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DROPPING THE MOTHERLOAD:
LESBIANS' DECISIONS TO BECOME MOTHERS OR REMAIN CHILDFREE

VOLUME I

By

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ABSTRACT

DROPPING THE MOTHERLOAD:
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By

Nancy Jennifer Mezey

This study focuses on the decision-making processes lesbians go through to become mothers or remain childfree. Although lesbians have been forming families both with and without children over the past 20 to 30 years, they have been doing so in a rocky and contradictory social climate. While second-wave feminism and the increased use of reproductive technologies facilitate the creation of lesbian families with children, homophobia and heterosexism discourage lesbians from becoming mothers. The result is that lesbians receive social support and face social constraints in making mothering decisions.

Because children are socially and not just biologically conceived, this study draws on social constructionist and structural perspectives, multiracial feminism, and the sociology of sexualities to ask two main questions: 1) How are the decisions of lesbians to become mothers or to remain childfree embedded in structural, cultural, and personal processes? and 2) What role do race, class, gender, and sexuality play in shaping these processes? It uses data from a qualitative content analysis of popular lesbian media and from eight focus groups consisting of lesbians of different racial-ethnic and class backgrounds who, within their identities as lesbians, are mothers or are remaining childfree.

Findings suggest that like heterosexual women, lesbians form orientations toward motherhood or remaining childfree early in life. These orientations are shaped by social

location and are based on childhood experiences and interpretations of those experiences. Early orientations are challenged and altered by structural and ideational factors (also based on social location) that shape lesbians' decision-making processes. Although the structure of the decision-making process is similar for lesbians and heterosexual women, the substance of the process is different because sexuality, together with race, class, and gender shape structures of opportunity and constraint differently. Despite the constraints created by sexuality, lesbians draw on their human agency to make intentional mothering decisions.

There are three implications of this study: 1) Sexuality is a fundamental organizing principle; 2) Social theory must include sexuality to fully understand the social world; and 3) The intentional nature of lesbians' mothering decisions counters conservative assumptions that diverse family forms develop out of deficient family values.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES x
LIST OF FIGURES xi

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM 1
I. PURPOSE OF STUDY 1
II. CONCEPTUAL ISSUES LEADING TO THE RESEARCH 2
A. Heterosexism and Homophobia in the Family Values Debate 3
B. Theoretical Concerns and Foundations 10
C. Gerson's Model of Understanding Mothering Decisions 13
III. LAYOUT OF DISSERTATION 16

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW 19
I. SOCIAL FACILITATORS OF LESBIAN MOTHERS AND FAMILIES 19
A. Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement 21
1. Denouncing Traditional Gender Roles And Sexual Norms For Women.... 21
2. New Thinking about Diverse Family Forms 22
3. The First Generation of Lesbian Mothers 22
B. The HIV/AIDS Epidemic 23
C. Reproductive Technologies 25
II. CURRENT STRUGGLES AND EXPERIENCES OF LESBIAN FAMILIES 28
A. Fighting for Same-Sex Marriage 28
B. Negotiating Institutions to Obtain Children 31
C. Creating Social Networks 35
D. Coming Out 36
E. Debating Motherhood within Lesbian Communities 38
F. Creating Egalitarian and Nurturing Families 40
III. FACTORS SHAPING WOMEN'S MOTHERING DECISIONS 42
A. Work 43
B. Intimate Relationships 46
C. Ideology Concerning Motherhood 47
D. Ideology Concerning Sexuality 54
E. Identity 57
F. Intentionality 59
Chapter Summary 61

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY 65
I. THE RESEARCHER AS A POSITIONED SUBJECT 65
II. EXTENDED CASE METHOD 69
III. DEFINITION OF TERMS 71
IV. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYTIC STRATEGIES 77
A. Focus Groups 78
1. The Research Site 81
2. Recruiting the Sample 82
3. Research Questions 86
4. Analytic Strategies 92
B. Demographic Questionnaire 97
C. Content Analysis 97
1. Selecting Media Sources 98
2. Ethical Concerns 101
3. Analytic Strategies 102
V. METHODOLOGICAL LIMITATIONS 104
Chapter Summary 106

CHAPTER 4
MEDIA SUPPORT FOR LESBIANS' MOTHERING DECISIONS:
AN ANALYSIS OF POPULAR LESBIAN MEDIA 108
I. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & WORK ISSUES 109
II. SOCIAL NETWORKS 110
III. POLITICAL ACTIVISM 114
IV. HEALTH AND SAFETY ISSUES 116
V. ENTERTAINMENT 117
VI. RELIGION 119
VII. DECIDING TO BECOME A MOTHER 120
VIII. POSITIVE VIEWS OF LESBIAN MOTHERS AND FAMILIES 124
IX. MEDICAL SUPPORT 125
X. LEGAL SUPPORT 127
Chapter Summary 129

CHAPTER 5
"CONSIDERING MYSELF LUCKY":
LESBIANS' DECISIONS TO REMAIN CHILDFREE 132
I. DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF CHILDFREE LESBIANS 133
II. FORMULATING ORIENTATIONS 136
A. Interpreting their Mothers' Experiences and Opportunities 137
B. Experiences with Children 141
1. Past Experiences with Children 142
2. Current Experiences with Children 145
C. Racial Discrimination 1417
III. PIVOTAL FACTORS IN DECIDING TO REMAIN CHILDFREE 148
A. Sexual Discrimination 149
B. Work and Financial Issues 153
C. Social Networks 159
D. Intimate Relationships 169
E. Ideas about Lesbian Motherhood 174
F. Barriers to Obtaining Children 175
1. Medical/Legal Systems 175
2. Rejecting Pregnancy 181
G. Age Issues 184
Chapter Summary 188

CHAPTER 6
"RAISING CHILDREN NO MATTER WHAT": LESBIANS' DECISIONS TO
BECOME MOTHERS 1911
I. DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW OF LESBIAN MOTHERS 192
II. FORMULATING ORIENTATIONS TOWARD MOTHERHOOD 196
A. Interpreting their Mothers' Experiences and Opportunities 196
B. Past Family Experiences 201
C. The Changing Nature of Motherhood and Families 203
III. PIVOTAL FACTORS IN DECIDING TO BECOME A MOTHER 205
A. Work and Financial Issues 206
B. Social Networks 213
1. Networks of Families and Communities 214
2. Lesbian Mother Networks 220
C. Intimate Relationships 225
D. Renegotiation of Gender Roles 229
1. Ideas about Lesbian Motherhood 229
2. Experiences within Lesbian Relationships 232
E. Help in Obtaining Children 236
1. Medical Help 236
2. Legal Help 244
F. Sexual Discrimination 248
Chapter Summary 252

CHAPTER 7
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION 254
I. MAJOR FINDINGS 254
II. IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS 265
III. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH 269
Conclusion 271

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR LESBIAN MOTHERS 273
APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR CHILDFREE LESBIANS 276
APPENDIX C: CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMED CONSENT FOR FOCUS GROUPS 279
APPENDIX D: DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE 281
APPENDIX E: MEDIA SOURCES USED IN CONTENT ANALYSIS 284

BIBLIOGRAPHY 288

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Distribution of Participants in Focus Groups 80
Table 2. Source of Recruitment for Focus Groups 83
Table 3. Racial-Ethnic Stratification in Focus Groups and U.S. Population 106
Table 4. Childfree Working-Class Lesbians-of-Color 134
Table 5. Childfree Middle-Class Lesbians-of-Color 134
Table 6. Childfree Working-Class White Lesbians 135
Table 7. Childfree Middle-Class White Lesbians 136
Table 8. Working-Class Lesbian-of-Color Mothers 193
Table 9. Middle-Class Lesbian-of-Color Mothers 193
Table 10. Working-class White Mothers 194
Table 11. Middle-Class White Mothers 195

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Lesbians' Decision-Making Processes 264

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

I. Purpose of Study

In her 1985 book, *Hard Choices: How Women Decide about Work, Career, and Motherhood,* Kathleen Gerson writes that she is studying a "subtle revolution" concerning the "far reaching changes taking place in the work and family patterns of American women" (Gerson 1985:1). Shortly after Gerson wrote those words, the U.S. began facing a second subtle revolution that also concerns far reaching changes taking place in family patterns of American women: the lesbian baby boom (Lewin 1993; O'Sullivan 1995; Weston 1991).

The lesbian baby boom has been forming over the past 20 to 30 years. It started with women who became mothers within heterosexual identities and then later identified as lesbians. More recently, lesbians within their identities as lesbians have been choosing motherhood by adopting and birthing children and becoming foster parents (Lewin 1993; Silber 1991). At the turn of the millennium, an estimated 22 percent of partnered lesbians had children in their home (Black, Gates, Sanders, & Taylor 2000). Furthermore, somewhere between 780,000 and 9 million children live in lesbian and gay families (Stacey and Biblarz 2001).

While lesbians have been forming families both with and without children over the past 20 to 30 years, they have been doing so within a rocky and often contradictory social and cultural climate. On the one hand, as I discuss in Chapter 2, certain social and cultural factors such as the women's liberation movement and new reproductive

technologies have created a climate that facilitates and supports the creation of lesbian families. On the other hand, lesbians are creating families within a heterosexist and homophobic climate fueled by the conservative "family values" movement and its off-shoot, the "marriage movement." The result is that lesbians receive a variety of social support and constraints in making mothering decisions (i.e., decisions about becoming mothers or remaining childfree).

This study focuses on the lesbian baby boom and the creation of lesbian families within a contradictory social and cultural climate by examining how lesbians' mothering decisions are embedded within larger social processes. Social processes, or the "construction and reconstruction of biography and the negotiation of circumstances" (McMahon 1995:50), exist within several distinct yet intersecting contexts, including structural, cultural, and personal. Because children are socially and not just biologically conceived, simply asking women why they "choose" to become mothers or to remain childfree is not an adequate means of understanding how women really do become mothers or remain childfree (Gerson 1985; McMahon 1995; Morell 1994). Therefore, this study asks two main questions: 1) How are the decisions of lesbians to become mothers or to remain childfree embedded in structural, cultural, and personal processes? and 2) What role do race, class, gender, and sexuality play in shaping these processes?

II. Conceptual Issues Leading to the Research

Three main conceptual issues led me to study lesbians' mothering decisions. First, I wanted to understand how lesbians form families despite conservative heterosexist family policy and homophobic family rhetoric put forth by family values crusaders (Stacey

1996). I wanted to show how lesbians make informed and thoughtful decisions about motherhood and families despite conservative political attempts to undermine their families. Second, I wanted to address a theoretical concern within sociology. As I began to study families, I realized that several key theoretical bodies were important but not inclusive of important factors. For example, I found that although the sociology of sexualities centers sexuality, it does center sexuality with race, class, or gender. Similarly, theories concerning race, class, and gender include sexualities, but do not privilege sexualities in the same way they privilege race, class, and gender. As a result, I wanted to develop a study that privileged sexuality with race, class, and gender.

Third, I wanted to look at how sexuality matters in shaping lesbians' mothering decisions. After reading Kathleen Gerson's (1985) book, *Hard Choices: How Women Decide about Work, Career, and Motherhood,* I began to wonder how lesbians' decisions might be similar to and differ from heterosexual women's mothering decisions. That is, I wanted to better understand how sexuality shapes lesbians' and heterosexual women's lives differently in regard to mothering decisions.

A. Heterosexism and Homophobia in the Family Values Debate

While most people say that family is one of the most important aspects of their lives, very few people agree on exactly what family is (Coltrane 1998). For different people family means different things and includes different members. Family can refer to "long dead ancestors, distant cousins one never sees, siblings or other blood relations, divorced people who live apart, friends who are so close they have become honorary family members, and so on" (Coltrane 1998:3). Furthermore, family invokes different feelings about people, practices, and traditions. Although family is often a taken for

granted term, it is a term without a fixed meaning (Coltrane 1998).

The question of how to define family has created a large political "family values" debate and its offshoot, the marriage movement. The family values debate and marriage movement are concerned more with family structure than with family well-being (Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998) and are fueled by conservative religious leaders, politicians, and social scientists (Blankenhorn 1990; Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998; Stacey 1996; Wilson 1993). Conservative thinkers argue that a decline in family values and a move away from the "traditional" nuclear family cause a decline in material and economic conditions.[1]

The conservative (and dominant) view of "the family" is based on an ideological definition of how some people believe the family ought to be structured in order to maintain a stable, cohesive society (Parsons 1955; Popenoe 1993b; Whitehead 1993). This dominant, conventional definition grew out of a structural functionalist framework of family developed by Talcott Parsons in the 1950s. The endurance and tenacity of this sociological doctrine has had far reaching political and social implications for families in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. According to structural functionalism and current dominant ideology, "the family" has a monolithic structure based on husband-father as primary breadwinner, wife-mother as primary household care-taker, and biological children in a nuclear, private, setting (Thorne 1992).

Conservatives claim "that the traditional nuclear family is the basis of social organization and cohesion in the United States" (Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998:6).

---

[1] Progressive thinkers counter conservative thinkers regarding to family values. For an in-depth discussion of the progressive position, see Baca Zinn, Dill, and Patton 1998; and Stacey 1996.

According to conservatives, the breakdown of the nuclear family structure means the breakdown of social cohesion and the cause of societal ills such as poverty, teen pregnancy, divorce, drug use, crime, and poor education (Dill, Baca Zinn, and Patton 1998).

Embedded within the family values debate and marriage movement is a related public debate concerning motherhood. As Glenn (1994) notes, "some of the most heated social and political debates taking place in late-twentieth-century America turn out to revolve around disputed meanings of mothering and motherhood in contemporary society" (p. 1). Issues concerning teen pregnancy, reproductive technology, welfare reform, and abortion place motherhood at the center of heated political debates (Ross 1995). Because dominant society has historically considered the term "lesbian mother" to be an oxymoron (Lewin 1993), lesbians have been excluded from public debates about motherhood. However, recently, as lesbians are becoming mothers in record numbers, they are finding themselves at the heart of the family values debate and marriage movement.

Lesbian and gay families stand in direct opposition to the traditional, or modern family form. Therefore, conservatives target lesbian and gay families through their policies and rhetoric. As Stacey (1996) writes:

> Gay and lesbian families represent such a new, embattled, visible and necessarily self-conscious, genre of postmodern kinship, that they more readily expose the widening gap between the complex reality of postmodern family forms and the simplistic modern family ideology that still undergirds most public rhetoric, policy and law concerning families (p. 108).

Conservatives target lesbians (and other queers) with their rhetoric, policy, and laws in four main ways. First, conservative rhetoric targets lesbian families by arguing that some

families are better for society than others; that is, some families uphold the moral fabric of society and others break it down and cause social problems. Conservatives rely on cultural deprivation models to explain the difference between family forms. Cultural deprivation is a term used by the majority culture to imply that the culture of a particular minority group "is not only deficient, but inferior" (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 2003:14).

Historically, conservatives have used cultural deprivation models, and particularly the "culture of poverty" model, to target poor and racial-ethnic families. The culture of poverty was coined by Oscar Lewis (1970) and is the belief that poor people (and particularly poor racial-ethnic people) support and maintain poverty through their different values and life-styles from middle-class (White) society. According to the culture of poverty perspective, poor parents are more permissive in raising their children, are less verbal, more fatalistic, less apt to defer gratification, and less likely to be interested in formal education than middle- and upper-classes (Jary and Jary 1991:103). Poor people's "deviant" cultural pattern is passed on through families from generation to generation. Thus, poverty is perpetuated by the poor families themselves, not by larger society (Lewis 1970; Moynihan 1967). Conservatives use cultural deprivation theories to argue that the values of poor families perpetuate female-headed households, teen pregnancy, birthing children out of wedlock, and other social "ills" (Murray 1993).

More recently, however, conservatives are relying on cultural deprivation models to argue that lesbians and gays are forming families because of deviant values concerning sexuality. According to conservative thinkers, the result of deviant family values is that lesbians and gays are forming families that cause social problems and passing on their deviant social values to their children. The passing on of sexually diverse values to

children "speaks precisely to the heart of what homophobes most fear, that public acceptance of lesbian and gay families will spawn an epidemic of gay youth" (Stacey 1996:131). According to conservative thinking, lesbian and gay families will, therefore, teach homosexuality instead of religion, produce masculine daughters and feminine men (Stacey 1996:132), and therefore shake up acceptable gender and family orders.

The second way that conservative thinking targets lesbian families is through their assumption that biological differences between men and women justify the nuclear family form. Biological models state that women and men should perform certain roles in the family because they are biologically disposed to those roles (Andersen 1997). In particular, women are "natural" caregivers and men are "natural" breadwinners. In order for a family to function "properly," men as husbands and fathers must be present. Conservatives "identify fatherless families as the root of everything from poverty, violence, drug addiction, crime and declining standards in education and civility to teen pregnancy, [and] sexually transmitted diseases..." (Stacey 1994:119).

The implication of the conservative view of fatherless families is that without a male figure, women are unable to keep their families functioning "properly." By contending that gender differentiation (i.e., heterosexuality), gender roles, and fathers within the "traditional" family structure are of utmost importance, conservatives place lesbians at the heart of the family values debate and outside the criteria for legitimate and functionally sound families.

Third, for strict conservatives the presence of father figures in families is not enough to keep a family sound. Conservatives use biological explanations to advocate the necessity and involvement of *biological* fathers. Sociologist David Popenoe (1996)

argues that not only are two heterosexual parents better than one, but biological fathers are most suited as the second parent because of the father's "genetic tie to his child" (p. 140). According to Popenoe, "a child who does not have a close and sustaining relationship with her or his biological father is far less likely to have such a relationship with any adult male" (p.140).

The conservative claim that a primary characteristic of a family is the biological connection between parents and children (Popenoe 1993a; Whitehead 1993) directly challenges lesbians families. Conservatives refer to biologically connected families as "intact" families, a value-laden term that implies that non-biologically connected families are incomplete and/or flawed. The view that biologically connected families are a necessity excludes lesbian families because lesbians cannot produce offspring who are direct genetic products of both parents, although reproductive technologies may provide a means in the future. Thus, lesbian families can not currently be "intact" families according to conservative definitions.

Fourth, according to conservatives, marriage is necessary for families to maintain social cohesion and strong child welfare. Conservative ideology concerning marriage is so prominent that it has taken on the form of the "marriage movement" that promotes the benefits of marriage to couples and society. According to conservatives, marital arrangements promote longer lives, greater household financial stability, greater physical and mental health for women and men, and more sexual satisfaction than non-marital arrangements (Waite and Gallagher 2000). Furthermore, the reduction in marriage and the increase in divorce are main causes of family decline and social problems such as poverty (Popenoe 1993b; Whitehead 1993). To increase the physical and mental well-

being of families and society, conservatives argue that marriage should be "the sole legal institution through which parental rights and responsibilities are defined and exercised" (Murray 1993:A14).

Although supporters of the marriage movement agree that marriage benefits individuals and society, there is some disagreement as to whether or not marriage should be extended to lesbians and gays (Waite and Gallagher 2000:200-201). Despite the disagreement, however, most supporters of the conservative family values debate feel strongly that both marriage and family remain heterosexual institutions (Stacey 1996). To ensure the heterosexual nature of marriage and family, Republicans introduced a bill in 1996 called the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). DOMA, which President Clinton signed into law, states that marriage is "a legal union between one man and one woman as husband and wife" (Dunlap, cited in Stacey 1996:120). Based on conservative ideology, DOMA specifically squeezes lesbians and other queers out of the legal definition of family.

The family values debate and the marriage movement, therefore, place lesbian families at the heart of their discourse. They provide policy makers and society in general a "legitimate" platform from which to discriminate against lesbians and other queer families. The lack of entrance into the legal institution of marriage presents many challenges to queer families. Lack of access to child custody for both biological and adoptive parents, lack of medical and financial benefits for lesbian partners, and lack of legal recognition of partnerships in hospitals, schools, and financial matters present difficulties for lesbians (and other queers) to maintain relationships with partners and children. The family values debate and marriage movement are integral to lesbians'

mothering decisions because they shape heterosexist family policy and spread homophobic rhetoric throughout society (Lehr 1999:106-107). Their policy and rhetoric may deter some lesbians from becoming mothers. They, at minimum, create a social and cultural climate that constrains lesbians' mothering choices.

B. Theoretical Concerns and Foundations

In an attempt to develop a study that privileges sexuality along with race, class, and gender, this study draws on progressive ideology and is informed by four sociological perspectives: a social structural approach, social constructionism, multiracial feminism, and the sociology of sexualities. A social structural approach focuses on how society is structured in ways to privilege certain groups and disadvantage other groups of people. Social structures refer to "[t]he patterned and recurrent relationships among people and parts of a social organization" (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:479). Social structures organize society and provide the social and economic framework in which people interact (Henslin 1999). A structural approach also examines the interplay between social structure and agency. Agency exists on a personal or group level and refers to "[t]he ability of human beings to create viable lives even when they are constrained by social forces" (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:479). By looking at the interplay between social structure and agency, a social structural approach lies at the heart of what C. Wright Mills called the "sociological imagination." According to Mills, a major task of sociology is to distinguish between personal troubles and social structure, and to understand the relations between the two (Mills 1959:8). That is, a social structural approach acknowledges that people start at different points. It looks at how

those points pose constraints and privileges, and examines how people respond and move within and through those constraints and privileges. In this study, a social structural approach helps me examine how social structures such as race, class, gender, and sexuality shape social processes of lesbians' decisions to become mothers or remain childfree.

The second theoretical perspective that informs this study is social constructionism. Social constructionism examines how social structures, institutions, cultures, and interpersonal relations are created and defined through social beliefs, norms, and expectations (Henslin 1999). On a macro-level, social constructionism argues that social structures and institutions are created by those in power to maintain and perpetuate an unequal distribution of resources. On a micro-level, social constructionism argues that how people define and interpret reality is based on their own background and experiences, not on any fixed or essential criteria. Social constructionism is important to my study because it allows me to examine how lesbians' experiences with, perceptions of, and ideology concerning motherhood differ based on their social location (i.e., their "position in society based on family background, race, socio-economic status, religion, sexuality, or other relevant social characteristics" (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:479).

The third theoretical perspective that informs this study is multiracial feminism. Multiracial feminism is a social structural and social contructionist approach that "challenge[s] the hegemony of feminisms constructed primarily around the lives of white middle-class women" (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996:323). Rather than thinking about women as a cohesive group, multiracial feminism places difference at the center of its analyses to examine how women are dissimilar from one another based on race, class, and sexuality.

While there are six themes of multiracial feminism, four in particular inform this study. First, multiracial feminism conceptualizes race, class, gender, and sexuality as key components in what Patricia Hill Collins (1990) calls the "matrix of domination" (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996). A matrix of domination consists of the multiple, cross-cutting, systems of inequality that affect women and men differently (Collins 1990). By using the matrix of domination as an analytic tool, multiracial feminism examines how women can simultaneously experience themselves as gendered, raced, classed, and sexualized (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996:326).

The second theme of multiracial feminism is that intersecting hierarchies can both oppress and privilege the same person. For example, a White lesbian can be privileged by her race, but oppressed by her gender and sexuality. The third theme is that race, class, gender, and sexuality are relational. Because hierarchical systems are based on power relations, they create relationships in which one group's privilege is reliant on another group's oppression. Finally, multiracial feminism integrates "the lived experiences of diverse and continuously changing groups of women" to understand commonalities and differences among women (Baca Zinn and Dill 1996:327). For my study, the themes of multiracial feminism provide the necessary analytic tools to question how race, class, gender, and sexuality as interconnected social structures infuse the lives of lesbians and shape their decision-making processes. Furthermore, they provide a means to draw on the experiences of a diverse group of lesbians to inform the field of family sociology.

The final theoretical perspective that informs this study is the sociology of sexualities. The sociology of sexualities draws on the strengths of a social structural

approach, social constructionism, and queer theory to challenge society's and mainstream sociologists' belief that sexuality is a fixed aspect of nature. The sociology of sexualities argues that sexuality is a socially constructed hierarchical system that organizes society to privilege heterosexuals and oppress queers (Seidman 1994:8). It also argues that limited notions of out versus in, gay versus straight, and male versus female lead to a false view of the fluidity and mutability of human sexuality.

A major aim of the sociology of sexualities is to decenter historically dominant heterosexist analyses and to show how sexuality is a pervasive force throughout the social world (Seidman 1994; Stein and Plummer 1994; Epstein 1994). The sociology of sexualities states that where we think issues of sexuality and power are absent, in fact they exist. It looks at how society sexualizes "bodies, desires, acts, identities, social relations, knowledges, culture, and social institutions" (Seidman 1994:174). The sociology of sexualities provides the foundation for my conceptualization of sexuality as a social structure that shapes lesbians' mothering decisions.

The four theoretical approaches that inform my study provide a critical and comprehensive framework in which to address my main research questions. They inform this study by helping me to think about how lesbian families, either with children or without, are socially constructed by a society organized around race, class, gender, and sexual hierarchies.

C. Gerson's Model of Understanding Mothering Decisions

In thinking about how to design my study, I turned to Kathleen Gerson's (1985) book on the mothering decisions of heterosexual women. Gerson interviewed 63 women from both working- and middle-class backgrounds to study "the relationship between women's

work and family decisions" (p. 2). She conducted in-depth life histories to understand how women develop orientations toward or away from domesticity (i.e., homemaking and motherhood). She then examined "turning points" to show early orientations are poor predictions for adult life decisions and directions. Turning points are "change-inducing events," that highlight "often hidden and taken-for-granted factors that promote stability" and change over women's life courses (Gerson 1985:69). According to Gerson, turning points do not happen with any particular speed or awareness of change. That is, turning points "do not necessarily refer to sudden, conscious changes in life direction. The speed of change may vary from gradual to rapid.... In the long run, however, the fact of change matters more than its form" (Gerson 1985:69-70). To Gerson, turning points highlight structural, not ideational, factors.

In her introduction, Gerson claims that her "study thus presents a model for understanding general processes of human development and a method for analyzing the link between human action and social change" (Gerson 1985:2). Because I too wanted to study human processes and link action with social change, Gerson provided an ideal model on which I could build, particularly by looking at issues of sexuality and race. In fact, Gerson encourages building on her model when she writes that "[t]he ideas developed in this study can be then tested and refined with other racial and socioeconomic groups" (p. 43). In my study, I took the liberty to test and refine her ideas using women of different sexual identities as those in her study.

To frame her study, Gerson relied on what she calls a "developmental approach" that offers a more complete theory of women's behavior than socialization or structural theories (Gerson 1985:37). A developmental approach looks at female development over

the life course and studies how "women 'process' the social structural arrangements they inherit" (Gerson 1985:38). In using this approach, Gerson focused primarily on structural factors, although she mentions key psychological and ideological issues throughout her analysis.

In conducting in-depth interviews, Gerson found that through childhood experiences such as mother-daughter dynamics, parental expectations, family dynamics, and the wider social milieu, girls develop orientations toward or away from domesticity. These orientations form a "baseline from which adult development proceeds" (Gerson 1985:43). However, Gerson found that these orientations are not good predictors of adult family patterns. Rather, four structural conditions explain a move toward or away from domesticity: marital stability, husband's wages, women's experiences in the labor force, and support networks for domestic wives (Gerson 1985:193-195). As Gerson writes,

> [n]either chance circumstances nor individual personalities determined the paths [heterosexual] women took as they made decisions that shaped the directions of their lives. Their choices reflected instead an interaction between socially structured opportunities and constraints and active attempts to make sense of and respond to these structures (p. 192).

Thus, Gerson suggests that the biggest shaper of women's mothering decisions is what happens in the world, not the values and psychological orientations toward or away from domesticity.

Although my study does not follow the exact methodological design of Gerson's study, throughout my study I rely on Gerson's analysis to guide my own. Furthermore, I use Gerson's study to illuminate differences between lesbians and heterosexual women. By making this comparison, I am able to show where and how sexuality matters.

III. Layout of Dissertation

In this first chapter, I explained that the purpose of my study is to examine how race, class, gender, and sexuality shape the decision-making processes lesbians go through to decide to become mothers or remain childfree. I also explained the two conceptual issues that led to my research. First, I explained how lesbians are making mothering decisions within the social and cultural context of a conservative social and cultural climate. The family values debate and marriage movement create a social landscape that denounces the quality and legitimacy of lesbians mothers and families and poses real constraints to becoming parents. Second, I discussed the need to integrate four theoretical frameworks to guide my study: a social structural approach, social constructionism, multiracial feminism, and the sociology of sexualities. These four theoretical frameworks allow me to examine how lesbians of diverse race and class backgrounds start at a different points, move through systems of social supports and deterrents, and arrive at their decisions to become mothers or remain childfree.

The remaining chapters provide additional information concerning lesbians' decision-making processes. In Chapter 2 I review literature that discusses historical and material factors that shape lesbians' decision-making processes. First I look at social factors that have facilitated the rise of lesbian motherhood, such as feminism, the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and reproductive technologies. Then I examine current struggles and experiences of lesbian families, such as struggles for same-sex marriage, the creation of social networks, and the creation of egalitarian and nurturing families. Finally, I discuss key structural and ideological factors in both heterosexual women's and lesbians'

decision-making processes. These factors include work, intimate relationships, ideology, identity, and human agency. Chapter 2 illuminates the key factors that place lesbians' either on childfree paths or paths of motherhood.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methodology for the study. First, I describe how as a lesbian mother, I am a positioned subject within my research. Second, I discuss the extended case method that connects my research methodology with my four theoretical frameworks. I also define key terms. Third, I describe my methods of data collection for and analysis of the focus groups and content analysis. A key part of this discussion is how my study relies heavily on the work and analysis of Kathleen Gerson (1985).

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the content analysis. The purpose of conducting a content analysis of popular lesbian media was to provide a picture of the kinds of support and deterrents lesbians may receive from the media as they decide to become mothers or remain childfree.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the results of the focus groups with childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers, respectively. Both chapters provide demographic overviews of the lesbians in each focus group. They also examine how lesbians formulate orientations toward becoming mothers or remaining childfree out of the interpretations of their mothers' experiences, early childhood experiences, sexual and racial discrimination, and the changing nature of motherhood and families in society. Then each chapter presents factors that create a "structure of opportunities" (Gerson 1985) through which lesbians must sort in order to decide to become mothers or remain childfree. Throughout each part of Chapters 5 and 6, I discuss how and why race, class, gender, and sexuality shape

lesbians' decision-making processes. I also highlight how the human agency of lesbians interacts with social constraints to shape mothering decisions.

The final chapter provides an overview of the findings by pulling the previous six chapters together. In Chapter 7, I return to my main research questions by discussing how lesbians of diverse racial-ethnic and class backgrounds decide to become mothers and remain childfree and how those decisions are shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality. I also discuss how this study differs from studies on heterosexual women. That is, I look specifically at how sexuality shapes lesbians' and heterosexual women's decision-making processes in different ways. Finally, I discuss the implications my study has for family sociology and suggest research questions for future study that emerged out of my study.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews literature on motherhood that guides my research. This literature points to the social factors that influence lesbians' decisions to become mothers and remain childfree. The task of this chapter is onerous because family sociology and family studies in general have largely omitted lesbian motherhood and queer sexualities from their theoretical frameworks and empirical work. In a review of over 8000 articles in nine family studies journals spanning a time from 1980 to 1993, Allen and Demo (1995) found that only a very small percentage of the articles speak about queer families or related issues. Furthermore, very little of the research pays attention to race, class, and gender diversities *within* queer families (Demo and Allen 1996; Morningstar 1999). To compensate for the lack of an inclusive body of literature, I review three major bodies of literature that piece together the main factors influencing decision-making processes concerning motherhood, lesbian motherhood, and race, class, and gender. First, I review literature concerning "social facilitators" of lesbian motherhood and families. Second, I review literature concerning the current reality of lesbian mothers and families. Third, I review literature concerning key structural and ideological factors that shape women's decisions to become mothers or remain childfree.

I. Social Facilitators of Lesbian Motherhood and Families

The first body of literature I review concerns social facilitators, or social factors or events that have facilitated the creation of lesbian motherhood and families. In Chapter 1 I discussed how the family values debate and marriage movement may pose potential

policy and ideological constraints for lesbians forming families. However, lesbians are also making mothering decisions within what Judith Stacey calls the current age of "postmodern families" (Stacey 1996). Postmodern families stand in opposition to the "traditional" family and signal "the contested, ambivalent, and undecided character of our contemporary family cultures" (Stacey 1996:7). According to Stacey, there is no one postmodern family. Rather, there are a multitude of postmodern *families* that take various shapes and forms. Included within the multitude of postmodern families are lesbian families.

Lesbian families are an historically recent phenomenon. While women have lived and participated in same-sex relationships for hundreds of years, lesbian families as a distinct social category have developed during the past three decades (D'Emilio 1983; D'Emilio and Freeman 1988; Faderman 1981; 1991; Stacey 1998). The literature indicates three key social facilitators that have helped lesbian motherhood and families develop: 1) second-wave feminism and the women's liberation movement; 2) the HIV/AIDS epidemic; and 3) the development of reproductive technologies. These three facilitators have created a social and cultural space in which lesbians are able to decide to become mothers or remain childfree. Examining social facilitators is important to my study because they present issues such as feminist ideology and the availability of reproductive technologies that influence lesbians decisions to become mothers or remain childfree.

A. Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement

Feminism and the women's liberation movement have greatly supported the formation of lesbian families and lesbian motherhood by creating a social space in which lesbians can develop their families. Feminism and the women's liberation movement have created a social space in three major ways: 1) by denouncing traditional gender roles and sexual norms for women; 2) by showing how there is no monolithic family form; and 3) by helping to create the first generation of lesbian mothers.

