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Gaëlle MESLAY\*

## Five Years of Same-Sex Marriage in France: Differences Between Male and Female Couples

*Marriage has been a common research topic throughout the history of demography, but it has only recently become possible to study marriage between people of the same sex. Five years after the legalization of same-sex marriage in France, it is time to make an initial review. Do couples of the same sex who get married have specific characteristics? Are there differences between male couples and female couples? Combining survey and civil registration data, the author examines the sociodemographic specificities of these same-sex unions.*

Following the creation of civil partnerships, which were the first opportunities for same-sex couples to gain legal recognition, same-sex marriage became possible in the early 2000s in the Netherlands. From this starting point, the European Union has been moving towards relative harmonization of legislation (Digoix, 2008), although not all EU countries have made the same choices, particularly regarding filiation and medically assisted reproduction. In 2017, 24 countries worldwide had legalized same-sex marriage (Carroll and Ramón Mendos, 2017), and the extent of the debate suggests this number is set to increase in the coming years.

But in countries where same-sex marriage is legal, the proportion of married people among same-sex couples is far lower than that of different-sex couples (Badgett, 2009). This can be attributed to several factors, such as the more frequent ideological opposition to marriage among gay men and lesbians<sup>(1)</sup> (Eskridge and Spedale, 2007) and the lesser likelihood of having children (Badgett, 2009). In addition, each country's specific legal environment has different impacts, depending on the advantages of marriage over civil partnerships or consensual unions. Marriage may be more or less desirable or even required

(1) Numerous ideological objections to and criticisms of marriage as a model can be found in both the scientific literature (Donovan, 2004) and activist discourses (Front homosexuel d'action révolutionnaire, 1971).

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to access certain rights. Under French law, same-sex couples seeking to adopt must be married (see below). Consequently, matrimonial behaviour may be gendered (Kolk and Andersson, 2018), since female couples living with children far outnumber their male counterparts (Buisson and Lapinte, 2013).

What are the characteristics of same-sex couples who marry in France? Are the determinants of marriage similar for both same- and different-sex couples? Do differences exist between male couples and female couples? Does the profile of married couples differ from that of cohabiting couples? To address these questions, we begin by examining the demographic and political context to better identify the components involved in the decision to marry. From a sociological and demographic viewpoint, we then assess married couples in terms of age, nationality, and geographical distribution. To do so, we draw on two sources: the civil registration data on marriages from the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (INSEE), which provides new information on same-sex couples, and the 2011 Family and Housing Survey (Enquête Famille et logements [EFL]), which enables us to compare same-sex couples with cohabiting couples (Box).

### I. The context in France: marriage in decline and specific legal aspects

To better understand which same-sex couples choose to get married in France, we need to consider the demographic and political context. The marriage rate has declined continuously since the early 1970s, having now reached its lowest point in over 60 years (Prioux, 2005; Bellamy, 2015).<sup>(2)</sup> People are getting married at older ages, after one or two cohabitation periods, and marriage stands as an option among other forms of union (Déchaux, 2009). In parallel, the legal recognition of same-sex couples was initiated in 1999 with the creation of civil partnerships (*pacte civil de solidarité* [PACS]), followed by the right to marry in 2013. Between 2013 and 2017, 39,916 same-sex marriages were celebrated in France, a major share of which was performed in the first year. This was the result of a ‘catch-up effect’ of people who had wanted to get married for a long time and then quickly availed themselves of the opportunity. With the number of cohabiting same-sex couples in France estimated at 100,000 to 150,000 (Buisson and Lapinte, 2013; Algava and Hallépée, 2018), this means that roughly one-third of them have married in 5 years, 39% with the upper estimate and 27% with the lower estimate. This rate is higher for women (31% to 47%) than for men (24% to 36%). But the proportions remain inaccurate. Determining the number of same-sex couples requires an extrapolation of a survey representative of the general population, yet quantifying same-sex

(2) The crude marriage rate decreased from 7.0 per 1,000 in 1960 to 3.5 per 1,000 in 2013. See [https://www.ined.fr/en/everything\\_about\\_population/data/online-databases/developed-countries-database/](https://www.ined.fr/en/everything_about_population/data/online-databases/developed-countries-database/)

### Box. Sources: Civil registration and the Family and Housing Survey

For each calendar year, civil registrars send marriage certificates to INSEE, which anonymizes them and conserves certain information about the two partners: sex, year and place of birth, prior marital status, and place of residence.<sup>(a)</sup> The advantage of the resulting civil registration databases is that they are exhaustive at the national level and may thus be used for analyses with no need for sampling or adjustment. This source is particularly important because same-sex couples are a minority group and constitute a population whose number is difficult to determine among the general population (Festy, 2007; Cortina and Festy, 2014). Statistics are currently available for 5 years: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017.

