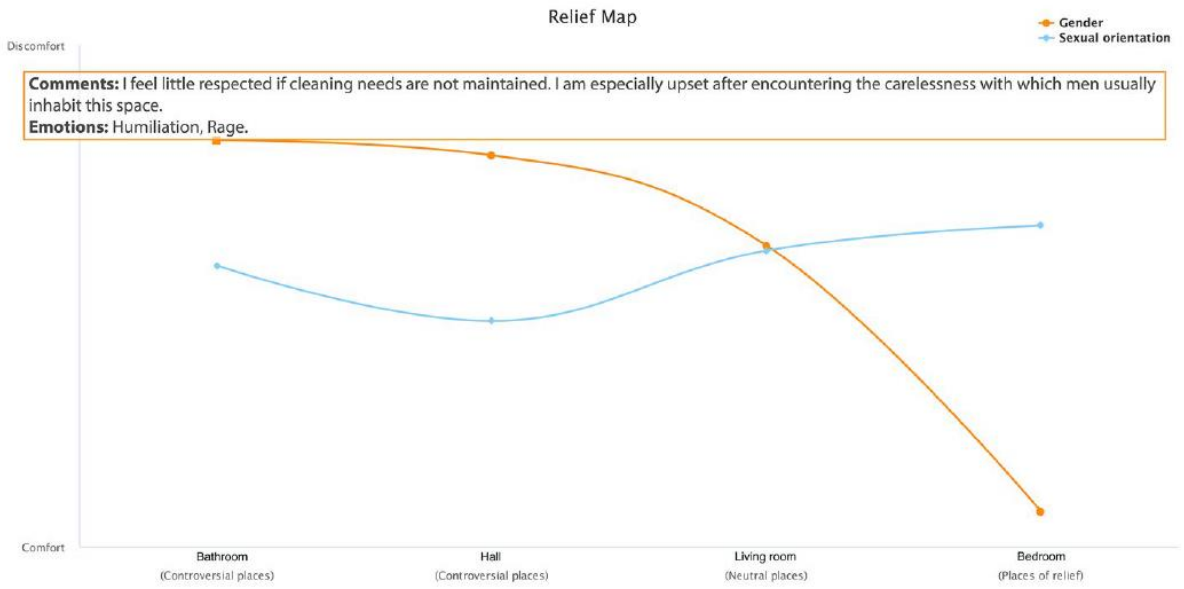

Figure 5: Anna's Relief Map

Conclusions

The family home is a heterogeneous place that is the site of multiple social and political processes. Here we have analysed how ten young non-heterosexual women from a medium-sized city in Catalonia experience the family home, with the aim of shedding light on geographies of home from the point of view of some of those who live on its margins, in this case due to their marginal position in relation to their gender, sexual orientation and age.

Our focus at the smaller scale of various specific rooms, and not on the home in general, has allowed a nuanced examination of the home space that complicates it, thus avoiding totalizing and homogenizing conceptions of private spaces. In this sense, through specific analyses of the hall, the living room, the bedroom and the bathroom—spaces that are traditionally considered private, mundane and apolitical—complex social process are made visible in the asymmetric power relations within the family. Adultist, sexist and heteronormative relations configure the home space through parental control, self-vigilance mechanisms, silences, and norms that condition and limit the participants' lives and involve various restrictions and discriminations, such as the affective inequality that is caused by the impossibility of having, talking about or displaying sexual-affective relations between women. However, the participants also illustrate how the home space is also a space of negotiations and resistances, where complex strategies are enacted.

The use of the Relief Maps tool has allowed for a systematic comparison of the experiences of the participants in a room-by-room approach, which contributes to developing the geographic and emotional perspective in a nuanced way. Our analysis of the home space has also revealed the presence of the public/private divide, as well as its contestation. This fundamental dichotomy is experienced in the everyday lives of the participants, but at the same time it is rendered fragile by its porous and fluid boundaries. In this sense, the public/private divide is affirmed and rejected at the same time through their experiences and negotiations, thus revealing the complexity of geographies of home in relation to power dynamics. Through this study, we have thus shown the importance of investigating geographies of home for understanding social processes. Further research on the experiences of LGTB youth will be needed, as well as other studies dedicated to those who live on the margins of home in relation to their class, race, religion or (dis)ability, in order to better understand the home space's role in reproducing and subverting injustice.

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