1. Denouncing Traditional Gender Roles and Sexual Norms for Women

The first way feminists created a social space in which lesbians could form families was by denouncing traditional gender roles and sexual norms for women. Early second wave White, middle-class feminists of the 1960s and 1970s strongly condemned the institution of the nuclear family and its oppressive roles for women, particularly roles as housewife and mother (Allen 1983; Firestone 1970; Giminez 1983). The questioning of gender roles during the 1960s and 1970s allowed women to think about and explore alternative gender roles. With this new exploration, divorce rates increased, as did the number of women and men living as cohabitants, not as husband and wife. New non-marital arrangements changed the shape of the family and challenged the notion that sexual relations are for the sole purpose of reproduction within marriage. As feminists challenged past family arrangements "[h]eterosexuality began to look somewhat like homosexuality, as nonreproductive sex and cohabitation without marriage came to be commonplace" (Faderman 1991:201). Furthermore, by challenging gender roles and sexual norms within families, "[f]eminism helped to remove gay life and gay politics from the margins of American society" (D'Emilio 1983:237). As gay life became less

stigmatized, lesbians living in family arrangements did not seem so strange to the dominant heterosexual world.

2. New Thinking about Diverse Families

The second way feminists created a social space in which lesbians could form families was by developing new thinking concerning diverse families. In the 1960s and 1970s, feminists of color such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Smith, Cherríe Moraga, and Gloria Anzaldúa began writing about their experiences, raising issues about racial-ethnic and class differences within feminism. While White lesbian feminists were fighting to end sexism and heterosexism, lesbian feminists of color were fighting to end racism and classism, as well as sexism and heterosexism (Lorde 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). These feminists formed the early generation of multiracial feminists.

Feminists of color, as well as socialist feminists, began incorporating a more integrated approach to thinking about families. They began challenging the notion of "the monolithic family" that stresses the nuclear family with the male breadwinner and female housekeeper and mother. Feminists looked to families of color and lower-class families to understand how families develop out of economic, social, and cultural inequalities. They began to examine how social structures based on inequalities create different family experiences for different groups of people (Thorne 1992:4-5). Acknowledging and respecting diverse family forms has broadened the definition of family to include lesbians and their kin.

3. The First Generation of Lesbian Mothers

The final way in which feminism helped create a social space for lesbians to form families was by helping married women with children come out as lesbians. During her

research on lesbian mothers in the 1970s, Lewin (1993) found that feminism was a key factor in helping women understand and honor their attractions to other women. In connecting personal issues with political ones, many women joined feminist consciousness-raising groups that "had a direct impact on their paths into lesbianism" (Lewin 1993:20). Some of the women in these groups were already divorced while others were still married. Through networks created and politics espoused during the feminist movement, many women came out as lesbians and left their husbands. The end result was the first generation of lesbians with children. This early generation of lesbian mothers has helped create the social and cultural space in which lesbians within their identities as lesbians are choosing to become mothers.

B. The HIV/AIDS Epidemic

In addition to feminism and the women's liberation movement, the HIV/AIDS epidemic also has influenced lesbians and the formation of their families. Scholars believe that it is not an accident that the beginning of the lesbian baby boom coincided with the great numbers of death by AIDS in gay communities. As many gay men died from AIDS, lesbians found that bringing children into queer communities was a useful way to counteract negative feelings of loss and disease (Lewin 1993; Moraga 1997; Weston 1991).

HIV/AIDS and the phenomenon of lesbians bringing children into queer communities may be particularly salient for lesbians-of-color. "Over 72 percent of AIDS cases occur in gay/bisexual men and over 41 percent of the total cases are ethnic minority group members" (CDC 1988, as cited in Morales 1990:224). In her memoir of her own

queer motherhood, Moraga discusses her feelings of devastation and loss as gay Latino men died of AIDS. She asks, "Is there a kind of queer balance to this birthing and dying...lesbians giving life to sons, our brothers passing?" (Moraga 1997:62).

Ironically, despite the epidemic's influence over the lesbian community's increase of children, in the late 1980s through the 1990s lesbians have been distancing themselves from gay men as sperm donors. The threat of contracting HIV from a known gay male donor and the threat of passing HIV on to a fetus make the possible procreative union between lesbians and gay men less viable an option. Prior to HIV/AIDS as a well-known disease, lesbians often asked gay men to donate their sperm. Today, however, fewer lesbians are willing to risk exposure to HIV/AIDS and are finding donors through regulated sperm banks that test sperm for an array of diseases (Bernstein and Stephenson 1995; Stacey 1996; Weston 1991).

The fear and risk of HIV/AIDS not only potentially reduces gay men's participation in the parenting process, but it also reduces options for lesbians who cannot afford to purchase sperm from sperm banks or pay legal fees for adoption (Weston 1991). Thus, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has both inspired the lesbian baby boom and limited queer parenting options.

Not only has the HIV/AIDS epidemic limited lesbians' choices of donors, but it may also have discouraged lesbians' from becoming mothers. While lesbians are generally at lower risks for contracting HIV/AIDS, they are not immune. Lesbians with HIV/AIDS must consider if they want to raise children knowing they have an illness that will most likely leave their children parentless or at least with one less parent (Martin 1993). Furthermore, because it is easier for lesbians to adopt children with special needs,

lesbians wanting to adopt must consider if they want to adopt children who are HIV positive (Martin 1993).

C. Reproductive Technologies

The third major factor that has helped create a social space in which lesbian motherhood and families have developed is the rise and use of reproductive technologies (Stacey 1998). The term "reproductive technologies" includes many different techniques of varying degrees of medical intervention. Reproductive technologies include fertility control technologies such as birth control pills, labor and childbirth technologies such as fetal monitoring and caesarian sections, prenatal and neonatal technologies such as ultrasound and amniocentesis, and conceptive technologies that help infertile and subfertile people to have children who are genetically their own (Giminez 1991). Conceptive technologies, such as donor insemination (DI), superovulation, egg donation, *in vitro* fertilization (IVF) , intra cytoplasmic sperm injection (ICSI), gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), and surrogacy are revolutionizing lesbian families.

While reproductive technologies are often thought of as mainly medical techniques, their use rests firmly on ideology, labor market trends, and the U.S. economic system. Pronatalist ideology, and ideology stressing the need for biological family connections, encourage Americans to use reproductive technologies to create genetically related children (Rothman 1989). In addition, as women delay childbearing in order to increase career opportunities, their fertility levels are dropping. Lower fertility levels often translate into the use of reproductive technologies to help women bear children (Lemonick 1997; McDaniel 1996; Rothman 1989). Furthermore, in the capitalist U.S. where there is no national health system to regulate reproductive technologies, the

opportunity for physicians to make money by offering reproductive services is overwhelming (Lemonick 1997; Rothman 1989). In the U.S., the cost of conceptive technologies is the responsibility of the individual user. Costs can be a serious barrier to use since the average cost for one IVF cycle is approximately $8,000. The cost of GIFT or donor eggs is even higher (Lemonick 1997). In addition, the U.S. is one of the only countries that allows payment to sperm donors (Blank 1998). Thus, both the procedures and the sperm can be cost prohibitive.

In contrast to the U.S., in most industrialized countries IVF is covered under national health plans. Ironically, however, it is the deregulated and capitalist nature of the U.S. medical system that allows lesbians to use reproductive technologies at all. Because countries with national health systems have forbidden the use of reproductive technologies by lesbians and single women, the U.S. is the only country in the world where "out" lesbians can legally use reproductive technologies (Blank 1998; Goransson 1998). Despite financial barriers, the combination of American ideologies, U.S. labor trends, and a capitalist medical system have led to the creation of over 300 fertility clinics. In the late 1990s, nearly 60,000 attempts of pregnancy using reproductive technologies occurred yearly, resulting in over 11,000 live births a year (Health Pages 1996-1998).

The increased use of reproductive technologies is fundamentally changing the nature of families and is shaking up the most taken-for-granted assumptions about family relationships (Eichler 1996). Because reproductive technologies are medically controlled and the procedures take place in physicians' offices, decisions about bearing children are being made "in a context which dissociates issues relating to fertility and the family from

sexual intercourse" (Novaes 1998:105). While Americans expect children to be conceived through heterosexual sexual intercourse, many children are being conceived without sexual intercourse and in some cases without the presence of a man. Furthermore, reproductive technologies are wreaking legal havoc and raising ethical questions about who the "mother" and "father" really are (Eichler 1996; Snowden and Snowden 1998). Giminez (1991) offers seven different ways that conceptive technologies and surrogacy have shattered the historical unity of being genetically, gestationally, and socially a mother. Because of surrogacy, egg donation, IVF, embryo transfers, and other technologies, many women can make any combination of genetic, gestational, and/or social claims to children. Thus, reproductive technologies have changed the very definitions and understanding of family relationships.

The increased use of and the ensuing family confusion caused by new reproductive technologies have broken ground for the creation of new postmodern families. While married heterosexual couples comprise the majority of users of reproductive technologies, single heterosexual women and lesbians in the U.S. are also increasingly using reproductive technologies, particularly donor insemination (Lasker 1998). Donor insemination is attractive to single heterosexual women and lesbians because it offers an opportunity to have biologically connected children without having intimate relations with a man. As Faderman notes, with "the dual proliferation of the pill and donor insemination...[w]omen no longer [have] to get pregnant as a result of having heterosexual intercourse, and women no longer [have] to have heterosexual intercourse in order to get pregnant" (Faderman 1997:62). Given the ability to become pregnant

without heterosexual intercourse, it is estimated that 10,000 children have been born to lesbian mothers in the U.S. using donor insemination alone (Lasker 1998).

II. Current Struggles and Experiences of Lesbian Families

While the three social facilitators discussed above have created a space in which lesbians can become mothers, the current reality of lesbian motherhood and families is shaped by political policies and institutional practices steeped in heterosexism. In reaction to the development of queer families over the past 30 years, a backlash movement supported and fueled by institutionalized heterosexism, anti-queer sentiment, and the conservative family values debate, is trying to undermine support for queer families (Hartman 1999; Kendell 1998; Purcell 1998; Stacey 1996). Thus, the second body of literature that informed my study is literature discussing the current struggles that lesbian mothers (and in some cases, lesbians in general) experience. Examining struggles gives me insight into issues that may directly relate to lesbians mothering decisions. The literature indicates six challenges and experiences that are relevant to my study: 1) fighting for same-sex marriage; 2) negotiating institutions to obtain children; 3) creating egalitarian and nurturing families in a homophobic world; 4) creating social networks; 5) coming out; and 6) debating motherhood within lesbian communities.

A. Fighting for Same-Sex Marriage[2]

The first struggle lesbian mothers (and lesbians in general) experience is the fight for same-sex marriage. While the *Baehr v. Lewin* (and later the *Baehr v. Miike*) case in Hawaii brought wide political attention and media coverage to the issue of same-sex

marriage in the 1990s, lesbians and gay men have been fighting for marital rights since the early 1970s (Lewin 1998; Mohr 1994; Tong 1998). Until the 1996 passing of DOMA, laws did not specifically state that marriage could occur only between a man and a woman. Therefore, in the 1970s gays and lesbians challenged marital laws, "claiming that in accordance with common-law tradition, whatever is not prohibited must be allowed" (Mohr 1994:35). The courts dismissed this challenge, stating that marriage automatically implies gender difference. Lesbians and gays also challenged courts by referring to the anti-miscegenation laws that were nationally struck down in 1967, arguing that preventing marriage based on sexual orientation was similar to preventing marriage based on mixed races (Lewin 1998; Tong 1998). Courts dismissed this challenge as well, until the famous 1993 *Baehr v. Lewin* case in Hawaii, which drew parallels to anti-miscegenation laws (Tong 1998). Most recently, in the summer of 2000, Vermont instituted its "Civil Union law" that "permits eligible couples of the same sex to be joined in civil union" (Markovitz 2000). The law grants same-sex partners in Vermont similar legal rights granted to married heterosexual couples.

Despite success in Vermont, most laws prohibit same-sex marriage. Because of the legal ban on same-sex marriage, lesbians and gays have looked to religious and secular ceremonies to mark their commitment to their partners. For example, since its founding in 1968, the gay-based Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) has performed about 2,000 commitment ceremonies a year (Haldeman 1998:149). And while many right-wing religious organizations have denounced same-sex marriage, queers are able to participate in religious commitment ceremonies offered by Protestant churches such as

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[2] The fight for same-sex marriage has been fought jointly by and equally affects lesbians and gay men. Therefore, this section speaks more generally to queers.

the United Church of Christ, Unitarian Universalist, Quaker, and Episcopal churches. Similarly, while the Roman Catholic Church officially sees homosexuality as "an intrinsic moral evil," some Catholic priests are redefining marriage to include same-sex unions and are offering "same-sex couples the option of holy union ceremonies" (Haldeman 1998:151). Many Jewish rabbis are taking more liberal stances accepting same-sex unions and offering Jewish ceremonies (Haldeman 1998; Lewin 1998). Lesbians and other queers are also undertaking commitment ceremonies without religious blessing, but with secular proclamations of lifetime commitments to their partners. Whatever form of commitment ceremony queers are engaging in, by the late 1990s not only had thousands of queers gotten "married" but the issue of same-sex marriage had become a common topic in the media and a heated political concern.

In response to the lack of access queers have to legal marriage, many companies and state and local municipalities have instituted domestic partnership programs giving unmarried couples access to health benefits. However, supporters of same-sex marriage see these benefits as "second-class solutions" (Kendell 1998:53). In addition, some states such as New York, Vermont, and Massachusetts, and some counties within various states, allow second-parent adoptions where same-sex couples adopt children together, creating a legal two-parent family (Stacey 1996; Moskovitz 1995). However, while the child is legally connected to two parents, the two parents are not legally connected to each other. Because domestic partnerships and second-parent adoptions are not nationally available, the amount of access queers have to these benefits, and thus the amount of legal recognition and protection their families have is determined by "the

happenstance of geography" (Kendell 1998:54). The lack of legal support for lesbian families may discourage some lesbians from becoming mothers.

B. Negotiating Institutions to Obtain Children

The second struggle that lesbian mothers experience is negotiating institutions to obtain children. In the midst of fighting for the legalization of same-sex marriage, many lesbians are adding children to their families by birthing, adopting, and becoming foster parents to children. Obtaining children requires that lesbians negotiate medical and legalinstitutions to obtain and retain custody of their children.

Similar to single heterosexual women and heterosexual women with fertility problems, most lesbians considering motherhood must think about how they will actually obtain a child. Lesbians can become mothers through legal guardianship, adoption, donor insemination (with a known or unknown donor), and heterosexual intercourse (Hanscombe and Forster 1981; Lewin 1993; Martin 1993; Pies 1988). There are various "how to" books explaining each option in detail (see for example Martin 1993; Pies 1988), as well as social science accounts that are both descriptive and analytical (for example, see Lewin 1993 and Sourbut 1996). No matter what method lesbians choose to obtain a child, they must be able to gain access to and negotiate their way through legal and medical institutions. To understand such "institutional negotiability," I examine the literature on donor insemination and adoption, the two most common ways in which lesbians become mothers (Martin 1993).

Donor insemination (DI) (also referred to as alternative insemination and artificial insemination) is a conceptive technology that is regulated by sperm banks and physicians who often use personal values to determine who should have access to this technology

and how much they should charge. The result is a bias toward wealthy, heterosexual clientele who use DI (Lewin 1993; Shogan and Filax 1995; Sourbut 1996). To bypass discrimination against lesbians and single women, feminists opened the Sperm Bank of California in 1982 "in response to the rising number of unmarried women seeking advice about insemination" (Benkov 1994:119). Currently there are a few additional sperm banks that willingly serve unmarried heterosexual women and lesbians. Despite select sperm banks, however, gaining access to the technology remains the most difficult problem lesbians have in using DI (Lasker 1998).

Access is made more difficult for lesbians because most sperm banks will only send specimens to a physician's office. Finding a physician who is willing to serve single women or lesbians is not always easy (Lasker 1998; Martin 1993; Pies 1988; Silber 1991). Some physicians do not show their biases until lesbians enter their offices, asking lesbians to undergo lengthy psychological exams to determine if they are "fit" parents (Lasker 1998; Shogan and Filax 1995). Furthermore, the financial costs of physicians and procedures, as well as the emotional toll, can be enormous.

To obtain a child through DI, not only do lesbians need to be able to afford costly reproductive technologies and to find a doctor with whom they can work, but they are faced with numerous decisions about selecting a donor. Choosing a donor can be complicated. For example, do you use a known donor, an unknown donor who your child can contact at age 18, or an unknown donor who your child will never know (Martin 1993)? Finding an appropriate donor may be easier for clients of European descent (if they want a White child), given the larger numbers of White donors available through sperm banks. However, for clients who are not White and who want children of

a similar racial-ethnic background as themselves, finding a suitable donor is much more difficult (Shogan and Filax 1995).

Even though obtaining a child through DI presents serious obstacles, some lesbians find DI a more viable option than adoption (Silber 1991). Outside of wanting to be biologically connected to a child, lesbians with no fertility problems often find that the obstacles in adopting are greater than those in doing DI. To begin with, the process of adoption can be lengthy, expensive, and complicated (Gottleib 1995; Martin 1993; Silber 1991). In thinking about adoption, all potential parents, whether lesbian or heterosexual, must choose what type of adoption to pursue: public, private, independent, international, or foster-to-adopt (Martin 1993; Pies 1988). Many adoption agencies will not work with non-married, non-heterosexual people. Similar to finding a "gay-friendly" doctor, finding a gay-friendly adoption agency often requires access to other lesbians with such information (Martin 1993). Furthermore, because of heterosexual biases within the adoption system, agencies often offer lesbians children with special needs (Lewin 1993; Silber 1991). It is ironic that adoption agencies are willing to give their most difficult children to parents who society deems the most "unfit" parents (DiLapi 1989). Deciding to adopt a special needs child is a big decision for prospective parents. This decision becomes more complex for lesbians faced with adopting an interracial child. Some lesbians are concerned that the combination of special needs, different racial-ethnic backgrounds, and lesbian parents will ultimately cause problems for the children who might be faced with "a sort of 'double jeopardy' situation" (Silber 1991:105; also see Weston 1991:167).

In addition to a complicated and biased adoption system, the biggest obstacle for

lesbians to adopt is a legal one. Lesbians facing custody battles have experienced a terrific bias against them in court. Lesbians attribute this bias to homophobic assumptions and ideologies that rule judges' thinking. Dominant ideology in the courts has assumed lesbians "to be promiscuous, liable to sexually harm the children, and sexually maladjusted" (Pollack 1987:319). Furthermore, courts believe that children of lesbians will grow up with confused gender identities and will be socially stigmatized by the rest of society. Therefore, courts have historically deemed lesbians as unfit to mother and have denied child custody to lesbians (Andrews 1995; Arnup 1995; Hartman 1999; Moskovitz 1996; Pollack 1987; Robson 1992).

Given the discriminatory legal history, lesbians who hope to adopt children face two major legal problems. First, lesbians fear they will lose the option to adopt or will lose their child once they adopt if they reveal their sexual identity (i.e., come out) to the adoption agency or courts (Gottleib 1995; Martin 1993; Pollack 1987; Silber 1991). And while some states are lifting bans on queer adoption, other states prohibit it. Many other states have not ruled one way or the other, leaving the decision to individual agencies and judges (Martin 1993; Stacey 1996).

The second legal problem lesbians face in adoption is that most states in the U.S. will not allow two people to initially adopt a child together unless they are married (Martin 1993). Thus, lesbian couples are faced with the problem of which partner will pose as a single woman and be the first legal parent of the child. As mentioned earlier, some states currently allow for second-parent adoptions, but many do not. Some states require that the legal parent give up rights to the child so that both parents can adopt together. Thus, for a short period of time the child is a ward of that state, which can be a

scary prospect for many lesbian parents (based on personal knowledge of legal procedures for second-parent adoption).

C. Creating Social Networks

The third struggle lesbian mothers experience is creating social networks. To help address issues concerning parenthood, discrimination in court and in everyday life, and socializing with other lesbian families, lesbians have created social networks that revolve around community building, educating school personnel, and providing social support for children (Dunne 2000; Morningstar 1999). Social networking within lesbian communities has been influenced both by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and by racism within lesbian communities. First, community organizing focusing on the HIV/AIDS epidemic provided general meeting places for lesbians and other queers. Many organizations that originally focused on the epidemic "began offering other social services, such as parenting and support groups" (Pollack 1995:99). Since the early 1980s, regional and national lesbian and gay parenting groups have burgeoned all over the U.S. The May-June 2001 issue of *Gay Parent magazine online* listed 80 local queer parenting organizations in 27 states (plus Washington, D.C.) and eight national organizations. The network of parenting organizations has created a structure for lesbian and gay parents that provides emotional, legal, and informational support. In addition, local, regional, and national networking has allowed lesbians to "come out" in numbers to educate the public, promote positive images of lesbian and gay families, and dispel myths spread by right-wing and religious crusaders as well as by conservative social scientists (Pollack 1995).

Second, lesbians and gays of color have documented racial discrimination within larger queer communities (Clarke 1983; Lee 1992; Lim-Hing 1992; Loiacano 1989;

Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993; Morales 1990; Smith 1998). The result of racial discrimination is that lesbians-of-color are creating their own social networks. For example, because of homophobia in her Black community of origin and racism in the lesbian community, Silvera (1995) describes how she and others created "an extended family, a Black, of colour, lesbian and gay community.... Our house was a bright array of colours: Black, Caribbean, Asian, Native lesbian mothers with children, living together, creating for ourselves what we were being denied" (Silvera 1995:317).

In creating new communities and networks, lesbians-of-color are following the legacy of women-headed extended social and kin networks within communities of color. Because of racial and class discrimination, women of color and poorer women in general have historically created social and kin networks to help with mothering and other responsibilities (Collins 1990; Espín 1997; Polatnik 1996). These networks serve to help women with child-care, employment issues, and emotional support. Following this legacy, lesbians-of-color are creating networks to help cope with racial-ethnic and sexual discrimination.

D. Coming Out

The fourth struggle lesbian mothers experience is whether or not to "come out." Because "lesbian mother" has historically been seen as an oxymoron, lesbians who have children are often assumed by larger society to be heterosexual (Lewin 1993; Pies 1988; Sourbut 1996). While this assumption can serve to protect lesbians and their children from heterosexist discrimination, not coming out perpetuates heterosexist images of motherhood and families. If lesbian mothers do not proudly and publicly admit that they are queer, what effect will that have on their children and internalized homophobia?

Deciding to come out and facing potential negative consequences of coming out to supervisors and co-workers, heterosexual friends, and families of origin is a constant consideration and negotiation for queer parents (Pies 1988).

The considerations and negotiations to come out for lesbians-of-color are particularly complex for two reasons. First, lesbians-of-color have to negotiate within and among several different communities. Deciding who to come out to, when to come out, and when to "hide" their sexual identity is a very sensitive and important issue for lesbians (Espín 1997; Greene 1994; Morales 1990). Second, for lesbians-of-color, coming out to families of origin often means coming out to extended families and communities. The importance of extended family and community networks and the fear of rejection from those networks resounds clearly from the writings of people of color. For many people of color, regardless of sexual identity, the racial-ethnic community in which they grew up and to which they belong is a primary reference point, a haven against a racist world, and a source of economic and emotional support (Anzaldúa 1987; Colindres 1993; Espín 1997; Hooks 1989; Loiacano 1989; Moraga 1997; Morales 1990; Silvera 1995; Smith 1983). Thus, for lesbians-of-color, "coming out to the family not only jeopardizes the intra-family relationships, but also threatens their strong association with their ethnic community. As a result minority gays and lesbians may run the risk of feeling uprooted as an ethnic person" (Morales 1990:233). Coming out and feeling uprooted may be particularly true for lesbians-of-color involved in intimate relationships with White women. In such cases, family of origin members may be more bothered by the interracial nature of the relationship than the sexual nature (Hooks 1989; Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993). However, finding partners who are of the same racial-ethnic

background as themselves is difficult for many lesbians-of-color (Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993).

No matter what the racial-ethnic make-up of their relationships, for lesbian mothers, the loss of ethnic community through coming out can mean the loss of ethnic identity for their children. In her admonition of the heterosexual Black community for banishing her and her children, Silvera (1995) writes that to "refuse to let our children take part in the community, to be of the community, to learn from the community, to eat the community's food, drink its drinks and dance its songs, to make [children] pay for a mother's 'sins' – that is the abomination" (Silvera 1995:314). Because of racism in larger communities, including lesbian communities, it is often difficult for exiled lesbians-of-color to teach their children about their racial-ethnic cultures outside of their heterosexual communities of color.

E. Debating Motherhood within Lesbian Communities

The fifth struggle that lesbians experience is an ideological debate within lesbian communities themselves. Lesbians debate whether or not lesbian mothers transform the institution of motherhood or assimilate into it. Lesbians who see lesbian motherhood as a form of transformation caution against viewing lesbian mothers as similar to heterosexual mothers (Pollack 1987). They say that while pointing to ways lesbian and heterosexual mothers are similar is a good strategy in the courts, "it negates the healthy and positive characteristics unique to lesbian parenting" (Pollack 1987:316). Pro-motherhood lesbians argue that lesbians are transforming motherhood in many ways, including being familiar with effective parenting skills and creating a more egalitarian division of labor in their households (Dalton & Bielby 2000; Flaks, Ficher, Masterpasqua, and Joseph 1995;

Sullivan 1996). Furthermore, because lesbians who adopt or have children through DI do not need to procreate with men to have children, they "subvert the causal link between sexuality and procreation..and bypass not only the involvement in what might be considered the patriarchal family but the sexual dimension of reproduction as well" (Lewin 1995a:107-108). Thus, some lesbian mothers who obtain children outside of heterosexual relations subscribe to the ideology that they are transforming the patriarchal and traditional form of conceiving and raising children.

Lesbians who view lesbian motherhood as a form of assimilation argue, on the other hand, that lesbians "validate and intensify the long-standing division of women into mothers and 'nonmothers' that has been one of the sources of their exclusion from the category of 'woman'" (Lewin 1995a:117). Radical feminists have long argued that in patriarchal society adult womanhood is conflated with motherhood in that motherhood is seen as the "natural" path for women. As lesbians become mothers, they gain heterosexual and "adult woman" status because people assume that all mothers are heterosexual. Thus, lesbian mothers often find that their sexual identities fade behind their identities as mothers, moving them from "unnatural lesbian" to "natural, adult, woman-mother" (Lewin 1995a; Weston 1991).

Lesbians who argue the assimilation side of the debate state that in addition to gaining heterosexual status, many lesbian mothers fight to uphold the legal and biological definitions of motherhood and family. For example, when lesbian parents separate, they may argue about who should gain custody of the children. Non-biological, non-legal lesbian mothers are beginning to bring their partners to court in an effort to win custody rights. Biological and/or legal mothers often win such custody cases by arguing that they

are the biological and/or legal parent and therefore the only "real" parent of the children (Lewin 1994, 1995a). Thus, lesbians are not only gaining privileges, but they are using historically oppressive legal systems to uphold traditional, biological definitions of the family.

F. Creating Egalitarian and Nurturing Families

Despite the many challenges facing lesbian families, lesbians are creating egalitarian and nurturing families for the parents and the children. While there is a dearth of literature examining divisions of labor in lesbian families, the literature that does exist suggests three ways in which lesbian families avoid hierarchical divisions of labor at home and create more egalitarian families than their heterosexual counterparts. First, while heterosexual couples use money to establish power relations, lesbian couples "do not use income to establish dominance in their relationships" (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983:60; see also Dunne 1999). Second, lesbians create an egalitarian setting when coparenting children. Sullivan (1996) found that 85 percent of the lesbian couples she interviewed "viewed parenting and domestic work as an equally shared responsibility such that neither partner took on a disproportionate share for any length of time" (Sullivan 1996:756). This is true across income levels. Finally, lesbian couples are more flexible in their decision making and household arrangements than heterosexual couples (Dunne 1998; Green, Bettinger, and Sacks 1996). The evidence shows that lesbian couples negotiate and reshape gender in order to create more egalitarian relations within families than in heterosexual families.

Not only are lesbian families more egalitarian for their adult members, but the few studies conducted on children of lesbian families show that these children are at least as

"normal" and "healthy" as children raised in heterosexual families (Stacey and Biblarz 2001). Studies show that children raised in lesbian families and children raised in heterosexual families have similar emotional and social development. Children of lesbians show no increased psychotic disorders, anxiety levels, depression, emotional or behavioral problems. Furthermore, children of lesbian parents have the same quality of peer relationships as children of heterosexual parents (Golombok & Tasker 1997; Mooney-Somers & Golombok 2000; Patterson 1996; Stacey & Biblarz 2001). That children of lesbian parents have the same emotional and social development as heterosexual parents despite increased teasing and discrimination "suggest[s] the presence of compensatory processes in lesbigay-parent families" (Stacey & Biblarz 2001:176).

Children of lesbian mothers also benefit from flexible gender and sexual expectations. The most recent analysis of data shows that queers are raising their children with more inclusive definitions of gender and sexuality that encourage crossing rigid lines of sexuality (Stacey & Biblarz 2001). For example, compared to daughters of heterosexual mothers, daughters of lesbian mothers tend to cross gender lines in sex-typed cultural norms and have "higher aspirations toward nontraditional gender occupations" (Stacey & Biblarz 2001:168). Sons of lesbian mothers tend to be less aggressive than sons of heterosexual single mothers, but have similar occupational goals. In addition, some research indicates that "[c]hildren reared by lesbian or gay parents feel greater openness to homosexuality or bisexuality" than do children of heterosexual parents (Stacey 1998:132). While conservatives shrink away from "gender bending" and sexual experimentation, progressives laud the new flexible and inclusive gender and

sexual ideology coming from queer families. Progressives argue that queer families are helping to lead the way out of "compulsory heterosexuality" and discrimination based on sexual identity that contribute to "one-third of all teenage suicide attempts" (Stacey 1998:133).

In addition to teaching more inclusive gender and sexual ideology, many lesbian families appear to be teaching their children about other oppressions such as race and class. While no systematic study has been conducted to my knowledge, descriptive literature indicates that lesbian families teach their children to respect racial-ethnic and class equality (Cook-Daniels 1997; Deaner 1997; Lorde 1984; Silvera 1995). Furthermore, because so many lesbian families are racially-mixed due to interracial adoption and interracial couples, children are living in inclusive families and learning about inclusive politics (Asch 1997; Green and Boyd-Franklin 1999).

III. Factors Shaping Women's Mothering Decisions

The third major body of literature that informed my study examines key structural and ideational (e.g., ideological, cultural, and personal) factors in women's mothering decision-making processes. This body of literature is important because it explains key factors that influence women's decisions to become mothers or to remain childfree. Examining these factors also shows how decisions are socially constructed through structural, cultural, and personal interactions and events.

To examine factors that shape decision-making processes, I drew on three bodies of literature: 1) feminist thinking of motherhood; 2) lesbian writings; and 3) writings by racial-ethnic scholars. The literature suggests six key factors that shape mothering

decisions and that informed my research topic and questions: 1) work; 2) intimate relationships; 3) ideology concerning motherhood; 4) ideology concerning sexuality; 5) personal identity; and 6) intentionality. The first two factors involve structural features. The remaining four involve ideational features.

A. Work

The first factor in women's mothering decision-making processes is work. Feminist studies conducted on why middle- and working-class White heterosexual women choose to have children or remain childfree have found that work is a primary force in shaping the decision-making process. Faux (1984) found that the lure of a career was the single greatest factor in drawing women *away* from motherhood. Work moves women away from mothering in three major ways. First, for women who remain childfree, rising work aspirations and expanding work opportunities allow women to explore interests outside of domestic ones (Bartlett 1994; Faux 1984; Gerson 1985; Ireland 1993). In addition, women may find it difficult to fit children into their work schedules. This is true for both middle-class and working-class women, although the reasons vary by class. For middle-class, college-educated women, careers not only mean upward mobility, but also a job satisfaction that allows them to expand upon educational and professional interests. Many working-class women, however, choose work over children not for the job satisfaction as much as for the chance to move ahead financially (Gerson 1985; Morell 1993).

The second main reason why work is such a strong factor in moving middle- and working-class White women away from motherhood is that career opportunities not only give women the opportunity to explore new non-domestic interests and to help sustain

and raise the socio-economic status of the family, but they also lead women to re-evaluate attitudes toward the domestic arena. Work opportunities alter women's "feelings and decisions about children and marriage and personal assessments of ability as well" (Gerson 1985:86). For example, work opportunities lead women to question the gendered division of labor at home. As feminist researchers have noted, even for wives whose husbands want children, the wives are responsible for the majority of childcare (Faux 1984; Gerson 1985; Hochschild 1989). To avoid upsetting their mostly egalitarian division of labor at home, and in fear of not being able to balance a career and motherhood, many childfree working women often opt to remain childfree (Faux 1984; Gerson 1985; Ireland 1993; McMahon 1995; Morell 1994). These women determine that the costs of childhood overshadow the rewards of motherhood (Gerson 1985; Morell 1993).

In contrast to women who remain childfree, *declining* work aspirations due to blocked mobility and dead-end careers often lead women into motherhood (Gerson 1985). Even a woman who "harbors deep-seated ambivalence toward mothering and domesticity but over time experiences *falling work aspirations*" will move toward motherhood (Gerson 1985:19). However, the option to leave work and to move into a primarily domestic life is based on class privilege. It requires that there be a second income able to support the entire family (Gerson 1985).

While some women are wage workers but are not mothers, and other women are mothers but are not wage workers, many women are both wage workers and mothers. Many of these women, such as middle-class women whose husbands also are wage workers, are financially able to do both. As a couple they can afford outside child-care

(Gerson 1985).

The connections between work and motherhood take on a different dynamic for women of color and women in lower classes. While the negotiation between work and motherhood presents a choice for economically and racially privileged women, for economically disadvantaged women working is a necessity. Within the context of financial necessity, how women view the relationship between work and mothering is based on racial-ethnic ideology. For example, even though many Chicanas may work out of necessity and see their financial contributions to the family as important to their children's future, dominant Chicano ideology holds that when financially possible, women should stay at home and mother (Segura 1994; Zavella 1987).

In contrast, for many African-American women, the very definition of motherhood incorporates work (Collins 1997; Hooks 1984). Many Black women believe that economically providing for their children is a key component of motherhood (Collins 1997). Not only do Black women see work as part of their obligation to be good mothers, but many "black women have identified work in the context of family as humanizing labor, work that affirms their identity as women, as human beings showing love and care..." (Hooks 1984:133). Thus, unlike many White and Latina women, African-American women see work as an integral part of mothering, out of both economic necessity and as part of completing their identities as women and mothers.