Same-sex married couples can also be compared with same-sex cohabiting (unmarried) couples in the Family and Housing Survey, which was carried out in France by INSEE and appended to the 2011 census. In this survey administered to 359,800 people aged 18 and over, with an over-representation of women, 1,390 people (after correction; see below) said they were in a union with a person of the same sex, 1,168 of whom were cohabiting with this partner. Our focus here is limited to cohabiting individuals because they are more likely to be comparable with people married after 2013 than those reporting to be in a non-cohabiting union. However, the two samples (married after 2013 and cohabiting in 2011) are different, since the people responding to the survey in 2011 could not yet get married. Nevertheless, these are the best general-population data currently available for quantifying same-sex cohabiting couples with certainty and with a sufficiently large sample.

As the survey bulletin was appended to the census and filled in by all the same-sex people living in the dwelling, the sex of the individuals registered in both the survey bulletin and the EFL survey can be verified. Errors concerning the sex of one of the two partners are thus corrected, leading to the creation of 42% of 'false couples' among the people appearing in a same-sex couple (Banens and Le Penven, 2016).

Other sources exist but cannot be used for a precise analysis of same-sex couples. The employment survey that INSEE conducts annually can be used to differentiate same- from different-sex couples, but errors concerning the partner's sex and the impossibility of checking them render it unusable for now. The same problem applies to the census, although new correction possibilities are being explored by taking into account partners' first names (Algava and Hallépée, 2018). Lastly, despite its large sample (7,825 interviewees), the survey on individual and conjugal trajectories (Étude des parcours individuels et conjugaux [EPIC]) carried out by INED and INSEE, included too few same-sex couples at the time of the survey to be used here.

(a) Visit the INSEE website:

<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/3304499?sommaire=3051496&q=mariage#documentation-sommaire>

couples is complex (Festy, 2007; Cortina and Festy, 2014; Banens and Le Penven, 2016). In addition, these proportions are based on an estimation of cohabiting couples only, as cases of marriage without prior cohabitation are rare. They also assume a stable stock of cohabiting couples<sup>(3)</sup> and a low remarriage rate during the period.<sup>(4)</sup>

(3) Some couples cohabiting in 2011 may have separated, but new ones may also have formed over the period, such that the stock is thought to be stable.

(4) One may assume that the number of remarriages is close to 0 and has only a marginal effect on the estimation. Applying the divorce rate of different-sex couples, i.e. 26.5 per 1,000 after 5 years of union (Bellamy, 2016), to that of same-sex couples would lead to 1,057 divorces for same-sex couples. The probability of people getting married twice during the period would thus be even lower.

Few means of comparison exist in other countries, as this would require knowledge of both the number of marriages and the number of same-sex couples. Around 45% of same-sex couples have married in the United States (Gates and Brown, 2015; Romero, 2017),<sup>(5)</sup> while the proportion appears relatively low in northern Europe (Banens, 2017; Festy and Cortina, 2019).<sup>(6)</sup> In comparison, the same-sex marriage rate in France appears higher though twice as low as that of different-sex couples.<sup>(7)</sup> The situation in France seems similar to that in Canada, where one-third of same-sex couples are married (Statistics Canada, 2017).<sup>(8)</sup> Because of the heated debate and strong political opposition to the legalization of same-sex marriage in France, a part of the gay and lesbian population might have gotten married as an activist act, fearing that the law would one day be called into question.

In France, the institution of marriage has several advantages that may be important for same-sex couples. Establishing filiation with a child for each partner is possible only as part of an adoption because other possibilities were not addressed by the law of 2013 (Théry, 2016).<sup>(9)</sup> Whether jointly adopting children through an organization or whether one partner is the biological parent and the other adopts the children, the procedure remains accessible solely to married couples, thus requiring this form of union for those seeking to adopt. Even in the simplest legal form of adoption of a minor, parental authority is transferred to the person adopting. This transfer precludes sharing this status between the partners unless married, which is not the case in most European countries (Nikolina, 2017). Marriage also enables a surviving spouse to benefit from their deceased spouse's pension rights, which for some is a vital form of protection as they age.<sup>(10)</sup> It also provides residence rights for a foreign partner in binational couples.<sup>(11)</sup> All these practical reasons clearly play a role in how same-sex couples decide on their type of union.

