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CONSIDERING PARENTHOOD:

A PREDICTIVE MODEL OF LESBIAN WOMEN'S DECISIONS TO PARENT

By

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ABSTRACT

CONSIDERING PARENTHOOD:
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By

Nancy Marion McCrohan

This research examined attitudes toward becoming a parent for lesbian women who were not currently parents. Data were gathered from surveys distributed at lesbian events and through a lesbian mailing list. About one-third of the one-hundred sixty-three women in the sample desired children, and about one-quarter intended to have children. Almost half of the women in the sample had, in the past two years, seriously considered one or more methods of becoming a parent. Nearly three in ten had considered pregnancy and nearly one-quarter had considered adoption. More than half of the women had discussed ideas about becoming a parent with others.

The majority of the women reported that it would be helpful to have interventions such as support groups for lesbian mothers, ways to get community support for lesbian mothers, and information on how to become a parent. The degree of expected support from others varied, but sisters, partners, mothers, and friends with children were expected to be most supportive if the participant chose to become a parent.

A path model of lesbian women's decisions to parent was analyzed with the use of LISREL software. Fishbein's theory of reasoned action was used as a framework for exploring the multivariate relationships. Most of the relationships expected by TORA were evident in the results. Specifically, attitudes predicted intention, and intention predicted behaviors engaged in which would lead to parenthood. Variables measuring subjective norms, however, did not fit in the path model. A post-hoc model suggested that length of time with a partner and affiliation with lesbian women who are mothers or desire motherhood may be

influential in increasing behaviors leading to parenthood, and may be useful to examine in future works. Future directions include research focusing on referent groups and normative messages, replication of the path model findings, dissemination of findings, and advocacy-based interventions with lesbian women in the areas of family and parenting.

"Even without children,

the potential for mothering

is an issue that affects all lesbians.

Women possess a deep connection with fertility,

if not in the physical realm

then on a spiritual and metaphorical level"

(Evans, 1990, p. 49).

"[T]he revelation of similarities

between lesbian [mothers] and heterosexual mothers

can threaten to nourish a trend

that accords more value to mothers

than to women who have no children,

regardless of their sexual orientation"

(Lewin, 1993, p.191-192).

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the literature on lesbian women and fertility research to get a picture of what we know about lesbian women's choices to become parents or to not become parents, and the extent to which the decision factors considered in previous research might illuminate lesbian women's experiences in considering parenthood. What we discovered is a dearth of information regarding lesbian women's decisions to parent.

Because of the lack of information about lesbian women, one of the main goals of this research was to provide data to describe the sample, and their desires and intentions regarding parenthood. A further goal was to create measures of lesbian women's attitudes toward parenting, subjective norms regarding the appropriateness of parenting, intentions to parent, and behaviors engaged in that would lead to parenthood. The attitude toward parenting measure contained items concerning motherhood identity, nurturance, creating a family, and material conditions. There were several measures of subjective norms, including expected support from others.

A final goal was to build a path model predicting lesbian women's intentions to parent or not to parent, based on the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein, 1979). Because this research was exploratory, the purpose of the Fishbein model was not to confirm the model per se, but to use the model as a framework for exploring the multivariate relationships and to describe the components of the decision to parent. A full description of the model follows the literature review. Briefly, the model was a structural (path) model, and was used to examine the use of attitude toward parenting and subjective norms as predictors of the intention to parent, and the use of intention to parent as a predictor of engaging in behaviors which could lead to parenthood.

Overview

There have always been lesbian mothers, although this has long been thought of as a contradiction in terms in popular culture. Many of today's lesbian mothers became mothers in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship and later "came out," or disclosed, their lesbianism. Since the early 1980s there has been a "lesbian baby boom," with many lesbian women deciding to have children after coming out as lesbians (Achtenberg, 1990; Brown, 1992; Gil de Lamadrid, 1991; Pies, 1987b). There has been a recent and growing interest in this lesbian baby boom in the lesbian population, popular culture, and in social research. Little data are available, however, beyond the fact that a baby boom is occurring (Brown, 1992). Most of the initial information on this phenomenon was in the form of stories (See Hanscombe & Forster, 1981).

Lesbian women becoming mothers are much like other women, concerned with daily tasks, health care, childcare arrangements, household preparedness, and so forth. Lesbian women are also different from heterosexual women facing parenthood, however, in many ways. The issues involved in lesbian parenting are diverse, but they all stem from the fact of the woman's lesbianism: relationships with family of origin; how to share parenting with another woman; how to have both partners recognized as mothers; and many decisions about the method of achieving motherhood. Lesbian women become mothers through adoptive, foster, biological, and co-parenting means. Each method has its advantages, disadvantages, and decision factors to be considered.

Lesbian women considering motherhood spend a great deal of time and energy thinking, processing, and deciding whether to have children, about the methods of achieving this, and the impact of their decisions (Frank & Brackley, 1989; McCartney, 1985; Pies, 1989). One obstacle that must be dealt with is the right to parent: how they, as lesbians, will

be fit to parent. There are questions about the fitness of lesbian women as parents and there have been psychological studies which conclude that the children of lesbian women are as psychologically sound as the children of heterosexuals (See McCandlish, 1987 for a review of studies; Pies, 1989). Further, there are studies which conclude that children of gay men or lesbian women are no more likely than the children of heterosexuals to become homosexual, have a confused sexual identity, or exhibit confused gender role behavior (DiLapi, 1989; Pollack, 1987; Steckel, 1987).

The existence of lesbian families and lesbian parents is controversial. The issues involved and the factors which influence these families need to be examined, in order to effectively respond to the needs of all the parties involved. One increasingly popular means of becoming a lesbian parent has been the use of alternative fertilization to achieve pregnancy. Society has begun to notice and question this practice. Some physicians are evaluating the wisdom of performing AF on single heterosexual women and lesbian women, in part due to concerns about the ethics of single parenthood or lesbian parenthood (Fletcher, 1985; Perkoff, 1985; Strong & Schinfeld, 1984). The issue of access is also a matter of concern in adoption and foster parenting for lesbian women.

We are still far from fully understanding the breadth and depth of the problems and joys of the alternative fertilization family (Corea, 1985). Corea reported that lesbian mothers in her study believed it would be beneficial to have information about their experiences gathered, possibly by one of the participants. This group also would be wary of researchers, and scrutinize any researchers before participating in a study. In summary, there are many issues involved in the creation of lesbian families that warrant attention, and very little information.

Values in Social Science

Value choices are implicit in the daily work of community psychology professionals. Values can shape the choice of problems to study, the framing of questions, and the methodologies we use (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger, Wandersman, & D'Aunno, 1984). Specifically, reformist values are important and unique aspects of the field of community psychology (Heller et al., 1984).

Community psychologists urge us not to deny the importance of our values, but to acknowledge that science and values are not incompatible (Heller et al., 1984; Rappaport, 1977). Furthermore, because it is inevitable that values affect our science, social scientists are obligated to explicitly state our biases and values, and to try to understand their impact upon our work (Heller et al., 1984).

In short, it is false to claim objectivity in scientific work (Heller et al., 1984; O'Brien, 1989; Rappaport, 1977). Objectivity in any endeavor involving human beings can never be completely attained, as if we live in a cultural, historical, sociological, psychological vacuum. Scientific writings which claim objectivity are not objective, but instead silently accept and promote current mainstream values. This author's subjective value orientation is that lesbianism is not pathological, and that there is nothing morally or socially unacceptable in being a lesbian mother. I believe that no mere label (eg. lesbian mother, grandparent, nuclear family) can convey the experiences of the person(s) or the social network within which they exist.

Target Population and Literature Coverage

Adult lesbian women who are not currently parents is the population of interest in this research. Other populations are discussed in the literature review, as appropriate, in order to highlight the experience of lesbian women considering parenthood. These other populations,

however, are not the main focus of this paper, and inclusion of them in a comprehensive manner is far outside the goals of this manuscript. For example, lesbian motherhood is explored to the extent that it sheds light on the position of lesbian women considering parenthood. This review does not provide an extensive analysis of the entire experience of lesbian motherhood per se, nor of gay fatherhood.

Single heterosexual women (not married nor in a committed relationship with a man), as single mothers or as users of alternative fertilization (AF) as a means of achieving motherhood, were examined because they share commonality with lesbian women seeking AF. They look similar in that crucial common factor of making reproductive choices that create families which do not include a father/ husband. The literature is limited for each of these groups, and the populations tend to be confused or not clearly defined. In research, lesbian women are sometimes hidden in "single women" categories, sometimes they are purposely included in a group with single women, and sometimes lesbian women are single women, without a male or female partner. Therefore, single women are discussed at certain points in the literature review to clarify issues involved in lesbian parenting.

There is very little research on the decision-making process of lesbian women contemplating motherhood, or the factors which may influence them. Therefore, the literature review pulled information from various areas in order to illuminate the experiences of lesbian women considering parenthood. Types of sources include theoretical works; exploratory, qualitative, and quantitative empirical works; and clinical works. Areas discussed included cultural institutions and norms; lesbian identity; lesbian mothers; interpersonal relationships for lesbian women; the role of the lesbian community; and heterosexual fertility decision-making processes and models.

Why the Frameworks are Important

This review of lesbian women considering parenthood included information about the cultural and interpersonal context in which lesbian women contemplate becoming parents in order to more fully appreciate the individual decision-making experience. The importance of looking at the larger picture is emphasized in community psychology. Community psychology is multifaceted in nature, and community psychologists often have an ecological orientation, focusing on the interaction of people and their environments (Heller et al., 1984). The framework of Bronfenbrenner (1977) and the multifaceted, multidisciplinary goals of community psychology fit well together. Bronfenbrenner outlines the ecology of human development, and he conceives of the changing relation between persons and environment in systems terms. The ecological environment consists of a nested arrangement of structures, each embedded within the next (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). Bronfenbrenner outlines socio-cultural, social-structural, family, and individual aspects of the ecological environment. In a later extensive review article, Bronfenbrenner (1986) reveals how the ecological model is particularly useful in understanding the development of healthy families, noting the importance of looking at levels larger than interpersonal dynamics. There is some overlap between the levels, but they should be viewed as nested, with the individual levels as the innermost, followed by familial, the structural, and the cultural as the outermost level (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). What this nesting implies is that the more individual levels of analysis cannot be considered without an understanding of the larger influences of cultural beliefs, norms, and prescribed roles upon an individual.

The justification for this current research rests upon Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of the ecological environment. As noted, in this conceptualization, each level of the ecological environment impacts the levels nested within that level, and thus, of course,

the individual level is impacted by the familial, structural, and cultural levels. As discussed in the literature review, there are many author's who believe that the cultural and structural context are quite influential upon lesbian women, and that this influence is in a direction not necessarily experienced by others. These author's were quite concerned that this is not experienced in a positive manner. Thus, it was revealed that this cultural influence has implications for very personal decisions about the creation and composition of one's family. In short, we must know more about lesbian women's decisions to parent because of the anticipated impact of cultural beliefs regarding parenthood and lesbian parenting upon individual level decisions.

Although the bulk of the survey focused on individual level data, the survey also asked questions that tapped information from all four levels of Bronfenbrenner's conceptualization of the ecological environment. For example, questions about societal assumptions represented the socio-cultural (ideas, values) level; questions concerning the legal treatment of lesbian mothers, and methods of becoming a parent represented the socio-structural (values institutionalized in systems) level; questions about the creation of a family and the changes parenthood could bring to a partnership represented the familial (relationship dynamics) level; and the attitude questions represented the individual level. This data was useful for descriptive purposes.

In terms of modeling, however, one cannot measure and model all possible factors, at so many levels of decision making all in one study. The second framework, the theory of reasoned action (TORA), helped to paint a picture of the decision factors involved in lesbian women's decisions to become parents. This was quite useful because it used a limited number of constructs in a network to provide a comprehensive, yet concise description of the decision to parent. The TORA model is basically intended to measure more individual level variables,

as opposed to the multi-level framework of Bronfenbrenner. The TORA framework, however, does focus on subjective norms and suggests that these are derived from socio-cultural messages and the desire to comply with these messages. TORA also suggests that measured attitudinal variables are based upon beliefs and are influenced by external variables. Thus, with the TORA, the higher levels are implied, but are not necessarily measured.

Thus, the chapters presented here begin with an overview of the cultural context in which lesbian women make decisions about becoming or not becoming parents, and move toward a description of the relationships between the behavior, intention, attitude, and norms relevant to parenting decisions.

Lesbian Women Choosing Motherhood

Lesbian and Mother as Ideologies in a Cultural Context

In this section, we will take a brief look at the ideologies regarding motherhood and lesbianism, as well as identities of woman, mother, and lesbian. The purpose is not to delineate an exhaustive review of these concepts, but to highlight the cultural context in which lesbian mothers and potential lesbian mothers exist. Decisions regarding highly "personal" choices about partners, families, and childrearing are situated in a specific psychological, cultural, historical, structural setting, which gives meaning to individual choices.

DiLapi (1989) presents a conceptual framework built on the idea that "societal values determine the appropriateness of motherhood" (p. 101), and that a hierarchy of appropriateness exists. In this hierarchy, the two main criteria of appropriateness for motherhood concern sexual orientation and family form. The most appropriate mother is the married heterosexual woman (correct form and sexual orientation); the marginally appropriate mother is the single, teen, disabled, or foster mother (incorrect form but correct orientation);

and the least appropriate mother is the lesbian woman (incorrect form and incorrect orientation). Other criteria in this hierarchical framework include fertility, method of conception or parenthood, and the consciousness of the decision to parent.

DiLapi (1989) suggests that this hierarchical model is a good tool to describe a "system of unequal distribution of power and resources supporting motherhood" (p. 108). An example of resource distribution is seen in the use of new reproductive technologies; options to deal with fertility problems are available mostly to heterosexual married couples. "Mainstream institutions such as social service agencies, medical facilities, and legal systems control who has access to these alternative forms of parenthood. In this way, the illusion of the `traditional nuclear family' remains intact" (p. 111).

Motherhood is not just a biological possibility for some women; it is also an ideology affecting our entire culture (Gordon, 1976). This compulsory motherhood (Gordon, 1976) reflects social beliefs that motherhood is an integral part of being female; that femininity itself depends on being a mother. It includes the idea that all women want to be mothers, that all women should be mothers, that all women will become mothers. Motherhood operates as an institution, defining women's value in society based on the ability to bear children. This mothering role is considered a critical role in the creation and maintenance of the family unit (DiLapi, 1989). However, the expectation that women will be mothers has also led to a narrowing of women's roles outside the home. The mothering role is considered a main reason for the second-class status of women (Chodorow, 1974).

Homophobia is rage, fear, and hatred of homosexuals, affecting both the person who feels this, and those with whom the person interacts (DiLapi, 1989). DiLapi demonstrates how homophobia is institutionalized in the United States by noting that in most of the U.S. discrimination of homosexuals is legal; that homosexual behaviors are illegal; and that national

civil rights legislation does not address homosexuals. "In the case of lesbian motherhood, institutional homophobia denies lesbians access to their reproductive rights, including freedom of sexual expression, information on health care, and parenting options" (DiLapi, 1989, p. 106).

A companion ideology to homophobia is heterosexism. Heterosexism is the idea that everyone should be, and is assumed to be, heterosexual (DiLapi, 1989). A heterosexist attitude implies that heterosexuality is not perceived as an institution, but just assumed to be every person's innate orientation. But some authors urge a closer look at heterosexuality as an ideology. "[H]eterosexuality, like motherhood, needs to be recognized and studied as a *political institution*" (Rich, 1980, p. 637). Heterosexism, like homophobia, is believed to be an additional barrier to lesbian motherhood, and is "reflected in legislative efforts to control behavior and deny access to services" (DiLapi, 1989, p. 106).

In summary, social beliefs and values are not just beliefs, but are translated into actions and institutional policies. Authors looking at the ideologies of compulsory motherhood, homophobia, and heterosexism reveal how these ideas become institutionalized; how the values become ingrained into the actions, policies, and operations of systems such as the courts, social service agencies and the medical industry. This is expected to have serious consequences for reproductive freedom for lesbian women.

Another aspect of the cultural context in which lesbian women consider parenting is their invisibility as families. Lesbian households are not alternatives to the family, but alternative kinds of families (Bozett, 1987; Pies, 1987a; Rothman, 1989). Lesbian households fulfill many or all the functions of a family (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991; Bozett, 1987; Schneider & O'Neill, 1993) and also act as social support for members of an oppressed minority group (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991). A lesbian family is achieved by self-identification and mutual

agreement, rather than through ascribed roles gained via biological or legal definitions. Ainslie and Feltey (1991) note that Marciano's concept of "wider families" -- families other than kinship and marriage based -- apply to lesbian families.

Because lesbian women create various configurations of families, they are sometimes seen as breaking down the recent tradition of nuclear families, and there is a dominant social belief that lesbian women (and gay men) should not be parents (Pies, 1987a). Lesbian women are seen as having no family, or not interested in family (Achtenberg, 1990), or not valuing family (Achtenberg, 1990; Bozett, 1987). There is no recognition that millions of lesbian women are parents.

There are those who argue that the lack of recognition of lesbian families must change, for developmental reasons (Slater & Mencher, 1991), and for social policy reasons (Schneider & O'Neill, 1993). In the social realm, there is a lack of recognition -- lesbian families have not had the benefit of rituals to mark and validate milestones and passages. Slater and Mencher (1991) point out that rituals to validate and sustain family life include an enormous variety of activities and events: engagement and marriage activities -- rings, last name changes, legal and financial changes; births; baptisms; Bar Mitzvahs; Bat Mitzvahs; anniversaries; funeral services recognizing the next-of-kin. Lesbian family life, "completely empty of images of normal progression", is allowed only individual level rituals, such as birthdays or new job celebrations, that don't relate directly to the family as a unit (Slater & Mencher, 1991, p. 373).

> Since the integrity of their bond is not recognized, the bond is seen as without stages, overriding themes, or temporal progression. There is no act, commitment, or length of time spent together that moves such a couple into a sanctioned social status. The couple must fight both active and passive disregard throughout life (Slater & Mencher,

1991, p. 376).

Even when a couple spends a lifetime together, the partners are seen as "unmarried women who never had a family" (Slater & Mencher, 1991, p. 376). Because of the perceived lack of validation, or progression as a family unit, the length of time a couple is together often takes on special meaning, as an indication of their legitimate bond (Slater & Mencher, 1991). The duration of the relationship takes the place of external conventional validation.

A social policy perspective echoes the developmental perspective: legal recognition of lesbian partnerships is missing, can impede family unity, and would be beneficial to the couple and to the larger society. Schneider and O'Neill (1993) suggest that spousal benefits to same-sex partners is in the best interest of gays and lesbians and *society as a whole,* that this is a social policy matter, and that denying same-sex spouse benefits is in opposition to the social policy of ensuring the well-being of citizens; acknowledging partners in this way "promotes security, stability, and other values which families ideally represent" (p. 23).

In summary, there are a variety of issues involved in preparing for parenthood, but the most problematic are the questions focused on the right to even have or raise children. Lesbian women have difficulties in addressing this issue, questioning their right to have children. These issues reveal the influence of societal norms and cultural biases in the individual level decision-making process. The internalized homophobia that lesbian women experience consists of the criticisms and doubts about one's self, life, and peers (Pies, 1989). Pies (1989) asserts that internalized homophobia cannot easily be avoided, and causes lesbian women to question their desires for parenthood. Gays and lesbian women are seen by the media and others primarily by their sexuality, not their skills, strengths, and personal characteristics. This makes it harder to see them as parents, involving a holistic perception of the person.

Thus, lesbian women deal with many concerns in evaluating motherhood. Pies (1989) reminds us that lesbian women face the same concerns as do heterosexuals, including time; money; emotional support; response from friends and family; and having a healthy child. These concerns are compounded by societal assumptions and biases about lesbian women, especially about lesbian women who choose to become parents. Robinson and Pizer (1985) agree that lesbian women face special problems in conceiving mostly because of the discrimination that they face.

Prevalence of Lesbian Mothers and Lesbians Who Want Children

To begin the analysis of the decision to become a lesbian mother, there are several basic questions that are commonly asked and should be addressed immediately. The questions are: (1) how many lesbian mothers are there?; (2) how many lesbian women would like to become mothers?; (3) why should lesbian women even ponder the role of mother and how is this role perceived?

As to the first question, lesbian women have always been parents in our society, visible or not (Falk, 1989; Pollack, 1990). It is estimated that there are 3 to 4 million lesbian mothers in the United States, (based on an estimate that 10-20% of women are lesbians, and that 20-30% of lesbians are mothers) (Pollack, 1987). Some of the children are from previous heterosexual relationships, whereas others are adopted, fostered, or conceived through reproductive technologies, such as AF. Some lesbian women raise their children as single parents, and some raise their children in the context of lesbian relationships.

Because so many lesbian women became mothers in the context of previous heterosexual relationships, the second question becomes how many lesbian women want to become parents after they are "out" as lesbians? Pies (1987b) reports that more than 300 lesbian women have attended her "Considering Parenthood" groups, which are usually

composed of 8 to 15 women, for a six week period. She reports that about 15% of each group decides to have children, and the others decide not to have children or are still considering their options at the end of the group (Pies, 1987b).

Ryan and Bradford (cited in Shaw, 1989), in the first national survey of lesbian health, report that 28.7% of their sample had been pregnant, and an additional 22.8% desired pregnancy. In a statewide (Michigan) health survey consisting of 1,681 lesbian women, 1.74% of the sample had had artificial insemination (Bybee, 1990). However, a larger number were interested in becoming pregnant: 25% of the total sample said they would try AI, and an additional 9% said they would consider sex with a man to become pregnant.

Zeidenstein (1990) did a descriptive study with 20 lesbian women regarding the effect of disclosure of lesbian identity upon gynecological and childbearing needs and experiences. She reported that 70% of the lesbian women in her study wanted to become mothers; 15% had considered parenthood and decided against it; and 15% had never considered parenting. Twenty percent of the women in her sample had children after coming out as lesbians, or were pregnant at the time of the study. It is likely that the rate of 70% desiring children is not truly representative of the desires of the general lesbian population, but was due to selective participation of lesbian women interested in the topic of gynecological and childbearing needs. Furthermore, 55% of the total sample had considered or pursued adoption, and 60% of the total sample had either considered or pursued AI in order to have children (Zeidenstein, 1990).

Johnson, Smith and Guenther (1987) reported that 58.8% of the 1,921 lesbian women in their 1980 health study had considered having a child after coming out to themselves. Of those who had considered having a child, 61% had considered AF, 37% had considered having sexual intercourse with a cooperative man, and 15% had considered having intercourse

with an unsuspecting man in order to conceive. Sixty-two (62%) percent of those who had considered having a child had considered adoption. Very few of those women who had considered having a child actually pursued this (10.3%), and about one-quarter of those had successful results. It appears from the article that "considered having children" was not defined for the respondents. The data from this question are very interesting, but there is no information about the outcome of that consideration (ie. considered and decided to not have), or the strength of current desires. The sample was one of convenience, with participants from women's music festivals, and the group was mainly white, young, and well educated. However, it was the largest sample to date, and included a wide range of ages, occupations, and geographical areas (Johnson et al., 1987).

To recap, it is estimated that there are millions of lesbian mothers in the United States today, a great many of whom became mothers in the context of a previous heterosexual relationship. The research cited varies in the estimates of the proportion of lesbian women who are considering parenthood. As a whole, however, the research suggests that a notable percentage of lesbian women are considering parenthood and becoming parents. Clearly lesbian motherhood is not an oxymoron.

Value of Considering Parenthood and Perceptions of Mother as an Identity

The third question is partly based on the assumption that lesbian women are not mothers: why should lesbian women even bother to think about parenting?; and how is this identity/role perceived? Perhaps we should be asking why should they not consider parenthood -- some authors suggest that it is very important to consider and ponder, regardless of the final decision.

Evans (1990) made the unusual call for all lesbian women to look at the issues of motherhood and to make conscious choices regarding this role. She insisted that to not

examine the meaning and desirability of any role is psychologically harmful. She did not suppose that all lesbian women would choose motherhood or choose childlessness, but that each must examine her desires, motives, and the meaning of the role for herself.

Evans (1990) looked at mothering issues for all types of lesbian women -- those who want children, those who have children from previous heterosexual marriages, those who are not mothers, those who are partners to lesbian mothers. Evans reviewed literature on lesbian motherhood and found nothing on the needs of lesbian women from a developmental perspective, nor any literature with a developmental framework that analyzed options regarding decisions about motherhood. Evans looked at the issues for parenting, noting that choices in this realm offer the potential for growth and for loss. She emphasized that parenthood decisions be informed ones that are made quite consciously.

In the literature regarding lesbian parenting, Evans (1990) and Pies (1988) provide unique contributions to decision-making and identity aspects of parenting, with unusual attention to childless lesbian women. Being a childless (or childfree) lesbian offers many opportunities, often unrecognized, for growth. Both Evans and Pies insist that it is important for lesbian women to make conscious choices about parenting, and emphasize that the best final decision belongs to each individual. "Even without children, the potential for mothering is an issue that affects all lesbians. Women possess a deep connection with fertility, if not in the physical realm then on a spiritual and metaphorical level" (Evans, 1990, p. 49).

Evans (1990) noted the differences between the role of mother and mothering energy. She reported that the role of mother is one which has been culturally distorted to mean a person defined by the needs of others, in contrast with the more spiritual construct of mothering energy:

When mothering is recognized and understood to be both part of and larger than the

> actual act of being a mother, this energy is powerful and creative. To own this heightened vision the lesbian woman without a child must individually reckon with what femininity really means to her, and how she chooses to express her fertility. If this question gets bypassed or its importance denied, a primary source of her development gets lost (Evans, 1990, p. 49).

Evans (1990) discussed the therapeutic tasks for helping lesbian women explore the meaning of motherhood, which include clarifying and supporting the mother role; accepting and grieving losses (either loss of traditional family or the lack of children); supporting the spiritual exploration of the feminine; developing alternative creative expression; and exploring the family of origin. Evans (1990) insisted that motives for parenting decisions need to be examined and that the family of origin is the most productive area for information and clarity.