Similar to the literature on heterosexual women, the limited literature on lesbian mothers addresses the role and influence of work in the social process of becoming a mother or remaining childfree. Books focusing on how lesbians can become mothers urge lesbians to think about how to balance work and family, what kind of work lesbians

will do once they are mothers, how important work is to their personal identities, and how motherhood will affect career goals and plans (Martin 1993; Pies 1988). No formal research to my knowledge has been conducted, however, to examine how work influences lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree.

B. Intimate Relationships

The second factor in women's decision-making processes is intimate relationships. Researchers have found that intimate relationships greatly influence decisions to mother or remain childfree, although the ways in which they do so are shaped by race and class. For example, fragile or impermanent relationships often lead middle-class and working-class White heterosexual women to remain childfree. Without a strong marriage, motherhood does not seem to be a true option (Gerson 1985). However, for poor, African-American women, this is not necessarily the case (Blum and Deussen 1996). Whereas White women see independence and strength along with a lack of a stable partner as reasons not to have children, Black women stress that independence and strength show they do not need stable partners in order to successfully mother their children (Blum and Deussen 1996).

For some heterosexual women, strong relationships with men can also prompt women to remain childfree. Faux (1984) found that women who have strong relationships with their husbands do not want to disrupt those relationships. In addition to the fear of changing division of labor dynamics and compromising family finances, many women fear that the presence of children will detract from the close interpersonal and sexual relationships they have with their husbands (Faux 1984; Gerson 1985).

The parenting desires of men may also influence women's decisions to become

mothers. In particular, women who may not personally desire children may become mothers to satisfy the desires of their husbands. As Gerson notes, "[t]he male desire to have children and the prospect of losing a spouse or partner if one opposed this desire were often decisive in opting for motherhood" (Gerson 1985:161).

Similar to heterosexual women, the attitude of lesbians' partners can influence lesbians' decisions to mother. Many lesbian couples break up after disagreeing about whether or not to have children (Martin 1993; Morningstar 1999; Pies 1988; Silber 1991). Couples must negotiate who will birth or adopt the child. Once decided, negotiating the relationship of both partners to the child is of particular concern (Dunne 2000). As discussed earlier, very few states allow second-parent adoptions for unmarried and same-sex couples (Stacey 1996). Thus, lesbian couples in which one partner has adopted or birthed the child need to discuss the role and relationship of the "other" mother (Muzio 1999). For some couples this is not a difficult issue to resolve. For others, this issue can create great schisms between partners (Martin 1993; Pies 1988; Silber 1991). Furthermore, lesbians who became pregnant using a known donor or through a previous heterosexual relationship face additional concerns. They must not only negotiate their and their partner's relationship (if a partner is present), but they must also negotiate the role of the donor or father (Lewin 1993).

C. Ideology Concerning Motherhood

The third factor in women's decision-making processes is ideology concerning motherhood. Ideology is "any system of ideas underlying and informing social and political action" (Jary and Jary 1991:226). Ideology concerning motherhood covers a wide range of topics and varies depending on race, class, gender, and sexuality. In

particular, dominant society holds an ideology of who is "fit" or "unfit" to mother. The ideology of fit and unfit mothers includes a hierarchy of motherhood, with heterosexual women in nuclear families as the most "fit" or "appropriate" mothers, heterosexual women in non-nuclear families as "marginal" mothers, and lesbian mothers as "least appropriate" or "unfit" mothers (DiLapi 1989). Lesbians are not the only "unfit" mothers. Dominant ideology also identifies teenage girls, poor women of color, and mothers who work outside the home as unfit mothers (Faux 1984; McMahon 1995; Phoenix 1991; Segura 1994).

A second dominant ideology, the "mandate for motherhood," states that women do not fulfill their roles as women unless they become mothers; that is, the mandate conflates womanhood with motherhood. The mandate for motherhood is prevalent in most arenas of women's lives and is experienced in many different ways. For example, girls are given dolls to nurture early in their childhoods. Women are offered less interesting jobs in the workforce to entice them to choose children over work. Religious doctrines preach the importance and sacredness of motherhood. Media glorify images of motherhood and show negative images of childless mothers (e.g., as "sad spinsters" or "neurotic" career women). Family members directly pressure female family members to have children (Bartlett 1994:2-23). Government policy reinforces the mandate for motherhood by instituting reproductive and family policy. For example, laws regulating birth control and abortion affect whether or not women have access to preventing or ending unwanted pregnancies. In addition, laws offering tax breaks to families with children support the mandate for motherhood (Faux 1984:151-152).

While the mandate for motherhood does not necessarily force women into having

children, it makes remaining childfree a difficult path for many women to take, particularly White middle- and working-class women (Veevers 1980). For example, the mandate for motherhood plays an important role in moving women who are already thinking about motherhood further toward having children. For these women positive images of motherhood portrayed throughout society reinforce women as mothers (McMahon 1995). Equally as important as positive images, negative images and perceived consequences of being a childfree women also influence women. Gerson notes that because the participants in her study:

> experienced strong contextual pressures favoring motherhood, they were less able to insulate themselves from the fears of what childlessness implied in the long run....As pressures mounted, reluctant mothers were increasingly haunted by the costs of permanent childlessness: social disapproval, consignment to a lonely and desolate old age, and the loss of a major life experience with intrinsic value beyond its social measure. The fear of these costs had powerful psychological ramifications for childless women facing pressures to parent...Some even concluded that rejecting motherhood would foreclose the possibility of meaningful human relationships altogether (Gerson 1985:164).

This passage from Gerson's work on middle- and working-class White children of heterosexual women illustrates the power of an ideology that characterizes childfree women as leading less fulfilling lives than women who become mothers.

Despite the influence of the mandate for motherhood, most researchers have found that the mandate for motherhood *alone* is not an adequate explanation for why many women become mothers or remain childfree (Gerson 1985; McMahon 1995). It is not an adequate explanation because women who internalize gender ideology throughout their lifetimes are subject to real constraints and opportunities. Women often do not have the means or the desire to "live up to" gender norms. For example, women who remain childfree rely on ideologies that contradict the mandate for motherhood by associating

pregnancy and birth with illness. Many childfree White women describe their repugnance at the thought of morning sickness and the bodily changes that take place during pregnancy (Bartlett 1994; Veevers 1980). Perhaps more importantly, however, is a newer ideology that supports the trend of increasing numbers of women in the work force. As Gerson notes, "[t]he rise of nondomestic alternatives has allowed mounting numbers of women to reject women's traditional development pattern" (Gerson 1985:211). Thus it is the tightly intertwined connections of ideology and reality that help shape the social processes women go through to become mothers or to remain childfree.

Ideologies concerning motherhood differ by race and class. Black feminists have identified four key ideologies specific to African-American women. First, for Black women, motherhood extends beyond the White definition of biological mother. While "mother" can be used to mean biological or "blood" mother, it can also refer to "othermothers" (Collins 1990; Stack 1975). Othermothers include grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, or close friends who form "organized, resilient, women-centered networks...by taking on child-care responsibilities for one another's children" (Collins 1990:119-120). In addition to direct child-care responsibilities, othermothers can also be "community othermothers" who are political advocates acting on behalf of their community. Rather than nurturing individual children, community othermothers nurture the Black community as a whole (Collins 1990, Polatnik 1996).

Second, whatever form of mother a Black woman may be, the status of motherhood can invoke a sense of power for Black women. In particular, women see themselves as the "lifeline" of the Black community. They also see their roles as mothers (blood, other, or community other) as a way of "'uplifting the race' so that vulnerable

members of the community will be able to attain the self-reliance and independence essential for resistance" and survival (Collins 1990:132). Therefore, a large part of the power African-American women feel as mothers is their ability to maintain the physical and emotional survival of their children (Collins 1994; Silvera 1995; Smith 1998).

Perhaps because Black communities respect and invoke a sense of power in African-American motherhood, larger Black communities often perceive Black lesbians as threatening the continuation of Blacks and cutting the Black community's "lifeline" (Clarke 1983; Hooks 1989; Silvera 1995). Because people view lesbians as not producing children, some Blacks see lesbians as a threat to the continuation of the group. The perception of lesbians as "not mothers" exists despite the presence of Black lesbian mothers within Black communities (Clarke 1983; Silvera 1995).

A third aspect of African-American ideology concerning motherhood is the notion of women's strength and independence from men. In separate studies on single heterosexual African-American women, Blum and Deussen (1996) and Jarrett (1994) found that the White, middle-class notion of women's dependence on men exists outside the framework of African-American experiences and ideologies. The two studies found that African-American mothers "claimed that they had been raised with expectations to achieve on their own, most repeatedly using the terms 'independence' and 'strength'" (Blum and Deussen 1996:203).

Fourth, while independence and strength do not necessarily imply a separation from the fathers of their children, research shows that marriage is not a prerequisite for motherhood. Ideology stressing independence and strength while down-playing marriage is accompanied by Black women's historical and continuing relationship between

motherhood and work, as discussed earlier. Ideologies concerning Black women's independence from men and motherhood outside of marriage potentially paves potential path for Black lesbians wanting to raise children because "out" lesbians are at least sexually independent from, and do not generally get married to, men.

The literature on Latina ideology concerning motherhood is less clearly defined than the literature on African-American ideology. As many scholars point out, there are great complexities and diversities within racial-ethnic communities and families (Clarke 1983; Espín 1997; Morales 1990). Diversities often exist along lines of ethnicity and class, as well as along lines of immigrant status. Thus, groups of people labeled "Latino" or "Hispanic" are so diverse that generalizing along racial-ethnic lines often becomes difficult.

The diversity among Latinos is evidenced in the diversity of their families. The literature on Latina/o families demonstrates a heterogeneity based on "immigrant status, urban/rural residence, household size, acculturation, and class status" (Segura and Pierce 1993:72). For example, in some Latino families, women may be expected to follow traditional gender roles requiring that motherhood exist within the context of marriage (Anzaldúa 1987; Colindres 1993; Greene 1994; Lawhn 1993). However, additional studies show how experiences of class, immigration, and ethnicity alter gender roles and make definitions of motherhood and fatherhood more flexible (Fernandez-Kelly and García 1990; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1999; Segura and Pierce 1993).

Despite the diversity among families, literature specifically on Chicano/a families points to three aspects of motherhood relevant to my study. First, while Chicanas see

motherhood and household responsibility as a primary responsibility and role of women (Baca Zinn 1979; Segura 1994), Chicanas often work as both mothers and paid laborers (Segura and Pierce 1993). Because of extended kin networks, working mothers often rely on family childcare rather than institutional care (Segura 1994; Zavella 1987). In some working-class families where women work and men's schedules permit, fathers take on major childcare responsibilities (Lamphere, Zavella, and Gonzalez 1993). Thus, due to structural constraints, women and men in Chicano/a families alter traditional gender ideology to accommodate economic realities (Segura 1994).

The second aspect of Chicana motherhood is that like African-American women, Chicanas often mother with the help of other women, particularly grandmothers. That is, Chicanas practice nonexclusive mothering (Segura and Pierce 1993). The implications of nonexclusive mothering particularly for Chicana daughters is that they grow up with multiple mother figures. This not only presents Chicanas with the idea that children can be raised by multiple women, but it also exposes them to a greater range of "gender-related cultural behaviors" and role models (Segura and Pierce 1994:76). How the experience and ideology of multiple mother figures affects lesbians' mothering decisions is important to my study.

The third aspect of Chicana motherhood pertains particularly to Catholic Chicano/a families. Catholic families tend to view mothers as holy and sacred. This representation offers ideals of "good" and "bad" mothers. Good mothers stem from holy images of *La Virgen de Guadalupe* (the Catholic patroness of Mexico) who is depicted as self-sacrificing and pure-natured. Wavering from positive cultural images of motherhood conjure up more negative cultural images that label women as bad mothers. The impact

of both positive and negative images of motherhood is that they "frame the cultural context for mothers and mothering in Chicana/o communities" (Segura and Pierce 1993:77). A question the literature on Catholic Chicana/o ideology raises is how are lesbians viewed as mothers and how does that view affect lesbians' mothering decisions?

D. Ideology Concerning Sexuality

The fourth factor in women's decision-making processes is ideology concerning sexuality. Ideology concerning sexuality influences beliefs and practices at all levels of society, including political and institutional, community, and personal. On a political and institutional level, scholars have documented the influence of what Adrienne Rich (1993) calls "compulsory heterosexuality." Compulsory heterosexuality is an "ideology that *demands* heterosexuality" (Rich 1993:228) and that assumes everyone to be heterosexual. People enforce their heterosexual bias through institutionalized privilege and subordination based on sexuality (Cabaj and Purcell 1998; Rubin 1993; Silvera 1995; Stacey 1996). Compulsory heterosexism exists within both secular and religious institutions. Within secular institutions, political policies deny lesbians and other queers the right to legally marry, deny national or state-level domestic partnership benefits, exclude sexual orientation from hate crimes, deny equal protection clauses for queers in work and housing, ban queer materials from school curricula, and limit government funding on HIV/AIDS research.

Religious institutions such as Judeo-Christian religions throughout most of the U.S. describe homosexuality as sinful (Hartman 1999). This is particularly true in communities of color where many of the sexual taboos stem from a deep religious foundation that denounces homosexual behavior (Espín 1997; Greene 1994; Hooks 1989;

Silvera 1995; Smith 1998). While some religious groups and larger institutions are beginning to accept same-sex relationships and identities, others stand firmly against non-heterosexual behavior (Hartman 1999). Both secular and religiously-based heterosexism greatly impact queers and their families and infiltrates the families and communities in which queers live.

The literature on sexuality and homophobia in families and communities shows a wide variety of experiences both within and among families of diverse races and classes. For example, coming out stories of lesbians across class and racial-ethnic lines show a mixed reaction of immediate family members (Moraga 1997; Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993; Silvera 1995; Weston 1991). The degree of homophobia within families and communities appears to be related to a racialized view of sexuality, cultural norms concerning sexuality and gender, and religious beliefs. For example, African-American feminist scholars argue that sexuality is racialized by privileged groups (Collins 1990; Davis 1998a and 1998b; Clarke 1983). Black women's bodies were sexually abused by White men during slavery. The end of slavery allowed Blacks to reclaim their sexuality, an aspect of key importance in ex-slaves' lives:

> For the first time in the history of the African presence in North America, masses of black women and men were in a position to make autonomous decisions regarding the sexual partnerships into which they entered. Sexuality thus was one of the most tangible domains in which emancipation was acted upon, and through which its meanings were expressed (Davis 1998b:249).

Despite the ability to make sexual decisions, the sexuality of Blacks has continued to be racially stigmatized and abused by Whites. More privileged racial groups have denigrated sexual acts of Blacks and labeled Black sexual behavior as deviant, as in the example of birthing children out of wedlock. Furthermore, while the bodies of Black

women are no longer legally to be used at the whim of dominant White culture, their bodies are currently abused through prostitution, pornography, forced and non-consensual sterilization, and rape and sexual violence (Collins 1990; Davis 1998a).

Because of racialized sexuality and because Blacks are subjugated through other forms of racism, Black scholars argue that in order to been seen as sexually "normal" by dominant society, African-Americans have overcompensated by following a more puritan ideology of sexuality that preaches homophobia (Clarke 1983). Black feminists believe that the combination of racism, classism, and sexism may add together to create a heightened homophobia among Black women in particular (Collins 1990; Greene 1994; Smith 1998; Silvera 1995). Even though Black women recognize their own gender, race, and class oppression, they might "victimize someone else by invoking the benefits of heterosexual privilege" (Collins 1990:194).

Homophobia in Black communities and families is, therefore, partially a product of racism. In fact, communities of color invoke racial images of their own by saying that "lesbianism" is a "White disease," not a problem indigenous to their own cultures (Clarke 1983; Espín 1997; Loiacano 1989; Morales 1990; Silvera 1995; Smith 1998). Thus, in coming out, lesbians-of-color often clash with the sexual norms of their racial-ethnic communities and face denunciation from their communities and families. However, because family and community are so important to the survival of racial-ethnic people, lesbians-of-color who are not intimately involved with White lesbians tend to maintain stronger ties to their families of origin and communities than do White lesbians (Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993).

In addition to the influence of racism, cultural beliefs also affect sexual ideology. For example, in Latino communities, particularly upper-class Latino families, the honor of the family "is strongly tied to the sexual purity of women. And the concept of honor and dignity is one of the essential distinctive marks of Hispanic culture" (Espín 1997:87-88). While women are encouraged to build emotionally close relationships with other women, lesbian relationships are not considered "sexually pure" (Espín 1997). Furthermore, because Latinas are expected not to discuss or overtly show or acknowledge their sexual desires, coming out to family and friends means going against sexual norms. Thus, in many cases it is not lesbian behavior that is problematic in Latino communities as much as "the overt acknowledgement and disclosure of a gay or lesbian identity that is likely to meet with intense disapproval..." (Greene 1994:244). For lesbians who are willing to keep their same-sex relationships more closeted, even if known about, there is a "silent tolerance" in Latino families and communities (Espín 1997; Greene 1994; Morales 1990).

E. Identity

The fifth factor in women's decision-making processes is identity. Identity is the "sense of self that develops" through interaction within given social contexts (Jary and Jary 1991: 226). Sociologists interpret identity and concepts of the self to be continually socially constructed and reconstructed (McMahon 1995). Women, whether mothers or childfree, maintain multiple identities. Women's identities as mothers and as being childfree are formed through the interconnections of work, family, ideology, and structure of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Blum and Deussen 1996; Lewin 1993, 1994, 1995a; McMahon 1995; Morningstar 1999). For example, material constraints

withstanding, women who identify more with work than with family will have an easier time remaining childfree. Women who identify with positive images of motherhood and domesticity are more likely to follow a path toward motherhood. Women with strong identities toward both work and family may find themselves mothering and working for pay (Gerson 1985; McMahon 1995).

Research on heterosexual women shows that the process of identifying oneself as a mother or childfree also relies on specific class positions. McMahon (1995) found that working-class White women identify themselves as adults through the process of having a child and becoming a mother. In contrast, middle-class White women feel they gain maturity through other identities, such as work and marriage prior to having a child. Thus, how women identify themselves as adults affects not only when they will have children, but if they will have them at all (McMahon 1995).

Research on middle-class White lesbian mothers shows that the addition of "mother" to a lesbian identity requires certain negotiations (Lewin 1993, 1994, 1995a). Because "lesbian mother" has historically been considered an oxymoron, some lesbians find it difficult to "frame an identity that takes both aspects of one's existence - motherhood and lesbianism - into account" (Lewin 1995a:109). Negotiating identities becomes more complex when lesbians internalize the transformation-assimilation debate within lesbian communities discussed earlier. Not only do lesbian mothers find themselves trying to negotiate their identities as mothers, lesbians, and lesbian mothers within *heterosexual* communities, but they also negotiate similar identities within *lesbian* communities (Slater 1995).

Negotiating multiple identities is further complicated by race and class (Barker 1989; D'Aoust 1995; Lewin 1994, 1995a). Lesbians-of-color negotiate identities within at least three different social arenas: the lesbian community; the racial-ethnic community; and society at large (Morales 1990). As discussed above, heterosexism and racism in the larger society and homophobia in racial-ethnic communities makes integrating a lesbian identity into those arenas difficult. In addition, as mentioned earlier, lesbians-of-color often experience racism within lesbian communities (Clarke 1983; Lee 1992; Lim-Hing 1992; Morales 1990; Smith 1998). Therefore, unless lesbians-of-color create their own communities, there is little possibility of accommodating all of their identities within one community. As many lesbians-of-color explain, the negotiation of different identities in order to oblige the numerous communities to which they belong can be difficult and exhausting (Espín 1997; Morales 1990; Silvera 1995).

F. Intentionality

The sixth factor in women's decision-making processes is intentionality. Intentionality of lesbians' decisions to mother is perhaps the most striking point raised in the burgeoning literature on lesbian motherhood. Intentionality refers to "an act which its perpetrator knows, or believes, will have a particular quality or outcome and where such knowledge is utilized by the author of the act to achieve this quality or outcome" (Giddens 1984:10). For lesbians who make the decision to mother within their identities as lesbians, there are no unwanted or accidental pregnancies or adoptions (Chabot 1998; Stacey 1996). By the very nature of lesbian relationships, the desire to have children and the process of becoming a mother requires that lesbians "construct their chosen family forms with an exceptional degree of reflection and intentionality" (Stacey 1996:111).

Lesbians are forced to consider and negotiate every step of the process to becoming mothers, from finding a willing partner or deciding to be a single mother, to coming out to family members and friends, to choosing a method of becoming a mother, to actually obtaining a child. Within the negotiation of myriad structural, cultural, and personal factors, children are very intentionally born and/or adopted into lesbian families.

The creation of intentional families is not unique to lesbian mothers. Childfree lesbians, gay men, and infertile heterosexual women and men also intentionally create families out of friends, "fictive kin," family of origin, and through adoption and the use of reproductive technologies (Weston 1991). But the unique aspect of creating family through motherhood is that lesbians intentionally choosing to mother must negotiate great political, legal, financial, medical, ideological, and personal challenges to fulfill their mothering desires.

In stressing the intentional nature of lesbian motherhood, however, researchers omit two key points in their analyses of the lesbian baby boom. First, researchers have not specifically looked at how intentional decisions to mother are being made within larger social and cultural contexts. For example, when asked by social scientists why lesbians choose to become mothers, lesbians (primarily middle-class White lesbians) report eight main reasons: 1) It is something they always wanted to do; 2) They wanted to create a family; 3) Their "biological clocks" were ticking; 4) They wanted to settle down and achieve adulthood; 5) They wanted to become "good" women (Dalton & Bielby 2000; Lewin 1993; Perreault 1995; Polikoff 1987; Silber 1991); 6) They thought children would help them succeed in life; 7) They thought that having children is one of the highest purposes in life; and 8) They thought that having children would strengthen the

bond between them and their partners (Siegenthaler & Bigner 2000:85). While these responses *hint* at how women make choices within ideological contexts, research has not thoroughly examined lesbians' responses to understand how intentionality is embedded in complex social, cultural, and personal processes.

The second point omitted from analyses of the lesbian baby boom is that by stressing the intentionality of lesbian *mothers* researchers have overlooked lesbians who are intentionally *not* having children; that is, they have overlooked lesbians who are intentionally remaining childfree. The question remains, therefore, of how intentional is the act of remaining childfree? How free from outside social and cultural forces are lesbians when they decide *not* to mother? Do lesbians remain childfree because of the historical separation of lesbian and mother? Do they remain childfree because they cannot afford children? Do they remain childfree because of cultural ideology that is difficult to counter? Do they remain childfree because of their own ideological or personal desires not to have children? These questions are key to my research. Furthermore, my research focuses on how larger issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality influence lesbians' "intentionality," placing particular attention on the social and cultural contexts within which lesbians make their mothering decisions.

Chapter Summary

The three main major bodies of literature that guide my research suggest that the decisions of women to become mothers or remain childfree are influenced by a variety of social factors shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality. The first body of literature suggests that the formation of lesbian motherhood and families in general have been supported by second wave feminism, HIV/AIDS epidemic, and reproductive

technologies. While these three factors have greatly shaped the social and cultural landscape in which lesbians can become mothers, they also contain aspects that may discourage lesbians from becoming mothers. For example, reproductive technologies provide the means for lesbians to get pregnant without heterosexual intercourse. The HIV/AIDS epidemic provided a motive for lesbians to become mothers. However, both reproductive technologies and the HIV/AIDS epidemic may discourage low-income lesbians from becoming mothers. Because low-income lesbians cannot afford expensive reproductive technologies and because they may not want to ask a potentially HIV positive male friend to be a sperm donor, low-income lesbians may choose to remain childfree. In addition, because HIV/AIDS is a particular problem in communities of color, lesbians-of-color may be particularly discouraged from using known donors. Thus, depending on race or class location, different factors influence lesbians' mothering decisions in different ways.

Second, the literature on current struggles and experiences indicates that social factors such as medical and legal institutions, social networks, and lesbians themselves are creating a social space in which lesbians can become mothers. However, these very factors are also discouraging lesbians from becoming mothers and therefore encouraging lesbians to remain childfree. While medical and legal institutions are helpful for lesbians who can afford them, they are inaccessible to others who cannot. Furthermore, medical and legal institutions maintain the necessary tools and materials with which lesbians can become mothers. However, sexual discrimination within those institutions prevent some lesbians from accessing those tools and materials.

Social networks also provide lesbians with a means of pursuing mothering and

childfree interests. However, lesbians' access to support networks varies greatly by race. Lesbians-of-color have a much greater difficulty finding social networks that support both their sexual and racial identities than do White lesbians. The amount of homophobia within families and communities of color may discourage some lesbians-of-color from becoming mothers.

In addition to race and class differences within medical and legal institutions and social networks, lesbians themselves present issues concerning gender and sexuality that influence lesbians' mothering decisions. Ideology concerning lesbian motherhood varies greatly within lesbian communities. Concerns about assimilating into or transforming traditional gender roles shape lesbians' orientations toward motherhood in ways that may influence their mothering decisions.

Third, the body of literature that discusses factors in women's decisions to become mothers and remain childfree also indicates how particular social factors influence lesbians' mothering decisions. For example, women's class positions shape the work they do. The work they do in turn determines whether or not women can fulfill career aspirations or if they are presented with dead-end jobs. Furthermore, class shapes the income and stability of the work that women do. In other words, class shapes women's relationship to work which then influences their decisions to mother or remain childfree.

In addition to work, ideology concerning motherhood and sexuality varies greatly by class and race. For example, race and class shape women's ideology about the relationship between marriage and motherhood, and work and motherhood. Furthermore, race and class shape women's ideology about "proper" sexuality, as well as notions of

coming out as a lesbian versus living within communities that support lesbians as long as lesbians keep their sexual identities to themselves. While research on heterosexual women has shown that ideology alone does not determine women's mothering paths, ideology can influence women's mothering decisions by supporting or discouraging motherhood and/or remaining childfree.

While the literature on factors focuses primarily on heterosexual women, this body of literature, coupled with the first two bodies of literature, suggest that lesbians' decisions to become mothers or remain childfree are strongly influenced by a variety of structural, cultural, and personal factors. Furthermore, how those factors influence women's decision-making processes varies greatly by race and class.

Chapter 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research methodology I used in my study. It begins with a discussion of a researcher as a "positioned intellectual." Then it discusses my use of the extended case method. Third, I define key terms used in the study. Fourth, I discuss the two main methods of data collection I used. Fifth, I discuss the analytic strategies employed.

I. The Researcher as a Positioned Subject

According to Rosaldo (1993), every researcher is a positioned subject in that s/he "occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision" (p.19). Researchers reposition themselves as they engage in different circumstances and settings of their research. Because of researchers' subjective positions within their research projects, they can never achieve complete objectivity. Thus, the breadth of what they can learn about their subjects is limited and their analyses are incomplete (Rosaldo 1993:7).

In reflecting on how to conduct my research, I considered my own position within this project. My positions or statuses as a lesbian, a sociology graduate student, and as a mother have clearly shaped the agenda and topic of my research. My various statuses have also no doubt influenced the research process, particularly in regard to gaining access to and interacting with potential and actual participants. Because of my multiple statuses and my relationship to my research project and participants, I found myself in a similar position as other scholars such as Krieger (1983), Weston (1991), and Lewin

(1993) who researched queer subjects; that is, I found myself as a positioned intellectual (Lewin 1995b; Ohnuki-Tierney 1984).

According to Ohnuki-Tierney (1984) and Lewin (1995b), positioned intellectuals (or what Ohnuki-Tierney refers to as "native anthropologists") are scholars who study their own cultures. Positioned intellectuals benefit from studying their own cultures because they have "intimate knowledge of daily routines that are exceedingly difficult for outsiders to observe" (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984:585). Despite the advantage of being able to use insider knowledge to inform the research, a researcher as a positioned intellectual must also be able to detach herself from her culture in order to detect key patterns that exist within that culture (Ohnuki-Tierney 1984). Thus, the positioned intellectual must find a balance between being an insider and distancing herself from the research as if she were an outsider looking into that culture. Weston (1991) discusses this balancing act when she writes about conducting research with lesbians and gays in San Francisco. She says that her research "did not entail uncovering some 'exotic' corner of my native culture but rather discovering the stuff of everyday life." She adds however, that "[t]o study one's own culture involves a process of making the familiar strange" (Weston 1991:14).

In addition to achieving a balance between distancing and using insider knowledge, positioned intellectuals may also find themselves in the curious position of being "native" to part of their culture, but "foreign" to other parts. For example, lesbian ethnographers are beginning to research differences within lesbian culture along lines of race, class, age, nationality, ideology, and gender identities. Such ethnographers are finding that lesbian participants do not necessarily consider the researcher to be part of

their community, "at least not in the sense that [their] identities and experiences share some centrally defining sameness" (Lewin 1995b:326).

During my research I experienced being both an insider and outsider. While I am a lesbian within the larger lesbian community, as a White, middle-class lesbian mother researching lesbians-of-color, working-class lesbians, and childfree lesbians, my native status weakened considerably. As other scholars have noted, insiders/outsider status has advantages and disadvantages (Baca Zinn 1979). I felt both the benefits and disadvantages of insider/outsider status in two particular areas of the research: in recruiting my sample and in conducting the focus groups. First, in recruiting White lesbians (of any class or motherhood status) I felt as an insider. I knew many of the potential participants or at least traveled in similar "circles." Thus, gaining access to groups of White lesbians whom I did not know (for example in bars or at church services or meetings) involved a comfortable rapport between me and the potential participants. However, as I discuss in greater detail below, I often could not gain access into lesbian-of-color events. During the few times I did gain access, I felt that the lesbians in the group were keeping their distance from me, being very wary of my status as a White lesbian and as a researcher. The result of my insider/outsider status in recruiting was an abundance of White middle-class lesbians and a great difficulty in recruiting African-American lesbians.

I also felt the benefits and strains of being both an insider and outsider while conducting the focus groups. Conducting focus groups with lesbian mothers was more like listening in to a conversation my friends might have been having. The experiences of mothers, the trials and tribulations, were familiar to me. However, I also had to work

hard at being a moderator and not a participant in the focus groups with mothers.

I had a different experience with childfree lesbians. During the latter half of the interview process I was visibly pregnant. The participants who knew me prior to the study knew that I already had one child. The participants who did not know that I had a child could figure out that I was soon to have one. I chose not to discuss my status as a mother or as a pregnant woman with participants prior to the focus groups because I did not want to draw attention to myself and move the discussion away from the experiences of participants. In most cases, I do not think my motherhood status had much of an impact on childfree lesbians. However, my pregnant status appeared to make two participants uncomfortable (one in the White middle-class focus group and one in the lesbian-of-color middle-class focus group). Both participants had very decisively chosen not to be mothers and both were very vocal about their views during the interviews. At the end of both focus groups they told me they hoped they had not offended me. I told them that everyone makes their own decisions and that I did not take their responses or opinions personally. I asked them if they had altered their responses because of my being pregnant. They both said that they had not altered the content of their responses but had toned their comments down a bit. While I have no real way of verifying if their responses reflect their true feelings and experiences, based on the responses they gave I believe that these two participants were as least as honest with me as other participants in the study. However, had I been a childfree lesbian I might have received more direct and strongly stated positions.

II. Extended Case Method

To frame the analysis of my data, I used the extended case method. The extended case method is a conceptual tool that helps link theory and methods. For this study, the extended case method connects the four theoretical perspectives that inform my study with the actual research design of the study. The extended case method links theory and methods through two major goals. First, the extended case method works to reconstruct and strengthen existing theory (Burawoy 1991:27). Reconstructing and strengthening existing theory fits well with my own theoretical stance. As discussed in Chapter 2, my research is a synthesis of different theories. None of these theories alone fully address my research topic. Because my study intersects with several theoretical bodies, using the extended case method helps me fill theoretical gaps and strengthen the theoretical perspectives upon which I draw.

The second major goal of the extended case method is to connect personal biography of the micro-social world with social structure of the macro-social world. That is, the extended case method "examines how the social situation is shaped by external forces" (Burawoy 1991:6). It looks at what micro-social phenomenon can tell us about the world in which it is embedded. Researchers who employ the extended case method have found that the most powerful criticisms of social structure "lie embedded in the everyday conditions and talk of ethnographic subjects" (Marcus 1986:180; see also Pierce 1995). Making connections between macro- and micro- worlds is crucial in studying the social processes that affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree. By relying on this goal of the extended case method and focusing on the social processes of mothering decisions, the data collected in my study allow me to connect

personal biography with larger social structures.

The extended case method uses two techniques to accomplish its main goals. One technique is to look for what is interesting, surprising, and unexpected in a particular social situation. That is, it treats everyday occurrences as anomalies, not as exemplars. However, the end result is to turn anomalies into exemplars (Burawoy 1991). By doing so, researchers ask "what unique conditions constitute the case and how the case can aid in a reconstruction of existing theory" (Gamson 1991:36). The technique of finding what is interesting and surprising in a social situation or case is particularly salient for me as a positioned intellectual. As discussed above, in studying one's own culture it is often difficult to turn what is personally familiar into something that is sociologically exciting. In conducting research on lesbian motherhood as a lesbian mother who has gone through the process of alternative insemination and second-parent adoption, I was forced throughout the research process to treat my own life and the lives of the women I interviewed as interesting, surprising, and unexpected.

The second technique that the extended case method employs to meet its two main goals is to maintain a continuous dialogue between data, analysis, and theory. As Burawoy states, analysis "is a continual process, mediating between field data and existing theory" (Burawoy 1991:11). Making continual connections among data, analysis, and theory allows the researcher to link the micro-information s/he is receiving from the data with the macro-orientations of theory. It also allows the researcher to explore "ways of utilizing technique to advance theory" (Burawoy 1991:271).

III. Definition of Terms

To conduct my research, I defined key terms that I used throughout my research:

Lesbians

Defining who falls into the category of lesbian is not an easy task (Rust 1992). While the common understanding of lesbians are women who have intimate and sexual relationships exclusively with other women, researchers have found that the sexual experiences of lesbians vary considerably. For example, Rust (1992) found that women who identified as lesbians had many similar sexual experiences as women who identified as bisexual. She writes that "[s]hared sexual identity... does not necessarily reflect shared personal experience and dissimilar sexual identity does not imply dissimilar experience" (Rust 1992:176). Using a definition of lesbian as a woman who is exclusive with other women is too narrow. In an attempt to respect the identities of women in general and lesbians in particular, and in following with past research on lesbians, for my study I defined lesbians as women who identify themselves as lesbian (Weston, 1991).