(5) This estimation was based on the marriage status reported by people self-identifying as LGBT, from samples of adults aged 18 and over among the general population. Self-identification as LGBT and information on the partner's sex serve to avoid errors stemming from 'false' same-sex couples (different-sex couples with the sex of one of the partners having been incorrectly entered).

(6) Based on the number of marriages and estimations of same-sex couples, 15% to 20% of same-sex couples were married in the Netherlands 7 years after it became possible (Badgett, 2009). However, lacking a more exact measurement, crude marriage rates (calculated by comparing the number of marriages to the number of men and women in the population) are much higher in France than in other European countries (Festy and Cortina, 2019).

(7) According to the Family and Housing Survey, 57% of people reporting to be in a union are married with their partner, if the analysis is confined to under-50s to limit the generational effect, as marriage is the majority form of union for the oldest couples.

(8) Ten years after same-sex marriage became legal.

(9) As with the presumption of paternity, some countries have introduced the presumption of parentage for same-sex couples, most often married or in a civil partnership, allowing the partner of the biological parent to be automatically recognized by law. Possibilities for the recognition of parentage also exist, with the partner declaring that they legally recognize the child, independently of the couple's status (French Republic, 2012; Waaldijk et al., 2017).

(10) In some European countries, civil partnerships, or even consensual unions, may allow people to access survivor's pensions. This is not the case in France (Waaldijk et al., 2017).

(11) For binational couples, marriage allows the foreign partner to apply for a residence permit. After 4 years of union, the foreign partner may also apply for French nationality.

## II. Same-sex couples are older than different-sex couples

The civil registration of marriages may be used to characterize married couples in several respects.<sup>(12)</sup> First, same-sex married couples are older than different-sex married couples. This is particularly true of male couples, with an average age of 45.9 compared to 40.7 for female couples and 36.5 for different-sex couples (Table 1). For gay men and lesbians, those having recently married are younger than those who married immediately after same-sex marriage was legalized, as the first same-sex couples to get married had doubtless been waiting a long time to be able to do so. Following its legalization in 2013, same-sex marriage has become more a part of the partnership path, increasingly similar to that of different-sex couples. In 2013, the average age at marriage of male couples was 49.8, which fell to 44.4 in 2017; that of female couples also fell from 43.0 to 39.3 over the same period.

Table 1. Average age and breakdown by age category of married and cohabiting couples

	Married couples			Cohabiting couples*		
	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples
	Men	Women		Men	Women	
Average age (2013–2017)	45.9	40.7	36.5	42.5	42.4	50.0
Number of individuals	42,606	37,226	2,281,442	548	620	231,513
2013	49.8	43.0	35.9			
	8,618	6,120	462,810			
2014	46.2	41.4	36.2			
	11,344	9,716	461,908			
2015	44.4	40	36.4			
	8,170	7,332	457,130			
2016	44.2	39.8	36.8			
	7,344	6,882	451,224			
2017	44.4	39.3	37.1			
	7,130	7,176	448,370			
<b>Age category (2013–2017) (%)</b>						
18–24	2.4	3.9	7.4	6.9	8.4	3.4
25–34	18.6	32.1	47.4	20.4	21.7	16.2
35–44	26.1	31.3	23.8	37.0	30.4	21.0
45–54	28.6	19.1	12.8	20.0	21.9	20.4
55+	24.4	13.8	8.7	15.8	17.8	39.1
* Cohabiting couples may be in a consensual union, a civil partnership, or married; same-sex couples are composed of only unmarried individuals, as the EFL was carried out in 2011.						
<b>Interpretation:</b> 32.1% of the women who married a woman between 2013 and 2017 are aged 25–34.						
<b>Coverage:</b> People married in France between 2013 and 2017; people in a cohabiting couple.						
<b>Source:</b> Civil registration of marriages, 2013–2017, INSEE; EFL, 2011, INSEE.						

(12) Though it would have provided an important resource from a sociological or demographic viewpoint, no information concerning the partners' occupations or occupational categories is included in French marriage certificates.