Perhaps it is so important for lesbian women to examine the role of mother (Evans, 1990) because the identities of lesbian and mother are viewed as opposites, and are both so strong. Rich (1979) discusses these two powerful sources of identity -- motherhood and lesbianism -- and how the two main components of these sources are experience and institution. These salient identities, lesbian and mother, are seen as opposites in both heterosexual culture and in the lesbian culture (Rich, 1979). Others note the difficulties of merging motherhood and lesbianism in concrete ordinary ways (Pollack, 1987).

The lesbian community is based in part on a sharing of feminist values (Lockard, 1985), and much of the feminist analysis of motherhood is highly critical of the oppressive nature of mothering in our culture today (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991). Thus, one could expect that this would lead feminist lesbians to a philosophical reluctance to engage in parenting. It is commonly believed that lesbian motherhood is a challenge to patriarchal culture and the nuclear family (Lewin, 1993).

Moreover, there are different experiences to be faced by lesbian women as mothers. "Because a lesbian woman does not fit any of society's stereotypes, she must create a niche for herself that is uniquely hers. The emotional and political implications of her decisions regarding mothering are different in many ways from those of heterosexual women" (Evans, 1990, p. 43).

Much of the literature on lesbian motherhood focuses on the similarities and differences between lesbian and heterosexual parenting. And there is consensus -- lesbian parents' experiences are the same as heterosexual parents' experiences (Evans, 1990; Pollack, 1990), -- and yet are also different from the heterosexual experiences of parenting (Brown, 1992; Evans, 1990; Pies, 1988; Pollack, 1990; Rohrbaugh, 1988; Stiglitz, 1990). Lewin (1993) leads us to contemplate how these similarities between lesbian and heterosexual parenting may serve to reflect and reinforce the gender system in which mothers are more valued than women with no children.

Lewin (1993) is concerned that motherhood and womanhood continue to be mutually defined, and that lesbians who can choose motherhood can gain access to womanhood through negotiation. It is important to ask why we have heard about lesbian mothers in the mainstream recently, and Lewin suggested two viewpoints. In one way, the increase in lesbian mother's visibility reflects lesbian pride and sense of entitlement or legitimacy. In short, a lack of shame and secrecy. In the other view, lesbian motherhood is motherhood, reaffirming the rigid "construction of gender in terms of motherhood and the simultaneous defusing of the threat to traditional gender categories" which had been achieved by the gay, lesbian, and feminist movements (Lewin, 1993, p. 192).

Lewin (1993) discussed the process of her research evaluating the stresses and coping of single heterosexual and lesbian women. She hoped to find that the lesbian women in her

study looked "normal", but she found more than that -- she unexpectedly found them quite ordinary. She found "creativity directed toward the complexities of negotiating identity rather than toward delineating bounded behavior or institutions particular to lesbian mothers" (p. 182). Lewin (1993) found that heterosexual and lesbian mothers were essentially the same in defining motherhood. She found that lesbians' stories "focused on establishing claims to motherhood and on affirming motherhood as a central identity" (p. 190). Lesbian women, however, shared the meaning of motherhood without assuming biological inevitability. She perceived that being both lesbian and mother, they moved between resistance and accommodation of gender identity.

This research would indicate that lesbian women do not focus on being "lesbian mothers" per se, but rather on being "mothers". If so, this may mean that for some lesbian women, "lesbian" and "mother" are not contradictory experiences; or that the identity of mother is stronger than that of lesbian; or that in discussing motherhood they are focused on the mothering experience per se and not perceiving any mothering experiences as being lesbian-mother-experiences.

In conclusion, research is needed regarding the proportion of lesbian women who identify with the role of mother or potential mother. Do lesbian women who identify as potential mothers all strongly desire to be mothers? Or are there some who see themselves as potential mothers but decide to not have children? Motherhood is more than an identity; it is also an experience in nurturing others. It would be useful to know more about lesbian women's attitudes about nurturant behavior toward children. Do mother identity and attitudes toward nurturing children correlate for lesbian women?

Ideology and identity are important aspects of the context in which one contemplates becoming a parent. It would also be useful to know more about lesbian women's perceptions

of societal messages regarding the appropriateness of lesbian motherhood, and concerns about being a lesbian mother. As descriptive information, this research project collected information about the proportion of women who want children, perceptions of societal assumptions about lesbian motherhood, and the perception of difficulties associated with lesbian motherhood. In addition, items related to mother identity and nurturance are included in the attitude toward parenting scale.

Why Lesbian Women Choose to Parent

Now for a final question -- why do lesbian women become parents? The limited research available on lesbian women who strongly desire parenthood offers some information about the consciousness of the decision to become a parent and reasons for methods chosen.

Hanscombe and Forster (1981) did groundbreaking work in their interviews with lesbian women in England and Wales. Based on their qualitative data, they report that many lesbian women would like to be mothers. They note that "lesbians are just women," with the same physical, psychological and fertility needs as other women (Hanscombe & Forster, 1981, p. 15). McCartney (1985) looked at motivations for becoming parents, and related a quote from one of the subjects which she thought typified the experience of the sample, " `Nothing is missing in my life, I just want to expand it' " (p. 323). Pies (1989), who has worked with lesbian women for many years doing research and parenting workshops, found that lesbians choose to become parents for some of the same reasons as heterosexuals: they want children, they want to bear a child, they want to create the experience with a partner, or they want to make a fulfilling childhood for their child.

It appears that alternative fertilization is a common method of conception for many lesbian women and single women. Harvey, Carr, and Bernheine (1989) did a study of 35 lesbian mothers, using self-report questionnaires. They questioned the women about the

reasons for biologically parenting, as opposed to adopting. They found the reasons included: wanting to experience pregnancy and childbirth (54.3%), the importance of early biological bonding (22.9%), the lack of adoption alternatives (17.1%), and the desire to raise a newborn (5.7%).

McCartney (1985) did a study of 12 single women and lesbian women seeking alternative fertilization, and one aspect of the study was the preference for AF over other options. She found that some women in the sample had infertility problems and therefore were reluctant to involve any man not invested in the pregnancy. Further, the women did not want any man with whom they had a loving but temporary relationship to feel obligated to care for the child; they wished to prevent any custody lawsuits; they did not want to have intercourse with strangers or acquaintances; they had difficulty adopting as a single person; they were cognizant of the greater stresses involved with raising children who were more readily available for adoption; carrying the pregnancy gave them greater control over the pre-natal environment; and the semen used in alternative fertilization was screened for health problems. The lack of eugenic concerns in the responses is noticeable; even though the women saw advantages in biological parenting, there is no indication that they were seeking "superior" genetic offspring.

The decision by lesbian women to use AF to conceive a child is a conscious choice and a lengthy process (Frank & Brackley, 1989; McCartney, 1985; Pies, 1989; Robinson & Pizer, 1985). Lesbian women seeking motherhood have not only given the method of conception a great deal of thought, but have contemplated the whole concept of parenthood thoroughly. Women seeking AF work very hard in planning ahead and seriously considering the many factors involved in being a parent, and these decisions "...reflected the conscious choice to pursue a strongly prized goal in life with the recognition of accountability for the

decision" (Frank & Brackley, 1989, p. 158). The women have given much consideration and "...focused attention to the personal, social, psychological, ethical, and practical considerations" involved in becoming an autonomous mother (Pies, 1989, p. 139).

Frank and Brackley (1989) summarized that the women they studied were fulfilling their dreams or goals, but also acknowledged possible future problems. Corea (1985) noted that many lesbian women face hostility and fear and they worry about what the child may experience. The women in McCartney's study (1985) had given thought to the child's environment, and to childrearing behaviors. Mothers have also planned how to tell the child of their AF conception (Frank & Brackley, 1989; McCartney, 1985).

In summary, the lesbian women in these few studies desire parenthood, they appear highly motivated and planful. They provided reasons for the methods chosen. The sample sizes in the research cited here are generally small, and the generalizability to the larger lesbian population is unclear. It would be useful to gather more information. Are most lesbian mothers this strong, this certain, this motivated? Do most lesbian women take such a long time to decide on a course of action? What is the true percentage of lesbian women who strongly desire motherhood?

Most of the research cited focused on lesbian women who are mothers or who are interested in motherhood, but there is less information available about lesbian women who do not choose motherhood. To what degree have other lesbian women given this role conscious and prolonged thought? In the current research, data were gathered regarding whether participants had thought a lot about their decisions and if they saw parenting as something that took a lot of planning. Data were also gathered on the types of methods considered for becoming a parent, and what activities had been engaged in that might lead to parenthood. In addition, the model of the intention to parent itself is an overall indicator of why lesbian

women want to parent -- the attitude items are enlightening as to the frame of reference and frame of mind of the participants.

Methods to Become a Parent

Lesbian women considering parenting must make a wide range of decisions regarding the best way to have children. To become pregnant, or to adopt?; which partner should become pregnant?; to have a known or unknown donor?; to inseminate at home or with a physician?; to use ovulation regulating drugs or not? The list goes on and on. We know very little about the proportion of women who use each method to have children. A brief overview of the potential difficulties with AF and adoption illustrate the wide range of decisions that lesbian women considering parenthood must make. There is a need to know what routes lesbian women take in order to become parents, what are the perceived difficulties of various methods, and whether these are obstacles to becoming a parent.

Some of the decisions to be made come with legal implications. The use of alternative fertilization (artificial insemination) by lesbian women to become pregnant is common for lesbian women choosing to have children. It is a situation that raises many questions; of great concern to many is the question of sperm vendors' (donors') rights, and how a legal recognition of these adversely affect a lesbian woman's ability to create a family unit that is acceptable to her. One of the difficult tasks faced by the women desiring AF is the choice of a sperm donor or vendor (Pies, 1987a). "[T]here are specific and historical reasons why lesbians choose unknown donors" (Pies, 1989, p. 147) which include protection from legal battles; the fear of losing custody; the desire to be the primary parent; not wanting to parent with a stranger; and the lack of suitable vendors.

In addition, decisions and choices would be easier if recognition of lesbian families was assured. The legal suggestions for changing alternative insemination and adoption

practices illustrates the usefulness of such recognition. Changes in legal process and clarification of legal rights, with emphasis on acknowledgement of lesbian created families, would be useful to lesbian women, lesbian families, their children, and society.

The Supreme Court has acknowledged the state interest in protecting legitimate family relationships and the family unit (See Labine v. Vincent, 1971; Weber v. Aetna Casualty & Surety Co., 1972), but it has not defined family unit nor defined the nature or boundaries of its interest in protecting the family (Reproductive technology, 1985). Polikoff (1990) asserted that the Court can "preserve the fiction" of a one-mother-one-father home, or it can recognize the reality of diversity, but it cannot make family life uniform for everyone (p. 473). Polikoff (1990) claimed that the courts need to serve the best interests of the child, which means the currently functioning family is the starting point, the context in which the child's needs are examined. She asserts that without consideration of the context, the courts will maintain inaccurate ideas about family homogeneity, which will be harmful to children where this form is different.

The situations that arise from the use of alternative fertilization by lesbian women to create families without sociological or legal fathers can become complex and frustrating for all parties if there is any conflict of understanding with a known sperm donor regarding paternal intentions or role. While it is beyond the scope of this review to go into detail about the legal arguments of such cases, it is useful to note here that several legal scholars are coming to similar conclusions about ways to prevent such legal conflicts; conclusions which focus on a recognition of "alternative" families. Central to a clear understanding and fair treatment for all parties is clarity in familial expectations for situations involving known vendors. Several commentators have endorsed the idea of a legislative provision for pre-insemination agreements to outline the intended rights and obligations of the parties (Bryant, 1990;

Donovan, 1983; Kaiser, 1988). Authors frequently suggest that contracts should be written if paternal rights are to be expected. Without a written agreement, the vendor (donor) would be understood to have waived his rights. There is no guarantee, however, that contracts would be enforced by a court. Agreements waiving paternal rights and obligations could be honored if all have freely consented. Paternal rights can be permanently waived in adoptions, and it may be possible to do this in insemination situations also.

There is a need for legislation which allows and protects the use of alternative fertilization at home instead of in a medical setting (Spallone & Steinberg, 1987). Having alternative fertilization in a medical setting does not guarantee adequate vendor screening (OTA, 1988); nor offers a clear assumption of a waiver of paternal rights (See In re R.C., minor child, 1989); nor meets a need for insuring the woman's safety (Spallone & Steinberg, 1987). Recommendations also include a legal recognition of various family structures, such as a two-mother home (McCandlish, 1987; Polikoff, 1987).

In recent years, openly lesbian women (and gay men) have had the options of adoption and foster parenting (Achtenberg, 1990). Florida and New Hampshire, however, explicitly prohibit lesbian women from adopting (Gore & Frank, 1993). In practice most states discourage adoption by lesbian women; this is unfortunate because of the clear evidence of lesbians fitness to parent and because there are inadequate numbers of qualified adoptive and foster homes for children (Achtenberg, 1990).

In states where adoption by lesbian women is allowed, it is only as a "single parent" adoption (Achtenberg, 1990). In most communities "joint adoptions" (two women are both legal parents) are not available to lesbian women (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991). There have been a few joint adoptions, all in Northern California, which were represented by the National Center for Lesbian Rights (Achtenberg, 1990). The first joint adoption of a child by a lesbian couple

was in 1986 in California and joint adoption by lesbian women is still considered "extremely rare" (Gore & Frank, 1993). As of 1989, there were only five joint adoption cases successfully completed in the United States (Achtenberg, 1990).

In recent years there have been increased efforts on the part of lesbian women to gain "second-parent adoptions." These are cases in which a nonbiological co-parent adopts the child of the lesbian mother, without a termination of the biological mother's rights. As of 1989, there were only ten second-parent adoption cases successfully completed in the United States (Achtenberg, 1990). Second-parent adoptions have been granted in Alaska, California, Minnesota, Oregon, Washington, and Washington, D.C. (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991). The courts generally do not allow second-parent adoptions for lesbians, as the court does not recognize the lesbian co-parent as related to the child by blood or marriage (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991). Gil de Lamadrid (1991) reports that the few second-parent adoptions granted are under special circumstances, and does not expect them to become widely available in the future. Further, the author only recommends pursuing this option if there is "overwhelming evidence of stability for the child" (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991, p. 28). The author defines stability as: longevity of relationship (5 to 10 years minimum); income or employment stability; adequate age of the child to verbalize the parental relationship; absence of a father; and general stability of the home.

Under most adoption statutes, second-parent adoptions are not quite the same as step-parent adoptions which are granted routinely (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991). The mother's partner cannot adopt the child without limiting the rights of the biological (or initial adoptive) mother (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991). Second-parent adoptions are considered non-agency, independent adoptions. In this situation, a state-licensed social worker is assigned to do a home study. These studies usually include visits to the home and interviews with all the family members.

The social worker completes a report, including recommendations, and judges often follow the recommendation of the social worker (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991).

In most states, in considering adoptions, the legal standard applied by the courts is the "best interest of the child." However, there is wide variability in the amount of discretion used by the judge in applying this standard. Adoptions can be denied for lesbian women on a per se basis, that is, based on the presumption that lesbians are unfit by virtue of their lesbianism (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991). While adoption statutes may appear in some states to be open to lesbian adoptions, the wording may preclude second-parent adoptions (Gil de Lamadrid, 1991).

In part three of her series of articles on lesbian parenting, Brown (1993b) talks about custody cases for previously-heterosexual lesbian women. In these court cases, "in just about any state in any year there are judgments against lesbian and gay parents based predominantly on their sexuality, but there are also judgments in their favor on the premise that sexual orientation alone is not sufficient basis for custody decisions" (Brown, 1993b, p. 20). Brown reports that according to the National Center for Lesbian Rights, the long-term trend for lesbian women involved in custody battles is positive, despite the mixed results we see now, and that the outcomes depend mostly on the individual judges and their fears. "The more people understand gay and lesbian families, the less afraid they will be of us" (Brown, 1993b, p. 21). It is likely that the gradual changes seen in the courts dealings with custody cases will also have an effect on cases for joint and second-parent adoptions.

In summary, alternative fertilization situations with known sperm donors are arenas for conflict due to the lack of recognition of lesbian families. The lack of recognition of lesbian families is even more striking in the area of adoption. The solutions offered in all these cases illuminate this issue; the solutions are focused on understanding and recognizing

lesbian couples and lesbian couples with children as real families.

In addition, the discussion of the obstacles and potential legal conflicts faced in becoming a parent illustrates that there are many difficult choices to be made for a lesbian woman to become a parent. We have very little quantitative information about the proportion of women who have tried or are willing to try various avenues for becoming pregnant or adopting. While a detailed listing of the pro's and con's of each possible method was beyond the scope of the current study, collecting information on what methods are considered and what behaviors are being engaged in are first steps in understanding the choices these women are making, and what choices they consider to be acceptable for themselves. In the current research, lesbian women who are not mothers were asked what methods of becoming a parent they have seriously considered in the past two years, and what activities they have done that could lead to parenthood in the last two years.

Parenting in a Lesbian Couple

Understanding the lesbian couple relation is important; a good foundation (including intimacy, loving, communication, and problem-solving skills) for the couple is critical to the success of the parenting relationship (Pies, 1987b). Acknowledgement that the couple relationship affects parenting, and is affected by parenting, are likely to be a considered by lesbian couples as they approach the topic of parenting.

The dynamics of a lesbian couple, however, can differ from heterosexual couples, based on two differences: the dynamics of having partners of the same gender, and the dynamics influenced by living in a homophobic culture (Mencher, 1990; Stiglitz, 1990). To say that lesbians are affected by having a female partner, and by being lesbians in our society sounds obvious. But let us examine the meaning of these differences. Recent feminist psychology has put forth ideas about healthy human development, questioning the male-

oriented frameworks which view separation and autonomy as the hallmarks of mature development. Instead there is a focus on the proposition that women grow through connection, and that development requires mutual, authentic relationships (Mencher, 1990). A scrutiny of lesbian relationships can provide a unique opportunity to examine women's psychological development.

The strength of a lesbian relationship is partly the result of the intense intimacy that two women can share. Several authors view this intense intimacy as potentially positive or negative (Mencher, 1990; Stiglitz, 1990). Fusion, merger, and enmeshment are used interchangeably to denote a common dynamic for lesbian couples (Mencher, 1990). Fusion is described as a state of psychic unity, where ego boundaries are crossed, or boundaries are unclear, and the characteristics of fusion are intense intimacy, a lack of separation, or overidentification (Mencher, 1990). Fusion is in part a bonding that serves as a united front against homophobia; it is an attempt to validate a stable bond in contrast to the lack of recognition experienced in the larger culture. Mencher (1990) suggests that, based on her interview data and contrary to the notion that fusion is limiting in terms of identity, "intense intimacy creates the trust and safety which foster self-actualization and risk-taking" (p. 4). Fusion dynamics and behaviors may not be problematic, and may be normative, growth-promoting, constructive, and an expression of relational strengths.

A thorough discussion about the dynamics of lesbian relationships, and debate as to whether these are growth-enhancing or destructive, is not necessary here. It is useful, however, to note the context in which lesbian couples exist and the unique ways in which being lesbian can affect the couple relationship, and hence, the manner in which lesbian women approach the idea of parenthood. The intimate lesbian couple relationship is like all intimate relationships: it is important. In addition, lesbian couple relationships are also imbued

with intense meaning. They may be a protection from homophobia, an affirmation of identity, and a realm of intense intimacy. Partnerships are for some lesbian women the only family they have -- if the family of origin is unaccepting of their identity.

Thus, it would be useful to know the concerns for the couple relationship vis-a-vis parenting: the perceived parenting desires of partners and the expectation of changes in the relationship or the bond brought on by parenting. Items regarding the desire to share the parenting experience with a partner and other questions related to one's partner were asked in the survey and were intended for inclusion in the attitude toward parenting scale.

Support from the Lesbian Community

A discussion of lesbian families would not be complete without an examination of the lesbian community. There is much discussion about the role of the lesbian community as an extended family, and about the importance of community support for lesbian women and for lesbian mothers. Barnhart (cited in Lockard, 1985) said the community is a partial alternative form of family unit for community members. Baran and Pannor (1989) reported that lesbians in their sample got strength from the lesbian community which appeared to be their large, extended family. Many authors refer to the lesbian community as a network of friends and lovers, "an extended-family who help each other emotionally, financially, and in other ways" (Richardson, 1981, p. 284). Slater and Mencher (1991) also viewed the lesbian community as positive, equating community with the social networks, cultural events, and the increase in lesbian women coming out publicly. "This sense of commonality with others is the unique opportunity offered by a lesbian community." (Slater & Mencher, 1991, p. 381). Pearlman (1987) discussed the "deeply human urge" to belong or feel a part of a group. Pearlman stated that the need to belong is especially important for lesbian women, and that the lesbian community provides that sense of belonging, the sense of affirmation or acceptance missing in

the larger culture, and helps to maintain lesbian identity.

Pearlman (1987) marveled at the diversity of lesbians beyond the similarity of gender and the decision to act on their preferences to relate emotionally and sexually to women. She pointed out the diversities in race, ethnicity, class, politics, education, work, living styles, role identity, coming out differences, sexual behavior, and so forth.

> What is special to lesbians (and gay men) as an oppressed group is that there is an attempt to create bonding and community without a shared historical and cultural experience (unlike other oppressed groups, blacks or Jews, for example), and in spite of enormous diversity. That both community and lesbian culture have been achieved, including a sense of lesbian history, tradition, and humor, is no small accomplishment (Pearlman, 1987, p. 316).

Lockard (1985) reviewed literature on the lesbian community, scrutinized a particular community, and formed a more specific definition of the phrase 'lesbian community'. Lockard related that the lesbian community is not the same as the lesbian population, and that it is distinguished by four features. She stated that the lesbian community is composed of (1) social networks of lesbian women, (2) their group identities, (3) shared subcultural values, and (4) an institutional base where the members can interact. Lockard proposed that the lesbian population is made up of women who identify as lesbians, and that a lesbian is anyone who claims to be.

Lockard (1985) discussed her participant observation experiences in a lesbian community in the Southwest region of the United States during a five year period. She noted the important resources provided to the community by the small number of elder lesbian women. She noted the importance of ethnicity as a factor in community participation, and reported that social networks were segregated according to racial lines. Lockard explains that

only a few Mexican-American women were active members in the mainly white lesbian community, and that rather than acting as a bridge between racial groups, they were marginalized in the Mexican-American social networks. "Cultural and language differences, and a continuing history of prejudice and discrimination have created a barrier that is not overcome by the bond of a common sexual preference." (Lockard, 1985, p. 93).

Citing data from her own study and other studies, Lockard (1985) concluded that the ethnic communities of minorities offer a family structure and ethnic identity that is important to the minority women, but this also makes it more difficult to come out as lesbians. They "risk the loss of that family and ethnic community support for the less certain support of the white lesbian community .... [therefore minorities] interact primarily with each other in their own social networks" which lack the institutional base of the white lesbian community (p. 93).

Thus, not everyone in the lesbian population is part of the lesbian community, nor comes to see members of the community as family members. Sharing "lesbian" as part of one's core identity may influence the degree to which the lesbian community is one's referent group. So, what is the role of the community for lesbian women? What does the community offer, and what are the implications for supporting lesbian women who choose to parent and those who choose not to parent?

There are tensions in the lesbian community due to the desire for "sameness", so important for keeping a common identity. But this need for sameness conflicts with the need for individual identity (Pearlman, 1987). This need for sameness has been described as "mirroring", indicating that one finds mirror images of oneself in others (Krieger, 1983). Differences can be uncomfortable in the lesbian community, and Pearlman wonders if differentness is seen as a tool to erode cohesiveness.

Lesbian mothers are being criticized by some lesbians for putting their energies and

time into mothering activities which are so closely associated with heterosexuality. Some lesbian community members do "criticize their [lesbian mothers] decision to have children as selling out to the heterosexual myth" (Brown, 1992, p. 26). Part of the concern is that lesbian mothers will not have the time and energy for political work.

Regardless of whether lesbian mothers look "different" from other lesbian women, some claim that being a lesbian parent is a very political act (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991; Brown, 1992). Pies says that "being a parent is one of the most political statements you can make"; if it wasn't so many people in the GOP would not be so upset about it (quoted in Brown, 1992, p. 25). Ainslie and Feltey reported that the women they interviewed saw motherhood as a vehicle for creating positive social change by raising politically aware children. The mothers further felt that coming out and creating a positive lesbian identity made them better mothers, and helped them to appreciate their children's uniqueness too.

Perhaps the criticisms are notable because the community is so political. Perhaps some lesbian mothers, because they are politically-minded, are aware of being invisible as parents and are not inclined to silence. Pearlman (1987) notes that members of the lesbian community have high expectations and idealized notions of what lesbian women and the community have to offer. It is not common for child-care to be provided at concerts, political meetings, and festivals in heterosexual culture, but lesbian women are expected to offer this, and to be more sensitive to issues. The expectations are different.

The lesbian community is not a perfect haven; lesbian women can still experience rejections, alienations, and conflicts in this context (Pearlman, 1987). Some lesbian mothers perceive that they have been invisible in their dual roles in the lesbian community, just as they are in the larger society, but they are beginning to find increased support in lesbian mother support groups (See Lesbian Mothers' Group, 1987). Some lesbian mothers seek out other

lesbian mothers when they feel rejected by or invisible to other lesbian women (Brown, 1992). Often this is in the form of a support or discussion group. Lesbian mothers gain a great deal from interacting and sharing with other lesbian mothers. They feel a sense of increased validation and self-confidence; they see more clearly what are lesbian mother issues versus mother issues (Lesbian Mothers' Group, 1987).