Childfree lesbians

Childfree lesbians refer to lesbians who do not desire to enter into motherhood within their lifetimes and who do not already have children (Bartlett 1994). I struggled greatly with what to call women who have remained childfree. There are many terms used in the literature including childless by choice, voluntarily childless, non-mothers, and not-mothers (Faux 1984; Morell 1993; Veevers 1980). These terms are problematic for three main reasons. First, they assume motherhood to be the norm and are used in opposition to that norm. Furthermore, terms like "childless" and "nonmother" signify a lack of

something, not a status in its own right. Second, the terms imply a final decision. Some women do not have children, but struggle with the decision to have or not have children throughout their childbearing years. Rather than actually making a decision, they "postpone" the decision until they reach menopause (McMahon 1995). There may not be one particular moment when a woman decides not to have children. By examining the processes in which women make mothering choices, it becomes clear that the dichotomy between mother and "not-mother" is a false one.

The third problem with the terms used to describe women who remain childfree is that they imply a real choice, rather than a choice constrained by social structural factors. As Morell (1994) states, "[c]hoice is a loaded word. The word suggests the opportunity of selecting freely among alternative possibilities" (Morell 1994:48). "Choice" relies not only on what one thinks her options are, but also on what her options are realistically and materially. The term "choice" denies the ongoing social processes that women experience concerning issues of motherhood (Morell 1994).

To avoid the above problems of terminology, I use the term "childfree" to refer to women who are not mothers. "Childfree" connotes a positive state where women are free from the responsibilities and burdens of child-raising (Bartlett 1994). The more positive connotation allows for the possibility of greater mobility, perhaps eschewing the issue of finality. While I recognize that not all women without children identify themselves as "childfree," prior to conducting my research it seemed to be the most appropriate term to use. During my focus groups with childfree women, I asked about this terminology. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the women's responses suggest that childfree is as problematic as other terms because many "childfree" lesbians have children firmly fixed in their lives.

Lesbian mothers

For the purpose of my study, lesbian mothers are lesbians who, within their identities as lesbians, have become or are actively seeking (i.e., in the process of adopting or inseminating) to become mothers. Because of difficulty in recruiting working-class mothers (see discussion below), I modified this definition slightly for the participants in the lesbian-of-color, working-class mother focus group. In that group, two women were resolving a medical problem before they started trying to have children and one woman had tried previously to get pregnant but was not trying at the time of the research.

I excluded from the study women who have birthed or adopted children while in heterosexual relationships and later identified as lesbians. While I recognize this group as lesbian mothers, I excluded them because the purpose of my research is to understand how social processes lead lesbians, within their identities as lesbians, to become mothers or remain childfree.

Family and Household

Family is the conjugal set of relatives and their broader set of extended kin. Who becomes part of a family is based on ideological notions of what the family *should* be. Thus, who exists as a family member may not always be clear to the outsider looking in. Households, on the other hand, "are the empirically measurable units within which people pool their resources and perform certain tasks" (Rapp 1992:50). Families recruit people into their households and organize those households according to relations of production, reproduction, and consumption. Family and household relations are determined by larger forces of race, class, and gender (Rapp 1992:51). The distinction between family and household is important because it allows for a broader definition of

family. Recognizing the material rather than ideology construction of families allows families to exist outside a monolithic definition.

Queer

Queers are people who identify with any diverse, non-heterosexual sexuality such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgendered. I prefer the term "queer" to "lesbians and gays" or "homosexuals" because it is all-inclusive of non-heterosexual people.

Class

I used two definitions of class. First, to operationalize class in selecting my sample, I define class as a "[r]anking in a stratification system based on economic resources" (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998:532). While class can be divided into several different categories, I focused on middle-class and working-class lesbians. According to sociological literature, middle-class people include those who hold relatively "high prestige (but not necessarily high-income) jobs that require considerable formal education and have a high degree of autonomy and responsibility." Middle-class people also consist of "white-collar workers who work primarily in minor jobs in bureaucracies" (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998:251-252). Working-class people often work at repetitive, blue-collar jobs with little autonomy that require little creativity and no education beyond high school. Working-class people also include "unskilled laborers whose formal education is often less than high school." Many working-class people are gravely blocked from upward mobility (Eitzen and Baca Zinn 1998:252).

Given sociological definitions, I divided participants into middle-class and working-class groups based loosely on three criteria: education, occupation, and income. I categorized participants who had an associate degree or less, who worked at "blue

collar" jobs, and who had low incomes as working-class. I categorized participants with a bachelor's degree or higher, who worked at managerial or professional jobs, and who had higher incomes as middle-class. Despite this categorization (or perhaps because of it) I found operationalizing class to be very difficult. Often a participant met two of the criteria but did not meet the third. In addition, some participants were in middle-class professions but came from working-class backgrounds and therefore identified as working-class. Some of the participants did not earn their own incomes, but their partners were high-earning professionals. Of the three criteria, income seemed to be the least important to whether or not participants identified as working or middle-class. However, income was important in decisions to have children or remain childfree. Because of the difficulty in operationalizing class, analyzing the data according to class was also difficult and required careful attention to the three criteria and the self-identification of the participants.

In addition to using an operational definition of class for sample selection, I used a second definition of class for designing my main research questions and analyzing the data. Here I defined class as a fundamental organizing principle. Fundamental organizing principles organize society and have three main characteristics. First, they are hierarchies of stratification, or structured inequalities. "Structured" refers to socially patterned stratifications. Thus, inequalities are based on social factors. Second, structured inequalities socially locate groups of people differently so that some have greater (or less) access to wealth, power, and privilege. Based on their distinctive social locations, people have different life chances and experiences. Third, structured inequalities are based on relations of power and domination. Because structured

inequalities allocate resources on an unequal basis, people with wealth, power, and privilege dominate people with limited access to such resources (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999). Fundamental organizing principles can exist on several levels, ranging from micro to macro. For example, they can relate to the organization of personal and intimate relationships, communities, social institutions, and society as a whole. At the societal level, fundamental organizing principles, including class, function as macrostructural forces. Defining class as a fundamental organizing principle helps me analyze my data.

I will use this conceptual definition to examine how class (as well as race, gender, and sexuality) organizes lesbians' decisions to become mothers or to remain childfree.

Race

As with class, I used two definitions of race. First, the operational definition of race I used to select my focus group sample was a "socially defined category on the basis of presumed common genetic heritage resulting in distinguishing physical characteristics" (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:478). For the purpose of designing the research questions and for analysis, I define race as a fundamental organizing principle.

Gender

As with class and race, I used two definitions of gender. First, to operationalize gender I only included lesbians, and therefore women. However, different women may view their own gender identities in diverse ways. Thus, my first definition of gender is the "cultural and social definition of feminine and masculine" (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:473), particularly as feminine and masculine are culturally defined by the lesbians in my study.

Like class, however, I also define gender as a fundamental organizing principle.

Thus, "gender is one element of social structure that, along with class and race, shapes the experience of all groups in society" (Andersen 1997:7).

Sexuality

Like class, race, and gender, I defined sexuality as a fundamental organizing principle. More specifically, it is the socially constructed, hierarchical organizing principle of intimate relationships and sexual desires, behaviors, and identities. Sexuality exists on all levels of social organization, from micro to macro, and relates to the organization of personal and intimate relationships, communities, social institutions, and society as a whole.

Racial-ethnic groups

Racial-ethnic groups are "[g]roups labeled as 'races' by the wider society and bound together by their common social and economic conditions resulting in distinctive cultural and ethnic characteristics" (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1999:478).

IV. Methods of Data Collection and Analytic Strategies

To collect my data, I employed three main research methods: focus groups, a demographic questionnaire, and qualitative content analysis. Using these three methods allowed me to triangulate multiple sources of data. Triangulation is useful for corroborating, elaborating, and illuminating the targeted research. In addition, triangulation "can greatly strengthen the study's usefulness for other settings" (Marshall and Rossman 1989:146).

I conducted my research in three overlapping phases. The first consisted of gaining research approval from the University Committee on Research Involving Human

Subjects (UCRIHS) at Michigan State University (October-November 1999) and recruiting my sample (December 1999 to July 2000). The second phase consisted of conducting focus groups (March to July 2000) and collecting data for content analysis (December 1999 to July 2001). The third phase consisted of conducting my analysis of the data and writing up my findings (September 2000 to April 2002).

A. Focus Groups

Focus groups provided the main source of data for my study. Focus groups are a form of qualitative research that rely on the interaction of participants in a group interview to generate information on a specific research topic (Morgan 1997). In relying on group interaction, focus groups have the advantage over individual interviews for generating a greater breadth of information (Crabtree, Yanoshik, Miller, and O'Connor 1993). Focus groups "can thematically identify the diversity of viewpoints or the range of behavior patterns associated with particular issues" with a small group of people in a relatively short period of time (Jarrett 1993:191). Focus groups reveal a wide range of opinions, experiences, and behaviors of a particular group of people. Thus, they help unearth areas of consensus and disagreement on a particular topic, allowing for a greater understanding of the range of experiences that particular group may have (Morgan and Krueger 1993). Given the difficulty I anticipated in recruiting lesbians of diverse racial-ethnic and class backgrounds, employing a research method that maximizes the information generated by a small group of people was ideal for this study.

In addition to the advantage of collecting a wide breadth of information from a small group of people, focus groups are ideal for this study for two other reasons. First, focus groups allow homogenous groups of people who have historically had limited

power and influence to express their opinions together in a non-threatening and comfortable setting (Morgan and Krueger 1993:15). This advantage is particularly important when interviewing lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbians. In addition, focus groups comprised of a homogeneous group of participants help prevent participants from idealizing their accounts of a social situation. For example, in her study of low-income, African-American women, Jarrett found that the participants were "well aware of how their lives differ from those of the mainstream. Consequently, in the presence of outsiders, particularly researchers, there are strong pressures to present idealized versions of their lives" (Jarrett 1993:197). However, in a group setting some participants may be willing to challenge idealized views expressed by other participants, thus reducing the risk of collecting unrealistic data.

The second additional reason why focus groups are ideal for this study is that they are useful in facilitating conversation about topics that are either habit-ridden or that have not been thought out by the participant prior to being asked (Morgan 1997; Morgan and Krueger 1993). Upon starting my research, it was unclear to me how much lesbians have thought about why they wanted to have children or to remain childfree. For example, a common response Lewin received from the participants in her study on lesbian mothers was that motherhood was "something they have always wanted" (Lewin 1993); that is, their desire for children was seen as natural or at least a taken-for-granted desire. Even in my own quest to become a mother, it was not until I began thinking about this research topic that I began to really question my own desire to have children. Focus groups can help unearth more complex explanations for seemingly "natural" or taken-for-granted topics by facilitating discussions that reveal the wide range of responses to the question

(Morgan 1997; Morgan and Krueger 1993).

The questions I asked in the focus groups followed a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendices A and B). A semi-structured guide draws on the advantages of both structured and unstructured guides often used in focus groups. Drawing on the model of a structured guide, I tried to ensure that participants in the focus groups discussed the same questions, making the data collected comparable across groups. However, I also drew on the advantages of an unstructured guide to minimize my role as moderator and allow the voices and stories of the participants to be heard (Morgan 1997).

Focus groups can be comprised of a particular type of participant (i.e., a homogeneous group) or of many different types of participants (Morgan 1997). I conducted eight focus groups comprised of homogeneous groups of participants, segmented not only by racial-ethnic and class backgrounds, but also by whether the participants were mothers or childfree. Drawing on homogeneous groups of participants allowed me to make comparisons across different groups of lesbians (Knodel 1993), a main goal of this study.

Table 1 below shows the division and number of participants in each focus group.

Table 1. Distribution of Participants in Focus Groups

	Lesbian Mothers		Childfree Lesbians		
	Working-class	Middle-class	Working-class	Middle-class	Totals
Lesbians-of-Color	3* (8.6%)	4 (11.4%)	2 (5.7%)	4 (11.4%)	13 (37.1%)
White Lesbians	3 (8.6%)	7 (20.0%)	5 (14.3%)	7 (20.0%)	22 (62.9%)
Totals	6 (17.2%)	11 (31.4%)	7 (20.0%)	11 (31.4%)	35 (100%)

*conducted in two separate interviews

There was almost an even division between lesbian mothers (17) and childfree lesbians (18). Thirteen (37.1%) of the participants were either African-American or Latina. The remaining 22 (62.9%) were White. Similarly, 13 (37.1%) women participated in

working-class focus groups, while 22 (62.9%) women participated in middle-class focus groups. As discussed earlier, however, several of the participants in the middle-class focus group identified themselves as working-class and came from working-class backgrounds. Therefore, the breakdown of participants by class is not neatly discernable. Participants fell between the ages of 22 and 46 years, a range that minimizes a cohort effect.

I had originally hoped to have six to eight participants in each focus group. However, due to difficulties in recruiting the sample and a problem with a few participants not showing up at the scheduled times, the numbers in each group was reduced. Fortunately, because of the long length of the interview schedule and because of the nature of the questions, I found that smaller focus groups worked well to foster in-depth discussions among the participants. Therefore, the smaller number of participants did not detract from the depth and richness of the data I collected. In fact, researchers have found that smaller "mini-focus groups" of four or five participants are often more effective in certain situations and are gaining in popularity. As Krueger (1994) writes,

> [f]ocus groups with specialized audiences in which the intent is to get more in-depth insights are usually best accomplished by smaller groups ..., when the participants have a great deal to share about the topic or have had intense or lengthy experiences with the topic of discussion (p. 79).

While two of my focus groups included only three participants, and one group consisted of only two participants, the smaller sizes of the focus groups facilitated a greater depth and breadth of discussion.

1. The Research Site

I recruited the focus group sample from five counties in a Midwestern state. I selected these counties because: 1) I was familiar with and have contacts in these areas;

2) they offered access to a large population of lesbians from which to draw a diversified sample; 3) they were within close proximity to my home base and to one another.

2. Recruiting the Sample

To identify participants and recruit my sample for the focus groups I used a combination of snowball and purposive sampling that allowed me to recruit a sample that consisted of lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbians. Snowball sampling is particularly useful when identifying hidden populations (Rea and Parker 1992) such as lesbians. Snowball sampling proved to be the most effective method of recruitment for all groups of lesbians. Initially snowball sampling helped me recruit White middle-class lesbians. As a member of a lesbian mothers' support group and as an active member in the lesbian community, I have access to many White middle-class lesbians, as well as some lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbians who fit the criteria for the study. The lesbians I knew in the community helped me make contacts with other lesbians in the area.

To recruit lesbians outside my specific area (particularly lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbians) I used four sampling methods. First I advertised the study and criteria for participants in a lesbian publication that reaches over 2000 lesbians throughout the state. Second, I recruited potential participants from lesbian social locales such as feminist bookstores, coffee houses, and bars in the targeted counties. Third, I advertised through lesbian organizations and religious groups in the five counties, as well as in community colleges, four-year colleges, and universities. Finally, I advertised on local online listservs that targeted lesbians of diverse backgrounds. Upon making initial contacts, I continued to use snowball sampling to expand the sample. Table 2 gives a

breakdown of how participants in the study were recruited. Nearly half (45.7%) of the sample was recruited through snowball sampling. One quarter of the sample was

Table 2. Source of Recruitment for Focus Groups

	Snowball Sampling	Lesbian Publi-cations	Lesbian-of-Color Listserv	Local Lesbian Mothers' Group	Flyer in Bookstore	Lesbian Bar	Church or Religious Group
Lesbian-of-Color M-C Moms	2			2			
Lesbian-of-Color M-C Childfree	3	1					
Lesbian-of-Color W-C Moms	2		1				
Lesbian-of-Color W-C Childfree	1						1
White M-C Moms	1			5	1		
White M-C Childfree	4	1					2
White W-C Moms	1			2			
White W-C Childfree	2					3	
Totals	16 (45.7%)	2 (5.7%)	1 (2.9%)	9 (25.7%)	1 (2.9%)	3 (8.6%)	3 (8.6%)

recruited from two local lesbian mother groups. Close to 20% of the sample was recruited from religious groups or lesbian bars. The remaining 12% of the sample was recruited from listservs and advertisements/flyers. Twenty nine (82.9%) of the participants came from my local area, four (11.4%) came from a larger city , and two (5.7%) came from different smaller cities in the state.

I found recruiting lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbian mothers (of any racial background) very difficult. I had hoped to recruit working-class lesbians from a particularly working-class county. However, despite several contacts I had or made at

colleges, local organizations, and work places, I could not recruit even one lesbian from that county. I was informed by several sources that lesbians in that area are particularly closeted and reluctant to participate in studies lest they be outed. My inability to recruit working-class lesbians from that county was mirrored in other areas. Through all my recruiting efforts, I was unable to recruit many working-class mothers of any racial-ethnic background. My conclusion is that either this group of lesbian mothers is very closeted or they really do not exist. Because donor insemination and adoption can be costly, I surmise that working-class lesbians are unable to afford children. As discussed earlier, because of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, lesbians are less likely to choose the less expensive option of using known donors. The financial cost of having children for lesbians is compounded by the wage gap between women and men and the lack of a male income in lesbian households.

In addition to the problems of recruiting working-class lesbians, I found that African-American lesbian communities in larger cities remained closed to my efforts. I made numerous unsuccessful trips to recruit lesbians-of-color from the largest city in the study area. As I continued my recruiting efforts, I learned several reasons for the lack of interest in my study by African-American lesbians in the City. First, I found that many of the lesbians with whom I met were mothers through heterosexual relations and therefore did not meet a major criterion for participation. Second, there appears to be more racism and a greater racial division in that city's lesbian "community." Several African-American lesbian support groups informed me that I was not welcome to recruit during their sessions because these were lesbian-of-color events only. However, group leaders told me I could come afterward and recruit then. The three times I showed up to recruit

at such groups, I discovered upon arrival that the meetings had been cancelled. My experience recruiting African-American lesbians led me to two possible conclusions: Either African-American lesbian groups are poorly organized or they are purposefully evasive (or both). My experience of racial division in the City was confirmed during the focus group with childfree working-class lesbians-of-color. Sara, an African-American participant who was raised in the City explained:

> There is a racial divide and you also have your...cliques. You have your little cliques...like you have the people like to party, you have your people that are more into the arts and entertainment, and then there's certain activities where you'll see everybody at.. It's been going on for the last two years or so, and it's unfortunate now because when you go to the activities all you see is White people.... It's in the magazines down there... And I try to read them here and there, and I dabble a little bit in the politics. Not a lot. But you... you hear the call even from the organizations in Washington that [our city] needs to come together.

Sara's comments suggest a third explanation for my recruiting difficulties: The African-American community in the City is not necessarily disorganized, but is divided by cliques that prevent cohesive and consistent organizational events from occurring.

Prior to conducting the research, I had decided not to include partners in the same focus group. I decided that if participants had partners who were willing to participate in the study, I would include the partner in a separate focus group. I decided this because I did not want to ask participants about relationships with their partners while their partners were present; i.e., I wanted participants to speak freely about their partners. I included three couples in the study. Separating one of the couples into two different groups was easy because one was African-American and the other White. However, I was unable to separate the two remaining couples. The partners in one couple were African-American and Latina. Initially I had tried to recruit both partners for separate groups, but the

African-American partner declined. However, both partners showed up at the focus group and both agreed to participate. Because another member of the focus group had cancelled at the last minute, I decided to include both partners in the group. The third couple fell under the category of working-class lesbian-of-color mother. Because I could not find many participants in this category, I decided to interview both partners together. In neither case where both partners participated in the same group did I detect any hesitance to participate due to the presence of the partner.

I developed two separate focus group interview guides, one for lesbian mothers and one for childfree lesbians. The questions asked within the two interview guides aimed at answering the research questions listed below. Each focus group participant filled out an informed consent and confidentiality form (see Appendix C).

Seven of the focus groups were held on the weekend at a location that I selected. The focus groups lasted approximately two hours each and were tape recorded. To help keep track of group dynamics, I asked two graduate students to assist me in running the focus groups. The two graduate students alternated coming to the focus groups and took extensive notes regarding body language, group dynamics, and general themes raised during the groups. I included these notes as part of my data and analysis. I conducted the eighth "focus group" (of working-class lesbian-of-color mothers) in the form of two in-depth interviews because I was unable to find a time that accommodated all three participants' schedules.

3. Research Questions

Using the findings from the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and to assess my main research question of how the decisions of lesbians to become mothers or to remain

childfree are embedded in larger social processes, I developed questions related to the social structural, cultural, and personal contexts in which mothering decisions are made.

Work

- How does the need to fit children into a work schedule affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- How do work aspirations hinder or enhance processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- How does the need to balance financial needs and the financial expenses of having children affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- How important is work to personal identity and how does this affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- How does the ability to be "out" at work affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?

Relationships

- For lesbians with partners, what influence does that partner have in decisions to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?
- For lesbians with partners, does not wanting to disturb or change a solid relationship with a partner affect decisions to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?
- For lesbians with partners, does wanting to add to or expand the relationship with a partner affect decisions to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?
- For lesbians with partners, does negotiating who will adopt or birth a child first affect decisions to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?
- For lesbians with partners of different racial-ethnic, class, religious or other

backgrounds from themselves, does how family or community of origin view their partners affect decisions to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?

- For lesbians without partners, what influence does not having a partner have in decisions to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?
- Does the role of a donor or father role affect the decision to becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?

Negotiating medical and legal systems

- How do the means in which lesbians can obtain a child affect processes of becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?
- How do the expenses of obtaining a child affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree, particularly given that medical and/or legal services often must be employed?
- How does the prospect of working with the medical and/or legal system affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- In the case of alternative insemination, how do the limitations in finding an adequate doctor affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- In the case of alternative insemination, how do the limitations in finding an adequate donor affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- In the case of adoption, how does the decision of what type of adoption to use affect processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- In the case of adoption, what role does the ability or necessity to adopt a special needs child play in affecting processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- In the case of adoption, what role does the ability or necessity to adopt a child of a

different racial-ethnic background from the participant play in affecting processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?

- For both alternative insemination and adoption, what affect does the ability or lack of ability to undergo a second-parent adoption have on the processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- For both alternative insemination and adoption, what affect does coming out or staying closeted to the medical and/or legal system have on the processes of becoming a mother or to remaining childfree?

Ideology concerning motherhood

- Do lesbians feel that the ideology of gender that generates the mandate for motherhood apply to them such that they feel the need to conform or reject the mandate for motherhood?
- How does the mandate for motherhood for lesbians interact with work aspirations?
- Do negative images of motherhood impact the social processes of becoming a mother or remaining childfree?
- Does the hierarchy of motherhood and the historical oxymoron of lesbian mother affect lesbians' ideologies of whether they can or should mother or remain childfree?
- Does the hierarchy of motherhood present negative images of lesbian mothers that prevents or enhances lesbians' decisions to become mothers or remain childfree?
- How do ideologies of motherhood and remaining childfree differ and/or overlap for lesbians of different races, classes, and gender identities?
- Within personal lesbian social circles, how does the ideological transformation-assimilation debate affect decisions to become a mother or remain childfree?

- Does how individual lesbians define motherhood (e.g., as power, as related to work, as continuing the "lifeline," as disconnected from or connected to marriage and men) affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does how a lesbian's community or family of origin defines motherhood (e.g., as power, as related to work, as continuing the "lifeline," as disconnected from or connected to marriage and men) affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does how a lesbian's religion defines motherhood (e.g., as power, as related to work, as continuing the "lifeline," as disconnected from or connected to marriage and men) affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?

Ideology concerning sexuality

- Does how a lesbian's community or family of origin defines sexuality (e.g., as heterosexual, as discreet for women) affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does how a lesbian's religion or religious background defines sexuality (e.g., as heterosexual, as discreet for women) affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?

Social and kin networks

- Does the availability or absence of social and kin networks affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does the availability or absence of lesbian support groups affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does discrimination (racial, class, and/or anti-mothering sentiment) within lesbian

communities affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?

Identity

- Does the need to negotiate multiple identities surrounding motherhood in the dominant heterosexual world, in lesbian worlds, and in racial-ethnic and class-based worlds affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?

Coming out

- Does being able to or not being able to come out to family and/or community of origin affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does the need to come out to show children queer pride influence lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?

HIV/AIDS epidemic

- Does the desire to give a new sense of life to the gay community in light of the HIV/AIDS epidemic influence decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does the threat of contracting HIV/AIDS from a donor affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Does the fear of adopting a child with HIV/AIDS affect decisions to mother or to remain childfree?

Intentionality

- Do age and the sense of a "biological clock" affect lesbians' decisions to mother or to remain childfree?
- Is there one deciding moment where a final decision to become a mother or to remain childfree was made?

4. Analytic Strategies

In analyzing the data from the focus groups, I looked for themes and subthemes in responses based on the race, class, and mothering decisions of the participants. To determine such patterns, I used a combination of qualitative data analysis tools including coding, memoing, building displays, and generating meaning out of the data. I used the qualitative data software QSR NVIVO to analyze the focus group data. I selected QSR NVIVO because it uses rich text files and can make links to World Wide Web sites and allowed for greater flexibility in data analysis than other software packages I examined.

The first data analysis tool I used was coding. Coding is a form of analysis that allowed me to organize my data. "*Codes* are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (Miles & Huberman 1994:56, authors' emphasis). The use of codes helped me organize and make sense of my data. I developed 43 codes for lesbian mothers and 42 codes for childfree lesbians based both on the specific research questions and on unexpected responses that came out of the focus groups. For example, as expected, I had coding categories of "work," "partners," and "social pressure." However, two coding categories that I had not anticipated prior to conducting the research appeared in the data: "past experience with children" and "family relations."

Another way to help organize and make sense of my data was through memoing. Memoing is "the theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding..." (Glaser 1978:83-84, cited in Miles & Huberman 1994:72). Memos can be any length, ranging from one sentence to an entire page. Memos reminded me of important thoughts and ideas I had throughout the data analysis.

I created the memos within QSR NVIVO which made them more accessible to me than using a word processing program. Creating memos in QSR NVIVO also allowed me to code the memos and include them in my analysis.

The third tool I used to analyze my data was building displays. Building displays move the process of data analysis from a descriptive mode to an explanatory one. A display is "a visual format that presents information systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions..." (Miles & Huberman 1994:91). Displays fall generally into two major categories: matrices and networks. Matrices are defined by rows and columns. Networks consist of "a series of 'nodes' with links between them" (Miles & Huberman 1994:93). I found that matrices were most useful in my analysis and constructed numerous different matrices using QSR NVIVO and my word processing software. First, for each focus group I created a large matrix of participants' responses coded in key nodes. For each matrix, the names of the participant from that focus group was written across the top (i.e., in the columns). The rows consisted of the 35 to 40 nodes created using QSR NVIVO. The eight matrices ranged from 20 to 60 pages, depending on the size of the focus group and the length of responses. After studying the nodes and the individual responses in the matrix in greater detail, I reorganized the nodes into a more coherent structure based on general categories of responses. Then using the more organized system of nodes, I created a reduced matrix for each focus group. The structure of the matrix was the same as for the original matrix, but consisted of a brief summary of the responses, rather than the actual responses. The eight reduced matrices ranged from two to twelve pages each.

In studying these reduced matrices, and wanting to move from analyzing

individual responses to themes across focus groups, I created two final matrices that reduced the data even further. These two matrices allowed me to start generating meaning from the data, the final stage of data analysis (Miles & Huberman). I created one matrix for childfree lesbians and one for lesbian mothers. The final matrices consisted of a series of smaller tables rather than one large matrix. Focusing only on the nodes I deemed most salient (22 for lesbian mothers and 25 for childfree lesbians), I created a table for each node. In each table, I listed each of the four focus groups across the top of each matrix (i.e., as columns) and the major responses in the rows. Then I counted the number of each response in each focus group and tallied the total number for each responses.

In building the first group of 16 matrices, I treated both the individual participants and the entire group as the unit of analysis (Morgan 1997). For the final two matrices I treated just the whole focus group as the unit of analysis. This allowed me to focus on common themes that emerged from the different focus groups. In creating the final matrices, I used two qualitative tools. First, I clustered the nodes into a categories. Clustering allowed me to understand the data by grouping them into similar characteristics (Miles & Huberman 1994) and helped me reduce the initial 40 nodes to 20 nodes. Second, I used the tool of counting when I tallied the responses in each node. Counting is a useful qualitative tool in three ways: 1) Counting allows the researcher to see overall trends or the "drift of the data more easily and rapidly by looking at distributions" (Miles & Huberman 1994:253); 2) Counting verifies a hypothesis by showing which cases support a hypothesis and which ones do not. For example, my counting system illuminated responses given primarily by participants of different racial-

ethnic or class backgrounds, thus verifying that the process of mothering decisions varies by race and class; 3) Counting keeps the researcher analytically honest. As Miles and Huberman (1994) explain, the nature of qualitative analysis allows researchers to emphasize points that support their beliefs and to underemphasize unsupporting data. Using the aid of numbers to analyze qualitative data minimizes such bias.

After creating my two final matrices in which I clustered and counted responses, I used six additional analytic tools discussed in Miles and Huberman (1994:245-262) to generate meaning from the data. While I discuss these tools separately, I often used them simultaneously and repeatedly. First, I noted patterns and themes. I did this by examining the matrix in which I counted responses and tried to gain some understanding of what the most commonly spoken responses were. I was looking for patterns of responses by mothering decision as well as by race and class. Second, I tried to determine if what the numbers were telling me were plausible, or made sense given my understanding of: 1) what I had initially heard in the focus groups, 2) what I had read and re-read in the transcripts of the focus groups, 3) what the two graduate students who assisted me with the focus groups had noted, and 4) with what the literature says about lesbians and mothering decisions. During the process of "seeing plausibility" I used a third tool of making contrasts/comparisons. In particular, I compared responses across focus groups to see how responses varied by race and class.

The fourth analytic tool I used to generate meaning was subsuming particulars into general. This tool allows the researcher "to locate the immediate act, event, actor, or activity in a more abstractly defined class" (Miles & Huberman 1994:255). This tool helped me look at the themes I initially developed and determine the larger themes into

which the responses fit. It was through the use of this tool that I began to see my data coming together into a more coherent picture. Using Microsoft PowerPoint, I built a new display in the form of an organizational chart. The display helped me to determine what subthemes I had included or omitted and if my general patterns were true to the data. What I found is a tendency to oversimplify. Thus, I employed a fifth analytic tool of partitioning variables. I returned to my matrices of data and re-evaluated my themes and subthemes, rearranging the model until it exemplified what the data were saying.

The final analytic tool I used was making conceptual and theoretical coherence. This tool ties the findings of my "study to overarching, across-more-than-one-study propositions that can account for the 'how' and 'why' of the phenomena under study" (Miles & Huberman 1994:261). In trying to achieve conceptual and theoretical coherence, I returned to my data and my initial analysis to develop an understanding of how the different themes and factors that emerged from the data are interconnected. That is, I looked for a common thread that could explain how lesbians start at particular points, move through different social factors, and decide to become mothers or remain childfree. The common thread I found came in the form of different kinds of support and constraints. I found that different factors, whether they be the family values crusade discussed in Chapter 1, social facilitators I discussed in Chapter 2, or other factors I discuss in Chapters 4 through 6, all provide systems of support and constraint that shape lesbians' decisions to become mothers or remain childfree. As the following chapters illustrate, systems and constraints provide a conceptual and theoretical coherence that explain how and why lesbians either choose to become mothers or to remain childfree.

B. Demographic Questionnaire

Before each focus group started, I asked each participant to complete a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix D). The questionnaire enabled me to collect data and generate descriptive statistics about my sample, including age, racial-ethnic background, income, religion, employment status, and political affiliations. The demographic questionnaire was based on the demographic questionnaire from Gerson's book, *Hard Choices: How Women Decide about Work, Career, and Motherhood* (1985) and on the demographic questionnaire used by Chabot (1998) in her dissertation research on the decisions and dilemmas lesbian couples face in using alternative insemination as a means to becoming parents.

To analyze the demographic questionnaire, I used SPSS, a quantitative statistical package. I created a database from participants' responses to the questionnaire and ran frequencies, distributions, and cross-tabs to generate descriptive statistics about the focus group sample.

C. Content Analysis

In addition to the focus groups, I conducted a qualitative content analysis of popular media by and for lesbians to gather a more general understanding of the kinds of national support lesbians receive in deciding to become mothers or remain childfree. Qualitative content analysis, also called ethnographic content analysis or qualitative document analysis (Altheide 1996), draws on different forms of communication, including written materials, music, pictures, and on-line information, to help supplement other forms of data (Marshall and Rossman 1989). I drew on different forms of lesbian cultural communication such as lesbian publications and electronic on-line sources to get

a broader understanding of what lesbians nationwide are saying about their own lives in general and on motherhood specifically. An analysis of lesbian cultural communication helped generate descriptive information about different aspects of lesbian life and cross-validate research findings obtained from the focus groups (Marshall and Rossman 1989).

There is a debate concerning the benefits of qualitative versus quantitative content analysis. Quantitative content analysis is "a way of obtaining data to measure the frequency, extent, if not the meaning, of messages" (Altheide 1996:15). It assumes that the greater the occurrence of some message, the greater the significance of that message. Qualitative analysis is less concerned, on the other hand, with the frequency of the message as it is the meaning of the message. That is, qualitative content analysis offers "an opportunity for the investigator to learn about how subjects or the authors of textual materials view their social worlds" (Berg 2001:242). Because I was more interested in gaining a deeper understanding of lesbians' views of their own social worlds, and not the frequency of a particular text, I used qualitative content analysis instead of quantitative analysis.