Comparing the age structures of same-sex cohabiting and married couples demonstrates for the first time relatively considerable differences between the two groups. For gay men, the oldest individuals (over 45) are over-represented among married couples, while for lesbians, the most represented age category is 25–34 (Table 1). Because most same-sex couples with children are female couples (Buisson and Lapinte, 2013) and because 25–34 is considered the ‘appropriate’ age category for becoming a parent (Toulemon and Leridon, 1999; Bajos and Ferrand, 2006; Debest, 2014), this may reflect the use of marriage for parental purposes, via adoption, for these women. In contrast, among men choosing to get married, the most important aspect is advancing age, no doubt because the risks of accidents and illness increase with age, leading individuals to pay greater attention to the protections offered by marriage. While we cannot confirm this based on INSEE statistics, issues of the partner’s legal protection (survivor’s pension, inheritance, wealth transmission, etc.) may play a more decisive role for male couples than for female couples when deciding on the type of union. The legal uses of marriage (adoption, protection) might be different for gay men and lesbians because of the more frequent presence of children with lesbians. As with lesbian couples, 25–34-year-olds are over-represented among heterosexual couples married between 2013 and 2017, no doubt because, even where adoption is not an issue, having or wanting to have a child increases the likelihood of getting married (Prioux, 2009).

The age difference between spouses is also greater among gay couples (7.4 years on average) and lesbian couples (5.1) than among heterosexual couples (4.3)<sup>(13)</sup> (Appendix Table A.1). This reflects a more limited population of potential partners, involving a broadening of age criteria when seeking a partner. It also corresponds to contextual specificities of same-sex couple formation. We know that age differences between partners vary according to where they meet, and notably that partners who meet at their place of study have smaller age differences than other partners (Bozon and Rault, 2012). For same-sex couples, opportunities to meet are more limited due to their belonging to a minority group. The workplace, socializing with friends, public spaces, and places of study are where most different-sex couples are formed, but to a lesser degree for same-sex couples, who meet in other contexts, notably via dating websites (Bergström, 2016).<sup>(14)</sup>

Lastly, among same-sex couples, married male couples are more likely to have considerable age differences (particularly more than 10 years) than female couples, which might also be explained by the different meeting venues of gay and lesbian couples. For example, lesbian meeting places are known to be more ‘invisible’ than those of gay men (Cattan and Clerval, 2011). The greater importance of ‘private’ lesbian venues, whose members tend to be more selected, may lead to the formation

(13) In most cases (66%), the man is older than his female partner.

(14) This different context produces effects that are not specific to married couples because their occurrence is similar among cohabiting couples (table not included).

of more homogamous couples in terms of age and social milieu, a result that has already been observed in other countries (Kurdek and Schmitt, 1987).

### III. Specific geographical distribution of male couples

Civil registration data show that married female couples more often live in rural municipalities and small- and medium-sized cities than do married male couples.<sup>(15)</sup> In contrast, male couples more often live in Greater Paris (28% of the total, compared with 16% for female couples and 19% for different-sex couples; see Table 2).<sup>(16)</sup> This appears to be a specific aspect of gay men, the result of mobility towards the capital. Regarding national migration, the choice of the Île-de-France department stands out much more among gay men than among lesbians (Rault, 2016). For example, a part of the gay population say that they chose Paris because it would enable them to meet people and frequent places of homosexual sociability (Giraud, 2014), while lesbian sociability takes place more often in private venues (Ferzli, 2001). In addition, distance from the parental dwelling proves to be more common for people reporting a same-sex partner than for those reporting a different-sex partner, and this is particularly true of gay men (Rault, 2016). Relatively similar to that of heterosexual couples, the

**Table 2. Distribution of married and cohabiting couples by the urban unit group of the partners' place of residence according to type of couple (%)**

	Married couples			Cohabiting couples		
	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples
	Men	Women		Men	Women	
Rural municipalities: < 2,000 inhabitants	17.7	21.1	20.5	15.7	17.6	27.3
Municipalities: 2,000–19,999 inhabitants	12.1	16.4	15.9	9.9	10.6	16.8
Small cities: 20,000–199,999 inhabitants	14.6	17.6	18.4	16.0	15.6	17.4
Cities: 200,000–1,999,999 inhabitants	26.0	28.1	25.4	26.9	34.9	23.4
Paris agglomeration	28.2	16.2	18.9	31.5	21.2	15.0
Overseas collectivities / abroad	1.4	0.6	0.9	—	—	—
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
Couple sample	21,303	18,613	1,140,721	548	620	231,513

**Interpretation:** Of married male couples, 28.2% live in the Paris agglomeration.  
**Note:** In the EFL, the urban unit group of the couple is calculated based on individuals' responses. The EFL was administered in metropolitan France only.  
**Coverage:** Couples married in France between 2013 and 2017; individuals of cohabiting couples.  
**Source:** Civil registration of marriages, 2013–2017, INSEE; EFL, 2011, INSEE.

(15) All results were controlled for age (regressions not shown). At identical age, differences between male couples, female couples, and different-sex couples remain, though this is less the case regarding geographical distribution, some effects of which may be partly attributable to age.