Ainslie and Feltey (1991), reviewing other studies, report that lesbian women active in lesbian feminist communities feel more autonomy, strength, self-esteem, self-acceptance, and a more positive lesbian identity, compared to more isolated lesbian women. Ainslie and Feltey reported the following themes in their study: the centrality of the lesbian community to the experience of motherhood; the significance of motherhood as political work in lesbian lives; the definition of motherhood as experience; and the expansion of the definition of motherhood by the lesbian community to include nonbiological co-parents and members of the lesbian community. Ainslie and Feltey summarize that "lesbian feminist communities play a central part in the restructuring of lesbian families" (p. 82). The community provides support and a comfortable social context. Lesbian women are more likely to have close friends than heterosexuals, which may indicate the existence of stable networks providing strength and consistency for the children (DiLapi, 1989).

One area rapidly changing in the lesbian community is the growing acknowledgment of the nonbiological co-parent as a parenting figure and an integral part of the immediate family unit of the lesbian family. The lesbian community is important in validating the co-parenting role in part because of the lack of acknowledgement of the co-parent by the larger culture (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991). Acknowledgement of the co-parent and validation of the family as a family is important for the child's well-being too (Ainslie & Feltey, 1991; Brown, 1992).

In summary, the lesbian community is in part a network of friends with a shared identity, and it can serve as a family for lesbian women. Affiliation with the lesbian community is correlated with positive integration of lesbian identity. The attitude toward lesbian motherhood in the community is mixed, and may even be in a state of transition. Lesbian women who are mothers have felt invisible in the community and in the mainstream. This is changing, however, and a critical factor in their changed experiences and perceptions is related to changing networks. Lesbian mothers who interact with lesbian women similar to themselves feel more comfortable and supported. But there is also the idea that the community in general is becoming more supportive.

Thus, there is much to yet learn about the perceptions/expectations of lesbian women regarding the support of the lesbian community and of individuals within it. In the current research, data were collected on: expected support from the lesbian community, expected support from friends, the importance of community support in parenting, the importance of friends' support in parenting, whether they had close friends who are parents or who have parenting interests, and whether they believe that most lesbians assume that lesbians do not become mothers.

Fertility Decision Research

Fertility Decision Models

There has been a cultural shift toward low fertility in recent decades (Oakley, 1986; Silka & Kiesler, 1977; West & Morgan, 1987). Overpopulation and related issues are in part causing attitudes to shift to a preference for lower fertility (Straits, 1985). There has also been much research directed at understanding fertility trends by examining individual decisions regarding fertility. Decreased fertility is attributed to the increased direct costs of children,

increased opportunities for women outside of the home, and the decreased cultural support for parenthood (Straits, 1985; West & Morgan, 1987).

Fertility decision-making research has focused on a variety of aspects of (heterosexual) fertility: voluntary sterilization (Miller, Shain, & Pasta, 1990; Miller & Shain, 1985); intent to relinquish to adoption (Tennyson, 1988); use of reproductive technologies (Johnston, Shaw, & Bird, 1987); influence of HIV (Sunderland, 1990); nonmarital childbearing (Linn, 1991; Oakley, 1985); prediction of fertility (Beach, Campbell, & Townes, 1979; Neal & Groat, 1980; Townes, Beach, Campbell, & Wood, 1980); intentional childlessness (Oakley, 1986; Silka & Kiesler, 1977); and even the decision to be a lesbian parent (Kenney & Tash, 1992; Pies, 1989). Much of the research in fertility decisions has been focused on the overall motivation or desire to have children (Beach, Townes, Campbell, & Keating, 1976; Beckman, 1987; Currie, 1988; Dunn, 1988; Oakley & Schechtman, 1980; Ory, 1978; Rabin, 1965; Straits, 1985; Townes, Campbell, Beach, & Martin, 1976; Voss, Knaub, & Eversoll, 1984; and Wood, Campbell, Townes, & Beach, 1977).

The factors examined in understanding influences on fertility decisions are varied. The factors examined have been at multiple levels: cultural, structural, familial, and individual. More specifically, the factors include: norms and sanctions; cultural support for having children; ideal family size; direct costs and indirect costs of children; value of children; socio-demographic variables; family of origin variables; changes in relationships or dynamics; impact on careers; and competition with extra-familial roles.

There are several models used in fertility research to understand or analyze individual fertility decisions. Decision models in reproductive decisions evolved from more general decision models. Decision models have focused on various aspects of decision-making, including a concern with the conditions under which decisions are made, and the quality of the

decision-making process (Janis & Mann, 1977). Most fertility models follow frameworks using a cognitive, rational, orderly progression of assessments.

Oakley (1985) studied premarital childbearing decision-making, looking at when the sample made childbearing decisions, the degree of discussion with one's partner about childbearing, and the amount of change over time (retrospectively) in the childbearing decisions. Oakley suggested that it is likely that different decision models are valid, but each model would apply to different subsets of the population. For example, she suggests that there are one-time single-decisions, sequential decisions, and tentative decisions strategies. Oakley suggested that single-decisions may apply for those who intend to have no children.

Dunn (1988) similarly suggested that there is not one decision-making model that fits all persons. In Dunn's (1988) analysis of very young mothers' decisions regarding a second child, she looked at the decision-making from several perspectives. Dunn (1988) examined ecological interrelationships and socio-cultural influences, including social, political, economic, household and individual resources and needs. From her findings, Dunn conceptualized several fertility "styles" of the young mothers.

In fertility decision studies, a commonly used model is the normative model (see Fried & Udry, 1980; Ory, 1978). According to this theory fertility decisions depend heavily on childbearing norms, reinforcing social sanctions, and influences of social-structural factors on the incorporation of norms. Factors relating to the constructs of the normative model include: ideal family size, age when decisions to parent are made, passive versus active decisions, and social sanctions and attitudes.

Another approach to understanding fertility decisions is the structural model, which looks at outcomes based on socio-demographic factors and psychosocial attitudes (see Currie, 1988; Ory, 1978; West & Morgan, 1987). Factors considered important according to the

constructs of the structural model include: family order or position, childcare responsibilities experienced in childhood, work histories, contraceptive availability, overpopulation, familial roles and extra-familial roles, religion, and sex roles.

Many studies utilize a subjective expected utility model (SEU) as a framework to understand the factors involved in fertility decisions. The factors of the SEU model commonly examined in fertility research include: the affective value and expectation of an occurrence, the normative beliefs and the motivation to comply with these, and the confounding variable of social desirability (see Fishbein, 1972; Townes et al, 1980). The SEU is derived from the social exchange theory model, but adds another factor -- the intention to act (see Fishbein, 1972).

Theory of Reasoned Action

Fishbein (1979) questioned the use of so many different models to explain behavior in different content domains. He urged psychologists to develop general and comprehensive theories of behavior. In short, he suggested that a limited number of constructs within a theoretical network could be used to predict and explain various behaviors. Fishbein and his colleagues called their efforts to create such a comprehensive theory the "theory of reasoned action" (TORA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein, 1979). This is based an the assumption that people are rational, with the capacity to process information. While information is not assumed to be complete, nor the processing perfect, data is assumed to be used in a reasonable way to arrive at a behavioral decision.

The utility and comprehensiveness of the TORA is illustrated by its use in investigating a variety of research topics. The TORA has been successfully used as a framework to investigate attitudes toward contraceptive use (Chan & Fishbein, 1993; Jaccard, Hand, Ku, Richardson, & Abella, 1981; Jaccard, Helbig, Wan, Gutman, & Kritz-Silverstein,

1990; and McCarty, 1981), attitudes toward a Park Service Policy (Bright, Manfredo, Fishbein, & Bath, 1993), intentions regarding safe sex practices (Fishbein et al., 1992; Fishbein et al., 1993), and prediction of intention to parent (Davidson & Jaccard, 1976; Fishbein, 1972; Jaccard & Davidson, 1975; Loken & Fishbein, 1980).

The theory of reasoned action maintains that behavior is determined by beliefs, outcome evaluations, and motivation to comply with perceived norms. The main questions put forth by the theory of reasoned action concern (1) what are the determinants of intentions, and (2) to what degree do intentions predict behavior. According to the TORA framework, intentions are based on the (1) attitude toward the behavior and (2) subjective norms (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein, 1972; Fishbein, 1979; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). More specifically, the attitude component is the attitude toward *performing* the behavior. Attitude is assumed to be made up of (a) beliefs about the outcomes of a behavior and (b) an evaluation of these outcomes. Subjective norms are (a) beliefs of what others expect one to do, or say one should do, and (b) the desire to comply with what others think. In other words, the theory of reasoned action says you do something when you think it will turn out well and think that others want you to do it. These are the driving forces behind intentions. As to the second aspect of the theory of reasoned action, evidence suggests that when appropriate means of intention are obtained, they are highly predictive of overt behavior (Davidson & Jaccard, 1976; Fishbein, 1979; Loken & Fishbein, 1980; Townes et al, 1989).

This theory of reasoned action suggests a rather parsimonious model of behavior. Fishbein (1979) says that once one has a good measure of attitudes, prediction of intention is not much improved by measuring other attitudes, personality variables, or demographic variables. These external variables do not describe why a person engages or does not engage in any given behavior, in and of themselves. They cannot be used to <u>directly</u> predict behavior.

These external variables, however, could be explored as factors that contribute to differences in people's beliefs, outcome evaluations, and motivations to comply, ie., they may determine intentions. Thus, Fishbein proposed that the theory of reasoned action provides a framework in which to appropriately study external variables.

In the current research, the theory of reasoned action (TORA) was used as a framework in which to understand and predict lesbian women's fertility decisions. Lesbian women are a unique subgroup in many ways. Given the assumptions of non-motherhood, and other lesbian-specific issues, the use of the TORA was expected to be most helpful in understanding lesbian women's decisions in a general and comprehensive manner. It was not anticipated that all lesbian women would make the same choices, but that differences in choices could be predicted by the direction of attitudes, norms, and intentions.

One of the tasks in the current study was to ascertain how to measure the attitudes of lesbian women. For this task we explored the meaning of parenthood -- the pros, the cons, as well as the issues that may be more lesbian-specific. Some of the factors found to be illuminating in previous research were used to create the attitude scale. Thus, the attitude component of this research was based on factors considered relevant to fertility decisions.

The items used in this research to represent attitude were assumed to be caused by beliefs about the consequences of actions and the evaluation of these outcomes. No effort was made to measure the beliefs about outcome and evaluations more specifically and directly, as was done by others (See Loken & Fishbein, 1980). Such an endeavor was outside the goals of the current research.

Recall that in addition to the attitude component, subjective norms are a component of the intention construct, according to TORA. Efforts were not made to ascertain the perception of a general norm of lesbian parenting by directly asking if specific, important referents (eg.,

person x or person y), believed the respondent should or should not become a parent. Instead, respondents were asked if they thought that specific people in their lives would be supportive if the participants chose to become parents. We did not directly ask if they were motivated to comply with other peoples opinions, but asked them how important it was to have the support of others. In addition, respondents were asked if they thought that most people assumed that lesbians did not become mothers, if they thought that most lesbians assumed lesbians do not become mothers. Thus, expected support from others was one of the subjective norm variables hypothesized to predict intentions to parent.

The use of the TORA has been successful in examining and predicting intentions to parent in several studies (Davidson & Jaccard, 1976; Fishbein, 1972; Jaccard & Davidson, 1975; Loken & Fishbein, 1980). In each of these studies, the two components -- attitudinal beliefs and normative -- adequately predicted childbearing intentions. In addition, in both Loken and Fishbein's study and in Jaccard and Davidson's study, the attitudinal components were more important determinants of intentions to have a child than were normative considerations. Furthermore, the TORA model proved to be comprehensive -- external variables (eg., SES in Jaccard & Davidson, or work variables in Loken & Fishbein) had an effect on intentions only indirectly -- to the extent that the external variables affected the attitude toward having a child and subjective norms. Knowledge of the external variables did not improve the prediction of intention beyond that accounted for by attitudes and norms.

In the next section, decision factors in empirical research in considering parenthood are discussed in greater detail. Specific information about the methodologies and samples of the studies that are cited will be given as each work is introduced. Here is some general information about the studies overall. Research in the area of fertility or childbearing decision-making is usually based on theoretical models of reproductive decision-making. The research

frequently is focused on norms, sanctions, structural (ie., practical, material) conditions, attitudes, behaviors (eg. birth control usage), and intentions.

Most of the research described here is quantitative, and is collected via mailed surveys, questionnaires, or structured or semi-structured interviews. About half of the target groups are heterosexual, married couples, and half are heterosexual individuals. About two-thirds of the studies collecting data from individuals collected data from women.

Some of the research projects' samples are randomly drawn, some are self-selected, and those that deal with intentional childlessness generally recruit respondents. About one-quarter of the samples are drawn from university or community college populations. The samples are generally drawn from urban areas, and at least half are demographically representative of their area. Most of the samples are predominantly caucasian, middle to upper income levels. Sample sizes range from 14 to 76 for the 3 ethnographic and exploratory studies cited here. Of the other studies, sample sizes range from 102 to over 1,000 individuals. Two of these are longitudinal studies.

Norms

Normative Number of Children

In Ory's (1978) work, she operated from the framework that the documented preference for 2-4 child families reflects several interacting norms and sanctions that act to regulate the number of children. The goal of her research was to evaluate the usefulness of both normative and structural explanations of fertility decisions. Ory worked from the unusual perspective of understanding voluntary childlessness. The sample consisted of 84 purposive parents (P) and purposive nonparent (NP) couples. Data were collected using semi-structured questionnaires, plus in-depth interviews with 10 couples. In evaluating the normative aspects of fertility decisions, Ory found that over 94% of respondents perceived a general family size

preference in the United States of 2-3 children.

Ory (1978) also measured the respondents' desired number of children at 9 life stages of the respondents' lives, retrospectively. She found that all respondents had internalized a desire for children at an early age. Respondents who became parents had desired a larger number of children at each life stage in comparison to the respondents who became NP. The Ps' desires were all within the 2-4 child range at each life stage. Ory found that the NP men and the P men did not differ in their desires at the life stages; the female P and female NP differed in their desires starting in childhood. In Ory's study, about 40% of men and 25% of women reported that they did not have a desired number of children or did not remember having a desired number of children when they were children themselves. Ory notes this as evidence of the saliency of parenting for women as compared to men.

In factoring the respondents' current ages, the older NP and P looked the same in their desires at earlier life stages. The younger NP and P look different at the life stage "before marriage". Ory interpreted this as an indication that the older NP were deciding to be childless via postponement, whereas the younger NP were more likely to get married with a mutual decision to have no children.

West and Morgan (1987) conducted a public opinion survey, via phone interviewing, using a random sample. The sample consisted of 438 adults and was demographically representative of the East coast metropolitan area in which the calls were made. The purpose of the survey was to examine the existence of a normative threshold for family size. West and Morgan had several research questions that they were examining: what is the ideal number of children per family; what is the amount of consensus on an ideal number of children among varying social groups; reasons for the decrease in ideal number of children (compared to two decades before); and subgroup differences in the importance of reasons for the decrease.

West and Morgan (1987) found that the ideal number of children was 2.24. It is unclear from the publication of the findings whether the ideal is supposed to represent the respondents' personal ideals, or the respondents' perceptions of a generalized normative ideal. There were no significant differences in the ideal number of children data by demographic groupings based on age, sex, education, or one- versus two- income families. There were some statistically significant differences in perception of the ideal number of children between groups in current family size, marital status, religion, and race. A minimum of two-thirds of respondents in all demographic groups (current family size, marital status, religion, and race), however, still reported 2 to 3 as an ideal range of number of children for a family.

Normative Pressures and Reference Group

There were several studies that examined the relationship between normative pressures and fertility planning. Fried and Udry (1980) found evidence that expected and experienced normative pressures are related to parity. The authors explored a very specific meaning of norm: a group is said to have a norm about a particular behavior if the members of the group approve or disapprove of the behavior and reward or punish persons based on their behavior. Norms per se do not control behavior; there are other conditions which must exist in order for norms to have an effect. First, people belonging to a group must perceive the existence and strength of the norm. Secondly, the group members must find the rewards and punishments associated with the norms salient.

Fried and Udry (1980) asked respondents if they had experienced encouragement or discouragement about having children. Over half of respondents at various parity levels, sexes, and races, reported receiving encouragement (which range from 52% of Black men to 72% of Black women). However, there was also a finding that a surprising number of parity zero respondents received discouragement from having a child.

Fried and Udry (1980) asked respondents if they expected persons in their social circle to be more approving or more critical if they should become pregnant soon. Most respondents did not expect a response. Of those expecting a response, people at lower parities anticipated positive reactions from people in their lives. Expectations of disapproval was almost absent in the lower parity, but increased with parity. At the higher parities (2+) fewer respondents expected any response from others, either positive or negative. The authors concluded that the positive normative expectations (and the absence of negative expectations) at lower parities would lead to a positive influence on fertility.

Fried and Udry (1980) asked respondents if they thought that others' opinions would influence their decisions to have a (another) child. The majority of respondents in all groups (results were analyzed grouping men and women, Black and white), said they would not be influenced at all. At higher parity, people were more likely to say they would not be influenced at all. Fried and Udry suggested that persons at parity two or more would feel no pressure or influence. An alternate interpretation of this finding is that persons at parity two or more have already attained the parity norm, so that further pressure is not likely to occur.

Silka and Kiesler (1977) had the unusual goal of gathering information on intentionally childless couples. They had a self-selected sample of heterosexual married couples responding to advertisements. They collected data via questionnaires and interviews from couples intending to have no children; couples delaying childbearing; and couples not yet mutually decided on having children. The respondents in the sample were representative of the population from which they were drawn. In Silka and Kiesler's (1977) study, 75% of those who intended to remain childless were advised/encouraged by others to have children; other groups (those unsure of intentions and those intending to have children later) experienced this encouragement less.

Ory (1978) measured social sanctions by the: degree and type of stereotyping of couples with nonnormative family sizes; expected societal reactions to chosen family size; and perceptions of social pressures to conform to normative family size. Of the nonparents (NP), 83% expected unfavorable reactions to their choices from others, and more than two-thirds of NP felt pressure to conform to having children. NP and parents (P) both perceived a negative cultural attitude toward childlessness. Both NP and P assumed that NP were seen as selfish, but they differed on the other reasons for the negative attitudes toward NP. The nonparents assumed that NP were perceived as troubled or immature, whereas the parents assumed NP were perceived as missing out or having incompatible activities.

Ory (1978) concluded from nonparents' comments that reference group support appeared to be an influential factor in the decision to have no children. "Many nonparent couples indicate that they countered pronatalistic pressures by minimizing social contacts with parents and friends, seeking new friends among the childfree, or joining organizations... that provided support and acceptance for the decision to remain childless." (Ory, 1978, p. 538). Ory concluded that the nonparents in her study redefined the social meaning of parenthood, and that they actively sought a referent group that valued nonparenthood.

Ory (1978) stated that research is needed to identify and refine both normative and structural components of fertility decisions. Further, she remarked on the importance of "social psychological factors mediating the impact of the normative" influences: (1) the respondents definition of the situation, and (2) selective referent group participation (p. 538). But NP choices of association and redefinition of the social meanings of parenting indicates that NP "attitudes and behaviors are not anormative but may be motivated by adherence to variant subcultural norms." (Ory, 1978, p. 538)

In summary, it is firmly established that 2 to 3 is the normative number of children in

the United States at the current time for heterosexual married couples. High parity couples report that they do not feel influenced by others' opinions; they receive no normative consensus about having additional children. Low parity couples report feeling pressured to have children, but did not feel they were influenced by such pressures. Non-parents say they feel pressured from others to have children, and report seeking out a different message from a different referent group -- associating with people who will affirm their decisions to remain childless.

It is expected that lesbian women will be subjected to conflicting messages about normative fertility behavior. Lesbians, as women, are exposed to the normative expectation of 2-3 children all their lives. As lesbian women, however, they have also experienced the normative assumption that lesbians don't exist, and if they do, they are non-mothers. "Since norms pertain not only to specific events but also to specific social positions, subgroups in the population may differ in their perceptions." (West & Morgan, 1987, p. 162).

There are no data at present that tell us how many children are desired by lesbian women who intend to have children or who have children. This kind of data, combined with data about expectations of support for parenting, would be a start to learning if there is a normative number of children for lesbian women, or if the traditional norm of zero is beginning to change for lesbian women. We do not have quantitative data regarding lesbian women's expectations for support of parenting choices. This could provide information about the normative expectations of various people in the respondents' lives, and the degree to which lesbian women are receiving mixed messages from different reference groups. In the current research, data were collected regarding whether participants have lesbian friends with an interest in parenting, what support was expected from various types of people and from the lesbian community, and the number of children desired.

Conscious Decision-Making Regarding Parenthood

Much of the early research in the area of fertility did not examine fertility so much as an area of choice, but as a range of decisions within an assumption of parenting; looking at the timing, the number of children, and so forth. It has only been in more recent decades that research has focused on whether fertility "decisions" are actually active, conscious, chosen decisions. People who are intentionally childless are a great resource for examining these distinctions.

Recall that in Ory's (1978) study, she measured the decision to have children at nine life stages. She found that Non-parents decide later in life, and are more likely to make post-marital decisions, as compared to Parents. Looking at all the life stages combined, 92.5% of NP had made active decisions regarding parenting, whereas 62.9% of P had made active decisions regarding parenting. Silka and Kiesler (1977) found that the couples who intended to have no children had thought about whether to have children for the longest period of time (5 years), and had discussed their decisions earliest (about 3 years), but had not discussed their decision more frequently than the other groups. Furthermore, intentionally childless couples are committed to their decision, feel happy about it, do not feel they need children for fulfillment, and do not expect to change their minds (Silka & Kiesler, 1977). In Ory's (1978) study, the NP group was more likely to define childlessness in positive terms.

Couples who intended to have children did not consciously decide to have children by way of considering and weighing options; they did not discuss or consider their intentions very much. Some said they had "always" intended to have children. These data imply that research on family decision-making "... may have over-emphasized the search for deliberation and choice to the neglect of other factors" influencing actions (Silka & Kiesler, 1977, p. 24).

Oakley (1985) pulled 202 ever-married subjects as a subsample from a larger study

(larger study reported in Oakley, 1986) and measured the extent of premarital decision-making. Oakley used a discriminant analysis to identify characteristics associated with making decisions about children, and grouped respondents into the following groups:

> Deciders (35% of sample, decided to have no children or decided on the number of children before marriage); Semi-deciders (28% of sample, decided to have children, but not the number of children); Talkers (23% of sample, had talked about children, but had not decided before marriage); Not talkers (14% of sample, were not decided and had not talked before marriage).

Oakley (1985) found that deciding on the number of children before marriage was associated with characteristics of the rational-comprehensive thinker, but also with non-normative childbearing expectations (whether below or above the 2-child norm). A majority (76%) of the Not Talkers expected to have 2 children. Oakley stated that fertility decisions are salient and therefore should lead to forethought, and yet for some people, childbearing is not even a factor in mate selection. Talkers (talked about, but not decided about children) described why they had not decided about the number of children before marriage: 7% disagreed with their partners; 58% said it was not important; and 35% cited other reasons such as feelings of ambivalence or lack of salience.

Oakley (1985) concluded that the Not Talkers accepted the fertility norm and acted upon it. Further, theories of the decision-making process (eg. Brim et al., 1962, and Janis & Mann, 1977) "are not very helpful for analyzing issues that never get onto the agenda. The findings of this study suggest that, for fertility, normative preferences - rather than high fertility values per se - may play a part for those who do not even talk about childbearing before marriage" (p. 563). Oakley says that theories and research on decision-making need to be expanded to include people who are not choosing between alternatives. In short, normative

strictures may indeed influence fertility behaviors, but may not necessarily be very helpful in explaining conscious decision-making.

In another article, Oakley (1986) noted that previous research in related topics (abortion, vasectomy) indicated that conscious consideration of alternatives may not be experienced by everyone. Part of Oakley's hypothesis was that people who specifically considered low-fertility options would be different in demographic, attitudinal, and other processing characteristics. Research on other decision-making areas (ie. not fertility decisions) suggested that people who recognize options are "more educated and less traditional.... these traits are associated with different values and decision processing characteristics" (Oakley, 1986, p. 251).

As noted earlier, evidence suggested that lesbian women tend to make very conscious decisions about becoming parents, and take a long time to think through the issue. Lesbian women who have children after they "come out" as lesbians are purposive, intentional parents; it is unlikely in the extreme that they would become accidental parents. However, it cannot be assumed that lesbian women have not unconsciously accepted the norm of 2 - 3 children. That they must purposely take steps to become parents is not proof that they have made conscious decisions to have children; they could be assumers who are taking steps to act on their assumptions. In the current research, participants were asked if they have thought a lot about whether to become a parent or not, and if they agree that there is a lot to think about and plan for before having children, and whether they have talked with others about parenting.

Structural Factors: Demographic, Material, and Attitudinal

In some fertility research endeavors, material, demographic, and attitudinal factors have been examined to illuminate the differences between parents and intentional nonparents, and their reasons for their choices. These structural factors (ie. material, demographic,

psychosocial attitudes) have been found to be useful in understanding the decision to become a parent or not. We will briefly look at some findings of research projects. Notice how there is no clear pattern that the variables in these studies, or any subgroup of these variables, can predict behavior. But they could be useful in determining the attitudes toward becoming parents, from which intentions to parent could be predicted.

The respondents in Silka and Kiesler's (1977) study provided information on reasons to have and to not have children. Those who intended to have no children and the unsure group were more likely to check every reason on their given lists for not having children than those who intended to have children. The main reasons given for not having children by the group intending to be childless were:

> time with spouse (100%); opportunities and freedom (90%); wife's job or career (81%); avoid responsibility (71%); leisure or travel (62%); worry/social problems (52%); economic (48%); manage work load (43%); dislike children or not sure good parent (29%). Less than 50% of the intend children group gave any of these reasons.

The reasons given for having children were the same for all groups. Reviewing the data on reasons to have and not have children, Silka and Kiesler (1977) concluded that there is "no evidence that the intentionally childless thought in qualitatively different ways about having and not having children than others" (p. 20).