1. Selecting Media Sources

I had two main criteria for selecting media sources. First, the media had to be "popular." By popular, I meant that any lesbian looking either in print or electronic media would be able to find the sources I found. That is, I was not looking for obscure or hard-to-find sources. The only source that I used that cannot be found on the Web or at mainstream bookstores is the *DT*[3], a publication by and for lesbians that is available in some queer and feminist bookstores, and also by subscription. Because the *DT* is a

[3] I have changed the name to protect the publication and its contributors.

commonly known source within lesbian circles, and because lesbians from all over the world subscribe to it, I included it in my list of sources. Furthermore, the *DT* is the only source I know of that has a sliding subscription scale ("more if you can, less if you can't"), it is a source that is affordable for all lesbians, not just ones who have access to computers and the Web, or print media.

The second criterion for selecting media sources was that the sources had to be written by and for lesbians. That is, the media had to be written by lesbians and for lesbians. I made two exceptions to this criterion. First, I selected some media by queers in general, but for lesbians. Second, I included the website from the Pacific Reproductive Services' because the organization is particularly gay-friendly and has sections written for lesbians. Apart from those two exceptions, I excluded media that were about lesbians but not by or necessarily for them (for example, articles about lesbians and lesbian mothers in popular media such as *Time Magazine, People Magazine,* and *The New York Times)*. My reasons for only including media by and for lesbians are three-fold. First, I did not interview heterosexual women in my focus groups and I wanted to be consistent in my data sources. Second, most of the information included in mainstream media is also included in lesbian media (e.g., court cases concerning custody and how "normal" queer families are). Finally, because of the large amount of media on lesbians and lesbian mothers, I needed to limit the media I used.

To determine which sources to use and how many to include in my study, I used "progressive theoretical sampling." Progressive theoretical sampling "refers to the selection of materials based on emerging understanding of the topic under investigation. The idea is to select materials for conceptual or theoretically relevant reasons" (Altheide

1996:33-34). I began my selection process by including sources that seemed relevant to my study. After identifying and studying the initial relevant materials, I then developed a "protocol," or a data collection sheet that lists items or categories that help guide data collection (Altheide 1996:34 & 25). After studying the protocol, I developed new protocols until I had "enough reports to demonstrate the range and the differences that make up the range" (Altheide 1996:35). In other words, I collected as many sources as I needed to both explain and illustrate the entire range of themes in the lesbian media.

Because I was focusing on childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers of diverse racial-ethnic and class backgrounds, I began by searching for media by and for childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers and by and for lesbians-of-color and of different classes. I immediately was faced by three problems. First, I was unable to find any body of media by and for childfree lesbians. In lieu of using childfree media, I looked at media by and for lesbians in general (childfree or not). Second, while I was able to find some media on lesbians-of-color, very few of them addressed lesbian motherhood. I only found two articles concerning lesbian motherhood in lesbian-of-color media, and one website with links to parenting websites. Third, I was not able to find any body of media that addressed class differences among lesbians. The only media I found on working-class lesbians came from academic sources that either listed names of famous working-class lesbians or provided excerpts of lectures or articles by working-class lesbians. However, none of the media provided any insight into the daily lives and activities of lesbians of diverse classes. Therefore, I was not able to use class as a unit of analysis.

My final analysis used media by and for lesbians in general, by and for lesbian mothers, and media by and for lesbians-of-color. I collected and analyzed over 70

sources (see Appendix E for a list of sources). While I include both print and electronic media in the content analysis, I include a greater number of electronic than print sources for three main reasons. First, there is a greater amount of electronic popular lesbian media than print. Second, electronic media allow lesbians without access to a restricted print publishing market to share their thoughts and information to a wide audience. Thus, electronic media offer insight into otherwise difficult to find information. Third, given that I have free access to the Internet, it was easier and faster for me to obtain lesbian media online than to search for obscure print media. However, I collected multiple issues of popular print media that are regularly available in feminist and local bookstores, including *Curve Magazine, Girlfriends, The Advocate, DT*[4], and *Alternative Family Magazine,* in order to include some popular print media in the study.

2. Ethical Concerns

In conducting the content analysis, I was faced with two ethical concerns. First, I had hoped to enter chat rooms on the Web in order to gain an understanding of what lesbians were discussing. To enter most chat rooms, people are required to register and select user names and passwords, making chat rooms into more "private" Web spaces. I found that there were a limited number of chat rooms in lesbian media and most were specifically for lesbians-of-color. I was faced with the question, therefore, of "invading" lesbian-of-color space in order to gain the information I wanted, or to limit my analysis to websites that were more "open" to the public. I decided to not "invade" lesbian-of-color space for four main reasons. First, my own feelings toward private spaces for oppressed groups of people is that boundaries should be respected. Second, in recruiting African-American

[4] Because this publication is available by subscription only and is not accessible through the Web or at most bookstores, I have changed the acronym of this publication to protect it from

lesbians for focus groups, I was told that White lesbians were not welcome at lesbian-of-color meetings. Therefore, I knew that at least some African-American lesbians wanted to protect their space. Third, I have been to other lesbian events, such as womyn's music festivals, where lesbians-of-color have protected space. Fourth, in the event that other researchers want to replicate my study or check my sources, I do not want to lead White and/or heterosexual researchers to private spaces for lesbians-of-color or lesbians in general. Therefore, I chose not to enter chat rooms and to select only websites that are not restricted by passwords or registration.

The second ethical issue I encountered involved whether or not to reveal the names of the sources I selected. Because most of the sources are either available to the general public through major bookstores or on the Web, I felt comfortable using the names of most sources. The one exception to this concern was a publication (the *DT)* that is available through lesbian and some feminist bookstores, as well as through subscription. Because the *DT* is a cultural icon and source of free discussions among lesbians, I felt the need to include in my study. However, I changed the name to protect it from outside scrutiny.

3. Analytic Strategies

To analyze the media I collected, I first had to determine if I was going to focus on manifest or latent content. Manifest content includes "those elements that are physically present and countable." Latent content includes "an interpretive reading of the symbolism underlying the physical data" (Berg 2001:242). After initially examining several media sources I decided to primarily use manifest content analysis, with an occasional addition of latent content analysis. For example, in formulating some of main

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public attention.

categories of analysis, I drew directly on the actual words and phrases found in the media (e.g., health and safety issues). However, in a few instances I developed more analytic and descriptive categories that were not physically present in the data. For example, I developed the category of "economic development and work." While there are clear data to support this category (see Chapter 4), lesbians in the media did not use the term "economic development."

Second, I had to determine what element of the media I would analyze. Berg lists seven possible elements to analyze or "count" in qualitative content analysis: words, themes, characters, paragraphs, items, concepts, and semantics (Berg 2001:246-245). In trying to be consistent with my analysis of focus group data, I decided to analyze words, themes, and concepts. Words are the smallest element to analyze in content analysis. Themes are a collection of words in the form of simple sentences and strings of words that exist throughout a source (Berg 2001). I used words and themes that I found in headlines of articles and on web pages that explained different aspects of lesbians' activities. For example, if I was analyzing a particular web page, I focused on section headers (i.e., words and themes) such as "health issues," "legal issues," and "social events." I used concepts, to place words and themes into a broader context. Concepts are more sophisticated use of words and "involve words grouped together into conceptual clusters (ideas)..." (Berg 2001:247). For example, I used clusters of words involving gender identity to formulate the concept of lesbian mothers "redefining gender and sexual roles" discussed in Chapter 4. Using concepts was particularly helpful in searching for latent categories.

Third, I coded the data. Initially I coded the data using a process of "open coding" where I wrote down all the major words and themes I found. As I became more familiar with the data, I began to develop different coding frames. Coding frames are a way of organizing the data and identifying findings after the researcher has completed the open coding (Berg 2001:253). Developing coding frames is "often a multileveled process that requires several successive sortings of cases under examination" (Berg 2001:253). Developing coding frames allowed me to determine broader "thematic emphases or definitions" (Altheide 1996:30), such as the concepts mentioned previously. I used the coding frames to develop an outline of the media.

Finally, to analyze and write-up my findings, I incorporated the four types of support I developed in analyzing focus group data. Using the four types of support was key to explaining the kinds of national support lesbians receive in deciding to become mothers or remaining childfree.

V. Methodological Limitations

The main methodological limitations of my study include the use of non-probability sampling, a less diverse sample than originally planned, and the operationalization of definitions. As discussed above, for the focus groups I used two non-probability sampling techniques: purposive and snowball sampling. These sampling techniques are not necessarily representative of the overall population (Henry 1990; Berg 2001). Therefore, my findings cannot be generalized to the larger population of lesbians. Given that there is no way of knowing what the U.S. lesbian population looks like, generalizing is even a more onerous goal. However, three factors indicate that some of

my findings from the focus groups may be specific to my research. First, I conducted my research in an area with a large population of lesbians in general and with a large, well-organized population of lesbian mothers. Lesbians from rural or urban areas that do not offer such a wealth of lesbian resources may have provided different responses.

Second, while the area in which I conducted my research had a large population of lesbians, I was not able to recruit as many working-class lesbians as I had hoped. Issues of recruiting were complicated by the problems I encountered in operationalizing class (see discussion above). Thus, my findings concerning class may be specific to my definitions and the participants I selected based on those definitions.

Third, I was unable to recruit as many African-American and Latina lesbians as I had originally planned. Furthermore, my study does not include any analysis for people of Asian, Native-American, or Pacific-Islander decent. Thus, my study does not reflect the diversity of people among different groups of lesbians-of-color.

Despite my inability to recruit an equal number of lesbians-of-color as White, or as many working-class lesbians as I had hoped, the racial-ethnic stratification of my study reflects to some extent the racial-ethnic stratification of the U.S. population. As shown in Table 3, the percent of White participants in the focus groups closely resembles the percent of Whites in the U.S. Furthermore, my sample over-represents African-Americans compared to the U.S. population. While comparing U.S. demographics to those of my focus group participants is questionable because the U.S. demographics include men and people outside the age groups of my study, Table 3 gives a general picture that I was able to obtain a sample that is at least as stratified as the U.S. population. Furthermore, because findings from the content analysis mimic those from

the focus groups, the data provide a form of internal validity in which different data sources produced "generally converging conclusions" (Miles & Huberman 1994:279).

Table 3. Racial-Ethnic Stratification in Focus Groups and U.S. Population

	Focus Groups	U.S. Population (2000)
African-American	25.7%	12.3%
Latino	11.4%	12.5%
White	62.9%	69.1%
Totals	100%	93.1%

For the content analysis I used "progressive theoretical sampling." Theoretical sampling is also a nonprobability technique and faces the same problems of generalizability as purposive and snowball sampling. However, while my sample of media sources used for the content analysis was not randomly selected, they represent what lesbians might easily find if they were searching for such sources either online or in print. Perhaps there are more elusive sources that demonstrate radical discussions concerning different aspects of lesbian life. However, because I chose only "popular" media, I am confident that the sources I selected are representative of mainstream lesbian media.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I described the research methods used in my study. Not only did this description highlight my methods of recruitment, data collection, and analysis, but it highlighted some of the difficulties I encountered in the field. The difficulties I encountered fall into three categories: 1) difficulties in recruiting participants; 2) potential biases in the research design; and 3) potential biases in the analysis.

First, my status as a positioned researcher both facilitated and hindered my access to potential participants in this study. As a middle-class White lesbian well-situated in middle-class lesbian networks, recruiting middle-class lesbians (particularly middle-class

White lesbians) was not very difficult. However, being middle-class and White made it more difficult to access working-class lesbians, particularly working-class lesbians-of-color. Furthermore, once I made contact with working-class lesbians-of-color, I had difficulty recruiting them for the study. The result is that I conducted smaller focus groups than I had originally planned.

Second, in trying to recruit participants, I used snowball sampling, as explained above. While I could not have recruited my sample without snowball sampling, my focus groups tended to have clusters of participants who were friends with one another. Having friends may have biased responses because friends may share similar thoughts on a particular subject. However, friends may also feel comfortable enough to disagree with one another. Thus, it is possible that my focus groups are biased in some ways, but counter-biased in other ways.

Third, my own position as a lesbian mother may have biased my analysis of the study. Throughout the study and my analysis of childfree lesbians, I have tried hard to think from a childfree perspective. Furthermore, I have tried not to use motherhood as the norm against which childfree status is measured and analyzed. I hope I have achieved my goal of remaining as neutral as possible both within the focus groups and within my analysis of the data.

Chapter 4

NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR LESBIANS' MOTHERING DECISIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF POPULAR LESBIAN MEDIA

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an understanding of the kinds of support media offer lesbians in their decisions to become mothers or remain childfree. To provide such an understanding, I examined both print and electronic popular media that pertain to lesbians in general and to lesbian mothers specifically. I wanted to know what kinds of support lesbians oriented toward motherhood, toward remaining childfree, or undecided, would receive if they examined popular lesbian media. My original plan was to conduct a qualitative content analysis of popular lesbian media by and for childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers. However, when I examined the media I found that although there is an impressive body of media by and for lesbian mothers, there is a dearth of media specifically by and for childfree lesbians. Thus, to complete my task, I examined general lesbian media that could serve any lesbian, childfree or not. I also examined lesbian media by and for lesbian mothers. Finally, I examined lesbian media by and for lesbians-of-color, particularly Latinas and African-American lesbians.

In my analysis, I found that both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers receive 10 types of support through the media: 1) economic development and work issues; 2) social networks; 3) political activism; 4) health and safety issues; 5) entertainment; 6) religion; 7) help in deciding to become a mother or remain childfree; 8) positive views of lesbian motherhood and families; 9) medical support; and 10) legal support. These 10 types of support provide a wide variety of opportunities to a diverse group of lesbians.

I. Economic Development and Work Issues

The first way popular media support lesbians is by showing what economic and work opportunities are available. Economic and work issues support childfree lesbians by offering a means of furthering economic and career goals separate from mothering issues. They also support lesbian mothers by offering opportunities for financial stability that lesbian mothers may desire. Lesbian media concerning economic development and work provide support to lesbians in three ways: 1) by helping lesbians find funding and jobs; 2) by listing resources for work-related issues; and 3) by listing and encouraging the use of lesbian businesses. None of the information concerning economic development and work were aimed specifically at lesbians of diverse races or classes. However, it appears that the services offered through the media are available to lesbians who can access or purchase the media.

First, lesbian media support lesbians by helping lesbians find funding and jobs. For example, the website for ASTRAEA Lesbian Action Foundation tells lesbians that ASTRAEA will help provide "financial support for lesbian-led and lesbian-focused organizations and projects." The organization offers grants to lesbian writers, students, and international sexual minorities.

In addition to providing funds, lesbian media help lesbians find work in lesbian-related fields or within lesbian-owned and -operated businesses. For example, in the May/June 2001 issue of *DT*, [5] lesbians can find advertisements for two employment opportunities: one for an inn/housekeeper for a horse farm and lesbian-owned and -operated Bed and Breakfast, and one for the executive director for "Feminists for Animal

Rights."

Second, in addition to actually offering funds or jobs, lesbian media provide lists of resources to help lesbians find work. Some media list sources where lesbians can go to find work or to address work-related concerns. Other media list sources that are looking for lesbians to purchase lesbian-owned businesses. For example, on the website called Queer Resources Directory, there is a link to "Business, Legal, and Workplace issues." The link offers further links to gay and lesbian professional organizations, to information about new gay and lesbian businesses, and to work-related issues specific to queers.

Finally, lesbian media positively support childfree lesbians by providing lists of lesbian-owned and -operated businesses to support. Although such lists are helpful for the lesbian consumer, they also help advertise and support lesbians who run their own businesses. For example, the website called Lesbian Shopper caters to the lesbian community by providing a one-stop shopping opportunity to purchase products from lesbian-owned and -operated businesses. Thus, media support lesbians by providing economic opportunities and helping lesbians fulfill economic aspirations.

II. Social Networks

A second way that lesbian media support lesbians is through social networking. Lesbian networks in popular media focus on three main areas that support both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers: 1) building communities; 2) creating and advertising social activities; and 3) providing dating opportunities. These three areas support childfree

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[5] The name of this publication has been changed to protect the *DT* publication and the lesbians who offer their help in social networking.

lesbians by helping them locate, emotionally support, and socialize with one another. Social networking through media is available for all lesbians in general and also specifically for lesbians-of-color. For example, the website Blackberri Café offers lesbians-of-color a place to meet, build communities, find mates, and socialize. The women who started Blackberri Café state that they wanted to create

> a central place on the internet where we could go to connect with other lesbians-of-color. This place did not exist..so we decide to create it....Our vision is to create a safe, nurturing place for lesbians-of-color to hang out. We want our café to be a comfortable, interactive community.

The website provides chat rooms, personal ads, and general news and information. It allows lesbians-of-color to meet and explore their social interests in a safe environment. It builds community and provides a place for social interaction by bringing lesbians-of-color together in one central location. While nothing specifically on the Blackberri Café website indicated that it is for childfree lesbians, certainly it is a place that childfree lesbians-of-color can visit to make connections with other lesbians-of-color.

In addition to websites such as Blackberri Café, perhaps the most extensive form of social networking can be found through the *DT's* section of "Lesbian Contacts." Lesbian Contacts consist of lesbians around the world who provide their names and contact information in order to answer questions that lesbians might have about a particular city or area and to help lesbians settle into new geographic areas. There are Contact Lesbians throughout the U.S., Canada, Europe, Asia, Latin and South America, and Africa.

In addition to social networks for lesbians in general, there is an impressive amount of social networking available through the media specifically for lesbian mothers. For example, the Family Pride Coalition (which can be accessed both through print and electronic media) is an organization whose mission "is to advance the well-being of

lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered parents and their families through mutual support, community collaboration, and public understanding." Not only does the Family Pride Coalition discuss legal, medical, and other important issues regarding queers and their families, but it also organizes two "Family Weeks." Family Weeks are week-long trips for queer families worldwide. In the year 2000, after only four years since the first family week, over 350 queer families from around the world joined together for "a gay-friendly, family vacation experience."

In addition to networking that brings lesbians face to face from long distances, the media provide lesbian mothers with local resources for networking. For example, the Lesbian Mother's Resource Page, a website "created for and dedicated to lesbian mothers," provides 10 pages of names of local lesbian and gay parenting organizations in the U.S. and internationally.

Not only do popular media provide a bloodline for lesbian mother networks, but they also provide networks for the children of lesbian and other queer parents. For example, on the website of Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE) children can find penpals, read newsletters, sign up for conferences, and apply for scholarships, all with and for children of queer parents. COLAGE also co-sponsors "Family Week" with the Family Pride Coalition. In addition to COLAGE, other resources for children can be found in the media. For example, *Alternative Family Magazine* lists a directory of family resources, including local groups for children around the country.

Despite a large system of networks for lesbian mothers in general, there appears to be very little media support for networking among lesbian mothers of color. This may be because lesbians-of-color have not formed many social networks. For example, two of

the three lesbian-of-color sources in the popular lesbian mother media suggest a lack of networking among lesbian mothers of color. The first medium was the article, "Nubian Mothers Tell Their Stories," found in *Venus Magazine Online.* In the article, one couple told how difficult it is to find other African-American lesbian families because so many Black lesbian mothers are closeted. While the couple telling the story said they are out in most social arenas, they write that many African-American "lesbian moms whom we have met are very much on the 'down low' about their sexuality, most times not even out to their kids." They write that they would love to network with other lesbian families of color if they could only find them.

The second lesbian-of-color website that mentions networks for parents is Blackberri Café. The website has a link called "parenting" that offers "[i]nformation and cyber-support for gay parents." That this link exists on an African-American lesbian website indicates that motherhood is a pertinent concern for African-American lesbians. Clicking on the link takes the reader to an impressive list of more links, including links to queer parenting organizations, Black parenting organizations, adoption sites, and magazines for queer, Black, and adoptive families. After perusing the Black parenting sites listed and having already examined the lesbian parenting sites, I found very little overlap between these groups. That is, media on Black parenting do not mention issues specific to lesbians, and media on lesbian parenting sites do not mention issues of parenting specific to lesbians-of-color.

My analysis of the media regarding social networks suggest that while White lesbians and their children have little difficulty finding social networks through the media, the lack of media by and for lesbian mothers of color, as well as the substantive information

offered in lesbian-of-color media, suggest that is difficult for lesbian mothers of color to find social support and networks. Thus, while social networks in media positively support lesbians in general, they may negatively, or at least neutrally, support lesbians-of-color who are considering motherhood. Despite the lack of support specific to lesbian mothers of color, the media provide support for lesbians to build communities, participate in social activities, and find dating opportunities. This support provides a social foundation for lesbians to pursue personal endeavors, both related to and outside of motherhood. The media help lesbians form real and virtual communities and alliances that enrich their social and personal lives.

III. Political Activism

The third way in which popular lesbian media support lesbians is through political activism. Political activism in general lesbian media includes activities aimed at improving the lives and social conditions of lesbians and other queers. Activities range from public policy work concerning equal rights to legal advocacy for lesbians in work and communities. The importance of political activism is evident in general lesbian media, media by and for lesbians-of-color, and media by and for lesbian mothers. For example, websites for the numerous regional chapters of the political activist group the Lesbian Avengers explain how the Lesbian Avengers use nonviolent direct action to fight for "lesbian survival and visibility." Each regional chapter of the Lesbian Avengers focuses on issues specific to their geographic area. For instance, the New York chapter of the Lesbian Avengers traveled "to Lewiston, Maine to work with local lesbian and gay activists against the Christian Right initiative to repeal Lewiston's anti-discrimination ordinance."

In addition to the Lesbian Avengers, the website for another queer activist organization, the New York City-based Audre Lorde Project Inc., explains how their organization

> serves as a 'home-base' for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Two Spirit, and Transgender (LGBTST) People of Color groups and individuals to organize from, hold relevant events and work together across our differences.

One of the programs of the Audre Lorde Project promotes "advocacy and community organizing around issues of social and economic justice within LGBTST People of Color." Projects include countering homophobia/heterosexism/transphobia and police violence aimed at queers.

In addition to supporting lesbians in general and lesbians-of-color specifically, the media also support lesbian mothers by providing examples of lesbian mothers who challenge and change traditional laws and beliefs about "the family." For example, an article in *The Advocate* (June 22, 1999 issue) states that "[p]arenting is making gays and lesbians confront the heart of society..." by "extending their demands for equal rights to schoolhouses and day care centers," as well as fighting against sodomy laws and fighting for anti-discrimination ordinances and domestic benefits. In addition, the Family Pride Coalition brochure discusses its "Advocacy Training & Parent Mobilization" program. The aim of this program is to "[t]rain families across the nation to become effective advocates in their communities [and to] [p]repare and distribute materials to help individuals and local parenting groups become in-state and local political activists." Thus, the media give lesbian mothers the sense that they are transforming society into a world that is welcoming and accepting of diversity.

IV. Health and Safety Issues

Lesbian media also support lesbians by focusing on health and safety issues specific to lesbians in general and lesbian mothers specifically. Media focus on a variety of health and safety issues, including general health issues, HIV/AIDS, intimate partner violence, pregnancy, children's health issues, and issues concerning insurance companies. For example, according to the website for the National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization (LLEGÓ), LLEGÓ "is the only national non-profit organization devoted to organize Latina/o" queers on national, regional, and local levels. The aim of LLEGÓ is to "overcome social, health, and political barriers faced due to sexual orientation, gender identity, and ethnic background." The health and safety issues that LLEGÓ focuses on include HIV/AIDS, breast cancer, and other health related issues that affect queer Latina/o communities.

In addition to challenging discrimination in medical systems, media also support lesbians by providing information about and lists of resources concerning health and safety issues. For example, a magazine for lesbians-of-color called *Issues* ran an article titled, "Domestic Violence Among Lesbians-of-color." Furthermore, the print magazine, *Curve*has a regular section called "Health Matters" that includes topics ranging from lesbian health research to how to address homophobia and heterosexism within the medical system. For instance, an article in the November 1998 issue of *Curve* discussed what to do when physicians ask lesbian patients if they are sexually active, on birth control, or pregnant. This information is relevant to both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers.

In addition to finding general health and safety information in the media, lesbian

mothers can find specific advice on maintaining healthy diets and pregnancies, children's health issues, household and toy safety, and negotiating health care systems and insurance agencies. For example, in the January-February 2000 issue of *Alternative Family Magazine*the "Health & Safety" section had five headlines: "Recalls," "Fireplace Safety," "Foods Babies Can Choke On," "Influenza – The Flu," and "Tips for Taking Your Child's Temperature." Similarly, The Lesbian Mom's Web Page offers a link to Health/Diet Factors, "a list of the what to and what not to do's when trying to get pregnant." These examples show how the focus of health and safety in lesbian mother media is aimed specifically at lesbian mothers and their families, not at lesbians in general. The exception to this is the Lesbian Mothers Support Society website. On that site the link to lesbian health offers "articles about various aspects of lesbian health concerns," including health issues of older lesbians, health needs of lesbians and gay men in general, health and homophobia, and lesbians' risk of HIV infection. The bottom line, however, is that for both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers looking for health and safety information, the media provide ample support.

VI. Entertainment

The fifth way that popular lesbian media support lesbians is by providing a variety of forms of entertainment. Entertainment in the media includes cultural entertainment such as art, poetry, and literature. It also includes vacation and travel opportunities for lesbians, sports events, and sexual entertainment either through sexually explicit materials or advertisements for sex shops. Only media on cultural entertainment contained any specific entertainment by and for lesbians-of-color.

First, cultural entertainment is available through most popular lesbian media,

including media by and for lesbians-of-color. For example, on Cuervo's Queer Latin@ Website, a website aimed at being a "one-stop shopping place for queer Latina resources on the Internet," there is a section for poetry "from the Queer Latin@ experience." This supports lesbians, and particularly lesbians-of-color, by allowing them to express themselves freely and to read other lesbians' poetry.

Second, entertainment media focusing on travel and vacation support lesbians by offering them the opportunity to travel with other lesbians. An example of media concerning travel is Olivia Cruises & Resorts, a travel agency that organizes and runs women-only cruises, resorts, and land tours. Similarly, Alyson Adventures is a travel agency that organizes and runs "adventure travel for lesbians, gay men, and friends." While neither of these media openly discuss issues of race and class, race and class are implicitly displayed through these media. In particular, while Olivia Cruises & Resorts does not specifically cater to lesbians-of-color, the pictures on their website include many lesbians-of-color. This suggests that lesbians of all racial-ethnic backgrounds use Olivia's services or are at least welcome to use their services. Despite this welcome to lesbians-of-color, the type of adventures these travel agencies offer are expensive. The cost of cruises and land tours through Olivia start at $2,500. Adventures through Alyson Adventures also cost over $2,500. Therefore, some entertainment in the media only supports wealthier lesbians.

Third, media support lesbians through sports entertainment. Sports entertainment in the media focuses primarily on women athletes and sports teams. For example, the July 2001 issue of *Girlfriends Magazine*a magazine on "lesbian culture, politics, and entertainment," featured a cover story on boxer Laila Ali.

Finally, media support lesbians by focusing on sexual activities, safe sex for lesbians, places to purchase sex toys, and erotic lesbian media. For example, *On Our Backs*which exists in both print and electronic form, claims to be the "the world's only erotic magazine by and for lesbians."

The existence of such a large body of entertainment within lesbian media suggests that lesbians have many ways of satisfying their creative cultural and social demands and desires. While these media support lesbian mothers, they also offer ample activities for lesbians to participate in outside of motherhood. The lack of an entertainment focus in lesbian-of-color media (with the exception of cultural entertainment) suggests that lesbians-of-color either focus their energy on different issues such as political activism, social networking, and health and safety, or they participate in entertainment opportunities available through general lesbian media.

VI. Religion

The sixth way that media support lesbians is by providing opportunities for lesbians to participate in gay-friendly religious organizations and events. While religion does not appear in an overwhelming amount of media, it is still an important source of support. Religion in popular lesbian media comes primarily in the form of religious organizations that are either gay-based or gay-friendly. For example, the website, Christian Lesbians.com helps Christian lesbians reconcile issues of faith and sexuality. It also provides a list of welcoming congregations where lesbians can practice their faith. Similarly, the online group, The World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'avah "holds conferences and workshops representing the interests of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Jews around the world." In addition to media that

serve religious queer communities, several websites such as LesbiaNation and the Queer Resources Directory offer stories about lesbians and religion, or links to other websites that address religious issues for lesbians.

While some media provide resources for religious and spiritual lesbians, other media discuss different aspects of religion, particularly how religion and sexuality relate to one another. For example, the website for the African-American Lesbian Forum published an article by Lee Hubbard discussing racism in the queer community and the division between Blacks and queers. The article discusses the role of the Black church and the invisibility of queers in the Black community. The article illustrates how religion, community, and sexuality weave a particularly salient but complex web in the lives of queers of color.

By discussing religion and providing access to gay-friendly religious organizations, media support both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers. They support lesbians in their decision-making processes by offering them a safe environment to explore any mothering desires they may have without the risk of losing religious communities to which they already belong. They also offer lesbians an opportunity to be part of religious communities that are not homophobic. Religious media particularly support lesbians-of-color by offering an accepting religious community that lesbians-of-color may not find within their communities of origin.

VII. Deciding to Become a Mother

A small body of media discusses issues lesbians think about in deciding to become mothers or remain childfree. I found information concerning the decision-making

process primarily in longer articles printed in magazines and websites. With the exception of the Lesbian Mothers Support Society website, there are no major headings or links to sites specifically about deciding to become a mother or remain childfree. Nevertheless, the few articles that address decision-making processes support lesbians' mothering decisions by helping them pivot through some of the issues involved in becoming a mother. In particular, media addressed two major areas related to mothering decisions: 1) general considerations and concerns; and 2) how lesbian mothers are redefining gender and sexual roles.

First, one source that addressed the decision-making process was the Lesbian Mothers Support Society's website. This website has a section titled, "Deciding to Have a Baby," that raises issues lesbians thinking about having children might consider. These issues include time factors, coming out to family and friends, telling family and friends about mothering decisions, work, money, and intimate relationships. Regarding work, the website encourages lesbians to consider their work aspirations, what kind of childcare they want, what kind of maternity policy their employer offers, and issues concerning coming out at work. Regarding relationships, the website asks lesbians to consider how having a child might affect relationships with partners and friends.

This medium supports lesbians by helping them think about specific issues that they may not otherwise consider. It may also discourage some lesbians from becoming mothers. After considering all the factors, some lesbians may decide that it would be better if they remain childfree. Working-class lesbians may be particularly discouraged if they do not have stable jobs with good health benefits. In addition, lesbians who come from homophobic families and communities of origin may also be discouraged from

becoming mothers after considering issues of coming out. Because of heightened homophobia in communities of color (Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993; Morales 1990; Silvera 1995), this may be a particular issue for lesbians-of-color who are considering motherhood. Thus, this medium may encourage some lesbians to become mothers and others to remain childfree.

In addition to addressing general issues, some media discuss how lesbians redefine gender and sexual roles by becoming mothers. Media concerning gender and sexuality support decisions to become mothers by helping lesbians redefine traditional gender roles. However, media concerning gender and sexuality also support lesbians' decisions to remain childfree by discussing how some people perceive lesbians to be unlikely mothers and how lesbian identities contradict identities of mother.

First, media support lesbians' decisions to become mothers by discussing how lesbians redefine gender to become a mother. According to the media, because some lesbians see motherhood as integrally tied to traditional heterosexual gender roles, they may originally think that they cannot have children. However, because of the lesbian baby boom, lesbians have begun to realize that they can have children within lesbian relationships. That is, they have begun to understand the role of mother within a non-gendered lesbian context, not within a heterosexual one. This redefinition of gender helps some lesbians become mothers. For example, in an article in a 1996 issue of *The Advocate*Lillian Faderman discusses how her friend Marsha decided to have children after she realized that she could be a mother without having a husband: "I've wanted to raise kids since I was 12 years old," Marsha says, "though I never wanted a husband to go with the deal." Marsha's comment suggests that it is the non-heterosexual nature of

lesbian motherhood that opened her to the reality of having children. Because she was able to have children within a lesbian context, she was able to redefine motherhood as a non-heterosexual women's role. By including such discussions, media support lesbians' decisions to become mothers by offering lesbians alternative ways to conceptualize gender and motherhood.

While media concerning gender and sexuality support lesbian mothers, they also support lesbians' decisions to remain childfree by showing how some people perceive lesbians to be unlikely mothers. This may discourage some lesbians from becoming mothers by presenting a view of lesbians and mothers as separate from one another. For example, in volume 4, issue 3 of the *Momazons'* newsletter, a lesbian named Dana tells the reaction she received when she was thinking about becoming a mother. Because she was more "butch" than her partner, she found that people had a hard time with her decision to get pregnant. Dana writes that her best friend's assumptions about her getting pregnant were that:

> 1) since [my partner] sometimes wears a skirt, she would be the logical choice to have the child, 2) since I live for discussing the superiority of German chainsaws and hippie log cabin homesteading, I was somehow the least likely to have a child, and 3) since my friend owns a Volvo, and has extremely big hair, she... deserves to have a child before me. I told her I didn't mean to threaten her gender identity...I was more than a little miffed at being typecast as "too butch to have babies..."

Dana's passage shows that her not fitting into a stereotypical feminine gender mold made it difficult for people to accept her as a mother, particularly a biological mother. Furthermore, by commenting that people who "own Volvos" are better suited as mothers suggests a middle-class bias in people's idea of who makes a "good" mother. Although Dana's comment alone may not deter lesbians from becoming mothers, it illustrates

heterosexist beliefs about who is fit to be a mother.

The second way that lesbian media support lesbians' decision to remain childfree is by discussing how some lesbians feel motherhood compromises their lesbian identities. By compromising identities, lesbians hold ambivalent or negative attitudes toward motherhood. For example, in the December 1999 issue of *Out* magazine, Stacey D'Erasmo explains how her partner wants to have children. Stacey, however, is not sure she wants to have children. Part of her reluctance toward motherhood is that her identity as a lesbian involves a separation from heterosexual gender roles such as motherhood. As she writes:

> Coming out as I did in the early '80s, somewhere between the amazons and the sex radicals, I felt very strongly the pleasure of gender self-invention: that I was free to take from femininity what I liked – the shoes, the push-up bras – whatever I liked. I've always felt like a girl, but my own girl, the one I made up. Motherhood, both by observation and education, I associated with silence, thwarted ambition, suffering, and constriction. It seemed to me to constitute the ultimate in stifled, devalued existences.... The solution to me always seemed easy: Don't be a mother. It was a handy-dandy way to differentiate, a nice firm line between my liberated self and the unliberated female masses. ... Now, though, here comes my lover with her maternity tool belt, and here come a million lesbians, marching to the sperm bank.