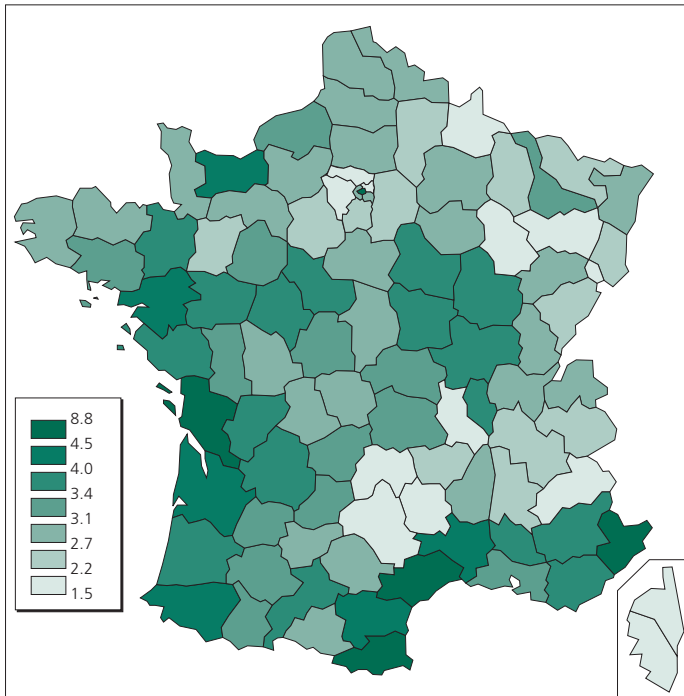
(16) Similar results are observed for cohabiting couples in the EFL. However, the proportion of married female couples in municipalities is much higher than that of cohabiting female couples (Table 2).



geographical distribution of lesbian couples may thus be seen as a consequence of their not adopting an approach of family distance and/or seeking to be closer to their families when they have children.<sup>(17)</sup> Geographical mobility is more common for partners in a male couple than for those in a female couple, with a larger proportion reporting, at the time of marriage, that they lived in a department other than the department of birth (69% compared with 63% for women, table not included).<sup>(18)</sup> This phenomenon can also be attributed to the observation that geographical proximity to parents appears in all cases to be more important for women than for men (Bonvalet and Lelièvre, 2012).

Similarly, observing the proportion of marriages by the spouses' residential department shows that the geographical distribution of female couples closely resembles that of different-sex couples, though female couples are slightly more present in a few departments with large urban areas (Gironde, Bouches-du-Rhône, Hérault, Loire-Atlantique, Nord). In comparison, the proportion of married male

Figure 1. Proportion of same-sex marriages out of total marriages (per 100 marriages)



**Interpretation:** Out of 100 marriages between partners living in Paris, 8.8 involved same-sex partners.

**Note:** French overseas departments and territories, accounting for under 1% of same-sex marriages, are not included.

**Coverage:** Marriages in France between 2013 and 2017.

**Source:** Civil registration of marriages (2013–2017), INSEE.

(17) Wilfried Rault (2016) shows that having children has a favourable effect on proximity to parents for female couples. Too few male couples have this family configuration for us to observe such phenomena.

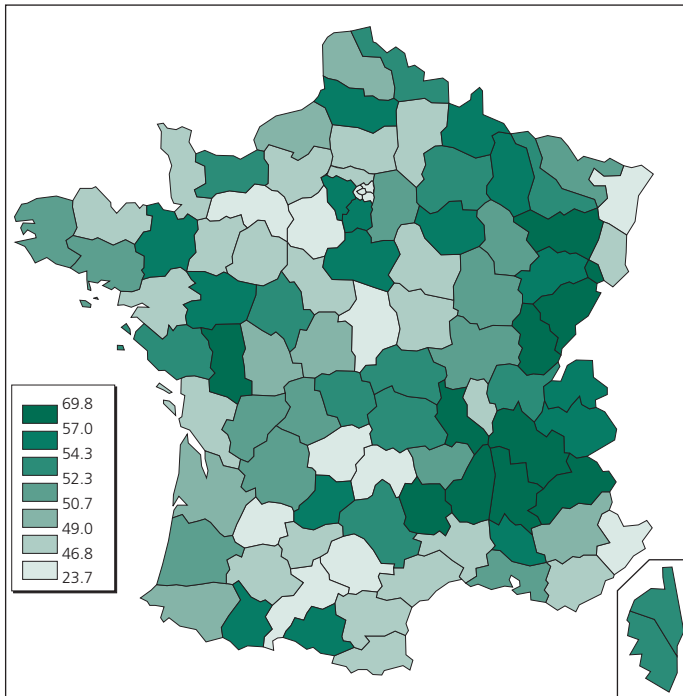
(18) Women in a lesbian couple are more mobile than individuals in a different-sex couple (51%).

couples is particularly high in Paris (28% of the marriages of two men concern residents in the Paris agglomeration, 19% in Paris proper; maps not included).