To recap, people who intend to have no children do provide reasons for wanting children, which are similar to those given by people who desire children. People who desire children provided reasons for not wanting children which are the same, but fewer in number, than those provided by intentionally childless persons. This suggests that the reasons for not having children are more salient, or more definitive reasons, for people who are intentionally childless as compared to reasons for having children. The number one reason given relates to

the partnership, however, most of other reasons are structural.

West and Morgan (1987) looked at the reasons for the decrease in the ideal family size over recent decades. The respondents indicated the following reasons for the decrease in family size as "very or somewhat important":

> economic costs (91.5%); wives busy working outside the home (85.4%); better birth control (89.2%); too worried about the future (67.4%); and less interest in children (40.9%).

Thus, the majority of respondents supported structural conditions (though not exclusively, notice the "less interest in children") as reasons for changes in ideal family size. These findings are "consistent with macroeconomic theories of fertility and leaves open the possibility that changes in structural components might result in changes in individual level decisions" (p.170). Van Dusen and Sheldon (cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977) also attributed the decrease in childbearing in recent decades to structural reasons such as: later marriages; fewer marriages; more divorce; increased labor force participation by women; and more educated women.

Few studies give comparisons between people who are intentionally childless, those who are postponing childbearing, and those who are undecided (Silka & Kiesler, 1977). Research on intentional childlessness completed in the 1960s and before is limited in its usefulness because "childlessness was rare and deviant" (Silka & Kiesler, 1977, p. 16). Comparing the nonparents (NP) and parents (P) in her sample, Ory (1978) found that NP and P differ on their family position. First borns are overrepresented in both the NP and P, there were more only children in the NP group (25.9% vs. 62.9%), and fewer last borns in the NP group (5.6% compared to 21.1%). The NP and P groups also differed in experiencing childcare responsibilities when they were children; 62.9% of P and 24.1% of NP had no

experience at all in childcare duties (Ory, 1978).

In terms of other structural items, Ory (1978) found that NP were more likely to be nonreligious. Other studies have not found any relationship between religiosity and parenting intentions or parenting status (Beckman, cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977; Silka & Kiesler, 1977). Silka and Kiesler (1977) found no differences in the various intentions groups in: selfishness; maturity; interest in humankind and community; community activities; investment in political and social causes; hobbies; nor materialism. Silka and Kiesler (1977) found no differences in the various intentions groups' backgrounds in terms of coming from "broken homes".

Nonparent women were more likely to work outside of the home than women who were parents in Ory's (1978) study. Susan Bram, (cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977) did not find that employment differentiated between couples intentionally childless, couples intending children, and couples with children. In Silka & Kiesler (1977) there were no differences in education, amount of employment, intentions for further education, education or career aspirations, intentions to work, desire for a fulfilling job, but the intentionally childless group had higher job prestige ratings. The intentionally childless women were more likely to be professionals and to hold traditionally-male jobs. Silka and Kiesler concluded that the intentionally childless group had higher levels of rewards and success in their employment.

Silka and Kiesler (1977) found no differences in the intentions groups responses to their Interpersonal Check List in: happiness; satisfaction with life; satisfaction with partner; happiness of childhood; self-esteem; agreement with partner on values; and attitudes and interests. There were no sex role differences found between nonparents and parents in Ory's (1978) study.

Silka and Kiesler (1977) found only one main area in which groups differed. The

intentionally childless and the unsure groups both differed from the intending children group in having: less interest in interaction with people; greater independence; preference for being alone; and in behavior that reflected these attitudes to some degree -- they lived farther from their parents and engaged in more solitary pursuits.

There are studies that found few relationships between certain attitudinal variables and parenting intentions / parenting status. Studies have found no relation between desired number of children (or current parental status) and nontraditional attitudes (Beckman, cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977; Eagly & Anderson, cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977); approval of women's liberation (Beckman, cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977; Eagly & Anderson, cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977); or sex role equity (Eagly & Anderson, cited in Silka & Kiesler (1977).

Susan Bram, (cited in Silka & Kiesler, 1977) however, did find in her dissertation research, differences in attitudes and life style among couples intending no children, couples intending children, and couples with children. The not intending groups had more egalitarian marriages and more shared activities. The groups in Bram's study were not different in background, social pressure, and attitudes about children.

Thus, the ideal number of children is conceptualized as a norm brought about by social pressures and expectations. The decline in the ideal number of children, however, in the last few decades has been attributed to structural reasons. Ory (1978) concluded that the normative model is best for explaining general childbearing expectations, but the structural model is best for explaining specific fertility outcomes within a normatively prescribed range (eg. cost of additional child; concern for overpopulation; ability to balance work and home). Thus, it is possible that structural factors may be especially useful in understanding the ceiling on fertility choices after the first child more than the whether to parent or not choices.

In summary, the evidence that demographic and attitudinal factors relate to parenting

decisions, or distinguish between groups with different intentions to parent is mixed. For the most part, demographic and attitudinal variables are not definitive in distinguishing between groups of parents and nonparents or those intending parenthood and not intending parenthood. This lack of congruence is expected according to the theory of reasoned action. None of these external structural variables are expected to directly predict intentions or behavior leading to parenthood. They can be useful, however, indirectly -- to the degree that they influence beliefs about outcomes of behaviors and the evaluation of those outcomes as positive or negative. Thus, they may be of some use in influencing attitudes, and analysis of such relationships could be pursued in future research.

Given how little we know of lesbian women's decision making, however, the inclusion of a limited number of demographic and attitudinal variables could be useful. Of all the possible demographic, material, and attitudinal variables, ones that are more directly related to the daily care of children and changes in life created by parenthood would be more illuminating than variables related to general life attitudes and personality. In the current research, we asked demographic and background questions such as participant's ages, number of siblings, experience with childcare, and questions about one's partner.

Summary

As the literature review reveals, there are many unknowns about lesbian parenting, and about what factors are important for lesbian women who are considering parenthood. There is almost no quantitative literature about how many lesbian women become mothers after coming out as lesbians, nor how many lesbian women seriously consider parenthood. There is no quantitative data on the factors weighed by lesbian women considering motherhood, or the difficulties that may be encountered in making decisions. However, there

are sources of information about lesbian women in general, lesbian parenting, lesbian relationships, and fertility decision-making for heterosexual people. Pulling information from these empirical, theoretical, and narrative sources provided ideas about factors that may be important for lesbian women as they contemplate parenting. The theoretical constructs that were included in the model are summarized below. Lesbian decision-making appears complex, yet the TORA brings together a limited number of components together in a comprehensive fashion. The TORA model is proposed as a comprehensive model to understand decision-making. It sheds light on the seemingly complex and mixed results in fertility research. In TORA, decisions are based on attitudes and norms which determine intention. Behavior can be predicted from intention, provided that intention is adequately measured.

Components of the Decision Model

To summarize, based on the TORA model, attitude, norms, intention, and behavior were selected as the components of the decision model. In terms of the attitude scale, the literature provided many ideas about possible components of this attitude. For example, as discussed, there has long been a conceptualization of lesbians and mothers as mutually exclusive roles. In contrast, research on fertility decision-making for fertile heterosexual couples often begins from a point which assumes parenthood as a role for these people, and then looks for a range of behavior within this assumption. Because of these concepts, identity as mother and nurturance were included as components of attitude. Nurturance has long been assumed to be one of the main satisfactions that draws people to become parents, but in fact, nurturance may or may not be linked with identity as a mother. Therefore, items concerning nurturance, and identity as mother, were included as part of the attitude toward parenting scale in the model.

Structural concerns -- those dealing with material conditions and demographics -- were

considered as factors in fertility decisions in previous research, with mixed results. While these kinds of factors were not very revealing in predicting behavior, Fishbein (1979) suggested they may be useful in understanding attitudes. Moreover, material conditions were considered salient reasons in choosing not to parent. Therefore, items concerning material issues -- time, money, responsibility, health care insurance -- were included as possible aspects of the attitude toward parenting scale.

Part of the feedback from the social environment is about the perception of the family *as a real family* created by a lesbian couple or lesbians with children. Moreover, the relationship with a partner is one of those most intimately affected by the choice to parent, and it is an important relationship. Therefore in the current research, items relating to children as a completion of the family, and sharing this experience with a partner were included as part of the attitude toward parenting scale.

The literature on norms suggests that feedback from people in the social network is important as a message of normative expectations. It appears that the social acceptance and encouragement of lesbian parenting is at a point of transition. Therefore, this research included a set of items to measure the degree of expected support from others (including heterosexual and homosexual friends, family members, and the lesbian community) for a decision to become a parent, as well as items measuring the importance of support family, friends, partners, and the lesbian community.

According to TORA, intention is expected to be the mediating step between attitude and behavior, and between norms and behavior; and neither attitude nor norms are expected to directly predict behavior. Intention is expected to predict behavior provided that it is measured well.

In summary, the attitude toward parenting scale included the concepts of mother

identity, material factors, nurturance, and creating a family. The intention construct was based on the degree to which one desired to parent and intended to parent. The behavior construct was based on the number of activities engaged in which could lead to parenthood. The proposed model examined attitudes, norms (via support), intentions, and behaviors, and attempted to predict behaviors from intentions, and to predict intentions from attitudes and norms.

Justification for the Research

It is important to learn more about lesbian women's decisions to parent because of the impact of cultural beliefs regarding parenthood and lesbian parenting upon individual level decisions. Parenthood is so universal, the research on motivation includes research that asks whether this is a conscious decision. Further, there is a long-standing assumption that lesbian women are childless persons. Homophobia is revealed in questions such as 'what right do you have to parent' and in the numerous myths regarding the fitness of lesbian parents. All of these cultural beliefs may influence individual level choices regarding reproduction.

The need to examine lesbian women's decisions to parent is also revealed by the fact of limited data on lesbian families and parents. There is a lack of data or need for further research on: lesbian desire and motivation to parent; decision factors in becoming a lesbian parent; lesbian decision making processes; the relationships between lesbian identity and identity as a parent/perceptions of parenting as an option; and the weighing of identity factors, support factors, nurturance factors, and material factors as decision factors in becoming a lesbian parent. Moreover, according to lesbian women, there is need for research. Lesbian mothers see research on lesbian mothers as desirable, but would be wary and scrutinize the researcher before participating in research (Corea, 1985).

Research Questions

Demographics and Affiliation with the Lesbian Community

1. What were the demographic characteristics of the sample? This included basic information such as race, age, and education. It also included parental status, relationship, living arrangement, and so forth.

2. What were the lesbian characteristics of the sample? This included the degree of lesbian identity, degree of disclosure of one's lesbian identity to various people, and degree of attendance at various types of lesbian/gay events.

Desire and Decision to Parent

3. What were the desires / intentions in regards to parenthood? How many children were desired?

4. What behaviors were engaged in that would lead to parenthood? What methods of achieving parenthood were being considering or tried?

Scale Development

5. Did the survey items that theoretically fit into anticipated scales (eg., nurturant, material, mother identity, and created family items as part of the attitude scale, and expected support as the norm scale) also fit according to statistical analyses? What items made up the scale and which did not belong in any scale?

Model Development

6. Did the anticipated model best predict the intention to parent?

   a. What were the relationships between the independent variables (those predicting intention to parent, and those predicting behaviors related to parenting)?

   b. Did the attitudes toward parenting scale predict the intent to parent?

c. Did the norm variable (expected support) predict the intent to parent?

d. Did the intention to parent predict the behaviors leading to parenthood?

METHODOLOGY

Setting

The setting for this research was the lower peninsula of the state of Michigan. The information came from a survey that was distributed via: a mailing to lesbian women by a lesbian organization that publishes a worldwide monthly newsletter, surveys given to lesbian women at lesbian events and lesbian establishments in the state of Michigan, individuals in communities who volunteered to distribute them, and placement in lesbian or lesbian/gay bookstores. The surveys were distributed from May to June, 1995.

Procedure

Sampling

Participants in the survey were drawn from mailings of the survey instrument, through bookstores, through individual distribution, and through in-person distribution of the survey instrument at lesbian establishments or events. The purpose of this approach was to include a wide variety of participants, and include women who may not have been on mailing lists. A snowball sampling procedure was used to gather participants. The difficultly of sampling groups that are difficult to contact, or who are subjectively defined by the individuals themselves, can be minimized by the use of snowball sampling, in which informants are able to introduce researchers to other members of the group (Burgess, 1982; Bybee, 1990).

Several organizations in Michigan were initially approached with a request to help in the research, and they were chosen based on three criteria. First, the organizations were lesbian or lesbian/gay organizations. Second, organizations were from various cities, representing different geographic areas. Third, the organizations had mailing lists of over 100 people, or were the largest or most nonspecialized of the lesbian newsletters in that area. The

organizations approached operate for the benefit of the lesbian or homosexual population. Their primary purposes were social, educational, support, and/or political. The contact persons in these organizations proved to be very helpful. They provided ideas about ways to distribute surveys, connected the principal investigator to other contacts, and allowed the principal investigator access to events being produced in order to distribute and collect surveys. See the appendix for an example of an initial contact letter from the principal investigator to an organization.

The surveys were marked with color codes on the side (binding area) of the survey to determine where the survey was distributed from, so that the return rates the various distribution points could be estimated. There were a total of 14 distribution points, which were aggregated into 5 distribution points for descriptive purposes. The success of the 14 distribution strategies ranged from a low of 10% (a bookstore), to a high of 55.5% (an event). The return rates for the 5 aggregated distribution strategies were as follows: 46.7% from the Lesbian Connection mailing; 30.8% from bookstores, 51% from distribution at events by the principle investigator, 36% from a lesbian mother's support group mailing, and 50.8% from in-person distribution by the principal investigator and other people. A total of 638 surveys were distributed, of which 299 were returned, for an overall return rate of 46.9%. Eight of the surveys returned were unusable because they were filled out by non-Michigan residents, they were filled out by more than one person, or they were returned after data entry was completed.

The sample consisted of surveys returned from the various distribution points: 10.4% from surveys individually distributed by the principal investigator, 3% from the lesbian mother's support group, 3.8% from bookstores, 57.4% from the LC mailing, 24.7% from in-person distribution at lesbian events, and 0.3% from an unknown source (a photocopy of the

survey was returned).

Data Collection

As noted previously, the surveys were mainly distributed in two ways -- via a mailing and through in-person distribution at social events. Surveys were also placed in bookstores and distributed to acquaintances by the PI and assistants in Saginaw and Kalamazoo. In-person, surveys were distributed at a lesbian social party, concerts, and other events. The principle investigator and an assistant solicited participation in the survey at these places and events. We encouraged people to fill out the surveys at the time of the event, or to take them home, in order to maximize the completion of the surveys. Priority was given to data collection at sites that were in geographically diverse settings, at settings conducive to data collection, and settings in which a racially diverse group was expected.

As the surveys were returned, the PI monitored the proportions of participants intending to have children. It was determined that additional effort was needed to distribute surveys to women who were likely to favor becoming parents, in order to have enough variance in the intention variable. To this end, surveys were mailed to 25 women in a small local support group for lesbian women seeking to have children, 9 (36%) of which were completed and returned.

Surveys were mailed to women on the Michigan mailing list of the "Lesbian Connection" newsletter. The staff of the "Lesbian Connection" newsletter allowed the survey to be mailed to 368 women, which is one-quarter of the persons on their Michigan mailing list. The Lesbian Connection (LC) newsletter has the largest lesbian mailing list in the world, which includes approximately 1,400 lesbian women in Michigan. Because of this extensive coverage, the LC was the only publisher mailing list necessary for this research. Also, other mailing lists would overlap with the LC list to a large extent.

The surveys and return envelopes were prepared by the principle investigator, and given to the Lesbian Connection (LC) staff for mailing. Because the mailing list is strictly confidential, the LC staff attached the mailing labels to the prepared surveys, and sent out the survey as a separate mailing from their newsletter. LC received payment for their labors and materials. The mailing included a cover letter from LC staff that explained the purpose of the mailing and reassured recipients that the mailing list remained confidential. See appendix for a copy of the LC cover letter.

The survey was cream colored and contained 10 pages of questions along with a cover page and back page. The survey was printed double-sided on 11.5 by 17 inch sheets of paper, folded and stapled, so that it read as a booklet with standard 8.5 by 11 inch size pages. A pre-paid business reply envelope was included with each survey to maximize returns and ensure anonymity. In addition, a 10% discount coupon and a flyer listing merchandise were included with every survey. The discount coupon was contributed by a nationwide distributor of women's music that operates out of the Lansing, Michigan area. This was included as an incentive to participate and token of appreciation for participation in the survey research.

Research Participants

The research participants consisted of 163 adult women who were self-identified lesbian women living in the state of Michigan. A power analysis determined that a sample size of 163 participants would provide power in excess of .80 to detect an effect size of $R^2 = .10$ for six predictors, at an alpha level of .05 for the path model developed in this research.

The sample consisted of all the nonparents under the age of 45 taken from a larger sample (N=291) of surveys respondents. The use of only nonparents under the age of 45 was dictated by the research questions proposed. The main thrust of the research proposed was the

prediction of behaviors leading to parenthood and intentions to become a parent. Thus, it was decided to include in the analyses only those women who were of an age at which parenting is typically pondered. A crosstabulation of age by intentions to parent revealed that there was a dropoff at age 45 in the intention to become a parent. Of women aged 40-44 who responded to the survey, 15.9% said they intended (or most of the time they intended) to have children. Of the women age 45 or older who responded to the survey, only 2 (2.9%) said they intended to have children. Thus, age 45 became the cutoff point.

In terms of examining only nonparents, the primary questions in this research concerned understanding lesbian women taking up the role of parenthood, rather than lesbian women who are *already* parents choosing to have *additional* children. Lesbian women who are already mothers know the role of parent; they do not need to imagine the role, they do not need to question whether this is a role with which they can identify. In addition, this research was focused on how lesbian women approach the decision to parent, *after coming out as lesbians*. The mothers who responded to the survey included those who had children before and after coming out as lesbians. Thus, for this research, becoming a parent at all and choosing to have additional children are separate issues. Moreover, one could hardly predict that which has already happened. Thus, only nonparents were chosen for this analysis.

Characteristics of the Participants

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the 163 research participants (non-mothers under 45 years of age). As shown in the table, less than one in five respondents were age 29 or less (18.4%). Nearly one in four respondents (39.9%) were age 30 to 34 and 41.7% were age 35 to 44. The mean and median age was 34 and the standard deviation was 5.6 years. The majority of the sample was caucasian women (87.1%), which is similar to the proportion of white people in the state of Michigan overall (83%). Although some effort was

made by the PI to include African-american women, the sample included only 3.1% African-american women, which was less than the overall proportion of African-american people in Michigan (13.9%).

The women in the sample were highly educated. About one in twenty (4.9%) of the women had only a high school education, and 21.4% had vocational training or some college. Nearly three-quarters of the women in the sample had a bachelors degree or a higher degree: 29.4% of the women in the sample had a 4-year college degree, 13.5% had some graduate schooling, and 30.7% had graduate degrees.

The majority (92.5%) of the women in the sample were employed. The annual household income ranged from $5,000 to $185,000. The mean annual household income was $44,704, the median income was $40,000, and the standard deviation was $26,580. Nearly one in three (28.7%) women in the sample had incomes of less than $30,000, 26.3% of the sample had annual household incomes from $30,000 to $49,999, and 35.0% had incomes of more than $49,999.

Nearly two-thirds (64.4%) of the women in the sample were in monogamous relationships, and 31.9% were single. The average length of time in the monogamous relationships was nearly 5 years (56 months), the median was 4 years, and the standard deviation was about 3.5 years (44 months). Of the women in monogamous relationships, nearly a third (31.7%) had been in the relationship less than three years. Nearly one in four (37.5%) of the women had been in the monogamous relationship between 3 and just under 6 years, and 30.8% had been in the relationship between 6 and 16 years.

Thus, the women in the sample tended to have many external resources, such as education, high income, and employment. The majority were in monogamous relationships averaging nearly five years, were white, and the median age was 34. Nearly 6 in ten women

(57.7%) lived with a partner or lover.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics

Characteristic N=163	N	Percent
Age		
19-24	7	4.3
25-29	23	14.1
30-34	65	39.9
35-39	29	17.8
40-44	39	23.9
Race		
African American	5	3.1
Caucasian	142	87.1
Other Minority	16	9.9
Education		
High School or GED	8	4.9
Vocation or some college	35	21.4
Bachelors degree	48	29.4
Some graduate/professional school	22	13.5
Graduate/professional degree	50	30.7
Employment		
Employed	148	92.7
Unemployed	2	1.3
Student	9	5.6
Homemaker	1	0.6
Annual household income		
$5,000-19,999	16	10.2
$20,000-29,999	29	18.5
$30,000-39,999	29	18.5
$40,000-49,999	28	17.8
$50,000-69,999	26	16.5
$70,000-185,000	29	18.5
Relationship status		
Monogamous relationship	105	64.4
Single	52	31.9
Other	6	3.7
Length of monogamous relationship, N=104		
Less than 1 year	12	11.5
1 year to 35 months	21	20.2
3 years to 47 months	17	16.3
4 years to 71 months	22	21.2
6 years to 95 months	14	13.5
8 years to 16 years	18	17.3

Characteristics of Women Not Included in the Sample

The women who were not included in the final sample due to age or parenting status are described here. Of the 128 women not included in the sample, 43% were parents under the age of 45, 22.7% were parents over age 44, 31.3% were nonparents over age 44, and 3.1% were missing data on one of these variables. In all, 66.9% of those not included in the sample were parents. Of those over age 44, 42% were parents.

The mothers under 45 years of age who were not included in the sample had 44.4% of their 72 children after they "came out" as lesbian women. The mothers over 44 years of age who were not included in the sample only had 10.2% of their 65 children after they "came out" as lesbian women.

The women in the two groups not included in the sample and the women in the sample were similar in many ways. Several tests were conducted to look for differences in these groups. Analysis of variance revealed that there were no statistically significant differences in the three groups (sample, young lesbian mothers, and older lesbians) in terms of the degree of lesbian identity, the annual household income, the degree of disclosure to their families of origin, and the degree of disclosure to straight friends. In addition, crosstabulation analyses showed there were no statistical differences between the 3 groups in terms of dichotomized race or ethnicity, residing with one's partner, nor in having close lesbian friends who had children. Furthermore, a comparison between the sample and the younger mothers showed no differences in terms of intentions to have children (older lesbian women were not included in this analysis).

There was a significant difference between the three groups, however, in terms of having a partner (χ^2 (4, N = 274) = 13.4, p = .009). Almost all (90.7%) of the younger mothers were in monogamous relationships, compared to 71.2% of the women in the sample

and 65.7% of the older lesbian women. In addition, there was a difference in length of the current monogamous relationship (analysis included only women in a relationship) (F (2, 190) = 15.5, p = .00). The women in the sample (m = 56 months, n = 104) had the shortest relationships, the young mothers (m = 86 months, n = 45) had longer relationships than the women in the sample, and the older lesbian women (mothers and not mothers) (m = 120 months, n = 41) had the longest relationships.

There was also a difference between the 3 groups in the proportion of women who had close lesbian friends who were actively trying to have children (χ^2 (2, N = 282) = 8.9, p = .011). Over one-quarter of the women in the sample (27.3%) and in the older lesbian group (26.9%) said they had close lesbian friends trying to have children, but 48.1% of the younger lesbian mothers said that they had close lesbian friends trying to have children. A final difference was in the amount of education (F (2, 287) = 3.7, p = .03). The women in the sample tended to have bachelor degrees, (m = 6.37, n = 163) whereas the young mothers (m = 6.42, n = 55) and the older lesbians (m = 6.9, n = 69) were more likely to have graduate degrees.

In summary, there were few demographic and disclosure differences between the sample and the 2 groups not included in the final sample. There were, however, other differences in these groups. The young mothers were more likely to be in monogamous relationships, and to have close lesbian friends trying to have children, whereas the older lesbians were more likely to have longer relationships. Both groups (young mothers and older lesbians) that were not included in the sample tended to have more education than the women in the sample.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was created based on a review of theoretical and empirical literature, pilot testing data, and pretest feedback. The format and questions were developed by the principal investigator with input from committee members and six pretest participants. The surveys were strictly confidential and anonymous, and contained closed-ended and open-ended questions. The survey included sections regarding background information; desires and intentions about becoming parents; perceptions about cultural assumptions about lesbians as parents and the legal treatment of lesbian mothers; expected support from others; and what activities or interventions would be useful to lesbian women in contemplating parenthood. There was also a section of attitudinal questions with a 5-point response set ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree", that focused on several aspects of parenting expected to be important in understanding choices to parent or not to parent: motherhood identity; nurturance; concerns about lesbian parenting; material factors; and creating a family. For those who were interested in becoming parents, there were also questions about whether they had engaged in activities related to becoming a parent (eg. charting ovulation, contacting an adoption agency), and what methods they had seriously considered. See the appendix for a copy of the survey instrument.

Pilot Testing

The pilot testing of the survey instrument was conducted at the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, and in the greater Lansing area, in August of 1994. The participants were 28 adult lesbian women who were solicited for participation at the Festival, acquaintances of the principal investigator, or acquaintances of participants in the pilot study (ie. snowball participants).

Confidentiality was assured because no names were written on the survey instrument.

The investigator accepted some of the completed surveys in person, but did not store or mark them in any manner that would identify a participant.

The pilot data were used to further refine the content of the instrument, and the model of decision-making. The data was entered into a systems file and analyzed using SPSS-PC. Analyses of the pilot data included an examination of the open-ended items and quantitative frequencies. Reliability procedures were run on sets of items that were expected to measure constructs of the model.

Pretesting of the Survey

The survey was revised after examination of the pilot data and consideration of the research questions. The pretest survey was completed by 6 participants who were acquainted with the principle investigator. These women varied in their intentions to parent. Evaluation of the pretest survey included an examination of the responses as well as written feedback from the participants concerning their experiences in completing the task. Additional revisions were then completed based on this information.