Stacey's passage describes how some lesbians reject motherhood because it is too closely tied to heterosexual gender roles. For lesbians who are ambivalent about motherhood, this medium supports decisions to remain childfree.

VIII. Positive Views of Lesbian Mothers and Families

While some media encourage lesbians to remain childfree, other encourage lesbians to become mothers. One way media do this is by portraying lesbian motherhood (and queer parents/families in general) in a positive light. Most media by and for lesbian mothers show how loving lesbian mothers are, how special their families are, and how

much fun parenting can be. Pictures of lesbian families show happy faces. Headlines discuss the love in lesbian families. The media cite studies on lesbian families to show how "normal" children of lesbians turn out to be. Furthermore, lesbian families are touted as being more tolerant and open to diversity than heterosexual families. For example, in an article in *The Advocate,* Lillian Faderman discusses the advantages of queer parenting. She writes that because queers "will always be outside the inside," they are in a good place to parent:

> It stands to reason that our children are more likely to be tolerant of differences and to eschew bigotry than children from more orthodox families.... Our very lives as homosexuals are disruptive of oppressive social orders, and when we become parents, we model creative alternatives to those orders.

Much of the lesbian mother media portray similar messages: that the families of queers are special, full of love, more tolerant than heterosexual families, and a positive force in family life and in shaping the lives of children. Because media portray lesbian motherhood in such a positive way, they support lesbians' decisions to become mothers.

IX. Medical Support

Media also support lesbians by providing medical support. In particular, lesbians considering motherhood are supported by the media in finding physicians and sperm banks. Once found, lesbians can access information about sperm donors, infertility, and pregnancy through DI. Such information comes in a variety of forms, including lesbians' personal stories about using reproductive technologies, lists of medical resources, and actual sperm banks and fertility clinics advertising and offering their services to a lesbian clientele.

First, much of the lesbian mother media include stories by lesbian mothers sharing

their personal stories with other lesbians. For example, in an issue of the newsletter from Momazons, "a national organization for lesbian mothers and for lesbians who want children in their lives," a lesbian couple wrote to announce their forthcoming triplets. They discuss getting pregnant through IVF and their excitement about being soon-to-be-mothers. The Momazons newsletter shows lesbians deciding to become mothers not only that becoming a mother is possible, but how exciting it can be.

Second, for lesbians looking for resources rather than personal stories, there are ample media, particularly in electronic form, that support lesbians' searches for physicians and sperm banks. For example, the website ,The Lesbian Moms Web Page has several pertinent links. One link offers a "state by state list of doctors and sperm banks that have been recommended by other lesbians who have used their services." Another link provides the reader with a discussion on donors and "the pros and cons of known donors vs. anonymous donors." A third link assists lesbians who are "lucky enough to have health insurance" convince their insurance agencies to pay for donor insemination. Such media support lesbians thinking about becoming mothers by helping them access the necessary medical support needed to become pregnant. However, as suggested by the comment about health insurance, lesbians without health insurance are less supported by such information as those with health insurance.

Finally, for lesbians who want to visit doctors' offices and sperm banks online, there are many options from which to choose. For example, by visiting the Pacific Reproductive Services' website, lesbians can find information on donors, how to inseminate, and how to order sperm. While Pacific Reproductive Services caters to a larger clientele, they have information and resources specific to lesbian and gay families.

In addition, they ship sperm to clients' home which minimizes contact with physicians. Thus, media support lesbian mothers by offering them information about fertility, DI, and gay-friendly sperm banks that will serve a lesbian clientele.

The wealth of media concerning medical issues for lesbian mothers are a rich source that offers lesbians with health insurance and economic resources much support. Media concerning medical issues help lesbians negotiate medical systems and find the medical support they need to become mothers. However, for lesbians with fewer financial resources, media are not so supportive, particularly if lesbians read the price lists for services on the websites of sperm banks and fertility specialists.

X. Legal Support

As with medical issues, there is an abundance of popular lesbian media that address legal issues. Legal issues in the media focus primarily on adopting children and creating legal ties in families. They also focus on the downside of not having legal family ties and on court custody cases. Because media on legal issues raise both positive and negative aspects of adoption, lesbians may be encouraged both toward becoming mothers and remaining childfree.

For example, the website for the Lesbian Mothers Support Society, the most comprehensive resource I found in lesbian mother media, provides links to resources addressing lesbian and gay adoption. The links include the ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project, lesbians' personal web pages sharing their adoption experiences, and listings of gay-friendly adoption agencies by state. Such links provide support to lesbian mothers by helping them locate gay-friendly agencies to help with adoptions. The Lesbian Mothers Support Society also has a web page with links to "legal aspects of

lesbian parenting as well as references to actual court decisions." There are links to websites of lesbian and gay law associations and to law journals such as the *National Journal of Sexual Orientation Law*.

While these links may provide support for lesbian mothers, they also may provide support for childfree lesbians by discussing issues of sexual discrimination and lost custody cases. For example, one link contains an article called "No Room For Discrimination In Adoption" that discusses how a "social worker used her position of power to pull a child away from his family, not because they were unfit or abusive parents, but merely because of their sexual orientation." Reading such news may deter some lesbians from pursuing adoption and encourage them to remain childfree. However, the article also states that the original ruling was overturned. It ends with an invitation from the author who works at an adoption agency that is gay-friendly. Thus, lesbians must decide for themselves how to interpret this information.

In addition to the above example, two of the three lesbian-of-color websites I found addressed legal issues. These sites also provide support for lesbians considering motherhood. For example, in issue five of *Blacklight Online*Ta'Shia Asanti wrote a tribute to "lesbian stepmoms," lesbians who help mother their partners' children but then lose contact with children after the relationships dissolve. Asanti discusses how lesbian stepmoms are not legally tied to the children and therefore have no legal right to see them, even though the stepmoms were important mothers in the children's lives. Asanti writes that homophobia in African-American communities "pushes them further into the darkness." Not only are African-American lesbian stepmoms left behind by past partners, but they are not acknowledged as mothers by a homophobic African-American

community. Although this article may support lesbians-of-color considering motherhood by letting them know that lesbian mothers of color do exist (even if they are closeted), it may also support lesbians' decisions to remain childfree by raising issues of sexual discrimination within African-American communities.

Chapter Summary

This chapter analyzed media by and for lesbians in general, by and for lesbian mothers, and by and for lesbians-of-color, to provide an understanding of the support childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers receive through the media. I found that though media overwhelmingly support lesbians' decisions to become mothers and to remain childfree. For childfree lesbians, media provide opportunities to obtain work and attain economic aspirations, create social networks with other childfree lesbians, become politically active in non-mother related issues, find entertainment, address health concerns, and be involved in religious organizations. These opportunities potentially support lesbians' personal and economic goals in ways that are unconnected with motherhood. For lesbian mothers, media provide help in deciding to become a mother, positive ideology for lesbian motherhood, social networks, medical and legal support, information to address health concerns, and ways to become politically active to help support lesbian families with children.

Despite the overwhelming amount of support media provide for childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers in general, the amount of support appears to vary by class and race. In regard to class, poor lesbians who are unable to purchase print media or access online media through the Internet are negatively supported. Being unable to access media denies poor lesbians the opportunity to make use of the information and services

provided by the media. Furthermore, once lesbians with few financial means access the media, not all the services provided in those media are economically feasible. For example, only wealthy childfree lesbians can afford some of the forms of travel entertainment. In addition, only lesbian mothers with financial means and/or health insurance can afford the reproductive technologies advertised in the media. Thus, for lesbians with little financial means, media may discourage motherhood.

In regard to race, the specific needs and concerns of lesbians-of-color appear to be less supported by the media than those of lesbians in general. There is a dearth of media by and for lesbians-of-color. Therefore, while lesbians-of-color can access general lesbian media, those media may not address concerns particular to lesbians-of-color. Furthermore, the media by and for lesbians-of-color that do exists appear more likely to support childfree lesbians than lesbian mothers. For example, there was evidence of media by and for lesbians-of-color that supported social networks, political activism, health and safety issues, cultural entertainment, and religious issues for childfree lesbians. However, of the media by and for lesbians-of-color, very little provide support for becoming mothers. Only two items within the media by and for lesbians-of-color (i.e., social networks and legal issues) discussed issues of lesbian motherhood and both included discouraging information for lesbians-of-color who want to become mothers. The item on social networks discussed the closeted nature of lesbian mothers and homophobia within communities of color. The item on legal issues discussed the problems that lesbian "stepmoms" encountered. The negative tone of these two media items may encourage lesbians to remain childfree.

Through my analysis, it is unclear if lesbians-of-color are less supported by the

media than White lesbians. It is possible that lesbians-of-color access media by and for lesbians in general, thus gaining the same amount of support as White lesbians. In general, however, I found that media provide support for both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers. Childfree lesbians can find social networks, sources of work and funding, health and safety tips, and sources of entertainment to fulfill personal aspirations outside of motherhood. Similarly, lesbian mothers can turn to the media to find emotional support, gay-friendly physicians and legal agencies, and a huge social network to support their decisions to become mothers.

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DROPPING THE MOTHERLOAD:
LESBIANS' DECISIONS TO BECOME MOTHERS OR REMAIN CHILDFREE

VOLUME II

By

Nancy Jennifer Mezey

A DISSERTATION

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Chapter 5

"CONSIDERING MYSELF LUCKY": LESBIANS' DECISIONS TO REMAIN CHILDFREE

This chapter examines the findings from the four focus groups with childfree lesbians. In analyzing the data from these focus groups, as well as from the focus groups in Chapter 6, I drew heavily on Gerson's (1985) ideas, concepts, and work in general. Similar to Gerson's (1985) study on mothering decisions of heterosexual women, I found that the different mothering paths that lesbians take develop out of lesbians' experiences as young girls and out of a "structure of opportunities" (Gerson, 1985:70), as well as ideational factors, in later life that shape a woman's alternatives and define her constraints and possibilities (Gerson 1985:40). The childhood experiences that lesbians shared in the focus groups provided a "baseline" (Gerson 1985) through which lesbians become oriented toward motherhood or remaining childfree. I found that childfree lesbians formulate orientations toward remaining childfree at a young age because they equate motherhood with a lack of personal and economic freedom. They also experience sexual and racial discrimination that deter them from wanting to raise children in a harsh world. The result of past experiences and interpretations of those experiences is that childfree lesbians formulate either of two orientations: 1) an orientation toward remaining childfree; and 2) an ambivalent orientation that leaves them undecided about becoming a mother or remaining childfree.

As Gerson (1985) writes, "once established,...early orientations are subjected to the real constraints and opportunities encountered in adulthood..." (20). Gerson points out that because of real constraints and opportunities, we cannot assume that the orientations

of young girls will predict final outcomes. Like Gerson, I found that the two orientations childfree lesbians developed were tested, challenged, and altered both by structural factors and by ideational features as lesbians moved through their lives. That is, an assortment of "pivotal" factors presented a structure of opportunities that ultimately steered lesbians onto childfree paths. Pivotal factors are similar to what Gerson (1985) calls turning points. As discussed in Chapter 1, Gerson's turning points consist of structural factors. To highlight both structural and ideational features in my analysis, I use the term "pivotal factors" to describe the factors that pose opportunities and constraints through which lesbians must negotiate to make life decisions.

In this chapter, I discuss the social processes and factors that childfree lesbians negotiate to make their mothering decisions. First I give a demographic overview of the childfree participants. Second I examine how lesbians formulate early orientations. Third I examine six pivotal factors that shape lesbians' mothering decisions. I pay particular attention to how race, class, gender, and sexuality organize the experiences of different groups of lesbians in ways that influence and shape their decisions to remain childfree.

I. Demographic Overview of Childfree Lesbians

Tables 5 through 8 show selected demographic information about each of the childfree participants. Table 4 shows the demographic information for the focus groups consisting of two working-class lesbians-of-color. As discussed in Chapter 3, this group contained only two participants. Sara is a 36 -year-old Latina and Terry is a 34 -year-old African-American. Terry is Baptist, while Sara does not have any religious affiliation.

Table 4. Childfree Working-Class Lesbians-of-color		
	Sara	Terry
Age	36	34
Highest Degree	AA	AA
Job Title	marketing assistant	civil servant clerk
Partner Status	partnered	single
Individual Income	$30,000 - $34,999	$30,000 - $34,999
Household Income	$60,000 - $64,999	$30,000 - $34,999
Pool Income with Oother Household Members?	completely	single income household
Religious Affiliation	none	Baptist

Table 5 shows selected demographic information for the childfree, middle-class lesbian-of-color participants. Ages in this group range from 35 to 46 years. All four participants have at least a bachelor's degree and all are in managerial positions, except for Pam who is a doctoral student. Pam differs from the rest of the group in two additional ways. First, she is the only Latina within a group of African-Americans. In addition, Pam has a lower salary than the other participants in her group. Both Amy and Roxanne are Baptist, while Leslie and Pam do not have any religious affiliation.

Table 5. Childfree Middle-Class Lesbians-of-Color				
	Amy	Leslie	Pam	Roxanne
Age	43	35	46	37
Highest Degree	BA	PhD	MA	BA
Job Title	food manager	data manager	Ph.D. student	power plant operator & Web designer
Partner Status	partnered		single	partnered
Individual Income	$45,000 - $49,999	$45,000 - $49,999	$15,000 - $19,999	$70,000 or higher
Household Income	$65,000 - $69,999	$45,000 - $49,999	$15,000 - $19,999	$70,000 or higher
Pool Income with Oother Household Members?	more than 50%	completely	single income household	completely
Religious Affiliation	Baptist	none	none	Baptist

Table 6 shows selected demographics for the childfree working-class White participants. The age range in this group is from 30 to 43 years. Three of the five participants have high school degrees, while the remaining two have bachelor's degrees.

With the exception of Mabel, the participants earn under $40,000 a year. However, the three participants with partners pool their earnings, significantly increasing their yearly incomes. Only two of the five participants in this group have any religious affiliation.

Table 6. Childfree Working-Class White Lesbians

	Amanda	Clara	Eve	Kerry	Mabel
Age	43	32	30	32	32
Highest Degree	high school	high school	BA	high school	BA
Job Title	civil servant – graphic reproduction specialist	office manager	civil servant – clerk	welder/fabricator	self-employed - retailer
Partner Status	partnered	single	single	partnered	partnered
Individual Income	$35,000 - $39,999	$20,000 - $24,999	$25,000 - $29,999	$30,000 - $34,999	$50,000 - $54,999
Household Income	$60,000 - $64,999	$20,000 - $24,999	$25,000 - $29,999	$45,000 - $49,999	$70,000 or higher
Pool Income with Oother Household Members?	completely	Single income household	single income household	completely	completely
Religious Affiliation	none	Christian/ Protestant	none	none	Catholic

Table 7 shows select demographics from the childfree, middle-class White lesbian group. This was the largest childfree group, consisting of seven participants. The age range in this group is from 34 to 46 years. With the exception of Tammy who has an associate's degree, the participants have at least a bachelor's degree. Most of the participants are in managerial positions, with the exceptions of Maria who is a teacher and Tammy who is a nurse. Also with the exception of Maria and Tammy, the participants in this group earn at least $50,000 a year either by themselves or as a pooled income household. Members of this group have a variety of religious affiliations.

Table 7. Childfree Middle-Class White Lesbians				
	Andrea	Barb	Judy	Kristy
Age	43	46	40	44
Highest Degree	BA	BA	MA	MA
Job Title	manager	manager	manager	manager
Partner Status	partnered	partnered	partnered	single
Individual Income	$70,000 or higher	$55,000 - $59,999	$55,000 - $59,999	$50,000 - $54,999
Household Income	$70,000 or higher	$70,000 or higher	$70,000 or higher	$50,000 - $54,999
Pool Income with Oother Household Members?	completely	less than 50%	more than %50	single income household
Religious Affiliation	Christian/ Protestant	Christian/ Protestant	none	none

Table 7. (cont'd)			
	Maria	Tammy	Tara
Age	46	37	34
Highest Degree	MA	AA	BA
Job Title	teacher	nurse	manager
Partner Status	single	partnered	partnered
Individual Income	$35,000 - $39,999	$35,000 - $39,999	$20,000 - $25,999
Household Income	$45,000 - $50,999	$70,000 or higher	$50,000 - $54,999
Pool Income with Oother Household Members?	less than 50%	more than %50	completely
Religious Affiliation	Catholic	Jewish	none

II. Formulating Orientations

As discussed above, childfree lesbians developed two early orientations, one toward remaining childfree and the other with ambivalence about becoming a mother or remaining childfree. They formulated these orientations out of two main factors: 1) interpretations of their mothers' experiences and opportunities; 2) experiences with children; and 3) racial discrimination they faced as children and young adults. As I discuss below, these three factors involve both structural and ideational features that shape lesbians' orientations. In particular, although the actual experiences of lesbians' mothers are shaped by structural factors such as race, class, and gender, lesbians'

interpretations of their mothers' experiences are ideational. However, most of lesbians' experiences with children are shaped by structural factors. Finally, racial discrimination is a structural factor that shapes lesbians' orientations. The combination of structural and ideational factors create orientations that become ideational; that is, orientations become part of how lesbians value and think about motherhood and remaining childfree in their adult lives.

A. Interpreting Their Mothers' Experiences and Opportunities

According to Gerson, "[d]aughters can...evaluate their mothers' behavior positively and seek to emulate it *or* they can evaluate it negatively and use it instead as a warning of what to avoid in their own lives" (Gerson 1985:49). Childfree lesbians not only evaluate the behavior of their mothers, but also evaluate the social position of and lack of opportunities their mothers had such that they equate motherhood with a lack of economic and personal freedom. Throughout the focus groups, childfree lesbians discussed how their mothers made personal sacrifices to raise children. They also discussed how motherhood created unstable situations for their mothers. Many childfree lesbians reject motherhood because they reject the traditional gender roles and responsibilities they believe their mothers' to have had. Thus, lesbians formulate values and ideas about motherhood out of their interpretations of the structural opportunities and constraints their mothers experienced.

As noted in previous studies on heterosexual women (see for example Polatnick 1996), women's negative and positive evaluations of motherhood are based on complex notions of race, class, and gender. I found this to be true among lesbians as well. While middle-class childfree lesbians-of-color and middle-class White lesbians interpret their

mothers' lives to be self-sacrificing, their interpretations of why they themselves do not want to be self-sacrificing differ by race and class. For middle-class lesbians-of-color, self-sacrificing seems too overwhelming and long-term a responsibility to assume. For example, Roxanne stated

> I just look at it as I'm just too selfish to do anything like that, and I don't think of myself as being selfish as...just selfish as far as the responsibilities that come with having a child and having the ideas that I have about childbearing, being a mother, being there 24-7, taking the kid here, taking the kid there...all those things that are built into it. No, no I can't do that. I don't have that. I don't think I can do it.

Middle-class lesbians-of-colors' emphasis on the forever and intense responsibility of motherhood developed in part out of watching their own mothers struggle in raising children. It may also have developed out of African-American ideology that stresses mothers' responsibility to "uplift the race" and ensure the survival of African-American children (Collins 1990; Silvera 1995; Smith 1998). The emphasis on motherhood's enormous responsibility helps many middle-class lesbians-of-color develop a desire for personal freedom that cannot co-exist with mothering responsibilities.

In contrast, middle-class White lesbians interpret the self-sacrifices of motherhood as oppressive to women in general because they understand motherhood and work to be mutually exclusive. Many middle-class White lesbians express how motherhood means staying at home, a position they find oppressive because it prevents personal growth and freedom. Because their middle-class White mothers had support of husbands that allowed women not to work, motherhood for middle-class White lesbians means taking care of children while forgoing higher education and a career. For example, Tammy explained how her mother was unable to get an education or start a career because of her mothering responsibilities. When she was younger Tammy thought,

> I'm going to give a career first, and I'm going to be settled in a career 'cause going back to what I had mentioned earlier I watched my mom raise all these children and not... I mean she tried to go back to college and wasn't able to do it "cause there was just too many kids at home... There was four of us so...and no father so...it was her, and I just thought, "No that's not going to be me," and then by 30 I thought, "I'm not going to have children."

Based at least partially on her interpretation of her mother's experience as preventing personal freedom in terms of work and educational opportunities, Tammy, and other middle-class White childfree lesbians developed orientations toward remaining childfree. Literature on heterosexual women supports my finding that middle-class White lesbians translate their mothers' experiences into the mutual exclusivity of work and motherhood. While women of color have historically been in the work force (Dill 1994), the class and racial privilege of middle-class White women allows them to more easily separate work and motherhood.

The race and class position of working-class childfree lesbians produced yet a different interpretation of motherhood than their middle-class counterparts. Similar to previous findings concerning the children of working-class White heterosexual mothers (Rubin 1992), working-class White childfree lesbians discussed how their mothers struggled to support and keep their families together. Working-class White childfree lesbians did not directly discuss how their mothers' struggles were tied to issues of class. However, in her classic work on working-class White families, Lillian Rubin (1992) explains that working-class White mothers live difficult lives in which they work long hours both in and out of their homes. Unlike parents in middle-class families, working-class parents are faced with less quality time for themselves and with more uncertainty about their children's futures (Rubin 1992:85). Perhaps to counter their own struggles and to help their daughters achieve greater personal freedom and economic status, the

mothers of working-class White childfree lesbians taught their children to be strong and independent. For example, Mabel stated:

> My mom raisedus different than she was raised. She wanted us to be strong and wanted us to be independent at a young age because she was so naïve and so...um...you know when she was growing up she went from her mother's home to her husband's home and never really learned how to be her own person. She was a mom before she was even an adult, and I think she really just didn't want that to happen again to her children so she went kind of the opposite direction and maybe a little too strong to make sure that we were independent and weren't naïve or didn't get taken advantage of maybe the way she felt she did.

The combination of not wanting to struggle as their mothers did and having been taught to be independent and strong so they could avoid such struggle helped working-class White lesbians develop a desire for personal and economic freedom and an orientation toward remaining childfree.

Working-class lesbians-of-color and middle-class lesbians or color from working-class backgrounds interpret their mothers' experiences similarly to the other three groups of childfree lesbians. They see motherhood as an enormous responsibility and saw the sacrifices their mothers made. However, they also interpret motherhood as preventing themselves and their families from achieving a higher class position. For example, Pam, a Mexican American lesbian from a working-class background, stated that the sacrifice of having children was not just a burden on her mother, but a financial burden on her family:

> There are seven children in my family and...my mother made a lot of sacrifices for us. She stayed at home. My father's Hispanic. He didn't want my mother to work. Um...at that time you know motherhood seemed like it was just a burden ...It was like...um...I mean, having a lot of children but not a lot of money and seeing what sacrifices my parents had to reason I didn't...didn't want to be responsible for a child as someone who didn't have a lot of money.

Pam attributes her mother's position to her father's racial-ethnic beliefs about gender

roles in families. Although it is unlikely that Pam would experience traditional gender roles in a lesbian household, Pam's desire for upward mobility for herself and her potential children, coupled with the "burden" of motherhood, contributes to her decision to remain childfree.

Previous studies on heterosexual women indicate that ideology alone does not determine mothering decisions (Gerson 1985; McMahon 1995). While this is true for childfree lesbian mothers in my study, beliefs about motherhood help form orientations toward remaining childfree. For example, Kristy from the middle-class White group, but who came from a working-class background, stated that to her, mother means being

> Chained.... I think that's what I was trying to say....is I feel that....I didn't want to subordinate my life to anyone else, maybe I knew that was selfish in the cultural situation, but I wanted my own life and I didn't think I could have one if I had children.

Through interpretations of their mothers' experiences, as well as through their own experiences with children (as I discuss below), many childfree lesbians formulate orientations away from motherhood and toward remaining childfree. By interpreting their mothers' lives as being greatly restricted by the structural and gendered nature of motherhood, childfree lesbians formulate ideational desires for personal and economic freedom that orient them away from motherhood and toward remaining childfree.

B. Experiences with Children

In addition to formulating orientations based through personal interpretations of their mothers' experiences, childfree lesbians also formulate orientations based on their own experiences with children. The experiences they have both support already established desires for freedom and help develop new desires for freedom. Experience with children

comes in two forms: past and current. For many participants, past experience with children either reinforced their lack of desire to have children or lead them to conclude that they do not want children. Current experience with children also reinforces childfree lesbians' existing lack of desire to mother, while simultaneously allowing childfree lesbians to have children in their lives.

1. Past Experiences with Children

Although childfree lesbians do not have children of their own, many of them have mothered children at some point in their lives. Many childfree participants have helped raise children in some capacity, particularly because many come from large families with four or more children. While there is not great variation by race and class in past experiences with children, past experiences of childfree respondents who helped their mothers varied loosely by class. Because the first wave of lesbian mothers came out of heterosexual relations, several of the lesbians I interviewed (regardless of class) have current or previous partners with children. However, working-class childfree respondents (regardless of race) tend to care more for younger siblings or family members' children, while middle-class childfree respondents tend to have past experience caring for their partners' children or for non-relatives' children. The class differences I found may be due to the fact that middle-class families can afford to hire outside childcare. Working-class families, however, may rely on family members for daily childcare responsibilities because of the lack of financial means to hire outside help (Rubin 1992).

I say there is "loose" variation by class because there is an overlap of experiences between working- and middle-class participants. The overwhelming sentiment from the participants is that having previously cared for children was either an experience they did

not want to repeat or that it had a been a good experience but not one they want forever. Past experiences with children reinforced many childfree lesbians' beliefs that motherhood is equated with impeded freedom. For example, Terry, a working-class lesbian-of-color, discussed two experiences with children expressed by other childfree participants regardless of race or class:

> Basically my... my decision was based on...family. I grew up in a big family, and I guess you know everything had to be shared and you learned how to get along with everybody that's in the family itself, but once you get your little freedom...you know you want to keep it that way which is very true. ...I come from a family of seven children so I think that was enough... And, I've a had a few partners....well a couple of partners that had children... and I love kids so...I mean that's never been a problem, but...I had one incident that uh...to discipline the child... and I was like okay no more dealing with other people's children either.

Terry's statement shows that her experience with her younger siblings and with her previous partners' children affects her orientation toward remaining childfree. She does not want the responsibility of a child because it interferes with her desire for personal freedom.

While Terry's experience includes caring for her younger siblings and her ex-partner's child, the experiences of most working-class childfree respondents are primarily with younger family members. For example, Kerry, a working-class White lesbian served as a temporary mother to three of her nephews for several years after the children's parents separated and could no longer take care of their children.[6]

For some working-class participants, the experience of caring for younger siblings is coupled with gender roles that participants find to be undesirable. For example, Sara

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[6] Interestingly, one of the participants in the working-class White mothers group also came to mother through similar circumstances. The inability of some separated or divorced working-class parents to continue caring for their children may be the result of a lack of financial means, as well as problems of family instability such as alcoholism, drug abuse, and violence that researchers have found to be the result of continual financial strife (Newman 1988; Rubin 1992).

from the working-class lesbian-of-color group explained that part of her decision not to have children is due to a combination of past experiences with children and a rebellion against the gender roles she experienced in a traditional household:

> You know, for me, I can remember as far back in my life saying I'm not having kids, and I think it could have a lot to do with having so many siblings and being the only girl...you're depended upon a little bit more than the boys...you know and you're...and you know my father's Mexican, and he comes from a very traditional family life...you know lifestyle, and my mother led a very traditional role as a...a mother and a housekeeper, so I was expected to follow her path. You know I...I've been told you know...well, you have to learn how to sew and you have to learn how to cook so you can take care of your family and take care of your husband... and then having to do that for my brothers... from the get-go I said I wouldn't have kids. You know I just wouldn't have them.

Sara's passage illustrates the connection between past experiences with children and decisions to remain childfree. It also shows how for some lesbians past experience with children are based on structures of gender that create certain expectations for females. Past experience coupled with gendered expectations help create the view of motherhood as oppressive that led Sara to formulate an orientation toward remaining childfree.

While working-class childfree participants primarily have past experiences mothering their younger siblings or other relative, middle-class childfree participants have experience mothering their partners' children or other people's children. For example, Judy from the middle-class White group discussed how her orientation toward remaining childfree is based on a camp counselor experience:

> I grew up in [the] camp systems, and the trip systems and doing stuff with the counselors and things, and...what we were doing was working with children during the summer so we did take care of children during the summer. We used to joke that it took us two weeks to undo what it took the parents you know however many years to do to get them to play in the mud and the rain and things like that. Um...but from that experience I think I got my concept that I didn't want to be a parent. It was too much work, and there were too many strange things that could go wrong.

Judy's comments shows how past experiences with children oriented her toward remaining childfree particularly because of the work involved in raising children and because things can go "wrong" in raising children.

Although class structures create some variations of which childfree lesbians have experience mothering, the end result is the same: past experiences with children give lesbians insight into the responsibilities of having children. This insight helps lesbians formulate views of motherhood as carrying too much responsibility, too risky (in terms of what can go wrong), and too embedded in oppressive gender roles. Thus, the partially structurally-induced past experiences with children help childfree lesbians formulate an orientation that rejects motherhood, seeks personal freedom, and steers them toward remaining childfree.

2. Current Experiences with Children

Whereas previous experiences with children orient lesbians toward remaining childfree, current experiences with children have a paradoxical effect on childfree lesbians. On the one hand, current experiences with children reaffirm childfree lesbians' desires to remain childfree. However, they also offer lesbians who want to interact with children the opportunity to do so. The bottom line for most childfree lesbians is that children can come as long as they can also go. For example, Tara from the middle-class White group explained that she and her partner spend much time with their nieces. While Tara enjoys the time she spends, she said:

> I think that every time I have my nieces for a weekend, it reaffirms ultimately that...that I'm happy with my choices and anything that...that makes me wistful comes and goes more quickly than the nieces do.

Amy from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group also spends time with her nieces and nephews:

> I have 27 nephews and nieces so I'm never without a child around me. I...you know...I help friends parent children so it's there. So that has been enough.

Both Tara's and Amy's comments show that while they do not want to be mothers, they spend time with the children in their lives which fulfills any "mothering" needs they may feel. However, they are free to leave the children with their respective parents when they want in order to pursue their own goals.

The overwhelming response by childfree participants of all racial-ethnic and class backgrounds demonstrates that childfree lesbians are not and do not want to be totally free of children. This is an important point for three reasons. First, it suggests that childfree women are not anti-children, anti-social, or sad spinsters, as much of society believes (Gerson 1985). Second, it challenges the language that I use in this study to describe women without children. While childfree is a good term because it encapsulates the sense of freedom that so many childfree lesbians seek, it is a limited term because it elicits the sense that these women have no children in their lives, a myth that the childfree lesbians in my study clearly dispel.

Finally, childfree lesbians wanting children in their lives is important because it shows how childfree lesbians use past and current experiences with children to formulate orientations toward remaining childfree. Past experience with children builds on and reinforces their view of motherhood as preventing freedom. But current experiences with children allow them to become "othermothers" (Collins 1990). That is, it allows them to mother other people's children while providing them the freedom to not have primary responsibility of children. As Amy stated about being childfree, "I consider myself

lucky." For Amy and most other childfree participants, being childfree means maintaining personal freedom but still having access to children when and if they want.

C. Racial Discrimination

One of the most unexpected structural factor that I found to formulate childfree orientations is racial discrimination. Middle-class lesbians-of-color strongly discussed the impact of racial discrimination on their decisions to remain childfree. All three of the middle-class African-American participants stated that racial discrimination is a major factor that deters them from having children. Roxanne stated this point most forcefully and also discussed how for women of color, racial discrimination is coupled with gender discrimination:

> It's just like a reality to me not to want to give birth to a child for color reasons that stop me from having a child. I would not want to bring...go through what I know what I went through as a Black female. I would not do that to my child. If I could not encapsulate it away from the way I felt from being a Black female I can't do that. That's not the reality of it. So I choose not to just because of those reasons. That right there. I don't know if Amy or Leslie have ever or do think about that or ever thought about that. I don't know as being other Black females... I had no idea. That was...it was...we were encapsulated in this Black family and now to know that people could be so cruel to you just because of color. So that comes along together there.

Both Leslie and Amy agree with Roxanne. Amy discussed how she did not experience racial discrimination until she left her parents' house and was in college. She emphasized that you cannot prepare a child for such cruelty. Thus racial discrimination is a major factor in shaping the orientations of lesbians' of color toward remaining childfree.

Interestingly, the two working-class lesbians-of-color did not discuss racial discrimination as a reason for remaining childfree. The discrepancy between working-class and middle-class lesbians-of-color may be because there were only two participants

in the working-class lesbian-of-color group, one of whom (Sara) was a light skinned Latina. It may also be because class and financial issues were more salient than race for the working-class group. As Terry stated, "You know I want to be financially stable, that's number one." With the exception of Pam who came from a working-class background, for the middle-class lesbians-of-color, money was not a salient concern. Therefore, racial issues might stand out more clearly than class issues to middle-class lesbians because they are privileged by class. However, working-class lesbians-of-color face regular financial struggles. The combination of lower class position and racial discrimination may worsen their financial situations. However, rather than reporting racial discrimination as the cause of their concerns about motherhood, working-class lesbians-of-color report financial issues as their biggest concerns.

III. Pivotal Factors in Deciding to Remain Childfree

Interpretations of their mothers' experiences, experiences with children, and racial discrimination leaves many childfree lesbians looking for personal and economic freedom and oriented toward remaining childfree. It also leaves some lesbians undecided about motherhood. A few childfree lesbians in my study had firmly decided at young ages to remain childfree. But most others were not so strongly oriented toward remaining childfree. As they continued on to and through adulthood, their orientations were tested and tried by seven main pivotal factors: 1) sexual discrimination; 2) work and financial issues; 3) social networks; 4) intimate relationships; 5) ideas about lesbian motherhood; 6) barriers to pregnancy; and 7) age issues.