Relative to married different-sex couples, married same-sex couples live mainly in western and southern France<sup>(19)</sup> as well as in the Paris region (Figure 1). Nine same-sex couples per 100 married couples live in Paris; 5 in the Hérault and Alpes-Maritimes departments; and just under 4.5 in the Gironde and Loire-Atlantique departments, which is consistent with the findings from other countries whereby same-sex married couples are more present in large urban areas (Black et al., 2000).

If we more specifically compare the places of residence of female couples with those of male couples among married couples, female couples have proportionally greater presence in eastern France and lesser presence in certain departments with large urban areas (Figure 2).<sup>(20)</sup> For example, Bas-Rhin,

Figure 2. Proportion of female marriages in all same-sex marriages (per 100 marriages)



**Interpretation:** Out of 100 same-sex marriages between partners residing in Paris, 23.7% involved female couples.  
**Note:** French overseas departments and territories, accounting for under 1% of same-sex marriages, are not included.

**Coverage:** Marriages in France between 2013 and 2017.

**Source:** Civil registration of marriages (2013–2017), INSEE.

(19) Out of 100 marriages, 4.7 same-sex couples live in the Charente-Maritime and Pyrénées-Orientales departments; 4.4 in Aude; 4.1 in Calvados, Gard, and Pyrénées-Atlantiques.

(20) In Bouches-du-Rhône, Gironde, Nord, and Rhône, the number of gay couples is almost as high as that of lesbian couples (around 50%). The proportion of gay men is particularly high in the departments of southern France.

Alpes-Maritimes, Haute-Garonne, and Hérault are home to more male couples than female couples among married same-sex couples (only 38%–47% of same-sex couples living in these departments are lesbian couples). Women are also a minority in Paris, with just 24% of lesbian couples among married same-sex couples living in the capital. They are also proportionally less present in the inner suburbs of Paris, notably in Hauts-de-Seine and Seine-Saint-Denis (where women represent 39% and 40% of married same-sex couples, respectively), but their proportion is higher in the outer suburbs (with lesbian couples accounting for 55% of the total in Essonne and Yvelines; Figure 2).

These differences likely reflect income inequalities, as women's net annual pay is 23.7% lower than that of men, attributable to differences between occupations, working time, and the pay gap (Chamkhi and Toutlemonde, 2015). Lesbian couples' residential possibilities are thus more limited than those of gay couples, which would explain their preference for the outer suburbs of Paris, where life is less expensive than in Paris proper and the immediate suburbs. The presence of children, more frequent among female couples, also has an impact on their choice of residence, with the proportion of families<sup>(21)</sup> being twice as high in the outer suburbs than in the capital (Atelier parisien d'urbanisme, 2010).

#### IV. Female couples: less binational and slightly more remarriages

Regarding nationality, married same-sex couples resemble cohabiting same-sex couples, with 16% of married male couples and 5% of married female couples being binational compared with 17% of cohabiting male couples and 5% of cohabiting female couples (Table 3). Binational couples are known to have limited options in terms of the organization of their conjugal and family life, and marriage may be necessary for the legal protection of non-French partners because it can allow them to remain in the country (Salcedo Robledo, 2015). However, similarities between the situations of married and cohabiting couples do not show more marriages among binational couples. The share of binational couples, which is relatively high among male couples, seems to be independent of the type of union.

In all cases, binational couple arrangements are much less common among lesbian couples,<sup>(22)</sup> while the proportion is similar for gay couples and different-sex couples (among married couples, 14% are binational). Yet, as with other types of couples, female couples have legal motivations for getting married. Although civil registration data cannot be used to identify the presence of

(21) That is, families with at least one adult and one child aged under 25 with whom there is a filial relation.

(22) This is once again consistent with the observation of a relatively pronounced homogamy among lesbian couples, particularly compared with gay couples (Kurdek and Schmitt, 1987).