Scale Development

Attitude Toward Parenting

It was expected that there would be a series of scales that would be useful in modeling the prediction of parenting intentions and behaviors: motherhood identity, creating a family, nurturance, and material concerns. These attitude toward parenting survey items were created based on the theoretical relevance of items and pilot testing reliability analysis of the items. Most of the anticipated attitude toward parenting scales appeared feasible based on the initial reliability procedures. These four scales were so highly intercorrelated, however, that they had to be considered subscales and were combined into one scale representing the attitude toward

parenting construct. Table 2 shows the intercorrelations between these attitude toward parenting subscales. The intercorrelations have been corrected for attenuation.

Table 2.

Intercorrelations Between Attitude Toward Parenting Subscales

Subscales	Creating a Family	Mother Identity	Nurturance	Material
Creating a Family	1.0			
Mother Identity	.78	1.0		
Nurturance	.85	.97	1.0	
Material	.72	.85	.82	1.0

Table 3 shows that reliability analyses of the attitude toward parenting subscales. These internally consistent subscales were not used in the prediction model. They are shown here to illustrate the attitudinal components initially hypothesized to predict the intention to parent, and to illustrate the process from which the final single attitude toward parenting scale was created. Table 3 provides for each subscale the number of items, the variable label corresponding to the question number in the survey, the item wording, the range of values for the corrected item-total correlations, the number of cases with no missing data on every item, the items that did not load in the procedure, and the alpha from the reliability procedure. An "(R)" indicates that the item was reflected in coding, so that direction of scales were parallel. A high value on the scales indicates an attitude consonant with parenting, lower values represent positive attitudes toward not parenting.

Table 3.

Reliability Analysis of Items in Attitude Subscales

SUBSCALE: MATERIAL

1.	C16	I don't have enough time to be a parent
2.	C33	I don't want to interrupt my job-career
3.	C40	I would rather spend money on other things
4.	C41	I don't want to be tied down with children
5.	C43	I don't want the responsibility of having children

Number of cases = 162
Alpha = .91
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .65 - .88
Item not included:
C17 It's important to have insurance before having a child

SUBSCALE: MOTHERHOOD IDENTITY

1.	C28	Being a parent does not fit with how I see myself
2.	C37	I would not feel comfortable as a mother
3.	C49	When I think of the future, I don't see myself having children
4.	C11	I have never seriously considered having children
5.	C24	I have never pictured myself as a mother

Number of cases = 160
Alpha = .90
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .70 - .83
Items not included:
None

Table 3. (cont'd.)

SUBSCALE: NURTURANCE TOWARD CHILDREN

1. C7 (R) I want to love a child
2. C9 (R) I want to nurture a child & help her or him grow
3. C13 (R) Caring for a child is a joyful experience
4. C27 (R) I want the challenge of raising a child

Number of cases = 158
Alpha = .86
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .61 - .79
Items not included:

C10 I don't like being around children
C14 I don't want to experience pregnancy or childbirth
C46 I find children too stimulating

SUBSCALE: CREATING A FAMILY

1. C8 (R) Having a child would make my family complete
2. C35 (R) Having a child is an experience I want to share with a partner
3. C36 (R) Having a child would increase the bond with my partner
4. C39 (R) Having a child would create a sense of family

Number of cases = 129
Alpha = .85
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .63 - .79
Items not included:

C45 My partner doesn't want children

The listing of scales in Table 4 is a summary of three of the four main constructs used in building the models predicting behaviors leading to parenting. The 3 components of the models shown here were attitude toward parenting, intention to parent, and behaviors engaged in that would lead to parenthood (scales related to norms are shown on another table). As noted, the subscales of nurturance, motherhood identity, material, and creating a family were highly intercorrelated, and therefore a single attitude toward parenting scale was created from the items that were in these subscales. The attitude toward parenting scale consisted of the mean of the responses to the items, so that every respondent had a single score for this scale. A summary of the reliability analysis is shown in Table 4. Attitude toward parenting was a strong scale; the alpha for this 13 item scale was .95.

Intentions and Behavior

The scale for measuring one of the dependent variables, intention to parent, was initially anticipated to consist of one item: "What item below best describes your plans about becoming a parent? Do you intend to have a child / children / another child?." This was followed by five complete sentence response options which ranged from: do not intend, most of the time do not intend, am not sure if I intend, most of the time intend, and definitely intend. Conceptually and empirically, however, another item also warranted inclusion: "What item below best describes your feelings about becoming a parent? Do you want to have a child / children / another child?. This was followed by a similar response set, substituting "want" in place of "intend". Thus, an average of these two items were used to measure intention to parent. These items correlated .87 and had an alpha of .95, as shown in Table 4.

The other dependent variable, behaviors leading to parenthood, consisted of 15 items which described various activities, such as charted ovulation cycle, talked with other lesbians who are mothers, applied for foster parent status, and so on. Respondents were asked if they

or their partner had engaged in any of the activities in the past two years, to which they responded "yes" or "no." The Behavior variable consisted of counting the number of "yes's" from all the items. The alpha of this 15 item scale was .70. Unlike the other scales, internal consistency is not important for the validity or the utility of this particular scale. This scale merely adds the number of behaviors engaged in. It is not an attempt to measure an underlying construct.

Normative Component

One of the pieces to be explored in this study predicting behaviors leading to parenthood was that of norms. In this study, it was suggested that asking respondents whether they expected support from specific others in their lives would be an adequate indication of the perceived normative messages regarding the appropriateness of parenthood for the respondents. Thus, the amount of expected support from others for becoming a parent was a normative construct proposed in this research. A section of the survey asked what how much support was expected if one chose to parent, on a five-point scale from "very supportive" to "very supportive." The items listed 14 different people, such as specific relatives, friends, partner, and co-workers, for whom support data was requested.

As shown in Table 5, a reliability procedure revealed that this scale consisting of items measuring the expected support from various people was not very internally consistent. Although the level of support from various sources were not consistent with each other, this did not necessarily mean that there was a problem with the measurement of this support or that the scale is not useful. It is entirely feasible that the expected support would vary from person to person. These items were useful as an average of the expected support from many sources. Therefore, the lower corrected item-total correlations were not an issue for this particular scale. The alpha for this 13 item scale was .81.

The expected support from people items had notable amounts of missing data. The high rate of invalid responses was not necessarily due to reluctance to answer, however, but to respondents who reported that they "did not have these people in their lives/not applicable". For example, 14.7% said expected support from the mother was not applicable and 1.2% did not answer. In terms of expected support from the lesbian community, 4.9% said this was not applicable and 0.6% did not answer, and 30.7% said the expected support from the sister was not applicable and 1.8% did not answer. The reasons for a person being "not applicable' were not requested in the survey. It is expected that this could be due to a number of possibilities, such as not having siblings, deceased relatives, or a disconnection from members of their family of origin.

Because this initially hypothesized normative component of the model -- expected support from others -- did not emerge as a predictor in the model testing, other data in the survey were examined as potential indicators of a normative construct. Several of the post-hoc scales were additional efforts at examining the expected support construct. These expected support scales were made up primarily of items that were subsets of the original expected support scale, but they measured support from family, support from friends, and support from lesbian sources separately instead of together. Other scales related to support and created for use in the model testing were importance of support from others, and affiliation with lesbian mothers or lesbians who desired to be mothers (another indication of support from others). The reliability analysis information for these scales is given in Table 5.

The scale for expected support of lesbian friends and community consisted of three items. Two of the items measured the amount of expected support of lesbian friends without children and expected support of the lesbian community. The third item in the scale asked whether lesbian friends support the decision to have or not have children, with a strongly

agree to strongly disagree response set. All three items had a five-point response option. The alpha for this expected support of lesbian friends and community scale was .73.

The expected support from family scale consisted of five items. These items measured the amount of expected support from various members of the family of origin -- father, mother, sisters, brothers, and other relative. All items had a five-point response option. The alpha for this expected support from family scale was .83.

The scale for expected support from friends consisted of four items. These items measured the amount of expected support from heterosexual and lesbian friends, with and without children. All items had a five-point response option. The alpha for this expected support of friends was .73.

A scale for affiliation with lesbian mothers consisted of 3 items measuring whether the respondent had any close lesbian friends who: had children, were thinking about having children, or were actively trying to have children. The response options were "yes" and "no" and the variable was computed by counting the number of "yes's" to these items. This resulted in a variable with values ranging from 0 to 3. The alpha for this scale was .58

Importance of support consisted of 3 items measuring the degree of importance of support for decision to parent or for decision to not parent from friends, family, and the lesbian community. The response options for these items, as for the attitudinal items, was a Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree." The alpha for this scale was .77.

Another attempted modification to the model was the use of a variables measuring perceived societal norms regarding the appropriateness of lesbian parenting. One measure concerned whether the legal treatment of lesbian mothers was a factor in respondents' decisions to parent or to not parent. This single item asking if the legal treatment of lesbian

mothers was a factor in the choice to parent was coded on a 5-point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The other two single item variables used in testing the model asked whether the respondents' perceived that most people assume that lesbians do not become mothers, and whether most lesbians assume that lesbians do not become mothers, again using a five-point Likert agree-disagree response set.

Demographic and Family Variables

Additional variables were included as modifications to the path model. This included length of time in a monogamous relationship. Because the *initially hypothesized components* of the model -- ie., creating a family, motherhood identity, nurturance toward children, and material reasons -- turned out to be subscales of a more general attitude toward parenting construct, other data in the survey were examined as potential indicators of those initial constructs. For example, creating a family was a subscale that dealt with having a sense of family with one's partner and child, of children influencing the bond between partners. So, upon further reflection, it was hypothesized that other variables dealing with partnership could be indicators of the "creating a family" construct. Length of time with one's monogamous partner was deemed an acceptable measurement of family, and was entered into the equation. This variable was desirous because there was no missing data -- those without a partner would have a valid value of zero, and because the length of time in a relationship takes on a special meaning for lesbian couples, as a representation of external conventional validation of their union (Slater & Mencher, 1991).

Another ad hoc adjustment was the consideration of demographic variables. One demographic variable considered to be salient vis-a-vis parenting was age. Parenthood is assumed to be a choice made only by those of "child-bearing" age. The question arises as to whether one is increasingly likely to choose non-parenthood as one ages and is still childless.

Similarly, number of siblings was used to modify the model because it has been examined as a variable related to fertility decisions in previous research.

Thus there were several continuous variables that were used in the attempt to build the path model that were not scales consisting of several items. One was age, measured in years, another was number of siblings, with values ranging from 0 to 11. Another continuous variable was the length of time in a relationship with a monogamous partner which was coded into number of months. Respondents without a partner were assigned a valid value of zero for this variable. The values for this variable ranged from 0 (35.8%) to 192 months.

To summarize the development of scales, most of the items anticipated to create 4 attitude scales of nurturance, motherhood identity, material concerns, and creating a family were found to more appropriately form one total scale representing attitude toward parenthood, due to the high intercorrelations of said items. The intention scale was a mean of desire and intention variables. The behavior scale was created as anticipated as a count of the number of behaviors engaged in. Finally, several scales were created to represent a normative construct. The internal consistency of most of these scales were adequate as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4.

Reliability Analysis of Items for Final Scales for Attitude, Intention, and Behavior Constructs

ATTITUDE TOWARD PARENTHOOD

1.	C16	I don't have enough time to be a parent
2.	C40	I would rather spend money on other things
3.	C41	I don't want to be tied down with children
4.	C43	I don't want the responsibility of having children
5.	C28	Being a parent does not fit with how I see myself
6.	C37	I would not feel comfortable as a mother
7.	C49	When I think of the future, I don't see myself having children
8.	C7	(R) I want to love a child
9.	C9	(R) I want to nurture a child & help her or him grow
10.	C13	(R) Caring for a child is a joyful experience
11.	C27	(R) I want the challenge of raising a child
12.	C8	(R) Having a child would make my family complete
13.	C35	(R) Having a child is an experience I want to share with a partner

Number of cases = 126
Alpha = .95
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .65 - .89
Items from subscales not included:

C33	I don't want to interrupt my job-career
C11	I have never seriously considered having children
C24	I have never pictured myself as a mother
C36	(R) Having a child would increase the bond with my partner
C39	(R) Having a child would create a sense of family

INTENT TO PARENT

1.	B1	Describe feelings about becoming a parent
2.	B2	Describe plans about becoming a parent

Number of cases = 163
Alpha = .93
Value of corrected item-total correlation = .87

Table 4 (cont'd.)

BEHAVIORS LEADING TO PARENTHOOD

1.	F2Q1	Contacted an agency regarding a home study
2.	F2Q3	Talked with lesbians who are mothers
3.	F2Q4	Talked with lesbians who want to be mothers
4.	F2Q5	Charted ovulation cycles
5.	F2Q6	Contacted sperm bank(s)
6.	F2Q7	Discussed ideas with my partner
7.	F2Q8	Discussed ideas with potential sperm donors
8.	F2Q9	Inseminated under a doctors supervision
9.	F2Q10	Inseminated at home
10.	F2Q11	Used ovulation regulating drugs
11.	F2Q14	Discussed ideas with potential "surrogate" mother
12.	F2Q16	Other activity mentioned
13.	F2Q2	Had a home study for adoption completed
14.	F2Q12	Applied for foster parent status
15.	F2Q13	Tried to adopt

Number of cases = 90
Alpha = .70
Range of values for corrected item-total correlation = -.01 - .65

Table 5.

Reliability Analysis of Items for Final Scales for Subjective Norm Construct

NORMS: EXPECTED SUPPORT OVERALL

1.	D1	(R) Mother's support
2.	D2	(R) Father's support
3.	D3	(R) Brother's support
4.	D4	(R) Sister's support
5.	D5	(R) Other relative's support
6.	D6	(R) Partner's support
7.	D8	(R) Lesbian community support
8.	D9	(R) Partner's family support
9.	D10	(R) Straight friends without children support
10.	D11	(R) Straight friends with children support
11.	D12	(R) Lesbian friends without children support
12.	D13	(R) Lesbian friends with children support
13.	D14	(R) Co-worker's support

Number of cases = 30
Alpha = .81
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .23 - .73

NORMS: IMPORTANCE OF SUPPORT

1.	C4	(R) It is important for me to have the support of my friends in my decision to parent OR to not parent
2.	C5	(R) It is important for me to have the support of my family in my decision to parent OR not to parent
3.	C6	(R) It is important for me to have the support of the lesbian community in my decision to parent OR to not parent

Number of cases = 163
Alpha = .77
Range of values for corrected item-total correlation = .56 - .64

Table 5 (cont'd.)

NORMS: EXPECTED SUPPORT FROM FAMILY

1. D1 (R) Mother's support
2. D2 (R) Father's support
3. D3 (R) Brother's support
4. D4 (R) Sister's support
5. D5 (R) Other relative's support

Number of cases = 48
Alpha = .83
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .54 - .75

NORMS: EXPECTED SUPPORT FROM FRIENDS

1. D10 (R) Straight friends without children support
2. D11 (R) Straight friends with children support
3. D12 (R) Lesbian friends without children support
4. D13 (R) Lesbian friends with children support

Number of cases = 137
Alpha = .73
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .37 - .70

NORMS: EXPECTED SUPPORT FROM LESBIAN FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY

1. D12 (R) Expected support from lesbian friends without children
2. D8 (R) Expected support from the lesbian community
3. C22 (R) My lesbian friends will support my decision to have or to not have children

Number of cases = 150
Alpha = .73
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .52 - .60

Table 5 (cont'd.)

NORMS: AFFILIATION WITH LESBIAN MOTHERS

1.	A7	Have close lesbian friends who have children
2.	A8	Have close lesbian friends thinking about having children
3.	A9	Have close lesbian friends actively trying to have a child

Number of cases = 161
Alpha = .58
Range of values for corrected item-total correlations = .34 - .42

NORMS: INDIVIDUAL ITEMS

1.	C2	Most lesbians assume that lesbians do not become mothers
2.	C1	Most people assume that lesbians do not become mothers
3.	C3	The way the law treats lesbian mothers is a factor in my decision to parent or to not parent

Model Development

Overview of SEM

Structural equation modeling (SEM) is a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses about relations among observed (measurable) and latent variables. SEM begins with the specification of a model to be estimated. A model is a statistical statement about the relations among variables. The *parameters* that require specification are constants that indicate the nature of the relation between two variables. Fixed parameters are not estimated from the data and their value typically is set at zero. Free parameters are those estimated from the data which the investigator believes to be nonzero. There are various indices of model adequacy, which indicate the degree to which the pattern of fixed and free parameters specified in the model is consistent with the pattern of variances and covariances from a set of observed data.

The SEM procedures emphasize *covariances* rather than cases. It minimizes the difference between the sample covariances and the covariances predicted by the model, rather than minimizing the functions of observed and predicted *individual* values. The fundamental hypothesis for these structural equation procedures is that the covariance matrix of the observed variables is equal to the matrix implied by the model. The covariance matrix of the observed variables is a function of a set of parameters; if the model were correct and we knew the parameters, the sample covariance matrix would be exactly reproduced. The residuals are the difference between the observed and implied covariance matrices, and are the foundation for overall model fit indices. Regression analysis, simultaneous equation systems, confirmatory factor analysis, and ANOVA are all special cases of the fundamental hypothesis in structural equation modeling.

The emphasis of the SEM is on systems of linear equations. Relations between all variables can be represented in linear structural equations. More specifically, it is the

structural equations linking the observed, latent, and disturbance (error) variables that are linear, and not necessarily the covariance structure equations.

The relationships among the variables of interest -- attitudes, norms, intentions, and behaviors -- were examined with the use of a structural equation model (SEM). The model hypothesized in this study is a path model -- it included only observed variables, and no latent variables. This model tested the linear relations among the variables with the use of LISREL software. The analysis was essentially a multiple regression with 2 dependent variables (intention and behavior). With SEM, one can calculate all regression equations simultaneously, as well as obtain other indices useful in modifying the model and indices evaluating overall model fit. These data are not available with a multiple regression analysis.

A nested comparison of alternative models is one in which the components in one model are a subset of components in another model. Such is the case in the current study. In the current study post-hoc modifications were made to the model (model #1). In post-hoc modifications, there is potential for capitalizing on chance or the idiosyncracies of the particular sample. This possibility is more likely with small samples with which the likelihood of finding a replicable model is quite low (Hoyle & Panter, 1995). Although a priori modifications are preferred, post-hoc modifications can be quite useful provided they are well-grounded in theory. The post-hoc modifications attempted in this study were pursued based on the following reasons: investigating the usefulness of additional variables as indicators of the constructs under investigation, and comparing the parsimonious first model with a less-parsimonious alternative model.

Components of the Model

Although predictive models were tested in this research, the goal was not to confirm any model per se. Rather, the goal in this exploratory work was to use the model as a framework for exploring relationships among variables in the decision to parent. The proposed SEM was an effort to describe and predict lesbian women's decisions to become parents or to not become parents. Several questions were addressed: (1) what were the relationships between predictors (attitude and norms) of the dependent variables (intention and behavior)?: (2) what was the relationship between attitude toward parenthood and the intention to parent?; (3) what was the relationship between the subjective norm variable (expected support) and the intention to parent?; and (4) what was the relationship between the intention to parent and the behaviors engaged in which lead to parenthood?

The research questions as *originally conceived* included a query regarding the relationships between the various attitude toward parenting scales (ie., between mother identity, material conditions, nurturance, and creating a family). These attitude subscales were to predict intentions to parent according to the model. As discussed previously in the scale development section, however, it was clear empirically that attitudes toward parenthood scales were really subscales of the same construct. Thus, the first question became: (1) what are the relationships between the total attitude toward parenthood scale and any other predictors (in this case, subjective norm variables) of the dependent variables in the model.

In the initial conceptualization it was thought that behaviors should include activities leading to parenthood (eg. contacting an adoption agency) as well as actual current parenthood. Upon further reflection, however, it was concluded that prediction of a status already experienced was not conceptually sound. This idea was abandoned in favor of predicting behaviors leading to parenthood only for women who were not currently parents.

Evaluation of Model Fit

The Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimation method was used to output the data. The robustness of estimators to violations of assumptions is an important issue for empirical study. West, Finch, and Curran (1995) assert that ML estimation is still appropriately used even for smaller sample sizes, when distributions are not substantially nonnormal.

The covariance structure hypothesis is that the observed data matrix is equal to the covariance matrix of the model parameters. Basically all measures of overall model fit involve functions of the observed covariance matrix and the covariance matrix implied by the hypothesized model. The fit indices assess the closeness of these two matrices, though the closeness is measured in various ways. The advantage of overall fit indices is that they evaluate the whole model and can indicate inadequacies not revealed by the fit of the model components (eg., parameter estimates).

As recommended by Hoyle and Panter (1995), several indicators of overall fit were used to assess the validity of the conceptual model. The use of more than one absolute fit index, at least one type-2 incremental fit index, and at least one type-3 incremental fit index were suggested. All fit indices used in this study, excepting the chi-square, are descriptive statistics; they do not allow for testing of statistical significance.

The chi-square variate and the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) were the measures of absolute fit used in this study. Absolute fit measures concern the degree to which the covariances implied by the fixed and free parameters specified in the model match the observed covariances from which the free parameters in the model were estimated. These are actually badness-of-fit indices -- an optimal fit provides a value near zero.

Incremental fit concerns the degree to which the model in question is superior to an alternative model, in this case the null model, in reproducing the observed variances. These

gauge the goodness of fit, with larger values indicating a greater improvement of the model over the alternative model in reproducing the observed covariances. Two incremental fit indices were used to assess the model fit: a type-2 index, the nonnormed fit index (NNFI), and a type-3 index, the comparative fit index (CFI). NNFI performs well when ML estimation is used. CFI is a preferred index because the values fall only between 0 and 1, thus providing a familiar normed range.

In this model, the critical value indicating an acceptable fit for GFI, NNFI, and CFI was .90 for each. In other words, a value of .90 or greater for any of these indexes indicates an acceptable fit of the hypothesized model to the data. Critical values for overall fit indexes in the standard sense are not defined, because the sampling distributions of overall indices of fit are unknown. An agreed-upon cutoff of .90 for overall fit indexes, however, has become a standard practice (Hoyle & Panter, 1995, p. 164).

The goodness-of-fit test statistic, T, is used for hypothesis testing to evaluate the appropriateness of an application of SEM and is equal to the product of minimized F and (N-1), where N is the sample size. This chi-square test is a simultaneous test of the null hypothesis that all residuals from the two matrices are zero, ie., that the model fits the data perfectly. The p-value of the chi-square variate was used to determine the statistical significance of the model fit. Values greater than .05 indicate an acceptable fit of the hypothesized model to the data.

The chi-square variate is the basis for most of the goodness-of-fit indices in the evaluation of a model. Therefore, it is important to note that the computation of the chi-square statistic is based in part on the degrees of freedom in the structural equation. In SEM, the degrees of freedom (df) are the number of free parameters subtracted from the number of elements on the covariance matrix (variance and covariance terms, ie., $(p(p+1)/2)$. In the

initial model, the number of free parameters was 5 (regression on behavior, regression on intention, error term for behavior, error term for intention, and the variance of attitude). There were 6 variance and covariance terms (3(4)/2). The df was thus equal to 1 (ie. 6 minus 5).

RESULTS

Introduction

The nature of the research was exploratory. Thus, one purpose of the present study was to describe the sample of lesbian women, their characteristics, and their desires, intentions, attitudes, and behaviors vis-a-vis parenthood. A further purpose was to build a model as a framework for discussing and understanding lesbian women's decisions to parent or to not parent. The goal was not to confirm the model per se but to describe the relationships between the factors in parenting intention and behavior. The components of the predictive model examined were attitude, intention, and behavior.

Descriptive Data from the Survey

Lesbian-Related Characteristics

Demographic information about the sample was provided in the methodology section. Lesbian-related characteristics of the sample are given in Tables 6-8. The first survey question asked the participants to indicated their sexual identity, with the use of a scale with a continuum from 1 to 7, with 1 being completely identified as a lesbian, 4 being identified as a bisexual, and 7 being completely identified as a heterosexual. As shown in Table 6, 91.9% of the women in the sample indicated that they identified as a "1" or a "2", 5% identified as a "3" on the sexual identity scale, and 3.1% identified as bisexual. Two respondents did not answer this question.

The respondents who reported their identity as a "4" and those who did not answer the question were kept in the sample for several reasons. It is expected that in none of these cases did the respondent confuse the intended population of the survey: "lesbian" was in large bold letters across the front of the survey, the entire introduction used the word "lesbian" no less

than nine times, and the first 17 questions in the survey pertained to disclosure of sexual identity, lesbian publications, lesbian events, close lesbian friends, paperwork with a lesbian partner, and so forth. It is likely that if these questions did not seem applicable (ie. if the respondent was not a lesbian), the respondent would not be motivated to answer, nor does it seem likely that anyone would take the time to answer a 20 minute survey that did not appear applicable to them. Thus, the respondents most likely felt this "lesbian survey" was appropriate to them.

Secondly, it is suspected that for most of these respondents, this question was a philosophical or theoretical one, and some data confirms this: 3 of these women reported that they were in monogamous relationships with women for 4, 6, and 11 years, respectively, and lived with their partners. They are, in effect, living lesbian lives, even if they are theoretically bisexual. This is not to argue against their self-perceptions, but rather to suggest that data from these women were not inappropriately kept: they look like lesbians. For all practical purposes, living monogamously with a lesbian partner for 11 years would qualify as a lesbian. For these reasons, it was deemed safe to include these women in the sample with the assumption that they are lesbian women.

Other lesbian-related characteristics are shown on Table 7. Participants were asked how often they attended lesbian/gay (LG) bars, LG social events, and LG political events. The majority (57.1%) of respondents said they rarely or never attended LG bars, and 35.6% said they occasionally attended. The majority (79.2%) said they frequently or occasionally attended LG social events. The majority (57.1%) reported that they frequently or occasionally attended LG political events.