Some of these factors offer a structure of opportunities that help lesbians remain childfree and realize economic and personal freedom. However, some create a structure of constraints that encompass both structural and ideational factors, such as heterosexist family policies and homophobic ideology, that discourage lesbians from becoming mothers and therefore encourage them to remain childfree. Whether pivotal factors offered opportunities or constraints depends largely on lesbians' social locations, particularly by race and class.

A. Sexual Discrimination

The first and perhaps most pervasive factor that shapes lesbians' orientations toward remaining childfree is sexual discrimination. As I discuss below, sexual discrimination shapes every aspect of pivotal factors, either through heterosexist policies or through homophobic ideology. It often creates a structure of opportunities that deters lesbians from becoming mothers and therefore pivots them toward remaining childfree.

Sexual discrimination, coupled with other negative social experiences, leads some lesbians to believe that becoming a mother means raising children in a hostile world. Most of the childfree lesbians I interviewed had experienced some form of sexual discrimination (i.e., homophobia or heterosexism) or a negative reaction to their sexual identities in different social arenas, including within their families of origin, communities, work, and medical and legal systems. Sexual discrimination from a combination of community and societal arenas exhausts some lesbians and prevents them from having children. While participants from all four groups mentioned different incidents of discrimination, White participants reacted most severely to sexual

discrimination.

Many of the White participants internalized the sexual discrimination they experienced. The internalization of sexual discrimination either exhausts lesbians so much that they do not have the energy to become mothers, or they translate their negative experiences into a view that it is unfair to raise children in a cruel, homophobic world. For example, Andrea from the middle-class White group is partnered with a woman who had children from a previous heterosexual marriage. She has seen how her partner's children are teased at school because of their mother's sexuality. Andrea, who wavered a lot in her decision to remain childfree, sees sexual discrimination as an exhausting force that has halted any of her mothering desires:

> I think that I could've been on the fence. That....um...had there been more societal....family...um...job support...um...had the situation been conducive that that would have possibly been enough to sway me, but uh...I...I just saw that it would have been battle after battle after battle, and...um...I didn't think that I was up for that, nor did I feel like I wanted to impose that on the child either.... I would be a decent mother, but I didn't think I would be an excellent enough mother to be able to counter-act the crap that my child would get from the greater community and I think, basically I decided that my maternal instincts and my desire to have children were not strong enough to counter-act those negatives.... To me, in our community...it's not something that is an easy decision. It's not like, "Oops I'm pregnant." You know, it's something that takes a tremendous amount of thought and work, and if you're neutral you're never going to have a child. I don't really see myself as really anti-children, I see myself as kind of neutral. I...I don't have the...the oomph to go do all the work that it would take to either get a sperm donor or to...to find someone to be a father and then deal with all of that...I mean I just...when I start thinking about how wonderful it would be to have a child I start thinking about all this other crap and all of a sudden I'm back to that neutral position again.

Andrea's comments illustrate how ambivalent she is in her decision and how much sexual discrimination plus a lack of social support thwarted any orientation toward motherhood that she might have once had. It also exemplifies how exhausting some lesbians find sexual discrimination to be.

Working-class White lesbians also expressed how sexual discrimination affected their decisions. For example, lesbians in the working-class White group raised similar concerns as Andrea, indicating how difficult being a lesbian can be:

> MABEL: I guess my decision to not have children is to not put a child into that position if I can prevent it, and I can't prevent who I am to other people's children, but I can prevent what circumstances I would put my own into.
>
> EVE: I would agree with that, definitely. I wouldn't put a child into a situation that would cause them more anguish.
>
> MABEL: Right. Same way I would not choose to be gay if I had a choice. This would not be a life I would choose if I could choose.

The above statements about what it means to be gay and how participants feel about being gay are powerful and sad. It shows how a world that is hostile to queers makes some lesbians struggle with personal and sexual identities and shape major life decisions. It also shows how sexual discrimination greatly colors childfree participants' worlds and affects their mothering decisions. In many ways, sexual discrimination creates a structure of constraints that deters lesbians from becoming mothers and therefore, by default, encourages them to remain childfree.

In addition to being discouraged from motherhood by sexual discrimination, working-class White lesbians differed from their middle-class counterparts because they held a view of the world as being ugly. This "ugly worldview" developed from particular social experiences and understandings of the world, such as overpopulation, crime, and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Mabel summed up what others in her group also expressed:

> I think there's enough kids in the world already. I honestly think you know...and I love children...and I'm involved with my nieces and nephews, too, but...I just think there's enough. I think this world is a crazy world that we live in...and...and with the guns and the drugs, and all the horrible things that happen. I don't think bringing a child into this world is necessarily a good thing. I don't know that I could protect a child enough to eliminate heart attack for myself maybe....maybe it's a selfish thing,

> but I just think there's enough kids in this world. And we have a horrible world that we live in right now, it's just my opinion.

It is unclear from Mabel's discussion as to whether she personally experienced crime and drug use or was referring to what she has seen in the media. However, Mabel's decision to remain childfree was greatly affected by her view that she lives in a "crazy world" unfit for children.

In addition to drugs, crime, and overpopulation, a few working-class White childfree participants discussed how HIV/AIDS added to their view that the world is too harsh for children. For example, Kerry explained how temporarily mothering her nephews led to her concerns about HIV/AIDS. In answering the question if HIV/AIDS affected her decision, Kerry responded:

> Yes, it does.... I would look at it as where [Mabel] was saying...where it's a bad world we're living in. Because [the boys] were pre-teens when they moved in...and I went through the...the puberty thing with my oldest nephew, and it's scary to think as a parent that...I mean kids will be kids...you know kids will be kids and boys will be boys. They're going to go out and do whatever they want anyway whether you tell them not to or not, and it is scary because you're going to lose that person eventually. You know and...and the thought of AIDS in that manner does affect my decision because I don't want to go through that....I mean everybody dies sooner or later, but that is an extremely hard thing to go through, and I don't want to be there.

Later in the interview Kerry stated that the fear of losing a child was the greatest reason why she wants to remain childfree. Because as an aunt she had no custody rights over her nephews when they were returned to their parents, in some way Kerry had already lost her children. She was not willing to go through that experience again, particularly given her view of the world as a scary place for children. The combination of her ideas of the world as a bad place for children, and her past experiences with children, shifted Kerry's orientation away from motherhood and toward remaining childfree.

Despite lesbians' structural experiences with sexual discrimination and their personal views of the world as an ugly place for children, childfree lesbians see their decisions to remain childfree as a vehicle through which they can express their human agency and teach heterosexual women to be more responsible in their mothering decisions. For example, Clara from the working-class White group feels that heterosexuals scorn her for both her sexual identity and the fact that she is childfree:

> People usually condemn us [queers] ...I've heard people say that we just never want to grow up...homosexuals and lesbians and gays they just don't want to grow up. They want to be kids forever. They don't want to have the responsibilities of parenthood and all that. And, in some ways it may look that way, but I feel we're very intelligent, well thought about people who are trying not to be selfish because we feel cheated some way in life, and we're going to consider ourselves and what we want for the next person that we bear. I mean I really resent the fact...I hear that a lot is that how immature we are and that we think that life is a party.

> [P]eople tell me that if you have a child you just make it work.... When you have a kid you make end's meet. And I feel that's bull because I'm a planner, and I think that when my life's right and I feel like I can do it and I'm gonna do it. I'm not being immature, and I'm not being a child, and I'm not negating responsibility. I'm thinking more thoroughly and clearly about it than what most heterosexual couples do because they're pushed into it.

Clara's comment not only illustrates the discrimination she feels for being a lesbian and for being childfree, but it also shows how she feels the heterosexual world can learn from lesbians; that lesbians are more responsible in their mothering decisions than heterosexual women because their mothering decisions are intentional.

B. Work and Financial Issues

As found in previous research, heterosexual women's relationship to work is an important factor in shaping their mothering decisions (Bartlett 1994; Faux 1984; Gerson 1985; Ireland 1993, Morell 1993). In this study, I found that lesbians' relationship to

work is also important in their decisions to remain childfree. Work has three effects on childfree lesbian's decisions: 1) it provides a structure of opportunities (Gerson 1985) through which childfree lesbians can gain economic freedom; 2) it constrains opportunities to become mothers by denying lesbians the support they need to become mothers; and 3) through pronatalist policies and social pressure it encourages lesbians to consider motherhood. As discussed below, these three effects vary by the combination of race, class, and sexuality. Specifically in the second effect, class becomes particularly salient for working-class participants because of heterosexist policies that discriminate against lesbians.

First, work presents a structure of opportunities for childfree lesbians to remain childfree by providing them with economic freedom and class mobility. That is, work provides the material opportunity for lesbians to realize their desire for economic freedom, a goal they see as mutually exclusive with having children. Furthermore, work provides a means of assuaging lesbians' fears of downward mobility that they equate with motherhood. The struggle for upward mobility and financial stability is evident in all focus groups regardless of race and class. However, there are variations in the focus of that struggle. Participants from the working-class groups or from working-class backgrounds spoke primarily about how work and being childfree allows them to be upwardly mobile. For example Kristy participated in the middle-class White group, but comes from a working-class background. She stated:

> I had a real strong drive to get out of my...working-class background, and where I grew up was a very small town,...and I wanted to get out of...the small town, get out of the trap that I perceived it to be...um... get out of living with a bunch of White Republicansand I was really driven to succeed.And uh...I'm sure that much of the reason that I moved up as far as I have so far is because I was able to make that kind of a single-minded pursuit, and I was able to keep going to school while I was doing

it, and get the degrees that I've gotten, and...um...has made me promotable, and I don't think I could have ever done that if I'd had a family.

Other participants from working-class backgrounds voiced similar opinions about the inability to be upwardly mobile if also a mother. For example, Terry from the working-class lesbian-of-color group stated that work greatly influenced her decision to remain childfree:

> right now I'm still trying to move forward, and I have one more...goal to reach....you know even though I have a good job, there's one place that I want to work inside of the...the office itself, so...moving around I don't think that's good for a child anyway... you know?
>
> NM: So right now your job aspirations take precedence and are more important?
>
> TERRY: Yeah, yeah. They come first right now.

Whereas Kristy discussed how having children would be bad for her in terms of achieving upward mobility, Terry stated that having a job would be bad for a child. Whatever the justification, however, many working-class participants want to move up the financial ladder and do not see children fitting into that goal.

Middle-class lesbians are also concerned about upwardly mobility. However, they differ from working-class lesbians in that they are also concerned about maintaining their financial standard of living. That is, they see children both as a barrier to upward mobility and as a possible cause of downward mobility. Their view of downward mobility is often tied to gendered notions that mothers should stay home with their children. This is not surprising, given that they interpreted their mothers' experiences as being mutually exclusive with work, as discussed earlier. For example, Andrea from the middle-class White group stated that if she were to have children, she would want to take

time off to raise the child. However, taking off time would compromise her and her partner's financial stability. She stated:

> I have the higher income of the two of us, and should I decide to take time off to have a child and things like that...economically it would affect our...our economic status and... possibility for promotions at work and things like that so that was a factor.

Andrea's comment shows how she not only fears that children would prevent her from being upwardly mobile (i.e., getting promoted), she also fears that children and the need to stay home would cause her and her partner to be downwardly mobile (i.e., jeopardizing her current economic status).

Childfree lesbians' discussion of work shows that as with heterosexual women, work and finances steer some women onto childfree paths. Just as Gerson (1985) found, how work supports mothering decisions varies by class. Lesbians from financially insecure working-class backgrounds use the combination of work and being childfree as a means of gaining upward mobility. Middle-class lesbians, on the other hand, come from financially secure backgrounds and use work and being childfree as a means of not only improving, but also maintaining, their financial position. But work steers these lesbians (regardless of class) onto childfree paths because lesbians view motherhood as hindering economic mobility and freedom. That is, work provides the structural opportunity for lesbians to achieve an ideal or personal goal that is born out of past experiences and beliefs about motherhood that are shaped by social location.

While work provides an opportunity for childfree lesbians to avoid motherhood and obtain economic freedom, it also lacks the support that lesbians already skeptical about motherhood might need to move them toward motherhood. That is, because of heterosexist policies, work deters some lesbians from becoming mothers and therefore

encourages them to remain childfree. In particular, the lack of domestic partner benefits at work deterred childfree lesbians from having children. The lack of domestic partner benefits seems to most greatly affect working-class participants, particularly White working-class lesbians. The majority of working-class White participants do not have domestic partner benefits. Because many lesbians either believe mothers should stay home with their children or fear they would not be able to afford childcare, a lack of domestic partnership benefits to provide health benefits to the partner having the child and to the child her/himself is a big concern. I asked each group what resources they felt were not available to them in making their decisions to remain childfree. Clara from the working-class White group stated:

> Insurance is a big thing. If a cost is a big thing to me then insurance would be a big thing to me. Getting partners covered on the insurance...I mean it's all a chain reaction right there so I would say that would be one point.

Clara's comment that "it's all a chain reaction" indicates how class and sexuality shape work so that family policy and mothering decisions become closely related to one another. Most health and financial benefits are obtained through work and most employees do not offer domestic partner benefits. Thus, for working-class lesbians with limited finances and jobs without domestic partner benefits, work discourages or at least does not encourage them to have children.

The third effect work has on childfree lesbians, particularly middle-class White lesbians, is to solidify their decisions to remain childfree by presenting them with the challenge of resisting pronatalist forces at work. Middle-class White participants voiced their concern about pronatalist social pressure at work. They experience a work world

that rewards women with children by giving them more lenient schedules and that burdens childfree women with extra work. Barb summed this experience up well:

> Being childfree makes you... you can do the extra work, you can take the long trips, you can take the overnight trips, you can do this...you'll cover when someone has to run and take care of the...the child who's called from school and is sick or got hurt or something like that. Um...I think you even get a reprieve if you have an animal cause I work with people...some other women who don't have children, but they have a dog and so they didn't have to go [on a] trip cause they couldn't find a care taker for their dog...so I think we carry that burden...additional work load.

Not only do middle-class White participants find that employees ask childfree workers to do more work, but childfree participants have fewer opportunities or acceptable excuses to relieve themselves of work duties. For example, Judy joined in:

> People [with children] can pick up in the middle of the day without question and go and take care of anything and I don't begrudge people that, but I don't want people looking side-ways at me if I say I have to pick up in the middle of the day and go do something that I can't do because I don't have you know an excuse or another person to do them...um...so....that was...it's a pressure and I could just as well do without it. Also, there's this thing that they give us every year. It's 8 hours of school leave. Well, I give it...I mean I turn it back every year. I don't use it. I don't want to use it. I don't...but I want to be able to use it in the worst way for something else.

School leave is a leave that Judy's workplace gives to its workers so they can contribute to schools in some way. Judy chooses not to use the time because, "it would require interacting with children which would drive [her] nuts." And while other childfree participants might not mind as much as Judy to interact with children, Judy's point is that there is no equivalent leave that allows workers to just have time off, time that does not necessarily involve children.

Not only do childfree lesbians have to address pronatalist work policies, but they also have to address pronatalist social interactions as well. At times, being childfree placed lesbians in strained social interactions at work, as Kristy explained:

> ...one of the things is about socializing especially...because I'm in management and most of my staff has children, and it's...it's kind of hard because you don't have that background and experience...and it can kind of be a nice lubrication for the work place if you can have a little social time, five to10 minutes during the day, but I always feel very awkward about talking about other people's children when I've never had any. Um...so I think that's...that's kind of an awkwardness that maybe never goes away...and even though I'm out as a lesbian, it's...you know they still seem kind of...they don't quite understand why I...I don't attach immediately to their children because...you know I'm a woman and so I should do that.

Kristy's comment describes how gender expectations of women as mothers and nurturers are present in the workplace and how uncomfortable they can make childfree women feel. It also shows that through policy and ideology at work, childfree women are forced to defend their childfree lives. The social pressure discussed by middle-class White participants shows that their decisions to remain childfree are acts of agency as a continuous resistance to pronatalist social pressure. While it is possible that pronatalist pressure in the workforce could pressure childfree lesbians into considering motherhood, for most of the childfree participants in my study pronatalist pressure serves only to annoy them and solidify their decisions. That is, childfree lesbians' resistance against pronatalist pressure reminds them that they really do not want to be mothers.

C. Social Networks

In addition to sexual discrimination and work and financial issues, social networks also provide childfree lesbians with a structure of opportunity in which to remain childfree. Depending on race and class, social networks either support orientations toward remaining childfree or constrain opportunities to become mothers. Whether or not lesbians are supported or constrained by social networks, the result is the same – social networks can steer lesbians onto childfree paths.

Most participants discussed being integrated into some form of social networks involving a combination of friends, family, and/or community. However, the tenor of each focus group varied greatly, indicating strong differences in social networks by race and class. Middle-class White childfree lesbians focused on childfree lesbian networks occasionally mixed with lesbian mothers. Working-class White childfree lesbians focused on lesbian networks divided by mothers and childfree lesbians. Middle-class childfree lesbians-of-color focused on family and religious community networks. Working-class childfree lesbians-of-color focused on networks of family of origin, communities of color, and lesbians and gays. The type of networks in which childfree lesbians are involved are largely determined by race, class, and sexuality and affect the quality of support lesbians receive.

Middle-class White lesbians primarily discussed their integration into childfree lesbian communities, with a slight overlap with lesbian mothers. They indicated that childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers lead somewhat separate, but occasionally overlapping lives. They also stated that although most of their friends are childfree, at times they socialize with lesbian mothers and their children. As Barb stated:

> I run in the same crowd that Judy and Tammy run in. And I think we make a special effort sometimes in saying that children can come and other times when we don't want children...you know we made the decision that it's not appropriate to have children at other times...it's poker night...Yeah, poker night. It's not a good night to have kids. You know and the group camping trips are sometimes not a good time for kids, but...um...but then there are other times when they're openly welcome.

Judy seemed less desirous than Barb of having children around, but Judy did state that her expanded circle of friends has children and "we like them anyway." Tammy said that sometimes she likes having children around because "it's a change to see a different lifestyle." They also expressed power over their social groups, being able to determine

which social events were appropriate for children and which events were for adults only. Furthermore, because the majority of their communities are childfree, middle-class White lesbians feel supported by friends in their decisions to remain childfree.

Kristy, from the middle-class White group, discussed how most of her friends are childfree and single. Thus, her friends' characteristics mirror her own and feel most comfortable to her. Tara and Andrea also stated that most of their lesbian friends are childfree. Only Maria from the middle-class White group, who had recently moved into her town, stated that she was not integrated into any lesbian community. The responses of middle-class White childfree lesbians suggest, therefore, that even with a split in the lesbian community based on mothering decisions, middle-class White childfree lesbians are able to find social support networks and friendships within the larger lesbian community that support their decisions to remain childfree. Most of the support is from other childfree lesbians. Thus it reinforces their decisions and offers a social world in which to enjoy the freedom to socialize as they please.

Childfree working-class White lesbians differ from their middle-class counterparts. Almost unanimously participants in the working-class White group complained of the rift in the lesbian community between childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers. The rift limits their choice of lesbian friends and support networks, leaving them with little control over their social lives. Kerry, who had custody of her nephews for several years, finds the working-class White lesbian community to be unaccepting of diverse mothering decisions:

> ...growing up in the beginning of our relationship [my partner and I] never really dealt with other lesbians at all. In fact, she was the only other lesbian I knew. But, after I started working where I do, I got into contact with some others and we've become friends. And just as we were getting to know more lesbians and

> actually interacting in the community...um...that part of the life, that's when the kids entered our picture. And when the kids entered our picture it was like...boom, that was gone again. And then now...now that the kids have moved back out, it's hard...it's hard for us to touch back into that because...you know it was like we were automatically shut out....you know you lose your contact with your friends being childless and having children. They are completely different you know, and that's like our lives...when it happened were like turned upside down and side-ways and about 360 degrees the other way, and ...that is exactly what happened to us and now we're actually having a hard time getting back into that circuit because...and it comes back to...harsh words, but if they threw you out of the community because you were having kids, why would you want to go back? Why go back?

For Kerry and her partner, the lesbian community offered little comfort or social support in her decision to either temporarily mother or to remain childfree. As Kerry indicated, for working-class White lesbians the split in the lesbian community between mothers and childfree lesbians affects the pool of lesbians from which to find social support, thus limiting support no matter what mothering decision one makes. Furthermore, working-class White childfree lesbians feel social pressure from lesbian mothers to become mothers. For example, Mabel explained:

> I'm feeling [social pressure]...we had [lesbian] friends of ours that had twins, and we felt it...um...me and my partner when they had their commitment ceremony...why aren't you guys having a commitment ceremony? Well, we decided not to. And now they're having children. Well, why aren't you guys having kids? You've been together more than five to six years. You should be having a family now. And, so we feel that pressure especially in today's environment...and now we're even feeling it even more with the children and commitment ceremonies, and society's norms even for lesbians now are becoming pressure to answer that question. I think it's out there.

The decisions of working-class White lesbians to remain childfree are scrutinized, therefore, within lesbian communities. Clara explained that pronatalist pressure from within lesbian communities is recent within the past 10 years. She stated that "ten years ago it was all about just having fun. You know finding out who you were." One result of the recent pronatalist social pressure is a cynicism by working-class White lesbians

toward the larger lesbian community. A second result is that many working-class White lesbians are forced to frequently revisit and defend their decisions to remain childfree. As Clara explains, social pressure to have children is

> always there, but I have to go back to how I feel, how I was raised, what I want out of life...you know what I think I'm capable of right now and that's....that makes...I mean that really challenges me to do that, but I think that's why I still continue not to have children is because I never was affected by peer pressure. Everybody feels it, but it depends on whether you act on it or not or let it...you know control.

Clara's comment demonstrates two important points. First, it suggests the interactive relationship between early life experiences (i.e., "how I was raised") and her current circumstances (i.e., "what I'm capable of right now") in making decisions to remain childfree. In other words, it shows the interaction between ideational and structural features. Second, it shows that although working-class White lesbians struggle to control their childfree networks, they are able to maintain their childfree paths. The resistance to pronatalist pressure within working-class White lesbian communities shows human agency that middle-class White lesbians did not exert in their social networks, but did exert at work, as discussed earlier. For middle-class White lesbians, control over their social networks seemed like a given, something that they take for granted. Middle-class White lesbians are not resentful toward lesbian mothers because of the large middle-class childfree lesbian community through which they can find support. The smaller, more divided working-class White childfree lesbian community feels restricted and confined by the "intrusion" of and social pressure created by lesbian mothers.

Unlike either group of White lesbians, childfree middle-class lesbians-of-color did not discuss their integration into lesbian social networks. Rather, they discussed social networks comprised of family of origin and religious communities. It is unclear if

middle-class lesbians-of-color did not discuss lesbian networks because they are not integrated into them, or if they find communities of color more important due to racism within lesbian communities and within larger society (Anzaldúa 1987; Espín 1997; Hooks 1989; Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993; Moraga 1997; Morales 1990; Silvera 1995; Smith 1983). Their discussion mostly focused on the importance of family of origin and religious communities and on the dilemma of homophobia within those families and communities. Homophobia in communities of color deters lesbians from becoming mothers by showing disdain for lesbian motherhood. Homophobia within communities of color illustrates how race and sexuality intersect to shape lesbians' decision-making processes. As Amy from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group explains, the importance of family and community creates both support and anxiety for lesbians-of-color:

> One of the reason to stay in the closet is, uh, you don't have to go through that drama. And...and I'll have to tell you from my perspective, and this will be from being an African-American woman. Home is what I can depend on. Home is always there. It's unconditional, and when you live in a society where you have to have some place you can go you...you can't...I mean it floors me when I think about...I hear parents disowning their children because they're gay or lesbian, and I've heard those for years, but I can't even imagine what that's like because one of part of me says they would be okay with it. The other part of me is sort of like what Pam said, it does change it. It does make it out there.

Amy's explanation shows that she needs her family for support and is unwilling to jeopardize that support by exposing her sexual identity. For lesbians who do not feel able to come out to their parents, the thought of bringing children into their families is often too difficult, as Leslie discussed:

> I think having a child would change the dynamics. I remember a family reunion that I went to a few years back and it was the first time I had actually taken a partner home with me....home to the extended family so to speak, and you know I'm....I'm thinking this...this is gonna be interesting 'cause I know... again it

> was that implicit, kind of underlying type of thing, and my partner at the time was White, and I'm going, "Oh, this is going to be really good." You know I'm bringing home a White girl. And...uh...and we were not the talk of the family reunion which was...you know I was like all prepared for that. But the talk of the family reunion was one of my younger cousins who was about 16-17 years and his pregnant 15-year-old girlfriend, so it was the youth thing but it was that...that pregnancy...you know the real definition of family kind of thing that really got everybody stirred up which led me to think....you know if I came home pregnant it would just short circuit everybody in the family. I think everybody would just kind of go, "Zzzz." And...and not be able to cope for awhile. I think they'd come around after awhile, but I think that initial thing would be really difficult 'cause it would push the issue. It would put it so much in their face that they would have to deal with it...you know at the present time it's...you don't really have to think about it.

Leslie stated later that her family's possible reaction did not affect her decision to remain childfree because she had made that decision much earlier in her life. However, lesbians in similar situations may take family responses into greater consideration. Thus, while families can provide a strong social network for people of color, they do not necessarily provide a strong network for lesbians, particularly for those deciding to become mothers. Furthermore, the absence of a discussion by lesbians-of-color about lesbian networks coupled with a dearth of lesbian-of-color media (as discussed in Chapter 4) indicates that social networking by lesbians-of-color may not be very extensive or may be difficult to find. The result may be that lesbians-of-color must rely on homophobic family networks instead of supportive lesbian networks. Thus, social networks for lesbians-of-color may create a structure of constraints that prevents lesbians oriented toward motherhood from actually becoming mothers.

The relationship between middle-class lesbians-of-color and their families of origin is similar to that of their relationships to religious communities. Several middle-class childfree lesbians-of-color belong to churches because of the emotional and spiritual support they offer. However, middle-class childfree lesbians-of-color are

reluctant to come out in church and avoid discussions about marriage and motherhood that fellow church members raise. For many lesbians-of-color, church provides both a source of social support and a source of sexual discrimination. Amy's discussion of homophobia in her church shows how it is not just being Black, but also being a woman and a lesbian that compound the discrimination lesbians-of-color experience and internalize in social institutions that also support them. In discussing coming out, Amy explains:

> ...my church is probably the hardest thing of all things for me. It is very difficult to be...I just have to say I'm a Southern, and this is so different so you understand...I'm a Southern Baptist...Black. This is very different from the White Southern Baptist. And I want everybody to know that there are two different groups. Southern Baptists are a really fun group. We're pretty tolerant of just about everything. We tend to see gays and lesbians as an invisible amongst us, but we know they exist. We're not particularly comfortable...and that's the way I'm treated.So for that the church is probably one of the...I mean it's a large community. So not only do I have to deal with my extended family, but the church extends forever, and they don't like that I'm a lesbian. They don't like that I like women. They really...at least publicly, that's not to happen. And they have all these scriptures which are not that many actually that say what I do is just sin which I find very interesting. So I fight with that, but that's who I am spiritually. I mean that's where...and see for me my mother was my introduction to my church so it's very difficult...because she made it seem so appealing.... You know the fact that I choose to be closeted, and I used to be concerned about being closeted, but you know it's my choice. Who knows who I am? What I am? I don't need the extra headache cause being an African-American, being a woman, being a lesbian...and then to top it off being a big girl. I mean there's four things I have to deal with. You know people look at me and go, "Oh my gosh. She's [so] tall. What's going on now?" I mean from fear to just you know...if I have a sense of humor it's because I've learned that it helps people relax with me, with my color, with my size...uh...it's just a tool. ... And...and the most difficult thing and has probably stopped me from really enjoying some of my relationships has been the church, and so that's how big of an impact it has had on me at that level because you really...you were taught to believe and you were taught that there's a God that sees everything you do.

Amy's experience raises two main issues. First, it illustrates how discrimination particularly in the church affects both her decision to remain childfree and to not reveal

her sexual identity. Second, it shows how the mothering decisions of lesbians-of-color are greatly affected by race, gender, and sexual discrimination. As with families of origin, church acts as a strong social network in general, but also as a source of stress through homophobia for out lesbians or lesbians who want children. Thus, the social networks of lesbians-of-color can deter lesbians from becoming mothers and therefore steer them toward remaining childfree.

The social networks for childfree working-class lesbians-of-color are very different from other lesbian groups and offer support for remaining childfree. Both participants in the working-class lesbian-of-color group are out to their families of origin and find their families to be supportive of their sexual identities and their childfree decisions. To help their families be supportive of their childfree decisions, Sara and Terry draw on conservative sexual ideology and coming out to their families as strategies of resistance against pronatalist sentiments within their families of origin. For example, Sara stated that her sexual identity explains to her parents why she is not having children:

> For me, I think it's been easier. I think because [my parents] can....they see that it's not....I think it's like a natural right to passage in the straight world. You know you....you graduate from college, you meet somebody, you get married, and then you start having...you know you buy the house and you have the kids....you know? But when I came out I....they could see that it...my life was an alternative type lifestyle, and it was much different than any of my brothers or my cousins.....you know so I think....when I say that I'm...I'm not going to have kids I think they can kind of see....they can put that together and correlate with how my lifestyle is....see why I've chosen to do that.

Terry agreed that coming out has squelched any pressure she may have felt from her parents. By coming out to her parents, Terry is able to use her sexual identity as an excuse for not having children. In addition, by drawing attention toward her heterosexual

sister, Terry draws on conservative sexual ideology to reduce any social pressure her parents might level against her:

> But see I have...I have a sister also. So if my parents....if....if someone decides to ask her...you know are you going to have any children? Yeah....you know she's like my extra brush-off you know? ...you know she's heterosexual.

Terry's use her of and her sister's different sexual identities and her parent's sexual ideology that separates lesbian and mother shows one strategy that working-class lesbians-of-color use to help reduce pronatalist pressure and gain support for their childfree decisions. It also shows how ideational features, such as sexual ideology, and structural factors, such as social networks, both shape lesbians' decision-making processes.

In addition to gaining positive support from their families of origin, childfree working-class lesbians-of-color are integrated into supportive queer and heterosexual communities. Thus, they rely on a variety of social networks, rather than just one, for support of their decisions to remain childfree. As Sara explained,

> I'm very active but I mesh the gay community. I mean I have a well-balanced life. I'm very active with my family. I'm very... I have straight friends, I have gay friends. I mostly hang out with my... my gay friends, but I do have straight friends, and I'm very active. I go to a lot of the gay functions...you know? We are very social. I'm a very social person you know? Every Friday and Saturday night...Thursday night...you know we're gone doing things, and...um...I feel that I'm very out there. Definitely!

When I asked Sara if she thought that being integrated into different communities affected her decision to remain childfree, she stated that what she liked about being childfree was the freedom to be able to join whatever communities she wanted. Her response shows a connection between being childfree and having social networks. On the one hand, the freedom of not having children allows her to be social. On the other

hand, the availability of social networks that support her decision to be childfree gives her the sense of freedom that she desires. Terry also expressed her integration into multiple social networks. Perhaps the strategy of multiple integration is one that working-class lesbians-of-color use to increase their support in a world with limited options. Furthermore, both Terry's and Sara's social networks support their desire for freedom and their decisions to remain childfree. The social networks in which Terry and Sara are involve support their decisions to remain childfree because they provide positive attitudes toward remaining childfree and provide social activities for childfree lesbians. It is thus the combination of ideational and structural features that help working-class lesbians-of-color remain childfree.

D. Intimate Relationships

As with research on paths to motherhood for heterosexual women (Gerson 1985; Morell 1994), the presence or absence of a partner affects lesbians' decisions to remain childfree. The discussion of intimate relationships reveals how undecided orientations can place lesbians onto childfree paths.

Four major issues concerning intimate relationships arose that illustrate how intimate relationships provide a structure of opportunities and constraints for lesbians. First, several childfree participants stated that they would have had children if they had met the right partner at the right time. Just as fragile and impermanent relationships lead heterosexual women to remain childfree (Gerson 1985), not finding the right partner at the right time means that intimate relationships deter lesbians from becoming mothers.

Although both working- and middle-class lesbians discussed not finding the right partner at the right time, the meaning of "right" partner and "right" time differs by class.

For middle-class participants, the "right partner" means someone who is emotionally stable, who is willing to commit to the relationship, and who wants to have children. The "right time" means that the right partner comes along at a time in the participant's life when the participant is ready to settle down and is not too old to mother. Barb, from the middle-class White group discussed how not finding the right partner at the right time affected her decision to remain childfree:

> I always...always thought I wanted to be a parent...um...and be involved in that. Through my various relationships...um...most of them have not wanted to have children. The one that did have...wanted to have children, fortunately I had the foresight to see that was not a good relationship...um... or a healthy individual so... the relationship ended and then now [my current partner] was married and had 2 children from that and is definitely over...any child-rearing things. So we may do things with the grandchildren and that's...that's it...and ....had I been involved in a relationship I probably would have very easily...could have been in a parent relationship right now.

For Barb, the right person (i.e., the one she is currently with) came along at the wrong time (i.e., after her partner had already had children).

For working-class participants, not finding the right partner at the right time differs from middle-class participants in that the "right" partner not only needs to be emotionally stable but also has to be financially stable. In addition, the "right" time means being in a financially stable position at the time of wanting to have children. Pam, who was in the middle-class lesbian-of-color group but who came from a working-class background illustrates this point:

> I think it was...not having a partner was a really big influence on my decision in two ways. Uh...one is I have seen people raising children and I see how much sleep they don't get. And...and I think trying to do it alone...um...I know people do it alone and they do great jobs, but...um...boy, to have a partner...to have someone to help...you raise that child...I think I would need to have someone else that you can share the joys and the responsibilities with. And the other thing...you know it's combined with matters of money. If you have another person then you have more income... 'cause you're probably...with lesbians you're probably both going to be

> working or if one of 'em is staying home then the other...that probably means the other person has a pretty good job and...and health benefits. Health insurance is...is uh...the older I get the more I'm concerned about having adequate health insurance...you know and...those sorts of things. So I think...I think it was...not having...not...at the time that I was thinking about and not having a partner really impacted on my decision. I think if I had been in a situation where I was with a partner and in...a stable relationship, and we really loved each other and were in a position to have a child, I think my decision probably would have been different.