**Table 3. Distribution of married and cohabiting couples by partner's nationality according to type of couple (%)**

	Married couples			Cohabiting couples		
	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples	Same-sex couples		Different-sex couples <sup>(a)</sup>
	Men	Women		Men	Women	
Both partners have French nationality	82.3	93.9	81.8	80.3	94.2	—
One of them does not have French nationality	16.1	5.3	14.4	17.2	5.2	—
Neither has French nationality	1.7	0.8	3.9	2.6	0.7	—
Total	100	100	100	100	100	—
Couple sample	21,303	18,613	1,140,721	274	310	—

(a) In the census questionnaire associated with the EFL, it is not possible to establish the binationality of couples for different-sex couples because the nationality of the respondent is asked for but not that of his or her partner. However, this is possible for cohabiting same-sex couples because both partners responded.  
**Interpretation:** Among 93.9% of married lesbian couples, the two partners have French nationality.  
**Coverage:** Couples married in France between 2013 and 2017. Cohabiting couples.  
**Sources:** Civil registration of marriages, 2013–2017, INSEE; EFL, 2011, INSEE.

common children in the couples before marriage,<sup>(23)</sup> some of them formed a union with a view to filiation relating to the recognition of the parenthood of the two partners.<sup>(24)</sup> While lesbians were initially less likely to marry than gay men, the number of lesbian marriages has increased over time, slightly overtaking that of gay men in 2017 (Table 1). This means that, proportionally speaking, lesbians marry more, since male couples outnumber female couples (six gay couples for four lesbian couples) (Buisson and Lapinte, 2013). This results partly from their family configurations, as the presence of children, which is more common among lesbian couples, undoubtedly leads to unions relating to the recognition of parenthood.

The remarriage rate is higher among female couples. In 20% of cases, one of the partners was married previously, compared with 18% for male couples and 29% of different-sex couples (Appendix Table A.2). For same-sex couples, this certainly involves heterosexual marriages, as the law was introduced too recently for the opportunity of two same-sex marriages to present itself. These cases of remarriage mainly involve older individuals, with almost half of the gay men who remarried being over 55 (Appendix Table A.2). This is less the case for lesbians, only 31% of whom remarried, and the age structure more closely resembles that of different-sex couples.

This also clearly reflects a generational effect. Heterosexual relations and their institutionalization via marriage were previously seen more as an obligation, but that perception is gradually lessening as same-sex relations become legally

(23) All same-sex couples are counted as having no common child in the civil registration databases.

(24) A qualitative survey under way, administered as part of the author's PhD dissertation, demonstrates that women often bring up the issue of marrying with a view to adoption, which remains less common among men.

and socially recognized. Among older individuals, different-sex marriage could have been used to access parenthood, since the possibilities used to be much more limited. For example, among lesbian couples, children aged under 5 are born much more often via medically assisted reproduction, while older children were more often conceived via a previous heterosexual union (Gross et al., 2014). Marrying with a view to adoption also corresponds to a generational effect. Marriage legally protects the two intended parents and thus plays a part when same-sex couples decide to start a family, a much more common occurrence than in the past.

## Conclusion

The legal recognition of same-sex couples has increased substantially in recent decades, as reflected in the right to marriage. The databases of the civil registration of marriages constitute new sources and can be used for the first time to observe significant differences in the geographical distribution and background of gay and lesbian couples married between 2013 and 2017. Female couples are less likely to be binational than male couples and different-sex couples. These differences can clearly be attributed to gendered relationships to space and national migration, as well as income disparities between the two groups. In addition, gay couples get married older, while most lesbian couples marry between the ages of 25 and 34. These observations raise issues of the legal aspects of union choice, which are not the same for men as for women, no doubt because the number of women living with children is much higher than that of men. In France, the rights marriage grants to recognize filiation between same-sex partners as well as the rights pertaining to the organization of one's union (including the possibility of residence for foreign partners, survivor's pensions, and inheritance) help to explain why the same-sex marriage rate is relatively high compared with other European countries, notably Scandinavian countries. The results call for further research, with a deeper investigation of the processes involved in choosing the type of union and the various aspects at play in the decision. Combining several types of methods could deepen our understanding of the motivations of these couples, without neglecting how certain positions in the social sphere may influence partnership decisions. The results also encourage further study of contextual effects using international comparisons, as well as greater analysis of national legal specificities.<sup>(25)</sup>

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(25) On this topic, see the Laws and Families project:  
<https://www.lawsandfamilies.eu/en/legal-project/interactive-database/#tab-question>.