The survey also probed the degree of disclosure of lesbian identity to various groups of people. As shown in Table 8, the majority of respondents (71.6%) reported that most or all

of their family knew of their sexual orientation, 90.2% said all of their LG friends knew, and 66.9% said most or all of their heterosexual friends knew their orientation. The respondents were less forthcoming with co-workers: 49.4% said none or a few of their co-workers knew, and 36.9% said that most or all of their co-workers knew of their sexual orientation.

In summary, most of the women in the sample were engaged in lesbian/gay social and political events, but were less likely to attend LG bars. The large proportion of respondents also reported "being out" to many people in their lives.

Table 6.

Lesbian Related Characteristics: Lesbian Identity

Lesbian Identity	N	Percent
Lesbian identity on a scale of 1 to 7		
1 = lesbian identity	101	62.7
2	47	29.2
3	8	5.0
4 = bisexual identity	5	3.1

Table 7.

Lesbian Related Characteristics: Attendance at Lesbian Activities

How often do respondents attend these activities (N / %)	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
Lesbian/gay bars				
N	12	58	73	20
percent	7.4	35.6	44.8	12.3
Lesbian/gay social events				
N	41	88	30	4
percent	25.2	54.0	18.4	2.5
Lesbian/gay political events				
N	35	58	45	25
percent	21.5	35.6	27.6	15.3

Table 8.

Lesbian Related Characteristics: Disclosure of Lesbian Orientation

How many people in these groups know of respondents sexual orientation (N / %)	None	A few	About half	Most	All
Family					
N	15	22	9	57	59
percent	9.3	13.6	5.6	35.2	36.4
Lesbian and Gay friends					
N	0	3	1	12	147
percent	0.0	1.8	0.6	7.4	90.2
Heterosexual friends					
N	7	32	15	59	50
percent	4.3	19.6	9.2	36.2	30.7
Co-workers					
N	33	46	22	33	26
percent	20.6	28.8	13.8	20.6	16.3

Parenting-Related Characteristics

Table 9 shows the parenting-related characteristics of the sample. Respondents were asked if they *wanted* children, as well as whether they *intended* to have children. Nearly half (46%) of the sample said they did not desire or most of the time they did not desire to have children. About one in five (20.2%) said they were not sure if they desired children, and 33.7% said they desired or most of the time they desired to have children.

People were more conservative, however, in terms of intentions to parent. Over half (53.4%) of the women in the sample said they did not intend or most of the time did not intend to have children. About one in five (20.2%) said they were not sure if they intended to have children, and 26.4% said they intended or most of the time they intended to have children.

Of those who intended to have children or who were unsure of their intentions (N=73), about three in ten (30.1%) said they wanted one child, 53.4% wanted two children, and 16.4% wanted three to five children. The mean number desired was 1.9, the median and mode were 2 children, and the standard deviation was .81. Three women did not answer this question.

In the survey, women were asked how often they thought about their intentions (intentions could be to have, to not have children, or undecided) regarding parenthood. Nearly four in ten (37.4%) women said they thought about their intentions very frequently or frequently, 36.2% thought about their intentions occasionally, and 26.4% thought about their intentions rarely or never.

In another question, participants were asked if they agreed with the statement, "there is so much to think about and plan for before having children." Almost every participant either strongly agreed (59%) or agreed (37.9%) with this statement. Participants were also

asked if they agreed that "I have thought a lot about whether or not I want to have a child." The majority either strongly agreed (32.5%) or agreed (35.6%), 19.6% neither agreed nor disagree, and 12.3% disagreed with the statement. In addition, as discussed below, many women talk about the idea of parenting with other people. Thus, it appears that the women in this sample perceive that having children is a planful undertaking, and a large portion of the women personally have thought about and/or currently think about their intentions.

Table 9.

Parenting Related Characteristics

Characteristic	N	Percent
Desire to parent		
Not desire	44	27.0
Mostly not desire	31	19.0
Not sure of desire	33	20.2
Mostly desire	29	17.8
Yes desire	26	16.0
Intention to parent		
Not intend	72	44.2
Mostly not intend	15	9.2
Not sure of intention	33	20.2
Mostly intend	20	12.3
Yes intend	23	14.1
Frequency of thinking about intentions		
Very frequently	24	14.7
Frequently	37	22.7
Occasionally	59	36.2
Rarely	35	21.5
Never	8	4.9
Number of children desired N=73		
1	22	30.1
2	39	53.4
3	9	12.3
4 to 5	6	4.1

Women were asked if they or their partner had done any activities or discussions related to becoming a parent in the last 2 years, and if yes, what methods they had seriously considered and what activities they had done. Of the entire sample, 64.9% reported that they had done some activity or considered some method related to becoming a parent, 57.7% had done 1 or more activities, and 46% reported 1 or more methods seriously considered to become a parent. Table 10 shows the proportion of respondents who said they seriously considered a method to becoming a parent. Respondents often did more than one behavior, so the percentages for each are not intended to add to 100%. About one-quarter of the sample had seriously considered each of the following: pregnancy from an anonymous donor (28.8%), pregnancy from a known sperm donor (29.4%), or adoption (23.9%). Less common were those who seriously considered pregnancy from sperm of a partner's male relative (12.9%) or foster parenting (12.3%), and almost none had considered engaging a "surrogate" mother (1.2%).

Table 11 shows the activities engaged in related to becoming a parent. The most common activities were communicative ones: about half (50.3%) of the women in the sample said they discussed ideas with a partner, 39.9% talked with lesbian mothers, 37.4% talked with lesbians who want to be mothers, and 17.8% discussed ideas with potential sperm donors.

Some activities related to becoming pregnant: 12.9% of the women in the sample reported that they had charted their ovulation cycles, 9.8% had contacted sperm banks, 6.1% had inseminated under a doctor's supervision, 3.7% used ovulation regulating drugs, and 1.8% had inseminated at home. No one in the sample reported trying to adopt or applying for foster parent status. Three women (1.8%), however, had contacted an agency regarding a home study, and 0.6% had a home study completed.

More than one in ten (11.7%) reported engaging in one or more "other activity". These other activities were open-ended responses. Three of these other activities were deciding or discussing NOT having children, four concerned potential guardianship or adoption of relatives, three concerned reading material, and 6 concerned discussions with various people. The remainder concerned doing donor insemination, becoming pregnant, preparing for pregnancy, saving money for invitro insemination, seeing an infertility doctor, and dealing with such family matters as an attorney.

It is important to note here that engaging in communication with others regarding parenting is not always done with the positiveness of parenting in mind. As the "other activities" reveal, some of these talks were confirmation of the idea of NOT parenting. It cannot be known from the closed-ended questions regarding communication with others how often this was a confirmation of a decision to NOT parent. The rest of the activities referred to in the closed-ended questions, however, are clearly those which would lead to parenthood, and thus would be undertaken only by those seriously interested in pursuing this role for themselves.

In summary, about one-third of the women in the sample said they wanted children, but about one-quarter said they intended to have children. About half of the women said they did not want to and did not intend to become parents. About one in five women were not sure of their desires and intentions. Nearly four in ten women reported thinking about their intentions vis-a-vis parenting very frequently or frequently.

Nearly six in ten women in the sample had done some activity (including discussions) leading to parenthood, and nearly half reported seriously considering at least one method to becoming a parent. The most common activities were communicative ones, but nearly 10% had contacted sperm banks, 6.1% had inseminated under a doctor's supervision, and 1.8% had

inseminated at home. Nearly 30% of the women said they have seriously considered getting pregnant, and nearly one-quarter said they seriously considered adoption, in the last two years.

Table 10.

Methods of Parenting Seriously Considered

Methods Seriously Considered by Respondent or Partner	N	Percent of Cases
Pregnancy from a known sperm donor	48	29.4
Pregnancy from an anonymous sperm donor	47	28.8
Adoption	39	23.9
Pregnancy from sperm of male relative	21	12.9
Foster parenting	20	12.3
Discussed ideas with potential "surrogate"	2	1.2

Table 11.

Activities Engaged in Related to Becoming a Parent

Activities Engaged in During Past 2 Years	N	Percent of Cases
Discussed ideas with partner	82	50.3
Talked with lesbians who are mothers	65	39.9
Talked with lesbians who want to be mothers	61	37.4
Discussed ideas with potential sperm donor	29	17.8
Charted ovulation cycles	21	12.9
Contacted sperm bank(s)	16	9.8
Inseminated under a doctor's supervision	10	6.1
Used ovulation regulating drugs	6	3.7
Inseminated at home	3	1.8
Contacted an agency regarding a home study	3	1.8
Discussed ideas with potential "surrogate"	2	1.2
Had a home study completed	1	0.6
Applied for Foster parent status	0	0.0
Tried to adopt	0	0.0
Other activity	19	11.7

Subjective Norms: Perceptions Regarding Societal Assumptions and Treatment

Respondents were asked several questions that related to their perceptions of people's assumptions about lesbians and the way the law treats lesbian mothers. Responses to these questions are shown in Table 12. The idea of "mother" and "lesbian" as conflicting and mutually exclusive roles is the underlying idea of these questions. In addition, the literature suggests that the societal disapproval of lesbians in general and lesbian parenting in particular, formalized in legal treatment of lesbian mothers, may influence the ways in which lesbians approach the possibility of parenting.

When asked if they agreed with "Most people assume lesbians do not become mothers," about eight in ten either strongly agreed (15.3%), or agreed (66.3%). About one in ten neither agreed nor disagreed (10.4%), 7.4% disagreed and 0.6% strongly disagreed. When asked whether most *lesbians* assume lesbians do not become mothers, about one in five either agreed (18.4%) or strongly agreed (0.6%), about one-quarter (25.8%) remained neutral, and over half of respondents either disagreed (43.6%) or strongly disagreed (11.7%).

Respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the following statement: "The way the law treats lesbian mothers is a factor in my decision to parent OR to not parent." The responses were as follows: strongly agree, 7.4%; agree, 18.4%; neither agree nor disagree, 22.1%; disagree, 33.1%; and strongly disagree, 19%. Thus, although over half did not agree with this statement, over one-quarter (25.8%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement.

Further analysis, however, revealed that lesbian women who were unsure of their desire to have children were significantly more likely to agree with the statement about legal treatment of lesbian mothers than were lesbian women who wanted children and lesbian women who did not want children (χ^2 (8, N = 163) = 17.4, p = .03). Of the women who

were not sure of their desires to parent, 45.5% agreed or strongly agreed that the legal treatment of lesbian women was a factor in their decisions. About one in five lesbian women who wanted children (21.8%) agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, as did 20% of lesbian women who did not want to have children.

Thus, about 80% of the respondents supported the perception that people in general do not see lesbian women as mothers, and about 20% perceived that *lesbian* women assume lesbians are not mothers, The results also imply that the (poor) legal treatment of lesbian mothers is an influential factor for a portion of lesbian women, particularly those who are uncertain of their desires.

Table 12.

Subjective Norms: Perceptions of Societal Assumptions

Questions regarding society	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
Most people assume lesbians do not become mothers	15.3	66.3	10.4	7.4	0.6
Most lesbians assume lesbians do not become mothers	0.6	18.4	25.8	43.6	11.7
The way the law treats lesbian mothers is a factor in my decision to parent or to not parent	7.4	18.4	22.1	33.1	19.0

Concerns about Lesbian Parenting

There were several questions in the survey that specifically addressed potential problems with *lesbian* parenting. These questions and the responses are shown in Table 13. One statement was "It would be a problem having a child 'outing' me." About six in ten respondents either strongly disagreed (30.8%) or disagreed (31.4%), and 26.4 neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Another statement in the survey was "I worry that my children could be harassed for having a lesbian mother." Nearly three-quarters of respondents either strongly agreed (20%) or agreed (53.1%), and 16.3% neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Finally, women were asked about this statement: "I would be very concerned about a sperm donor's legal rights to a child." About two-thirds of the respondents either strongly agreed (29%) or agreed (38.3%), 17.9% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 11.7% disagreed with the statement. Thus, it appears that about 10% of women were concerned about children disclosing the parents lesbian orientation, but most were concerned about possible harassment of their children, and about sperm donors' legal rights to children.

Table 13.

Concerns About Lesbian Parenting

Questions regarding lesbian parenting	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
It would be a problem having a child "outing" me	5.0	6.3	26.4	31.4	30.8
I worry that my children could be harassed for having a lesbian mother	20.0	53.1	16.3	6.9	3.8
I would be very concerned about a sperm donor's legal rights to a child	29.0	38.3	17.9	11.7	3.1

Parenting with a Partner

There were questions regarding the recognition of the co-parent presented to the respondents in the survey. These questions and the responses are shown in Table 14. In these questions, respondents revealed that recognition for the co-parent (the women who is not legally or biologically the "parent") is important, yet elusive. One statement was whether "When a lesbian couple has a child, it is difficult for the non-biological co-parent to be recognized as a full parent." About 7 in ten women either strongly agreed (24.5%) or agreed (47.2%), 17.8% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 10.4% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. "Arranging for legal recognition of a co-parent is important if a lesbian couple has children." was the other statement to which participants responded. Nearly all respondents said they strongly agreed (61%) or agreed (28.3%) with this statement. Less than one in ten (7.5%) neither agreed nor disagreed, and only 3.1% disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement.

Other questions dealing with the relationship with one's partner vis-a-vis parenting

were whether having a child was an experience the respondents wanted to share with a partner, and whether having a child would increase the bond with their partner. About six in ten women either strongly agreed (32.9%) or agreed (28%) that having a child was an experience they wanted to share with a partner, 18.6% neither agreed nor disagreed, and about one in five said they either disagreed (13.7%) or strongly disagreed (6.8%). The women were divided as to whether parenting would be a bonding experience with their partners. About three in ten women either strongly agreed (8.4%) or agreed (21.4%), about one-third neither agreed nor disagreed, and more than one-third either disagreed (22.9%) or strongly disagreed (13.7%) that parenting would increase the bond with their partners. Thus, more than half the women expressed that it was desirable to share parenting with a partner, but only half as many thought it would be a bonding experience with a partner.

Table 14.

Parenting with a Partner

Questions regarding parenting with a partner	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
It is difficult for the nonbiological co-parent to be recognized as a full parent	24.5	47.2	17.8	6.1	4.3
Arranging for legal recognition of a co-parent is important if a lesbian couple has children	61.0	28.3	7.5	2.5	0.6
Having a child is an experience I want to share with a partner	32.9	28.0	18.6	13.7	6.8
Having a child would increase the bond with my partner	8.4	21.4	33.6	22.9	13.7

Table 14.

Parenting with a Partner

Questions regarding parenting with a partner	Strongly agree %	Agree %	Neither %	Disagree %	Strongly disagree %
It is difficult for the nonbiological co-parent to be recognized as a full parent	24.5	47.2	17.8	6.1	4.3
Arranging for legal recognition of a co-parent is important if a lesbian couple has children	61.0	28.3	7.5	2.5	0.6
Having a child is an experience I want to share with a partner	32.9	28.0	18.6	13.7	6.8
Having a child would increase the bond with my partner	8.4	21.4	33.6	22.9	13.7

Subjective Norms: Supportive People

Respondents were asked four questions polling the *importance of support* for their decisions -- decisions to parent OR decisions to not parent -- from friends, family, the lesbian community, and from their partners. About half of the women (50.3%) agreed or strongly agreed that the support of friends was important in their decision to parent OR to not parent. Nearly half (46.6%) said the same about their families. But the respondents were more equivocal in regards to the lesbian community; about one-third (35.6%) agreed it was important to have the support of the lesbian community, and another third (36.2%) said they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Almost all the respondents either strongly agreed (62.8%) or agreed (28.7%) that the support of their partner was important in the decision to parent or to not parent.

Respondents were asked if they thought that "Lesbian mothers get support from the lesbian community." About four in ten women agreed (38.9%) or strongly agreed (0.6%), about one-third neither agreed nor disagreed (34.6%), and about one-quarter either strongly disagreed (3.1%) or disagreed (22.8%) with this statement. The majority of respondents thought that their lesbian friends would support their decision to have or to not have children: about three-quarters of respondents either strongly agreed (37.3%) or agreed (37.9%), 21.1% neither agreed nor disagreed, and 3.7% either disagreed or strongly disagreed that they would have the support of their lesbian friends in their decisions. Thus, respondents expected support from their lesbian friends for the respondents' decisions, but were slightly more reserved in their assessment of support of the community for lesbian mothers in general.

Respondents were asked *how much* support they would expect from various people *if they became a parent.* A summary of these results are shown on Table 15. There is a lot of missing data in this set of questions due to respondents choice of "not applicable". The

response categories were 1 = very supportive, 2 = somewhat supportive, 3 = neither supportive nor unsupportive, 4 = somewhat unsupportive, 5 = very unsupportive. As you can see from the table, the respondents were rather hopeful in their expectations from some people. The median response was "very supportive" for lesbian friends with children, sisters, and partners. Other people who were expected to be somewhat supportive if the respondent became a parent were heterosexual friends with children, mothers, the lesbian community, and heterosexual friends without children. Heterosexual friends without children, brothers, fathers, and partner's family all averaged between somewhat supportive and neutral. Respondents expected the least amount of support from co-workers and "other relatives" .

Thus, the overwhelming majority said the support of their partner was important in their decision to parent or to not parent, about half of the respondents said the support of friends and family was important, and about one-third said the same about the lesbian community. Respondents also expected a high level of support from lesbian friends with children, sisters, and partners should they become parents. Nearly 40% of the women said the lesbian community supports lesbian mothers, but about one-quarter said the opposite.

Table 15.

Subjective Norms: Expected Support From Others

Person	N	Median	Mean	SD
Lesbian friends with children	151	1.0	1.5	0.6
Sisters	110	1.0	1.7	1.0
Partner	115	1.0	1.7	1.3
Straight friends with children	149	2.0	2.0	0.9
Mother	137	2.0	2.0	1.2
Lesbian community	154	2.0	2.2	0.9
Lesbian friends without children	158	2.0	2.2	1.0
Straight friends without children	152	2.0	2.4	1.0
Brothers	112	2.0	2.4	1.1
Father	116	2.0	2.4	1.4
Partner's family	106	2.0	2.5	1.3
Other relatives	139	3.0	2.8	1.0
Co-workers	150	3.0	2.9	1.1

Norms: Affiliation with Lesbian Mothers

Respondents were asked three questions regarding their affiliation with lesbian women who had or desired children. As shown in Table 16, the majority of respondents said they had close lesbian friends with children (69.8%) and had close lesbian friends who were thinking about having children (65.6%). More than one-quarter (27.3%) of respondents said that they had close lesbian friends who were actively trying to have children. Thus, affiliation with lesbian women who had children or who desired children was common for the women in this sample.

Table 16.

Norms: Affiliation with Lesbian Mothers and Desirers

Affiliation Questions	N who said "Yes"	Percent of Cases
Do you have any close lesbian friends who have children?	113	69.8
Do you have any close lesbian friends who are thinking about having children?	107	65.6
Do you have any close lesbian friends actively trying to have children?	44	27.3

Helpful Interventions

Respondents were asked to look at a list of activities that could be helpful to people in thinking about whether they want to have children, or to help people feel comfortable with their choices. Respondents were asked to indicate how helpful each of these activities would be for them, on a scale of "helpful", "not sure", and "not helpful." Table 17 shows the proportion of people who said an activity would be "helpful" to them. As seen in the table, getting support was deemed helpful by the majority of respondents. Most respondents reported that support groups or discussion groups for lesbian mothers (73%), ideas on how to get support from the community for lesbian mothers (72.4%), and practical information on "how to" become a parent (71.8%) would be helpful. In addition, 62.6% said it would be helpful to get ideas on dealing with one's new lover's children.

Thus, the need for support and information related to parenting was clear. In addition, women want help for an area that did not relate to choosing parenthood per se, but to being involved with a parent, and the possibility for becoming a "stepmom." In addition, about six in ten women said that a discussion group for lesbians who are undecided about becoming parents would be helpful. And about half said it would be helpful to know how to talk to one's partner about parenting desires and to clarify values about parenting.

Table 17.

Helpful Interventions in Thinking About Parenthood

Interventions that would be "Helpful" Total N=163	N who said "Helpful"	Percent of Cases
Support or discussion group for lesbian mothers	119	73.0
Ideas about getting community support for lesbian mothers	118	72.4
Practical information about "How to" become a parent	117	71.8
Ideas to deal with your new lover's children	102	62.6
Discussion group for lesbians who aren't sure whether they want to become mothers	97	59.5
Ideas about how to talk with one's partner about parenting desires	80	49.1
Help with clarifying values about parenting	77	47.2
Discussion group for lesbians who definitely do not want to become mothers	30	18.4
Ideas about getting community support for lesbian women who do not want children	22	13.5

Structural Equation Model Results

The Conceptual Model

Recall that the theory of reasoned action (TORA) was used as a framework for exploring the relationships among variables in the decision to parent. In this framework, subjective norms and attitude are expected to predict intention, and intention is expected to predict behavior. Because this research is an exploratory step, confirmation of the TORA model is not goal here. The TORA model was used instead as a tool to examine the constructs believed to be relevant to the decision to parent in a comprehensive yet parsimonious manner. The TORA has been used successfully in previous fertility decision research.

The set of relations described here is displayed in Figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 shows the original conceptual model and Figure 2 shows the revised conceptual model. Figure 1 was not a testable model due to the limitations of the scales, as discussed in the methodology chapter. Figure 2 was the testable model most closely approximating the original conceptual model depicted in Figure 1. The difference between these two models is that in Figure 1, there are a series of attitude toward parenting subscales that are hypothesized to predict intention to parent, whereas in Figure 2, there is a single attitude toward parenting scale (which consists of items that made up 4 attitude subscales in Figure 1) hypothesized to predict intention to parent.

Figure 2 depicts the series of relationships among concepts that are operationalized in this empirical study. As Figure 2 shows, attitude toward parenting is expected to have a relationship to intention to parent; it predicts the intention to parent. Similarly, the normative variable (expected support) is expected to predict intention. The intention to parent is hypothesized to predict behavior. All these relationships are linear. Notice also that the arrows go only in one direction; the variable with the arrow pointed toward it is predicted by the

variable from which the arrow originates.

It is further hypothesized in this model that attitude toward parenting does not have a direct relationship to behavior, however, there is an indirect effect of attitude on behavior through intention. Further, no relationship is specified from behavior to intention, nor from intention to norms, nor from intention to attitude; it is hypothesized that these relationships do not exist.

The strength of the relationships cannot be specified in the conceptual model. It is the hypothesized relationships of the conceptual model, along with the observed data, that allow the strength of the relationships to be estimated by the structural equation. Further, the direction of the relationships cannot be established empirically, these are conceptual issues which should be reflected by the theoretical constructs in the model. That is, which variables are predictors, which variables are dependent, or whether the relationship is causal cannot be determined by the data itself. There are no causal relationships specified in this model. The design of the study and the level of knowledge of the phenomena under study prohibit any suggestion of causality.

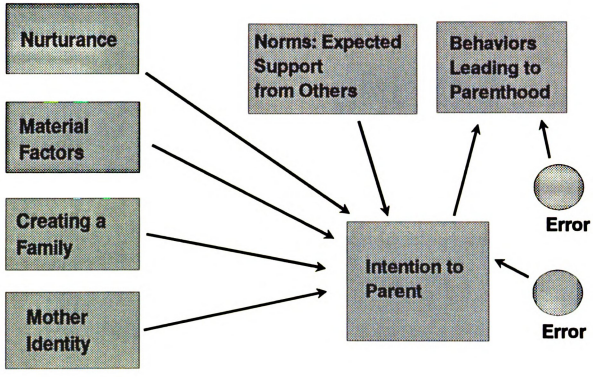

Figure 1: Original Conceptual Model

Lesbian Women's Decisions to Parent

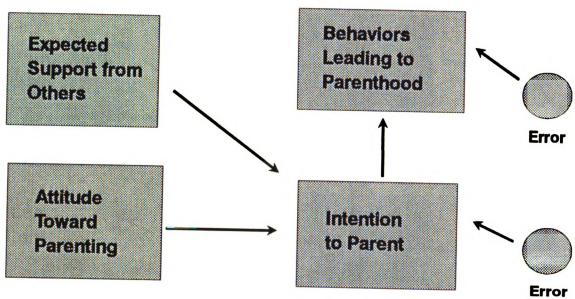

Figure 2: Revised Conceptual Model

Lesbian Women's Decisions to Parent

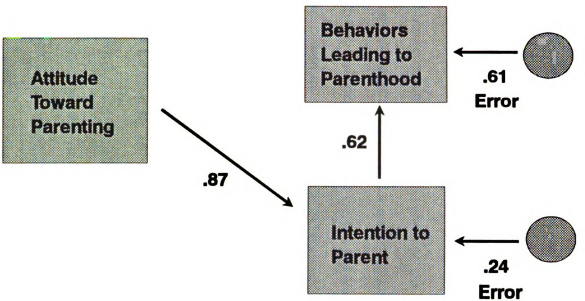

Figure 3: Statistical Model

Lesbian Women's Decisions to Parent

N=163

The Statistical Model

In Figure 3, the statistical model is shown. This is a direct extension of the revised conceptual model in Figure 2, but it includes the results of the analysis. This figure is a path diagram to communicate the SEM at the statistical level. All the relationships hypothesized to exist in the conceptual model were supported by the analysis with the exception of the norm variable of expected support. Expected support is not shown in Figure 3 because the T-values in the analysis indicated that this variable did not fit the data, and did not belong in the model. As discussed previously, the expected support variable is a scale of the average amount of support expected (for becoming a parent) from various people in the community, friends, and family. The attitude toward parenting variable is a scale made up of the mean of 13 attitudinal items from the survey. The intention to parent variable is a scale made up of the intentions and desires to parent items from the survey. The behavior variable is a count of all the activities engaged in that could lead to parenthood.

The statistical model shown in Figure 3 is made up of several components. There are several free parameters, ie. parameters to be estimated by the structural equation model. There are 5 free parameters: the regression weights for behavior and for intention, the error variance terms for behavior and for intention, and the variance of attitude. There are also several fixed parameters in this model, ie., those parameters which specify that there is not a relationship between variables. In this model, the fixed parameters are attitude to behavior (indirect relationship only), behavior to intention, and intention to attitude.

