

# Spain



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In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the lesbian and gay liberation movement was gaining ground in North America and Northern Europe, life remained very difficult for lesbians in Spain. In 1970, Franco's government enacted the Law of Social Danger and Rehabilitation, under which same-sex sexual conduct was punishable by imprisonment. This law was repealed when the current Constitution came into effect in 1978.

Although lesbian and gay organizations were not allowed to exist openly under the Franco regime, El Movimiento Español de Liberación Homosexual (MELH, Spanish Movement for Homosexual Liberation) began operating illegally in 1971. When the political climate changed, MELH began making its existence more widely known, and several new gay and lesbian groups were formed beginning in 1976. In all of these groups, however, lesbians were far outnumbered by gay men.

The first lesbian organization, El Colectivo de Lesbianas

(Collective of Lesbians), was formed in September 1977, within the Frente de Liberación Gay de Cataluña (Gay Liberation Front of Catalonia). It split off a year later, forming its own group called Grupo de Lucha para la Liberación de las Lesbianas (GLAL, Group for the Liberation of Lesbians). The majority of the lesbian organizations in the 1970s and 80s, including GLAL, grew out of and alongside the feminist movement. During this time, the focus of lesbian groups was primarily on political advocacy rather than on providing services to meet the needs of lesbians. More recently, however, lesbian groups have begun to move into different areas. Grants from state and private organizations have allowed these groups to improve their infrastructure and to develop services targeted toward lesbians, such as psychological counseling, legal counseling, and telephone information lines. There are approximately twelve exclusively lesbian groups currently in existence in Spain. In addition, there are approximately 25 lesbian and gay groups in which lesbians,

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while still in the minority, are increasingly vocal.

#### LESBIAN PARTNERSHIPS

Currently, as shown by a survey of the Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas (CIS) carried out in April 1994, 53% of Spaniards feel that lesbian and gay partnerships should be legally recognized in the same way that heterosexual

domestic partnerships are.<sup>1</sup> This has become a central focus of several lesbian and gay organizations. In November 1994, the Parliament voted in favor of such recognition and ordered the Ministry of Interior Affairs and the Ministry of Justice to draft the necessary legislation. The proposed legislation would give lesbian and gay couples the same rights as unmarried heterosexual couples in the areas of inheritance, pension, and property rights. In anticipation of its passage, many city and town halls have begun to set up procedures through which lesbians and gay men can register their partnerships.

#### PARENTHOOD

This proposed legislation marks a milestone in the history of the lesbian and gay movement. One major area that it does not address, however, is adoption. As an individual, a lesbian can adopt a child.<sup>2</sup> However, two women are not allowed to adopt as a couple, and a lesbian who is open about her sexual orientation would face great difficulty. There is still significant opposition in Spanish society to adoption by lesbians or gay men. According to the CIS survey, 55% of those polled are opposed to such adoptions, and only 33% are in favor. The Spanish Society of Pediatrics has stated that it is necessary for children to be placed in "a family environment in which the roles of the mother and the father are clearly established, each with a particular part to play in the care and training of the child,"<sup>3</sup> and the Catholic Church has issued statements explicitly opposing lesbian and gay adoption rights.

Lesbians who wish to bear children are able to obtain donor insemination without much difficulty. The Law of Assisted Reproduction does not specify any requirements regarding marital status. Legally, however, the biological mother is the child's only parent, and her partner has no legal rights regarding the child.

REPRESSION OF LESBIANISM IN THE FAMILY AND IN THE  
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

Many lesbians who reveal their sexual orientation to their family face rejection and condemnation. Due to tradition and difficult economic conditions most unmarried women live with their parents until their early thirties, making such rejection particularly difficult to bear. This dependence on the family is one of the primary reasons that many lesbians remain "in the closet," hiding all of the aspects of their lives that may reveal their lesbianism.

Young lesbians who do not receive the support of their families have few alternative sources of information. There is a tremendous lack of accurate information regarding homosexuality in the Spanish educational system. Currently, homosexuality is not discussed in most school curricula, although there are some isolated cases where schools request the help of lesbian and gay groups in giving presentations. Several organizations are currently calling for the progressive standardization of teaching about homosexuality in schools.

## LESBIAN INSTITUTIONS

Recently, the first two bookstores specializing in gay and lesbian literature have opened, and they have helped to create visibility and community. At the same time, several new lesbian publications have recently appeared. However, beyond the existing social and political groups, lesbians have few public spaces in which to socialize. As opposed to gay men who have saunas, parks, and a varied selection of bars and discos, lesbians have only a few bars, which means that most lesbian socializing takes place in private homes. This contributes to the low visibility of lesbians in Spanish society and the consequent isolation of many individual lesbians. Thus, despite the promising new legislative developments, many lesbians remain "in the closet" and have internalized the negative images of lesbianism that they have learned