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## APPENDIX

**Table A.1. Age difference between spouses by type of couple (%)**

	Married same-sex couples		Married different-sex couples
	Men	Women	
0–2 years	26.4	36.8	45.1
3–5 years	24.0	27.6	27.6
6–10 years	24.6	23.5	18.1
11+ years	25.0	12.2	9.2
Total	100	100	100
Couple sample	21,303	18,613	1,140,721
Average age difference	7.4	5.1	4.3
<p><i>Interpretation:</i> The age difference for 36.8% of married lesbian couples is less than 3 years.  <i>Note:</i> For different-sex couples, the age difference is calculated based on the difference between the youngest and the oldest spouse, without taking account of sex.  <i>Coverage:</i> Couples married in France between 2013 and 2017.  <i>Source:</i> Civil registration of marriages (2013–2017), INSEE.</p>			

**Table A.2. Previous marital status by type of couple (%)**

	Married same-sex couples		Married different-sex couples
	Men	Women	
At least 1 previously married (%)	18.2	20.4	28.6
<b>Age category of previously married people (%)</b>			
18–24	0.1	0.1	0.3
25–34	2.4	8.4	9.5
35–44	13.6	27.1	26.5
45–54	36.1	33.4	32.5
55+	47.8	31.1	31.2
Total	100	100	100
Sample of previously married people	4,280	4,309	450,115
<p><i>Interpretation:</i> In 20.4% of married lesbian couples, at least one of the partners was previously married.  <i>Coverage:</i> Individuals in married couples of which one was previously married.  <i>Source:</i> Civil registration of marriages (2013–2017), INSEE.</p>			

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### Gaëlle MESLAY • FIVE YEARS OF SAME-SEX MARRIAGE IN FRANCE: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE COUPLES

In 2013, France followed in the footsteps of several other European countries by legalizing same-sex marriage. However, there is a lack of information for estimating the proportion and sociodemographic characteristics of same-sex couples who marry. Using civil registration data on marriages, we show that male couples are older and more commonly live in Paris, while female couples more closely resemble different-sex couples, and binational female couples are rarer than binational male couples. These differences clearly reflect gendered variations in the relationship to the institution of marriage and the greater importance of legal issues regarding adoption for lesbians. This work also situates same-sex married couples in relation to cohabiting couples who participated in the French Family and Housing survey, demonstrating certain specific characteristics among married couples.

### Gaëlle MESLAY • CINQ ANS DE MARIAGES DE MÊME SEXE EN FRANCE : DES DIFFÉRENCES ENTRE LES COUPLES D'HOMMES ET LES COUPLES DE FEMMES

Depuis 2013, la France a suivi de nombreux pays européens en ouvrant le mariage aux couples de même sexe, mais peu d'éléments permettent d'estimer la proportion et les caractéristiques sociodémographiques des couples de même sexe qui ont choisi de se marier. À partir des données d'état civil sur les mariages, nous montrons que les couples d'hommes sont plus âgés et plus souvent parisiens, tandis que les couples de femmes ressemblent davantage aux couples de sexe différent. En revanche, les couples binationaux sont plus rares chez ces dernières. Ces différences traduisent sans doute des variations genrées dans le rapport à l'institution matrimoniale et une plus grande importance des enjeux juridiques liés à l'adoption pour les lesbiennes. Enfin, ce travail situe les couples mariés par rapport aux couples cohabitants présents dans l'enquête Famille et logements, faisant ainsi apparaître certaines spécificités des couples mariés.

### Gaëlle MESLAY • CINCO AÑOS DE MATRIMONIO ENTRE PERSONAS DEL MISMO SEXO EN FRANCIA: DIFERENCIAS ENTRE LAS PAREJAS MASCULINAS Y FEMENINAS

Desde 2013, Francia, siguiendo el camino de numerosos países europeos, permite el matrimonio entre personas del mismo sexo, pero hay pocos datos sobre la proporción y las características socio-demográficas de las parejas del mismo sexo que han decidido casarse. A partir de los datos del estado civil sobre los matrimonios, mostramos que las parejas de hombres son de mayor edad y más a menudo parisinas mientras que las parejas de mujeres se parecen más a las parejas de sexo diferente. En cambio, las parejas binacionales son más raras en las últimas. Estas diferencias traducen sin duda variaciones de género en la relación con la institución matrimonial y una mayor importancia de las cuestiones jurídicas asociadas a la adopción para las lesbianas. Por último, este trabajo compara las parejas casadas con las parejas cohabitantes presentes en la encuesta Familia y Vivienda, lo que pone de manifiesto ciertas particularidades de las parejas casadas.

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**Keywords:** marriage, sexualities, gender, conjugality, unions, same-sex couples, France

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