The numbers on the far right side of the diagram, with arrows going to behavior and to intention are the error variance terms. The error estimates are derived from the parameter estimates and the discrepancy function. The number next to the arrow pointing to intention is the regression weight of attitude on intention. The number next to the arrow pointing to

behavior is the regression weight of intention on behavior. These regression weights are standardized weights, they indicate the amount of change in the dependent (predicted) variable for a given change in the predictor. These are both in standard deviation metric.

In a SEM such as this, the squared multiple correlations (R^2) for the structural equations are provided. The R^2 is a regression statistic that indicates the amount of variance in the dependent (predicted) variable that is accounted for by the components in the equation, ie., the predictors.

Results of the First Model

Table 18 shows the data used to create the structural equation model. The table includes the correlation matrix as well as univariate information: means, standard deviations, kurtosis, and skewness. As shown on the table, skewness and kurtosis values indicate that the data do not substantially depart from normality. Thus, no corrective procedures were necessary, and the Maximum Likelihood (ML) estimator was appropriate for use with this data.

The results of the analysis (parameter estimates, squared multiple correlations, and overall fit indices) are summarized in Table 19, the implied correlation matrix is shown in Table 20, and the standardized parameter estimates are diagrammed in Figure 3. The standardized regression coefficient for intention is .87, meaning that for every one standard deviation increase in attitude, there is a .87 standard deviation increase in intention. The standardized regression coefficient for behavior is .62, meaning that for every one standard deviation increase in intention, there is a .62 standard deviation increase in behavior.

As shown on Table 19, the R^2 for behavior is .39. Thus, the (predictor) intention accounts for 39% of the variance in behavior. The R^2 for intention is .76. Thus, the (predictor) attitude accounts for 76% of the variance in the dependent variable intention. The

error variance for behavior is .61 and the error term for intention is .24.

The model fit indices shown in Table 19 reveal that the model is a close fit to the data. The chi-square value is not statistically significant, indicating the model is a good fit; (χ^2 (1, N = 163) = 0.29, p = 0.59). The GFI = 1.00, the NNFI = 1.01, and the CFI = 1.00, which all indicate a close fit of the model to the data.

As shown in Table 20, the correlation between attitude toward parenting and behaviors leading to parenthood is .55. This is the indirect effect of attitude on behavior. The direct relationship between attitude and behavior was tested in the model by re-running the analysis with a path specifying prediction of behavior from attitude toward parenting. The T-value in the output showed that this path did not fit the model. Thus, the SEM indicated that attitude toward parenting was not a sufficient predictor of behaviors leading to parenthood, as would be expected from the TORA.

Table 18.

Observed Data for Structural Equation Model # 1

Correlation	Behavior	Intention	Attitude	Expected support
Behavior	1.0			
Intention	.625	1.0		
Attitude	.561	.873	1.0	
Expected support	.171	.291	.341	1.0
	Behavior	Intention	Attitude	Expected support
Mean	1.95	2.60	3.26	3.75
Range	0-10	1-5	1-5	1-5
SD	2.236	1.415	.974	.641
Skew	1.193	.373	-.131	-.560
Kurtosis	1.309	-1.222	-.752	.359

Table 19.

Standardized Results of Model # 1

PARAMETER ESTIMATES:

Behavior = .62 * intention, error variance = .61
Intention = .87 * attitude, error variance = .24
Variance of attitude = 1.00

SQUARED MULTIPLE CORRELATIONS
FOR STRUCTURAL EQUATIONS:

Behavior R^2 = .39
Intention R^2 = .76

OVERALL MODEL FIT INDICES:

Chi-square (1, N = 163) = 0.29, p = 0.59
GFI = 1.00
NNFI = 1.01
CFI = 1.00

Table 20.

Correlation Matrix Implied by the Structural Equation Model # 1

Correlation	Behavior	Intention	Attitude
Behavior	1.0		
Intention	.62	1.0	
Attitude	.55	.87	1.0

An Alternative Model

As discussed in the methodology chapter, efforts were made to modify the SEM. Modifications were made in an attempt to tap into theoretical constructs which may have been inadequately measured in the first model. The normative component of the model -- expected support from others -- did not emerge as a predictor in the first model. Thus, other normative variables were considered, including several support measures, and perceived societal norms regarding the appropriateness of lesbian parenting.

Other modifications were made because the initially hypothesized attitude components of the model (ie., creating a family, motherhood identity, nurturance toward children, and material reasons) turned out to be subscales of a more general attitude toward parenting construct. Thus, length of time with one's monogamous partner was an attempt to tap into the "creating a family" construct. Finally, demographic variables considered to be salient vis-a-vis parenting -- age, and number of siblings -- were also used in attempts to modify the first model.

The variables considered as modifications to the first model are shown in Table 21. The variables used to modify the model, the reasons for use of the variables, and whether the modifications were validated by the output are all shown in the table. Modifications to the model were at first tested one variable at a time. Variables were empirically shown to belong or not belong in the model, based on the modification indices and the T-values for each parameter. After all the variables had been entered individually, the ones that appeared to fit the data were entered into the equation simultaneously, and these variables together still appeared to fit the data.

Modifications to the model were undertaken with the assumption that the new variables entered into the equation would be predictors of intention, just as attitude was a

predictor of intention. Modification indices for length of time in a monogamous relationship, and affiliation with lesbian mothers, however, revealed that these variables were better predictors of behavior than intentions. As Table 21 also shows, age was found to be a predictor of intention to parent.

The correlations between the variables used in the attempt to modify the first model and the dependent variables (intention and behavior) are shown on Table 22. As the table shows, there are several scales that are moderately correlated with both behavior and intention. A high correlation alone is not an indication that a variable may be an adequate predictor of a dependent variable, because the LISREL path models are analyses of covariances rather than individual cases (ie., both the correlation and the standard deviation are considered in the computations).

In examining the correlations shown in Table 22, one can see that expected support from friends is correlated with both behavior ($r = .23$) and intention ($r = .34$); expected support from lesbian sources is correlated with both behavior ($r = .20$) and intention ($r = .23$); and affiliation with lesbian mothers and desirers is correlated with both behavior ($r = .34$) and intention ($r = .23$). Age is correlated with intention ($r = -.34$), and time in a relationship is correlated with behavior ($r = .23$).

Table 21.

Variables Used in Attempted Modifications to the First Model

Variable	Reason for Inclusion	T-value and Modification Index Information
Length of time in monogamous relationship	Attitudinal indicator of sense of family	T-value & MI indicated this was a **predictor of behavior**, but not intention
Age	Demographic thought to relate to parenting choices	T-value & MI indicated this was a **predictor of intention**
Number of siblings	Demographic thought to relate to parenting choices	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Affiliation with lesbian mothers & desirers	Normative indicator of support from others	T-value & MI indicated this was a **predictor of behavior**, but not intention
Expectations of support from lesbian friends and community	Normative indicator of support from lesbian others	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Expected support from family	Normative indicator of support from family of origin	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Expected support from friends	Normative indicator of support from friends	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Importance of support	Normative indicator related to support from others	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Most people assume that lesbians don't become mothers	Normative indicator of appropriateness of lesbian parenting	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Most lesbians assume that lesbians don't become mothers	Normative indicator of appropriateness of lesbian parenting	T-value indicated this did not predict intention
Legal treatment affects decisions	Normative indicator of appropriateness of lesbian parenting	T-value indicated this did not predict intention

Table 22.

Correlations Between the Variables Used in Attempted Modifications to the Model and the Dependent Variables

Variable	Behavior	Intention
Length of time in monogamous relationship	.23	-.02
Age	-.15	-.34
Number of siblings	.06	-.08
Affiliation with lesbian mothers & desirers	.34	.23
Expectations of support from lesbian friends and community	.20	.23
Expected support from family	.03	.11
Expected support from friends	.23	.34
Importance of support	.19	.24
Most people assume that lesbians don't become mothers	-.03	.01
Most lesbians assume that lesbians don't become mothers	.16	.07
Legal treatment affects decisions	-.11	-.15

Results of the Alternative Model

The final alternative model included the three variables from the first model (attitude, intention, and behavior), as well as three new variables: length of time with one's partner, affiliation with lesbians who are or who desire to be mothers, and age. Table 23 shows the data used to create the alternative structural equation model. The table includes the correlation matrix as well as univariate information: means, standard deviations, kurtosis, and skewness.

The results of the alternative model are shown in Tables 24 and 25, and the path diagram is shown in Figure 4. The standardized regression coefficient for intention based on attitude is .84, and the standardized regression coefficient for intention based on age is -.11. The standardized regression coefficient for behavior based on intentions is .59. The standardized regression coefficient for behavior based on length of time in a relationship is .22, and the standardized regression coefficient for behavior based on affiliation with lesbian mothers is .19.

As shown on Table 24, the R^2 for behavior is .48. Thus, the (predictor) intention accounts for 48% of the variance in behavior. The R^2 for intention is .77. Thus, the (predictor) attitude accounts for 77% of the variance in the dependent variable intention. The error variance for behavior is .52 and the error term for intention is .23.

The model fit indices shown in the table reveal that the model is a close fit to the data. The chi-square value is not statistically significant, indicating the model is a good fit; (χ^2 (4, n = 163) = 4.32, p = 0.36. The GFI = .99, the NNFI = 1.00, and the CFI = 1.00, which all indicate a close fit of the model to the data.

As shown in Table 25, the correlation between attitude toward parenting and behaviors leading to parenthood is .56. As with the first model, the direct relationship between attitude and behavior was tested in the second model by re-running the analysis with a path specifying

prediction of behavior from attitude toward parenting. T-values in the output showed that this path did not fit the model. Thus, the SEM indicated that attitude toward parenting was not a sufficient predictor of behaviors leading to parenthood, as expected.

Comparison of Models

In comparing alternative models, comparison of the overall goodness of fit indices is not appropriate (Hoyle & Panter, 1995). A chi-square difference test, however, is appropriate. With 3 df difference, the 4.03 difference in the chi-square values between the models was not significant (it is smaller than the critical value at 3 df, 7.81). This indicated that Model # 1 and Model # 2 were not significantly different. In short, empirically, these models were equivalent.

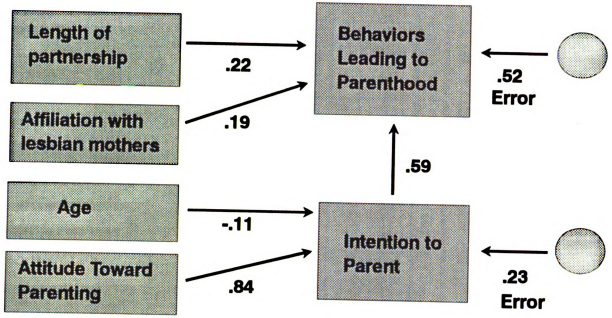

Figure 4: Statistical Model # 2

Lesbian Women's Decisions to Parent

N=163

Table 23.

Observed Data for Structural Equation Model # 2

Correlation	Behavior	Intention	Attitude	Time	Affiliation	Age
Behavior	1.0					
Intention	.625	1.0				
Attitude	.561	.873	1.0			
Time	.236	-.018	.058	1.0		
Affiliation	.340	.204	.190	.151	1.0	
Age	-.144	-.369	-.306	.242	.125	1.0
	Behavior	Intention	Attitude	Time	Affiliation	Age
Mean	1.95	2.60	3.26	35.69	1.62	34.15
Range	0-10	1-5	1-5	0-192	0-3	19-44
SD	2.236	1.415	.974	43.984	1.020	5.568
Skew	1.193	.373	-.131	1.399	-.135	-.196
Kurtosis	1.309	-1.222	-.752	1.531	-1.091	-.358

Table 24.

Standardized Results of Model # 2

PARAMETER ESTIMATES:

Behavior = .59 * intention + .22 * time + .19 * affiliation,
error variance = .52
Intention = .84 * attitude - .11 * age,
error variance = .23
Variance of attitude = 1.00

SQUARED MULTIPLE CORRELATIONS
FOR STRUCTURAL EQUATIONS:

Behavior R^2 = .48
Intention R^2 = .77

OVERALL MODEL FIT INDICES:

Chi-square (4, N = 163) = 4.32, p = 0.36
GFI = .99
NNFI = 1.00
CFI = 1.00

Table 25.

Correlation Matrix Implied by the Structural Equation Model # 2

Correlation	Behavior	Intention	Attitude	Time	Affiliation	Age
Behavior	1.0					
Intention	.62	1.0				
Attitude	.56	.87	1.0			
Time	.26	-.02	.06	1.0		
Affiliation	.31	.14	.19	.15	1.0	
Age	-.14	-.37	-.31	.24	.12	1.0

DISCUSSION

Descriptive Analyses

The survey provided a great variety of information on the sample, the parenting desires of the respondents, and the factors predicting intention to parent and behavior leading to parenthood. A substantial proportion of the women in the sample had disclosed their lesbian identity to their friends and family members, and participated in lesbian/gay social events and political events. The sample consisted of women who had resources -- jobs, high incomes, and extensive education.

There was variety in parenting desires. About one-quarter of the women in the sample reported that they intended to have children. One striking feature was the amount of people who said they were not sure of their desires and intentions about becoming parents -- about one in five. Of the women over 44 years of age who were not included in the sample, more than half were parents. Of the parents under 45 years of age who were not included in the sample, about one-quarter wanted to have additional children. Of all the women under age 45 responding to the survey (those included and those not included in the sample), about one-quarter were mothers. About one-quarter of the children of the women not included in the sample were born/adopted after the women came out as lesbians. Thus, the findings in the current study would appear to suggest that approximately 25% of lesbian women are mothers or decide to be mothers. These proportions are more likely to be representative of white, educated, lesbian women in their 30s in Michigan than they are of lesbian women in general.

These findings are not dissimilar to previous literature on the percentages of current lesbian mothers: 29% in Ryan and Bradshaw, 20% in Zeidenstein, as well as the percentages of lesbian women deciding to become parents: 15% in Pies' (1987b) groups, 23% in Ryan and Bradshaw. Recall that 34% of the women in Bybee's (1990) study were interested in

parenting, and 60% of the women in Johnson et al.'s study (1987) said they "considered" parenting. In terms of acting on one's desires, about 10% of the women in the current study were trying to become pregnant. This is the same proportion as in Johnson's study, but is higher than Bybee's study, which was 2%.

Comparisons between the current study and the previous studies are limited, however, by considerations of the samples and the purposes of the studies. In the current study, only non-mothers under age 45 were included in the sample. Other studies cited did not have such restrictions. Furthermore, there could be differences due to the focus of studies -- gathering data on parenting desires was not central to the purposes of the previous studies. In addition, a caveat regarding the sample in the current study must be given. The sample is neither random, nor assumed to be representative of lesbian women in general. Further discussion of the limitations of the sample follows in the section labeled "methodological limitations".

About four in ten women in the sample said they thought about their intentions regarding parenthood frequently. Those who desired children tended to say they wanted 1-2 children (m = 1.9). The number of children desired is somewhat less than the commonly cited norm of 2-3 children for people in the United States. Thus, the normative number of children desired by lesbian women appears to be smaller than that for the general population.

Another point of interest was the proportion of women who had done some activity that could lead to parenthood. Talking with others was one of the most common of activities pursued. There was also some evidence that even for women who do not want to have children, the possibility and/or the undesirability of parenting is discussed with others. And nearly half of the women reported having seriously considered methods to becoming a parent. Women in this sample were 3 times as likely to pursue artificial insemination under the supervision of a physician than to pursue this method at home. And there were nearly equal

numbers of women considering artificial insemination with a known donor as with an anonymous donor. For some time there has been discussion about the prevalence of these activities but very little data. This descriptive data is a starting point for understanding the choices in methods that lesbian women are making to become parents.

The picture that emerges from this data is that the possibility of parenting is a salient topic to lesbian women. Many women in the sample were thinking about parenting, thinking about how they could become a parent, talking about parenting, and taking steps to become parents. This is in sharp contrast to the notion that lesbian women are not mothers and are not interested in becoming mothers.

Parenting is an important topic to lesbian women beyond the "decision to parent" focus taken in this study. Lesbian women are affected by parenthood even if they are not parents or do not desire to become parents. The data revealed that women want help talking with partners regarding parenting desires, they desire to clarify values about parenting, and they want help dealing with the children of a new lover. This leads to other questions not specifically addressed in the survey. These questions include to what degree motherhood impacts one's dating, one's options in establishing a relationship with a new lover, and the circle of friends with whom one associates.

The women tended to expect support from certain people in the event that they became parents but they did not expect everyone in their lives to be supportive. Support from a partner, family, and friends was important, and to a lesser degree, from the lesbian community as well. Less than half of respondents said that the lesbian community is supportive of lesbian mothers and only one-third of respondents said that support from the lesbian community is important to them. But "supportive" was the median response in the expected amount of support from the lesbian community. Thus, there is variability in the

importance of and expectations of support from the community. There is more to be learned about the place of the lesbian community in lesbian women's lives and families.

There was an explicit assumption in the current research that lesbian women's decisions to parent could be influenced by lesbian-specific concerns and by normative expectations. This was based on literature suggesting that women had lesbian-specific concerns related to donor rights, recognition of the nonbiological coparent, fears of harassment of the child (for having lesbian parents), fears of being "outed" by a child, changes in relationships with others, and overcoming the normative expectations of lesbian women as non-mothers (See Corea, 1985; Frank & Brackley, 1989).

The findings of the current research indicate that lesbian-specific concerns are indeed very real, as evidenced by the information provided by the women regarding the legal treatment of lesbian mothers, donor rights, recognition of the nonbiological coparent, and fears of harassment of the child (for having lesbian parents). In addition, there is feedback about perceived normative messages. The majority of respondents reported that there is a widespread belief that lesbian women are not mothers, and nearly one in five respondents said that *lesbians* also believed that lesbians are not mothers.

Lesbian-specific concerns for parenting should not be dismissed: about one in five respondents who wanted children and about one in five respondents who did not want to have children agreed that the way the law treats lesbian women was a factor in their decision to parent or to not parent. But this legal treatment was more salient for the lesbian women in the sample who were *not sure* of their parenting desires and intentions. Nearly half of women who were not sure of their desires and intentions agreed that legal treatment of lesbian parents was influential in their parenting decisions.

Although concerns are clearly shown in the data, there is not strong evidence that the

parenting decisions of the sample are dictated by lesbian-specific concerns. The emergence of an attitude toward parenting scale that was not lesbian-specific in content or tone suggests that the fertility decisions of the sample are not necessarily driven by lesbian-specific concerns. In conclusion, the current research suggests that there are lesbian-specific concerns in parenting which are noted and contemplated by lesbian women. Whether lesbian women's decisions to parent are definitively influenced by these concerns is as yet unknown and cannot be ascertained with the data gathered in this study.

Measurement Conclusions

The development of the attitude toward parenting scale was a central concern in this research. As noted in earlier chapters, the initial research questions suggested that there would be a series of attitude toward parenting subscales, each reflecting different aspects of parenting. These aspects included material concerns, concerns with motherhood as an identity, nurturance toward children, and creating a family. These subscales were so highly intercorrelated, however, that one general attitude toward parenting scale was developed for use in the predictive model. In addition, the highest intercorrelation in the attitude subscales was between the motherhood identity subscale and the nurturance subscale. It appears that feelings of nurturance toward children and perceiving oneself as a potential parent are not separate, but go hand-in-hand. Thus, it was clear that there were not several independent attitude toward parenting constructs being measured. Rather, there was one attitude toward parenting construct being measured (albeit with items which included various aspects of parenting). Thus, it appears that different aspects of parenting are not separate, but are integrated into the way one conceptualizes parenting.

It is expected that the attitude toward parenting scale developed in this research may

be a worthwhile measure for future fertility decision research because of the internal consistency and because it addresses various aspects of parenting. For example, the scale includes items which may reflect the most salient reasons to parent (nurturance) and those most salient for not parenting (material). In addition, the attitude toward parenting scale includes items which may be salient for *all* women (identity as a mother, and creating a family) but which have not received much attention in previous literature, and have been brought to light by the considerations of how lesbian women may approach the idea of parenting.

The attitude toward parenthood scale is striking in another sense -- it is not oriented toward *lesbian* parenting per se, but toward parenting. The scale lacks lesbian-specific features. Recall the items making up this scale (see Table 4): there are no items that specifically relate to difficulties or concerns of *lesbian* parenting. There are also no items relating to any lesbian-specific joys or positive challenges in parenting. Whether such lesbian-positive items would have been a part of the attitude scale is unknown -- due to the oversight of the principal investigator in not including such items in the survey. This suggests that motherhood may be perceived as plain motherhood, rather than being seen as "lesbian motherhood." This would be consistent with Lewin's (1993) findings that lesbian women were focused on establishing claims to motherhood and affirming motherhood as a central identity, rather than being focused on lesbian motherhood.

The development of a scale to measure perceived normative information was another main focus of the study. The measure of norms initially developed -- expected support from various specific others if one became a parent -- was not an adequate predictor of intention to parent. Therefore, post-hoc efforts were instituted to make use of other normative data from the survey. Importance of support, affiliation with lesbian mothers, and several expected

support measures were all scales developed from the survey data as measures of normative information. In addition, several individual items were examined as measures of normative messages of the appropriateness of lesbian parenting -- items regarding whether most people assume that lesbians do not become mothers, whether most lesbian women assume that lesbians do not become mothers, and whether the way the law treats lesbian mothers is a factor in the decision to parent or to not parent.

One possible shortcoming of the measure of expectations of support as a normative measure is that there is room for different interpretations of the responses. Expectations of support may be an ambiguous way to measure norms regarding lesbian parenting -- expectations could be based on knowledge of the respondents' parenting desires. For example, low levels of support for parenting from important people in one's life could be due to the belief that the respondent would not choose to parent. In this case a low level of support could be a reflection of one's desires, rather than a normative message regarding the appropriateness of the respondent (or any lesbian woman) becoming a parent.

All these normative scales appeared to be adequate in terms of internal consistency. There is a strong possibility, (see discussion on the model analyses below) however, that none of the normative scales developed were really adequate for tapping the normative construct. The norm scales developed in this study may be related to norms, but are not precisely measuring norms. Measurement would likely be improved if it more directly measured specific messages regarding the appropriateness of parenting. In addition, to get a fuller picture of the normative component of the decision-making process, it may be necessary to measure relevent features of norms -- knowledge of referent groups, perceived messages of norms, and motivation to comply with norms.

Model Analyses

In addition to describing the characteristics of the sample, and the parenting desires, two (nested) structural equation models were created. While both models adequately fit the data, the first SEM was deemed to better explain the phenomena of interest -- prediction of intention and behavior leading to parenthood. In this first model, behavior was predicted from intention, and intention was predicted from attitude toward parenting. The squared multiple correlations were substantial for both dependent variables, indicating that a large proportion of the variance was accounted for by the independent variables in the equation, ie., that these factors explain the intention and behavior to a large extent.

In the second model, these same relationships held, but additional variables appeared to be predictors of the dependent variables. In the second (post-hoc) model, behavior was predicted from intention, length of time in a monogamous relationship, and affiliation with lesbian mothers (or those who want to be mothers). Intention was predicted by age as well as attitude toward parenting.

As noted, modification indices for length of time in a monogamous relationship and affiliation with lesbian mothers revealed that these variables were better predictors of behavior rather than intention. Upon reflection, there is some conceptual soundness to this empirical finding. Affiliating with lesbian mothers and having a long-term partnership should not increase intention to parent per se, but if intention is there, they may aid one to act upon desires. When one affiliates with lesbian mothers or has a partner, one can see the possibilities and anticipate assistance in one's endeavors. Unlike the attitude variable, the time and affiliation variables represent more tangible experiences with people. If these variables are indeed indicators of a sense of family and support, respectively, then the findings make sense. For example, lesbian mothers and lesbians who want to be parents can act as sources of

support, and the length of a partnership may be part of the perception of the couple as a family.

Further, as discussed previously, young lesbian mothers not included in the sample were more likely to have a partner than the women in the sample. This suggests the importance of partnership in fertility decisions and lends credence to the viability of length of time with a partner as a predictor of behaviors leading to parenthood.

The second model cannot be relied upon to better describe the data. Post-hoc modifications allow the potential for spurious and idiosyncratic aspects of the sample to influence the model fit, and may not be replicable in other samples. Further, there is some room for debate as to what constructs these three additional variables truly represent. While it was put forth that length of time represented a family variable, and that affiliation with lesbian mothers represented a support variable, other possibilities exist. For example, others may act as role models, support figures, pillars of stability, sources of information, and as family members. In any of these roles, there is the opportunity to facilitate action.

In conclusion, the first model is better in explaining the data. The post-hoc model was not statistically better than the first and post-hoc models are not preferred. In addition, the first model is more parsimonious, and the utility of the TORA has been previously documented in decision-making research and is derived from theory.

Recall that the TORA expects that an attitude component *and* a normative component are the predictors of intention. None of the (1 initial nor the 7 post-hoc) normative measures, however, were predictors of intention to parent. One possibility is that the TORA does not adequately describe the relationship between norms and intentions, or the relationship between norms and intentions for lesbian women or for the women in this sample. Other possibilities to explain this outcome in terms of the limitations of the measurement were previously discussed.

Another possibility is that the weight of the normative and attitudinal components differ for various subgroups or under different conditions, and that this component, if measured, would have shed light on the current findings. Further questions arise -- are there conditions under which importance of support would be weighty enough that it would figure into the decision to parent? Would the importance of partner support alone make a difference?

In summary, most of the main assumptions of the TORA appear to fit the data from the current study -- behavior was predicted from intention, intention was predicted from attitude, and intention was a mediating step between attitude and behavior. Subjective norm variables, however, did not appear to be a predictor of intention, contrary to the expectations of the TORA. Previous studies have shown that TORA was useful in predicting fertility decisions. Because the current study was exploratory, however, confirming or proving a model was not a main goal. It was a goal to discover whether TORA was a useful framework for exploring multivariate relationships. And the results of the current study do indeed suggest that the TORA framework is useful and informative for examining and describing relationships between variables in lesbian women's decisions to become parents. Caution, however, must be taken in interpreting these results because of the unknown representativeness of the sample.

Finally, although the second model cannot be promoted as a better framework for examining relationships among variables, it suggests areas for further exploration, such as the role of partnership and affiliation with other people in influencing lesbian's fertility behaviors. These may represent normative components of the decision to parent.

Methodological Limitations

As with any study in which respondents are self-selected, there are potential methodological limitations and concerns which must be addressed to aid interpretation of the data. First, over half of the surveys returned were from respondents on the LC mailing list. To what degree the women who subscribe to LC are different from other lesbian women is unknown. And the degree to which the women in the sample are representative of the lesbian women of Michigan, or of the women on the LC mailing list is not known. In addition, recall that lesbian mothers and desirers were specifically sought near the end of data collection, to improve the distribution of the intention to parent variable. Nine women of the women in the Lesbian Mothers Group responded to the survey, and may make up as much as 5.5% of the sample data.

One question that stands out is how representative is the sample in terms of resources -- education, employment, income? The sample is very unlike the general population of Michigan in these regards. But is the sample more representative of the women who subscribe to LC, of lesbian women in Michigan, of the women who go to women's music concerts, or of the lesbian women who want to be parents? It is likely that there is a tendency for lesbian women to have higher education than their heterosexual counterparts, *and* that those with higher education tended to be interested in filling out the survey. Indeed, there may have been a sympathy factor: people sometimes asked "what is this research for?" and were very responsive when the answer came, "this is my dissertation research."

Clearly we have reason to think the sample is <u>not</u> representative of lesbian women -- because there is no data available to describe "typical" lesbian women, and because of the high amount of resources of the respondents. But neither can we assume the sample is more representative of lesbian women who want children, nor of lesbian women who are not

interested in parenting. The sample is more likely, however, to be representative of women for whom the topic of parenthood is salient. The women invested their time and energy into responding to a survey that took approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. It would seem likely that the women completing this survey think that parenthood is an important topic.

In summary, we cannot say with certainty how representative these data are for all lesbian women in Michigan. These data are more likely to be representative of educated lesbian women in Michigan for whom the topic of parenting is salient. The most likely shortcoming here in terms of gathering participants is that poor lesbian women are not represented. And unfortunately, their experiences may be very different than the women who participated in the research. Becoming pregnant through "artificial means" and adoption are quite expensive. Do poorer lesbian women have similar desires, but less resources with which to accomplish them? Do they tend to give up on the idea before it is fully formed, knowing the financial impossibility of the endeavor? Do they undertake very different strategies to achieve parenthood?

Another factor to consider is the degree to which social desirability, acquiescence, or response bias is present in the dataset. Lesbian women agreed that there is a widespread notion that lesbian women are not mothers. Similar myths exist regarding a lack of nurturance and an anti-family stance of lesbian women. Some respondents may have consciously or unconsciously responded to the survey in ways that would negate these (negative) images. The bias could be subtle or blatant. The bias could be manifested in the attitude or the intention variables.

The degree of response bias is difficult to gauge. There is no research comparable to the current study with which to compare the distribution of attitude scores and intentions regarding parenthood. When additional research is undertaken the representativeness of the

current data will be easier to evaluate. There are reasons, however, to think that social desirability and response bias may be somewhat minimized in the current study. The questions in the survey were carefully worded to not imply any judgement or preference of response choices. And about half of the women in the survey provided unpopular ideas -- they did not want to have children, and these women tended to have lower scores on the attitude toward parenting scale. Also, many women approached the principal investigator with great enthusiasm. They were eager for more data on lesbian women to become available.

Again, a caution -- the representative of the sample compared to lesbian women in general cannot be ascertained. The findings of the current study tend to suggest that up to one-quarter of lesbian women are interested in parenting. The literature on lesbian parenting suggests that there is a notable proportion of lesbian women who are having children or desire children, and that there has been a widespread "gayby boom" in the lesbian community. And there has been an explosion of new books about lesbian parenting in the early 1990's.

Implications for Future Research

It appears that lesbian parenting is a topic of interest to many lesbian women, even those not intending to parent. More research on lesbian women is needed, to validate interest in becoming a parent, the proportion of women who are interested in parenting, the behaviors engaged in related to parenting, and the impact of having children on lesbian families and friendship networks.

We also need to know more about the normative influences in decision-making. This could include whether lesbian women feel pressured to become mothers, the degree to which they feel conflict with being a lesbian and a mother, or if there are lesbian-specific concerns that are barriers to becoming a parent. More in keeping with the TORA model, it would be

useful to gather more normative information such as who are the referent groups, whether these people think respondents "should" become a parent, and what is the level of motivation to comply with referent groups or individuals. In addition, there are personality attributes, such as self-esteem, that are correlated with a lack of motivation to comply with others (See Loken & Fishbein, 1980). Such variables could be useful in furthering our understanding of the normative component of fertility decisions. Future research could focus more on the normative component of the TORA model.

Further research is needed to assess the degree to which the current study is representative of lesbian women demographically. Additional research is needed that taps into lesbians with different socio-economic backgrounds specifically. This may mean going into environments, such as bars, that are less conducive to data collection.

Future research specifically about the decision to parent is needed to replicate the current findings, and to assess the validity of the relationships between attitude, intention, and behavior described by the model. And more research is needed to further investigate and assess the utility of the post-hoc modifications to the decision model.

Investigators who make attempts to replicate the current research or pursue related topics would need to be cognizant of the variability of parenting desires in lesbian women. Research predicting fertility decisions would need variability in a sample in terms of parenting desires. In this case, it is recommended that data should be monitored as it is collected to ascertain the variance in the interest in parenting. There are many other areas of interest that could be pursued from this point forward and an investigator would need to be clear as to what population should be tapped. For example, there is a need for research specifically focused on the pro's and con's and considerations involved in the methods of parenthood. In this case, an investigator would not be advised to seek lesbian women in general for the study,

but to recruit only lesbian mothers and lesbian women interested in parenting.

Conducting research on parenting decisions of lesbian women will be different from that of heterosexual persons because of the variance in parenting desires. In previous research investigating voluntary childlessness, recruitment of the sample was necessary. In a lesbian population, one may more easily find childless lesbian women who intend to remain childless, but may need to more actively recruit those who desire to parent. The variability of parenting desires in lesbian women, as found in this sample, make lesbian women a potentially great resource for understanding fertility decisions.

Future Directions

The data gathered in this study has been a first step in building a picture of lesbian women's attitudes toward parenting and decisions to parent. Further research is needed, however, both qualitative and quantitative. By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the information can provide a richer, fuller understanding of the concepts studied. This research was an opportunity to develop and test a new instrument. Further testing of this instrument, and modifications to it, are in order. Future research should also aid in our understanding of fertility decision theories and their applicability to lesbian families, and suggest whether additional theoretical concepts may be important in determining lesbian women's attitudes toward parenting.

The data from the current research can be disseminated to the lesbian community, other researchers, and the general public, to aid understanding of lesbian women, lesbian families, and lesbian parents, and to help dispel some of the myths and fears regarding lesbianism and lesbian motherhood. Forums for this dissemination could be in the context of workshops, conferences or brochures.

The research data suggests the need for interventions with lesbian women in the areas of family and parenting. Moreover, information dissemination and interventions can be done collaboratively with the lesbian community. Interventions can be created from an advocacy approach rather than a problem approach, as tools to help lesbian women help themselves. The information gathered can be used to create: aids for decision-making; clarification of values exercises; discussion groups; lesbian parenting support groups, and so forth.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Appendix A

Example of an Initial Contact Letter to a Community Organization

(NOTE: The actual letter was sent on department letterhead)

July 21, 1994

Lesbian Connection
P.O. Box 811
East Lansing, MI. 48826

Dear Lesbian Connection:

I am a lesbian graduate student at Michigan State University surveying adult lesbians about parenting. The survey asks about things like the role of the community in our families, how many lesbians are mothers, how many plan to become mothers, and the decision factors in becoming a parent. I am interested not only in lesbians who are or plan to become mothers but in all lesbians' views about motherhood.

I am writing to you because I need your assistance -- I hope you will help me get in touch with lesbians in your organization and allow the survey to be mailed to some of your members. There are several different ways to do the mailing, and different ways for your organization to help.

In the later part of August I will call you to discuss the survey and how your organization can participate. I consider this project a community effort and hope that you will not see this project as a burden, but as an opportunity. I plan to share the survey information gathered with the participating organizations and would like to explore ways we can work together.

The research I am proposing is worthwhile and the information gathered will ultimately be used to benefit lesbian families and communities in Michigan. Our families are important and we deserve recognition. I feel confident that you will do all that you feel comfortable doing to make this a successful survey.
Peace,

Nancy McCrohan
Department of Psychology
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824-1117

OR

(home) 1028 Parker
Lansing, MI 48912
517-485-5774

APPENDIX B

Appendix B

Cover Letter of the Lesbian Connection Mailing

(NOTE: The actual cover letter was sent on LC letterhead)

May 10, 1995

Hi!

We're sending the enclosed survey to about one-fourth of our Michigan mailing list on behalf of Nancy McCrohan, an MSU graduate student who is looking for lesbians in Michigan to fill out her survey. The survey is completely voluntary and anonymous, and asks your opinions about parenting and whether or not you want to become a parent.

The student wants a variety of lesbians to fill out the survey, including women who *do not* want to have children, women who are *not sure*, women who *want* children, and women who are *already parents.*

The survey takes about 20 to 25 minutes to fill out, and asks about things such as societal attitudes toward lesbian parenting, support from others for *not* being a parent *or* support for being a parent, attitudes about motherhood as an identity or role, reasons for having children and reasons for not having children, and demographic questions.

You can rest assured that LC's mailing list remains confidential - our mailing list is never sold or given away. We ourselves did all the addressing of the envelopes.

You can use the enclosed pre-paid business envelope to return you survey. Nancy also arranged for a discount coupon for Goldenrod as a thank you for filling out the survey.

If you have any questions or comments feel free to drop us a line or give us a call. Thanks for your help.

For *Lesbian Connection,*
The Ambitious Amazons - Margy & Sandy

APPENDIX C

Appendix C

Survey Instrument

(NOTE: This instrument has been photographically reduced)

DON'T WANT TO HAVE CHILDREN ??...THIS SURVEY IS FOR YOU !!

LOOKING FORWARD TO HAVING CHILDREN ??...THIS SURVEY IS FOR YOU !!

NOT SURE IF & WHEN YOU WANT CHILDREN ??...THIS SURVEY IS FOR YOU !!

YOU ALREADY HAVE CHILDREN ??...THIS SURVEY IS FOR YOU !!

SURVEY OF LESBIAN WOMEN'S OPINIONS

ABOUT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

This is a survey about lesbians' ideas about our families and becoming parents. This survey is for ANY adult lesbian in Michigan, NOT JUST lesbians who are mothers, or who plan to become mothers. Lesbians, lesbian couples, and lesbians with children have been mostly invisible in our society, although this has been changing a little recently. With this survey, I hope to better understand our families and ideas about parenting. You can help by filling out this survey. Women are individuals, with all kinds of experiences and lives. I tried to keep this in mind when I wrote the questions. I want to learn about all kinds of lesbian women, from all races and classes and ages and families. If you have ideas about families that I don't ask about, please write on the back of the survey or add another sheet of paper.

This survey is being done by Nancy McCrohan, a lesbian graduate student at Michigan State University. A report of the findings of this survey will be given to lesbian organizations in Michigan when it is completed. I hope to use the information to help ourselves and our families.

If you have already filled out a survey, pass on the extra copy of the survey to another lesbian who has not filled it out. If you know of other lesbians who would like to fill out this survey, make copies or write me to ask for more copies.

The survey is confidential and anonymous, so please do NOT put your name on it. This survey will take about 20-25 minutes to complete. You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this survey. If there are any questions you don't want to answer, just leave them blank. If you have any questions or concerns about this survey, please contact Nancy McCrohan at 517-485-5774.

THANKS!!

Please return this survey as soon as possible or by June 15, 1995.

PART A. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A1. To what degree do you identify as a lesbian? *Circle the number below that best describes your sexual identity.*

Lesbian Identity			Bisexual				Heterosexual Identity
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	

A2. About how many people in the following groups know your sexual orientation (you are "out" to)? *Circle the answer that best describes the amount of people.*

Family	None	A few	About half	Most	Everyone
Lesbian / Gay friends	None	A few	About half	Most	Everyone
Straight friends	None	A few	About half	Most	Everyone
Co-workers	None	A few	About half	Most	Everyone

A3. Please circle the number of newsletters or publications you read or to which you subscribe.

0 1 2 or more lesbian publications
0 1 2 or more lesbian/gay publications (for both men and women)
0 1 2 or more feminist /women's publications (not lesbian only)

A4.	How often do you go to lesbian /gay bars?	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
A5.	How often do you attend lesbian /gay social events, such as concerts or dances?	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
A6.	How often do you participate in lesbian /gay political events, such as marches?	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never

A7.	Do you have any close lesbian friends who have children?	Yes	No
A8.	Do you have any close lesbian friends who are thinking about having children?	Yes	No
A9.	Do you have any close lesbian friends actively trying to have a child?	Yes	No

A10. How would you describe your current relationship? *Circle one answer.*

1. In a monogamous relationship with one woman
   Length of this relationship: _____
2. In a primary relationship with one woman, but have other sexual partners
3. Single, seeing more than one woman
4. Single, but involved with one woman
5. Single, not seeing anyone romantically
6. Other (*Please describe*)_____

A11. Have you ever completed any legal paperwork with a partner for:

1.	Power of attorney?	Yes	No
2.	Patient advocate for medical decisions?	Yes	No
3.	Last will & testament?	Yes	No
4.	Co-parenting agreement?	Yes	No
5.	Other? (*Please describe*)_____		

A12. Have you ever had a commitment ceremony? Yes No

A13.	How often did you take care of children when you were under 18 years old? *(This includes paid or unpaid, watching relatives or non-relatives)*	More than weekly	About weekly	More than monthly	About monthly	Rarely or never
A14.	How often have you taken care of children in the past two years? *(Not including your own if you are a parent)*	More than weekly	About weekly	More than monthly	About monthly	Rarely or never
A15.	How often do you have contact with children right now ? *(Not including your own if you are a parent)*	More than weekly	About weekly	More than monthly	About monthly	Rarely or never
A16.	How often would you like to have contact with children right now ? *(Not including your own if you are a parent)*	More than weekly	About weekly	More than monthly	About monthly	Rarely or never

A17. Are you currently a parent or a co-parent?

1. Yes
2. No

A18. **IF YOU ARE A PARENT** please give the age & sex of each of your children, and whether you identified as a lesbian at the time you had that child.

		CHILD #1	CHILD #2	CHILD #3	CHILD #4
1.	Age and gender of child				
2.	Did you have the child before or after coming out?	Before After	Before After	Before After	Before After

A19. Do you have a partner who already had children before you were partners?
1. No, I have no partner
2. No, my partner did not have children before we were partners
3. Yes, but I don't consider myself a co-parent
4. Yes, and now I feel I am a co-parent
5. Yes, but I am not sure of my role with the children
6. Yes, and my role with the children is:_____

A20. With whom do you live? *Circle ALL that apply.*
1. Lover / partner
2. Communal or cooperative housing
3. Female roommate(s)
4. Male roommate(s)
5. No one (live alone)
6. My child(ren)
7. Partner's child(ren)
8. Our child(ren) (mine and my partner's)
9. Other (*Please describe*)_____

A21. How many sisters do you have?_____

A22. How many brothers do you have?_____

A23. What year were you born? _____

A24. What is your yearly household income before taxes? _____

A25. What is your main job or occupation? _____

A26. What is your zip code? _____

A27. How many years of school have you completed? *Circle ONE that fits best.*
1. 8 years or less (no high school)
2. Some high school
3. Graduated high school or GED
4. Vocational Training
5. Some college
6. College degree
7. Some graduate or professional school
8. Graduate or professional degree

A28. What is your race or ethnic background? *Circle ONE that fits best.*
1. Asian
2. Black / African American
3. Hispanic
4. Native American (Indian)
5. White / Caucasian
6. Other (*Please describe*) _____

PART B. DESIRE TO PARENT

PLEASE ANSWER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS WHETHER OR NOT YOU PLAN TO HAVE CHILDREN, OR WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE A PARENT. There are many ideas and concerns people hold about having children. People often feel mixed about having children. Sometimes people want and don't want children all at the same time.

B1. What statement below best describes your FEELINGS about becoming a parent? Do you WANT to have a child /children /another child? *Circle the number that best describes your feelings.*
1. I do not want to have a child
2. Most of the time I think that I don't want to have a child
3. I am not sure if I want to have a child
4. Most of the time I think that I want to have a child
5. I definitely want to have a child

B2. What statement below best describes your PLANS about becoming a parent? Do you INTEND to have a child /children /another child? *Circle the number that best describes your feelings.*
1. I do not intend to have a child --------> *(Go to **Question B3**)*
2. Most of the time I don't intend to have a child
3. I am not sure if I intend to have a child *(Go to **Question B4**)*
4. Most of the time I intend to have a child
5. I definitely intend to have a child ----> *(Go to **Question B5**)*

B3. How often do you think about your intention to NOT have a child /children /another child?
1. Very frequently
2. Frequently
3. Occasionally *(Go to **Question B7**)*
4. Rarely
5. Never

B4. How often do you think about WHETHER you will have a child /children /another child?
1. Very frequently
2. Frequently
3. Occasionally *(Go to **Question B6**)*
4. Rarely
5. Never

B5. How often do you think about your intention TO HAVE a child /children /another child?
1. Very frequently
2. Frequently
3. Occasionally
4. Rarely
5. Never

B6. IF you want children (or more children), how many children TOTAL would you like to have? _____

B7. What would NOT APPEAL to you about having a child (or another child)?_____

_____

_____

B8. What would APPEAL to you about having a child (or another child)? _____

_____

_____

B9. What are (or would be) your greatest worries about becoming a parent/being a parent? _____

_____

_____

PART C. IDEAS ABOUT HAVING CHILDREN

What is your opinion of the following statements? Do you strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the following statements? *Circle the answer that best describes how you feel about each statement.*

C1.	MOST PEOPLE assume that lesbians do NOT become mothers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C2.	MOST LESBIANS assume that lesbians do NOT become mothers	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C3.	The way the law treats lesbian mothers is a factor in my decision to parent OR to not parent	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C4.	It is important for me to have the support of my friends in my decision to parent OR to not parent	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C5.	It is important for me to have the support of my family in my decision to parent OR to not parent	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C6.	It is important for me to have the support of the lesbian community in my decision to parent OR to not parent	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree

Again, the next few pages should be answered by EVERYONE, whether you are a parent or not, whether you even want a child (or another child) or not. People have ideas that may influence if, when, and how many children they will have. Here are some ideas that people have about IF and WHEN they want a child. To what degree do you agree or disagree with the following statements? *Circle the answer that most closely matches your feelings.*

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neither Agree nor Disagree
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree
np = no partner /does not apply

C7.	I want to love a child	SA	A	N	D	SD
C8.	Having a child would make my family complete	SA	A	N	D	SD
C9.	I want to nurture a child and help her or him grow	SA	A	N	D	SD
C10.	I don't like being around children	SA	A	N	D	SD
C11.	I have never seriously considered having children	SA	A	N	D	SD
C12.	I don't want to add to the population explosion	SA	A	N	D	SD
C13.	Caring for a child is a joyful experience	SA	A	N	D	SD
C14.	I don't want to experience pregnancy or childbirth	SA	A	N	D	SD
C15.	I would like be involved with a child as a "close aunt" or close friend	SA	A	N	D	SD
C16.	I don't have enough time to be a parent	SA	A	N	D	SD
C17.	It's important to have insurance before having a child	SA	A	N	D	SD
C18.	After you have children you make time for them	SA	A	N	D	SD
C19.	Having a child would be a contribution to society	SA	A	N	D	SD
C20.	There is so much to think about and plan for before having children	SA	A	N	D	SD
C21.	Arranging for legal recognition of a co-parent is important if a lesbian couple has children	SA	A	N	D	SD
C22.	My lesbian friends will support my decision to have or to not have children	SA	A	N	D	SD
C23.	It would be a problem having a child "outing" me	SA	A	N	D	SD
C24.	I have never pictured myself as a mother	SA	A	N	D	SD
C25.	I want to leave a part of me behind	SA	A	N	D	SD
C26.	I worry that my children could be harassed for having a lesbian mother	SA	A	N	D	SD
C27.	I want the challenge of raising a child	SA	A	N	D	SD

SA = Strongly Agree
A = Agree
N = Neither Agree nor Disagree
D = Disagree
SD = Strongly Disagree
np = no partner /does not apply

C28.	Being a parent does not fit with how I see myself	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C29.	I want to do other things (like travel or finish my education) before having any children	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C30.	Having a child would create a connection to the past and the future	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C31.	I think motherhood is an oppressive institution	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C32.	I have thought a lot about whether or not I want to have a child	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C33.	I don't want to interrupt my job / career (or partner's job)	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C34.	I don't want to bring children into the world the way it is	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C35.	Having a child is an experience I want to share with a partner	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C36.	Having a child would increase the bond with my partner	SA	A	N	D	SD	NP
C37.	I would not feel comfortable as a mother	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C38.	I would be very concerned about a sperm donor's legal rights to a child	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C39.	Having a child would create a sense of family	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C40.	I would rather spend money on other things	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C41.	I don't want to be tied down with children	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C42.	I want to have an impact on the world	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C43.	I don't want the responsibility of having a child	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C44.	When a lesbian couple has a child, it is difficult for the non-biological co-parent to be recognized as a full parent	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C45.	My partner doesn't want children	SA	A	N	D	SD	NP
C46.	I find children too stimulating	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C47.	Lesbian mothers get support from the lesbian community	SA	A	N	D	SD	
C48.	It is important to have the support of my partner in my decision to parent OR to not parent	SA	A	N	D	SD	NP
C49.	When I think of the future, I don't see myself having children	SA	A	N	D	SD	

PART D. SUPPORT OF OTHERS

How do you think other people would feel if you had a child? Do you think you would have the support of these people if you decided to have a child? If you already have children, how much support do you think you have from these people right now?

VS = Very Supportive
SS = Somewhat Supportive
N = Neither Supportive nor Unsupportive
SU = Somewhat Unsupportive
VU = Very Unsupportive
na = Does Not Apply to Me (don't have these persons in my life)

D1.	Mother	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D2.	Father	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D3.	Brothers	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D4.	Sisters	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D5.	Other relatives	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D6.	Partner	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D7.	My children	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D8.	Lesbian community	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D9.	Partner's family	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D10.	Straight friends without children	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D11.	Straight friends with children	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D12.	Lesbian friends without children	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D13.	Lesbian friends with children	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na
D14.	Co-workers	VS	SS	N	SU	VU	na

PART E. INTERVENTIONS

Here is a list of activities that could be used to help people think about whether they want to have children or not, or to help people feel comfortable with their choices. How helpful would these activities be for you, personally? Circle the answer that best describes your opinion of the helpfulness of each activity.

E1.	Discussion group for lesbians who aren't sure whether they want to become parents	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E2.	Practical information about "How To" become a parent	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E3.	Help with clarifying values about parenting	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E4.	Ideas about how to talk with one's partner about parenting desires	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E5.	Discussion group for lesbians who definitely do NOT want to become mothers	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E6.	Support group or discussion group for lesbian mothers	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E7.	Ideas about getting community support for lesbian women who do NOT want children	Helpful	Not sure	Not helpful
E8.	Ideas about getting community support for lesbian mothers	Helpful	Not sure	Not Helpful
E9.	Ideas on how to deal with your new lover's children	Helpful	Not sure	Not Helpful

PART F. BECOMING A PARENT

F1. Have you OR your partner had ANY discussion about parenting OR done ANY activities related to becoming a parent, in the past two years?

1. Yes --------> *(If Yes, **please answer the questions on this page**)*
2. No ---------> *(If No, go to **last page**)*

F2. Have you OR your partner done ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES related to becoming a parent, in the past two years? *For each activity, circle the appropriate answer.*

1.	Contacted an agency regarding a home study for an adoption	Yes	No
2.	Had a home study for an adoption completed	Yes	No
3.	Talked with other lesbians who are mothers	Yes	No
4.	Talked with other lesbians who want to be mothers	Yes	No
5.	Charted ovulation cycle	Yes	No
6.	Contacted sperm bank(s)	Yes	No
7.	Discussed ideas with my partner	Yes	No
8.	Discussed ideas with potential sperm donors	Yes	No
9.	Inseminated under a doctor's supervision	Yes	No
10.	Inseminated at home	Yes	No
11.	Used ovulation regulating drugs	Yes	No
12.	Applied for foster parent status	Yes	No
13.	Tried to adopt	Yes	No
14.	Discussed ideas with potential "surrogate" mother	Yes	No
15.	Other *(Please describe)*		

F3. Have you or your partner seriously considered any of the following METHODS FOR BECOMING A PARENT?

1.	Pregnancy from an anonymous sperm donor	Yes	No
2.	Pregnancy from a known sperm donor	Yes	No
3.	Pregnancy from sperm of a male relative of the nonbiological partner	Yes	No
4.	Foster parenting	Yes	No
5.	Adoption	Yes	No
6.	Discussed ideas with potential "surrogate" mother	Yes	No

THANK-YOU very much for your information and your time.

If you would like to add anything else, please do so.

If you would like to be part of a one-time discussion group about this survey to be held Fall 1995, please send a note with your name, address, and phone number to the address listed below. Please send your note of interest **separate** from this survey in order to protect your anonymity.

To return this survey, use the envelope inside the survey.
(If the envelope is not there, please mail to Nancy McCrohan, Department of Psychology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824).