Unlike for Barb and other middle-class participants, for Pam and other working-class participants the financial stability of the partner and of the participant herself determined if a partner was the "right" one at the "right" time. This is most likely because working-class participants understand the hardships of not being financially stable and do not want to increase financial hardships by having children or bringing a child into a financially strained situation. The result is that working-class definitions of "right" partner have more criteria to meet than those of middle-class participants, perhaps making it more difficult for working-class lesbians to become mothers than for middle-class lesbians.

The second issue involving intimate relationships is that some lesbians stated that if their partners had wanted children, the participants would have helped raise the child. However, the participant would not take initiative to have a child herself. Not finding a partner who wants children creates a structure of opportunities that supports lesbians' orientations toward remaining childfree. But not finding a partner also provide a structur of constraints by discouraging any desire (albeit small) they might have for becoming mothers. For working-class lesbians, the partner taking initiative has to be financially stable enough to afford children. Similarly, for lesbians from any class background who believe that one parent should stay home with a child, financial stability of the partner is also a concern. Most of the participants who stated that they would help a partner who wanted to have children also stated that having a child would not be their first preference.

However, if they really loved their partner, they would not leave that partner because of the partner wanting children.

The third way that intimate relationships affect lesbians' decisions to remain childfree is by creating a structure of constraints because some participants were partnered with women with children from previous heterosexual relationships, and those women did not want any more children. Race and class did not appear to shape whether or not women were partnered with such women. In addition to thwarting opportunities to have children, partners with children from previous relationships did not consider the participant to be a co-mother, particularly if the children were already grown. For example, Andrea from the middle-class White group explained:

> by the time that I got together with my partner...she had already been there, done it...had 'em. So... I...I said well...there'll always be grandchildren you know. I missed having the opportunity of knowing [her kids] when they were young so I've never really bonded as a step-parent...um...particularly because when she and the kids moved in with me, her relationship with her ex-husband was very strained, ...so I mean she had already been there, and at that point once they're already teenagers even...there's enough difference in our ages...she's 13 years older that she was already past that point of having a discussion so it just...it was never a real push to do it, but had I been with somebody different it's possible I would have children...

Andrea's statement shows that age of a partner may be a factor in determining the partner's desire to have more children. In addition, the relationship of the partner to her children and to her ex-spouse may also affect her desire to have more children. It also shows the powerful affect partners can have in the decision-making process. In Andrea's case, her partner constrained Andrea's choice by not encouraging any desire Andrea might have to become a mother. Because Andrea was ambivalent about motherhood, she was probably not motivated to find another partner who is more interested in being a co-mother.

In contrast to both of the above responses that illustrate how intimate partners create a structure of constraints that deter some lesbians from becoming mothers, the fourth aspect of intimate partners illustrates how the orientations of some childfree lesbians are so strong that lesbians avoid relationships with women who want children. In this case, the values and ideas in a lesbian's mind, rather than structural factors, steer the decision-making process. Some participants stated that they want to remain childfree so much that they would either leave a relationship or had actually left a relationship because their partners wanted to have children. White participants most strongly expressed a desire not to be with a partner who wanted children. For example, Judy from the middle-class White group stated:

> Any time anybody I dated ever started talking about children I ran. I should've held the TV show on who wants to be a childless lesbian couple. And my current partner feels pretty much the same way, too....very much the same way...She runs from the room when children come in...

Similarly, Eve from the working-class White group stated:

> I was in a relationship for a short time, but during that time kids did come up, and I was the one who was going to get to have them and there was a little pressure in that situation. But...uh...it was a short-term relationship and I was out of there too fast to even have it come up again.

It is possible that White participants feel they can be more careful in their choice of partners because there is a larger pool of potential partners then there is for lesbians-of-color. This larger pool is particularly available to middle-class White lesbians who have large childfree social networks. This is assuming however, that lesbians-of-color have smaller social networks and that they prefer to be partnered with lesbians-of-color.

E. Ideas about Lesbian Motherhood

A fifth pivotal factor that shaped lesbians' decisions to remain childfree is the ideas lesbians have about lesbian motherhood. While this is not a strong factor, negative thoughts about lesbian motherhood lends support to lesbians with orientations toward remaining childfree. Childfree lesbians expressed mixed ideas about lesbian motherhood. Slightly over half the participants from the four childfree focus groups expressed positive ideas about lesbian motherhood. They discussed how lesbian mothers are raising children in more understanding and open ways than heterosexual parents. Both Sara and Terry from the working-class lesbian-of-color group believe that children raised by lesbians are more sensitive to issues of sexual and racial discrimination. Other participants believe that lesbian mothers offer society an example of how families can be more loving and flexible than heterosexual families. Literature on lesbian families supports the positive ideas about lesbian motherhood that the participants in my study expressed (Cook-Daniels 1997; Deaner 1997; Lorde 1984; Silvera 1995; Stacey 1998).

However, an almost equal number of participants voiced dissatisfaction with the lesbian baby boom and lesbian motherhood. These participants believe that lesbian mothers are simply emulating heterosexuals. They wonder if two parents can really be as egalitarian as lesbian mothers claim themselves to be. Furthermore, while most childfree participants see lesbian motherhood as being class-neutral, others see lesbian motherhood as a class privilege. For example, Pam from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group stated:

> I've seen couples who have had children...you know they emulate the... the way that they were brought up or the class that they were brought in. I don't think that we talk enough about class issues in this country, but there are definite classes and I...I kind of grew up in like working class and of course we aspired to be middle

> class...and so I see a lot of the women that I know who have had children came from middle class, and so they...you know they get their houses and they want their children to go to a good school and things like that just...you know the kinds of middle-class values and issues that...that happen. Um...those are the things that those women are coping with...and they're the women who could afford to make the choice to have children.

It is likely that because Pam, who is a financially-strapped graduate student from a working-class background, sees motherhood as a middle-class privilege, she is deterred from having children. In general, negative ideas about lesbian motherhood reinforce negative views of motherhood in general and strengthen some lesbians orientations toward remaining childfree.

F. Barriers to Obtaining Children

The fifth pivotal factor that shaped lesbians' decision to remain childfree concerns the logistics of how to obtain a child. As discussed in Chapter 2, lesbians obtain children through previous heterosexual relationships, DI, and/or adoption. Because I exclued lesbian mothers who had obtained children through previous heterosexual relationships, lesbians in my study could obtain children either through DI or adoption. DI and adoption generally require interaction with medical and legal systems. DI also requires that lesbians are willing to get pregnant. Because lesbians in my study find medical systems to be both heterosexist and racist, and because lesbians rejected the idea of being pregnanct, medical and legal systems created a structure of constraints that thwarted orientations toward motherhood and supported lesbians' decisions to remain childfree.

1. Medical and Legal Systems

I found that sexual and racial discrimination within medical and legal systems deter some lesbians from having children. Discrimination within the medical profession

varies largely by race and class. Middle-class lesbians in both groups consistently discussed how health workers badger them about birth control methods and pregnancy tests. For several middle-class White participants, the ignorance of health workers to lesbian issues affected the health care they received, but not their mothering decisions. For example, Judy reported:

> It didn't affect my decision, but I've been through some horror stories like Tara...ending up in the hospital knowing darn well the reason I was there because I was in anaphylactic shock from having taken some antibiotic, and the doctor insisted on giving me a pregnancy test because they wanted to make sure, and my partner was sitting right there, and we were explaining who we were and what we were doing, and it didn't matter.

For other participants like Kristy from the middle-class White group, experiences with sexual discrimination in health professions did affect her decision to remain childfree:

> I think it's...it's just another factor on top of everything else that reinforced the decision, but...um...when you go in for a GYN and they ask you what kind of birth control you're using, you're thinking, "Oh my God. You know I have to come out to my doctor" You know who knows how he or she's gonna feel about that. It's just another obstacle on top of that, that this assumption that everyone's heterosexual, and that if you're not using birth control you're taking the chance of just you know waking up pregnant one day...um...as opposed to it being a very rational decision that we're able to make, so I think that's just another layer on top of knowing that the medical community as a whole, especially when I was in my 20s which is you know a couple decades ago...um just didn't...didn't see the differences...didn't acknowledge that there were women who...you know weren't in danger of becoming pregnant every time they turned around.

Like Kristy, Maria's dislike for health workers came out of experiences that occurred some twenty or thirty years earlier. However, Maria's dislike and distrust of health workers comes out of gender, not sexual, discrimination:

> My sister had a difficult birth. Her son...she seemed to me to be going through a lot of pain, and the way she described it I thought it was all unnecessary. I thought maybe she should have a law suit against this doctor, and this when I was [in college] and they were burning their bras from the gynecological text books that said women have to have pain. If a woman tells you she doesn't enjoy pain send her to the psychiatrist. Do you remember those days or was it before your

> time? I was afraid of those...of gynecologists. I had heard that they were just knife... knife wheeling maniacs, and my own sister had gone through some terrible times. And I said...I think it did affect me a little bit. I put it out of my mind. I know I didn't want to go to a male gynecologist.

For middle-class White women like Kristy and Maria, the need to involve the medical profession to get pregnant shaped their decisions and kept them on a childfree path. That is, through both sexual and gender discrimination, the medical profession creates a structure of constraints that deters lesbians from becoming mothers.

Middle-class lesbians-of-color discussed very similar experiences with the medical profession as middle-class White lesbians. However, their interactions with the medical profession are also racialized. As Leslie recounted her past experiences with physicians, her tension visibly increased:

> I used to hate going to the doctor because that would be one of the first questions out...out of their mouths. Are you pregnant? What form of birth control do you use? Hello! And now...one of the...it's kind of funny. Fortunately, I've had the same doctor for several years now so I don't have to go through that anymore, but...um...I had to see someone different when I went in a few weeks ago for ....bronchitis, and you know went through that whole litany. And it's like..."no, no, no...I'm not pregnant and there's no chance that I'm pregnant." "Well how can you be so sure?" "Well lesbians sleep with men now" and lashed out into this whole thing that...you know there are lesbians that sleep with men. "Well, I'm a lesbian that doesn't sleep with men, okay? It's like no sperm coming near my ovaries. It's just not happening." ...It hasn't influenced my decision about children, but that is one of the things that used to piss me right off because they didn't believe you. It didn't...it didn't matter what you said. Oh, yeah that too. "You're Blackyou're always pregnant. You all like rabbits." It's like you get that... and it was insulting. It was insulting that you know they wouldn't think that I would number one be honest about my own body. It's like Hello? I'm in a doctor's office. I must be wanting to take care of myself. It should be a clue right there. You know Black women are so...you know we just get around. We have low moral standards. We sleep with anything. But ...that's been my experience with the medical community that...that whole series of things, and you know... it still makes my blood boil when I think about it. It's like I can feel little blood pressure points going off here.

Leslie's experiences suggest that because health workers believe African-American women are more promiscuous than Whites, African-American lesbians experience even more harassment by health workers to use birth control and to take pregnancy tests than White lesbians. While Leslie's experience with physicians is that they pressure African-American women to use birth control, Amy commented that she does not "think society pressures Black women to have children." She may be correct, but as Leslie pointed out, many health workers hold racist beliefs that African-American women have "low moral standards." The beliefs that African-American women should not have children but are sexually active results in social pressure for African-American women to use birth control and have pregnancy tests, a pressure that middle-class childfree lesbians in the study clearly resent and resist. Many of the participants stated that one way they resist such racism is to come out to the health care provider. For some participants, that tactic works well. However, as Leslie explained, not all health workers believe that lesbians do not have sexual intercourse with men. Resisting racist, sexist, and heterosexist medical beliefs and practices shows how lesbians use human agency to defend their decisions to remain childfree.

Working-class White participants focused their conversation of the medical profession on a different topic from the two middle-class groups. They discussed how reproductive technologies are cost prohibitive, particularly because most health insurance programs do not cover such procedures. As I discussed in the section on work and financial issues, working-class White lesbians are particularly concerned about their lack of health benefits and about heterosexist policies that deny domestic partner benefits. The combination of expensive technologies, and a lack of personal funds or a structural

means to pay for such technologies, creates a structure of constraints that prevents some lesbians from choosing motherhood.

Working-class lesbians-of-color were the only ones who stated that the medical profession was not a barrier for them to obtain children. Both participants stated that they have gay male friends who had offered to be sperm donors if the participants ever wanted to get pregnant. Both Terry and Sara trust their gay male friends to be HIV negative. As Sara explained:

> SARA: For me, I have a very close and dear friend of mine that for years has been saying let's....he's gay...let's have a baby together. And even up until a week ago he was saying....you know, "Come on! Let's have....we can have a baby together... and we'll share custody"....so a donor....I mean that wouldn't be a question at all. I wouldn't have to....financially I know it....you know what you have to go through, and I mean I could always...if I wanted to I could make arrangements with him.
>
> NM: So dealing with the medical community is not an issue for you?
>
> SARA: Not at all. No.

As Sara's answer suggests, having a gay male friend as a potential donor means she does not have to get involved with the medical system; nor does she have to pay for the aid of reproductive technologies.

Unlike the effects of the medical system on most of the participants (with the exception of working-class lesbians-of-color), the legal system plays a lesser role in lesbians' decision to remain childfree. Only two participants reported having any direct interaction with the legal system, and both had positive experiences. However, many participants discussed how they had heard about discrimination against lesbians in the courts, particularly involving custody cases. No distinct patterns by race and class appeared in the discussion of the legal system, with the exception of the two working-

class lesbians-of-color. Both Terry and Sara stated that they are not concerned with the court system because if they were to have children, they would want a biological connection with their children and therefore would not adopt. They did not discuss second-parent adoption. The remaining participants discussed how sexual discrimination in courts is unfair to lesbians with children. As Judy from the middle-class White group stated:

> I don't have any experience but I think it is a crying shame what some eligible people, regardless of who they are, have to go through to get a child when there are so many children born not wanted...who would you know...these people would make perfectly good parents. Um...not myself, but....and maybe better parents than people who have kids sometimes. So, you know...I mean I can rally about it socially, but it doesn't pertain to my life necessarily.

A few participants thought that if they did want to have children sexual discrimination in the legal system might affect their decision. For example, Eve from the working-class White group mentioned that she had considered being a foster parent. She stated:

> I guess the only thing that I would have to say is I have a very negative outlook on the government in general, and the legal process for just about anything....Yeah, it would definitely [affect my decision]. I mean I think...if I thought...if I had decided to do fostering and the government...who knows they would come and take it away you know, and they could do that because society lets them just do that. I mean it's not just them. I mean it's the whole thing, in general. Look what they're doing with Elian [Gonzales] and that whole thing...

Eve's comment suggests that although most lesbians do not deal directly with the legal system, they are aware of how courts mishandle family cases and enforce discriminatory policies. Sexual discrimination in the courts adds to the larger experience of sexual discrimination felt by lesbians that deters them from becoming mothers and supports their decisions to remain childfree.

2. Rejecting Pregnancy

In addition to the structure of constraints that medical and legal systems created, childfree lesbians had a personal adversity to pregnancy. Although I did not ask any specific questions about pregnancy, throughout the interviews childfree lesbians from every focus group raised four reasons why they do not want to get pregnant: 1) being pregnant and delivering a baby is physically undesirable; 2) they do not have a biological urge to get pregnant; 3) the nature of their sexual relationships does not result in accidental pregnancy; and 4) pregnanc y is not a viable option because of economic or personal reasons.

First, similar to childfree heterosexual women (Bartlett 1994; Veevers 1980), lesbians voiced a repugnance toward pregnancy and childbirth. Most of the participants regardless of race or class stated that they do not want to go through the hassle of being pregnant for nine months or the pain of labor and delivery. Several participants stated that they rejected pregnancy because they had watched a friend or family member go through labor and delivery. For example, Amanda from the working-class White group stated, "... the nine month pregnant and the delivery...I actually saw my last niece born, and I cannot understand how anybody would go through that." Childfree lesbians' rejection of pregnancy because it is an undesirable and painful process supports their view that motherhood is undesirable and their orientations toward remaining childfree.

Second, while some lesbians such as Amanda attribute their rejection of pregnancy to the experience of a friend or family member, others attribute their rejection of pregnancy to a lack of a biological or hormonal urge. That is, they said that not wanting to get

pregnant is a natural state for them. Not having a biological urge makes rejecting pregnancy easier for most lesbians.

Third, childfree lesbians stated they would not get pregnant because the very nature of same-sex relationships prevents accidental pregnancies from occurring; and they were not willing to intentionally try to get pregnant. Participants acknowledged that choosing to remain childfree is easier for lesbians than for heterosexual women because of the nature of same-sex relationships. For example, Sara from the working-class lesbian-of-color group stated:

> Biologically, I think....well I have a couple of good [heterosexual] friends that... got pregnant by accident. You know? And because... of same-sex sex you don't have that worry. So there are...there are...I have good friends that were forced into parenthood because...yo u know abortion ... was not an avenue for them. So, you know their marriages didn't work out and ...they became mothers because they were in relationships and they ended up getting pregnant even though it wasn't planned....

Because lesbians generally do not ha ve sexual intercourse with men, they have very little chance of getting pregnant by accident. Sara's point is that physically it is easier for lesbians than heterosexual women to choose to remain childfree.

The fourth reason why childfree lesbians do not want to get pregnant is because of personal and economic reasons. While most childfree lesbians found rejecting pregnancy easy based on the first three reasons discussed above, two middle-class lesbians-of-color discussed how for them, rejecting pregnancy was a conscious and difficult decision. Their rejection ultimately came from a lack of economic and social support for motherhood and a strong sexual ideology dictating that only heterosexual women should get pregnant. The first exception came from Pam who said that at age 42 much to her surprise she felt a biological urge to get pregnant.

> [F]or the first time in my life it was like biologically it was almost felt like my eggs were crying out, "Its now or never." You know like actually having a biological urge to duplicate yourself...and I had never had that feeling before. I didn't...have it when I was young. You know it's just like... let's get pregnant.

Pam's decision to ignore, or suppress, her biological urge was a difficult one. But because she does not have a partner and is not financially stable enough to have a child, she chooses to remain childfree. As she stated,

> You know your body's saying let's get pregnant. And then I just decided no, you're not doing this now. You're just...you're not going to do it. It would be selfish. I decided it would be...it would be selfish of me to do it at that time when I was feeling this urge to do it, and didn't have a partner.

Pam's statement shows how the combination of her financial situation and her lack of an intimate partner created a structure of constraints that outweighed her biological urge (and any emotional desires accompanying that urge) to have children. It also demonstrates the connection of structure and agency, how lesbians weigh their material constraints and opportunities against their desires, and make intentional decisions to remain childfree.

The second exception to the easy rejection of pregnancy came from Roxanne. Not only did Roxanne reject pregnancy because she perceives it to be too painful, but also because she believes that women should only get pregnant through heterosexual intercourse. Thus, in order for her to get pregnant, she would have to engage in heterosexual acts:

> I'm still in the mindset of heterosexual birthing. I...I haven't gotten to the point of going to a clinic or any of the other stuff. I'm still in the same old natural way of having babies, so therefore I can't go...I don't know that side.

Although Roxanne ultimately decided not to get pregnant, making that decision was difficult for her. Social pressure from, and a desire to please, her mother encouraged her to consider pregnancy and motherhood:

> My mother... I mean you know it's your mother... My mother gave me everything that ... she thought you should have she gave it to you. Whatever it was. So, for me to have to deal with that and it's taken years for me to become strong with my viewpoint, strong with my opinion, and it has gotten me through some worried moments where I might have dipped in the pool to heterosexuality thinking, "Oh maybe...let me see if I can..."

For Roxanne, therefore, rejecting pregnancy was a rejection of her mother's views of what she "ought" to be doing, of traditional gender expectations, and of heterosexual rules. Roxanne's statement makes three important points. First, it shows how difficult staying childfree can be for some lesbians given pronatalist social pressure. Second, it shows how Roxanne, like Pam, used her human agency to make an intentional decision. Third, it emphasizes childfree lesbians' rejection of women's traditional roles because those roles impede personal goals and desires for freedom.

Whatever the reason, lesbians' rejection of pregnancy closes a door to a major route for obtaining children. Rejecting pregnancy, coupled with discrimination within medical and legal systems create ideational and structural barriers, respectively, to motherhood that ultimately lead lesbians to remain childfree.

G. Age Issues

For many childfree participants, the culmination of early orientations and negotiating pivotal factors is that even if they wanted to have children at the time of the focus group interview (and most did not), they felt too old now to become mothers. Participants discussed four age-related issues, divided by race and class: 1) middle-class White

participants stated that motherhood was not an option when they were coming out; 2) lesbians-of-color stated they are too old to have children; 3) middle-class White lesbians feared that they will have no one to take care of them in old age; and 4) childfree lesbians from all groups regretted having no biological legacy.

First, middle-class White participants discussed how motherhood is a new option for lesbians. When they were coming out the opportunity for motherhood was not available. For example, Tara wonders:

> maybe 20 years ago this wasn't even an option to say, "you know okay...well, I...you know I may be a lesbian but I can still have a child if I want"...where maybe 20 years ago it was like...."Okay I'm a lesbian I can't have children."

Andrea confirms Tara's statement when she said:

> there really wasn't a lot of precedent when I was coming out in the '70s. Um...I didn't know anybody who was choosing to have children. The people who had children were people who brought them in from a previous relationship.

In the 1970s, not only did most of lesbians become mothers through previous heterosexual relationships (Lewin 1993), but also reproductive technologies were not as readily available as they were in the late 1990s (Lasker 1998). Thus, coming out in the "pre-reproductive technologies era" prevented some lesbians from becoming mothers.

The second age issue was raised particularly by middle-class White lesbians. They feared that as they grow older they would not have anyone to take care of them. Kristy and Tara from the middle-class White group explained their concerns:

> KRISTY: My step-father just passed away and my mother's had...um...a brain tumor a couple yeas ago and so she's not really with us anymore, and because of the remarriage there's seven kids, so I mean it's...when my step-father was getting ill it's just all of the family, and this huge extended family coming in, and I'm kind of sitting there in the room thinking, "You know I don't even have a partner anymore. I don't have children....Who's gonna take care of me when I get old?" That's kind of the reason I think that...it's not a good reason to have children, but it's a comfort, I

guess, as you're getting a little bit older to know that somebody will care whether you live or die.

TARA: And, yeah, I think just a little portion of me is deathly afraid that I'm gonna you know get to be 60 or 70 and say, "Oh my God, she was right." You know I should have had a child.

The participants' concern shows ambivalence toward their decision to remain childfree, particularly as they were growing older. However, other participants in the group were quick to point out that there is no guarantee that children will take care of their parents as their parents' age. The lack of guarantee offers some childfree respondents security in their decisions to not have children.

Third, several lesbians-of-color stated that they are currently too old to have children. This was particularly true for Pam, who really wavered in her decision to remain childfree. In explaining the events that led to her remaining childfree, Pam explained

when you look back on it, it was really a long series of events. I mean when... I was feeling the biological pressure which was about the time that I was 42 was at the time when a lot of my friends who are little bit younger than me were like 38, 39, and said....decided, "Bing, I have to have a child now. I am either adopting or artificial insemination." And leading up to that...at that time I had been...I was 2 years into a doctoral program and said... it doesn't look like I'm going to be done anytime soon. I don't have any money. I'm not in a relationship. If I did want to have a child, as far as me biologically having a child it's either now or never. Because...also because I could tell through my body changes that...um...I...I'm probably...I may go through menopause before I'm 50, and...and it looks like it's turning out that way. And...and uh...so I...I decided that there's enough children in my life surrounding me that I...I...I've decided that probably.this probably just isn't gonna work out, and in some ways it's a regretful decision. You know like if...if every...if you had enough money in the world or you had someone else to raise a child with I think I probably... it would be something I would seriously consider. Um...and I probably wouldn't have even thought that when I was in my 20s. In my 20s I definitely said I don't want to have children. I didn't feel any biological urge...

Pam struggled with her decision to remain childfree more than other participants in her group. However, participants from other groups also showed ambivalence in their

decisions to remain childfree. Pam's discussion demonstrates how mothering decisions are reliant on both structural and ideational factors. Her lack of money and a partner, combined with her values of a financially stable two-parent family, create a structure of constraints that prevented her from becoming a mother. Furthermore, Pam's discussion illustrates how age eventually makes the decision for childfree women, a discovery that heterosexual childfree women make as well (Morell 1994). Pam later mentioned that she is aware that reproductive technologies allow older women to have children. However, she said that she would have to "win a million dollars" before she could afford such services. The combination of age and lack of financial and partner stability ultimately sealed Pam's decision to remain childfree.

The fourth age issue is that some participants who perceive themselves as too old to mother are also concerned that they have not left any biological legacy. This concern crosses race and class boundaries. Terry from the working-class lesbian-of-color group expressed this concern when she stated:

> One main was....uh you know having a part of me left here...you know once I get older...you know I...I do think about that. I still think about that today. You know is it worth leaving...you know my mark back here, and I call it my mark. You know having a part of me...a Terry and whether it be a male or a female...you know and it will be a part of me left back here on this earth.

Terry's comment illuminates the undecided orientation of some childfree lesbians toward motherhood. However, undecided lesbians have a distinct advantage over undecided heterosexual women. Unlike childfree heterosexual women, childfree lesbians who feel too old to have children but who are still ambivalent can still hold out hope of finding a younger partner with whom they can co-parent, a path that Terry was considering and that several of the lesbian mothers I interviewed took. As Terry explained:

> I want to remain childfree because I feel like I am too old. But if...you know, the next partner that I meet and they decide they want to have...they have to be financially stable first, too so...and they can bear the child.

Terry's advantage is that being a lesbian gives her a potential "second chance" to find a younger partner who can birth a child and with whom she can co-mother.

The discussion of sexual discrimination, work and financial issues, social networks, intimate relationships, renegotiation of gender roles, barriers to obtaining children, and age issues shows how seven factors create either a structure of opportunities that supports lesbians' orientations toward remaining childfree or a structure of constraints that deters lesbians' oriented toward motherhood from becoming mothers. For many undecided lesbians, the structure of constraints, particularly created by sexual discrimination, work and financial issues, and intimate partners, placed lesbians on childfree paths.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the findings from four focus groups with childfree lesbians. The findings suggest that during their early years, childfree lesbians develop orientations through events, experiences, and interpretations of those experiences in their early lives. As childfree lesbians continue through their lives, seven pivotal factors based both on structural and ideational features (sexual discrimination, work and financial issues, social networks, intimate relationships, renegotiation of gender roles, medical and legal issues, and age issues) challenge, and at times alter, lesbians' early orientations. After negotiating and weighing the benefits and consequences of motherhood versus remaining childfree, the lesbians in the four childfree focus groups ultimately made intentional decisions not to become mothers and to remain childfree.

Although the basic structure of the decision-making process is similar for lesbians of diverse class and race backgrounds, the elements of the process differ because pivotal factors create a structure of opportunity or constraint that varies by social location. The effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality fundamentally organize the lives of lesbians and their decision-making processes. In regard to early orientations, race, class, and gender shaped the experiences of the participants' mothers and lesbians' interpretations of those experiences in ways that led them to desire personal and economic freedom and be oriented toward remaining childfree. Class organizes the kinds of experiences lesbians have with children. And racial discrimination can affect lesbians-of-color so strongly that they fear exposing children to that discrimination. Social location also shapes how pivotal factors support or constrain lesbians' decision-making processes. For example, sexuality organizes a heterosexist system that shapes policy and practice in the workforce and in medical and legal systems. It also creates a homophobic ideology that affects issues concerning coming out and social networks. Class organizes the workforce, giving both working-class and middle-class participants a means to upward mobility, thus supporting their decisions to remain childfree.

Despite the numerous factors that deter lesbians from becoming mothers, childfree lesbians ultimately make intentional decisions to remain childfree. The intentionality of their decisions is a source of pride for the childfree participants in my study. As Amy from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group explained,

> I have two siblings right now besides myself who don't have children. Why they don't? I think some of it's timing, poor relationships...um...but I think I'm the...I'm, for sure, the only one who chooses not to because I don't want to have a child ...In my relationship of current, we both have discussed this one issue and we choose not to have children. ...I, personally...my partner choose not to even

> we...we have two incomes, two cars, a house, mortgage we...we could afford a child, a good home, we choose...not to.
>
> But my concern is that...um...the point that...that I would hope that anything like this would do is that...number one women have the right to make a choice whether they do have children or not. That is one of the things that interested me, and that...that being one of the "nots" was...I wanted to be a "not." I wanted to make sure that people understood that not everybody...this is not a phase...this is not a fad...that some women out there don't want to have children. Whether I was straight...whether I was straight or not I would...I would not if I were with a man I wouldn't want to have a child. Definitely.

Amy's response shows a pride in her decision to remain childfree that most other participants share. It also emphasizes that her decision is one she intentionally made once she negotiated the many pivotal factors that present constraints and opportunities in her decision-making process.

Chapter 6

"RAISING CHILDREN NO MATTER WHAT": LESBIANS' DECISIONS TO BECOME MOTHERS

This chapter examines the findings from the four focus groups with lesbian mothers. As with childfree lesbians discussed in Chapter 5 and with previous studies on heterosexual women (Gerson 1985), lesbians decide to become mothers based on a combination of their experiences as young children and on a structure of opportunities and constraints with which they are faced in later life. Based on childfree experiences and interpretations of their social worlds, lesbian mothers developed one of two orientations: either toward motherhood or an ambivalence or undecided orientation toward motherhood. Unlike childfree lesbians, the early orientations of lesbian mothers were not shaped by racial discrimination. There are at least three explanations for the lack of influence of racial discrimination in the early orientations of lesbian mothers. First, it is possible that lesbians who later became mothers did not experience such discrimination when they were young. Second, it is also possible that they experienced discrimination but somehow did not internalize it in a way that affected their mothering decisions. Third, lesbian mothers discussed the impact of racial discrimination later in life. Thus, it is possible that their more recent experiences relating to them as mothers was more clear and salient in their minds than discrimination that they may have experienced earlier in their lives.

Similar to childfree lesbians and heterosexual women (Gerson 1985), early orientations of lesbian mothers are tested and tried by pivotal factors that lesbian mothers face in later years. Unlike childfree participants, lesbian mothers in the study found

copious support for their orientations toward motherhood, although some factors posed constraints that discouraged some of them from becoming mothers. However, ultimately the structure of opportunities to become mothers outweighed the structure of constraints.

This chapter discusses the social processes through which lesbian mothers move to make their mothering decisions. First it offers a demographic overview of the lesbian mother participants. Second it examines how lesbians formulate their early orientations. Third, it examines six key pivotal factors that shape their decisions. It pays particular attention to how race, class, gender, and sexuality organize the experiences of different groups of lesbians in ways that influence and shape their decisions to remain childfree.

I. Demographic Overview

The data for this chapter come from four focus groups consisting of a total of 17 lesbian mothers. Tables 9 through 12 depict selected demographic information about each lesbian mother in the study. Table 8 depicts the demographic information of the three working-class lesbians-of-color. As discussed in Chapter 3, none of the participants in this group had children at the time of the interview. Diane and Kizzy are partners and anticipate that Kizzy will try to get pregnant in the near future. Joy has a new partner who also wants children. Joy has tried to get pregnant previously, but is currently waiting for her relationship to mature before she starts trying again. The participants' ages in this group range from 28 to 44 years of age. Their educational level ranges from a high school diploma to a bachelor's degree. All three participants have similar types of jobs providing customer service. All three are partnered. Their individual incomes range from $15,000 to $39,000. Kizzy and Diane pool their incomes completely, earning a household income of over $45,000 a year. All three participants identify as Protestants.

Table 8. Working-Class Lesbian-of-Color Mothers			
	Diane	Joy	Kizzy
Age	44	33	28
Highest Degree	BA	High school	AA
Job Title	computer help desk worker	customer service representative for health insurance company	computer help desk personnel – but currently disabled
Partner Status	partnered	partnered	partnered
Individual Income	$35,000 - $39,999	$25,000 - $29,999	$15,000 - $19,999
Household Income	$45,000 - $49,999	$50,000 - $54,999	$45,000 - $49,999
Pool Income with Other Household Members?	Completely	Not at all	Completely
Religious Affilication	Christian/Protestant	Christian/Protestant	Christian/Protestant
Number of Children	0	0	0

Table 9 depicts the selected demographics of the mothers who are middle-class lesbians-of-color. Their ages range from 31 to 45 years. All participants have either a bachelor's or master's degree. Anita and Beth are in managerial positions, Desiree is a lawyer, and Miriam is a community health worker. All four participants are partnered. As discussed in Chapter 3, Desiree and Miriam are partnered to each other. Anita and Beth also have partners. Beth's partner is Kathy from the middle-class White group. There is a large range of individual salaries in this group, ranging from below $15,000 to

Table 9. Middle-Class Lesbian-of-color Mothers				
	Anita	Beth	Desiree	Miriam
Age	39	45	30	31
Highest Degree	BA	MA	MA	BA
Job Title	office manager	civil servant – manager	lawyer	community mental health worker
Partner Status	partnered	partnered	partnered	partnered
Individual Income	$30,000 - $34,999	$50,000 - $54,999	$25,000 - $29,999	$10,000 - $14,999
Household Income	$50,000 - $54,999	$70,000 or higher	$40,000 - $44,999	$40,000 - $44,999
Pool Income with Other Household Members?	completely	more than 50%	completely	completely
Religious Affiliation	none	Baptist	Unitarian Universalist	Unitarian Universalist
Number of Children	4	3	2	2

upwards of $50,000. If we factor in household income for those who completely pool

their incomes, the range is much smaller, from $40,000 to upwards of $70,000. Three of the participants claim a religious affiliation. Participants have between from two to four children.

Table 10 shows selected demographics for working-class White mothers. The age range is from 22 to 40 years. Martha has a high school degree, while the other two participants have associate's degrees. The three participants have a variety of job titles and responsibilities, from janitor to supervisor. All three participants have partners. When we include pooled incomes, the income range for this group is between $40,000 and over $70,000. Only Sadie has any religious affiliation. Janet and Sadie both have two children. Martha was trying to get pregnant at the time of the interview. Her partner has three children from a previous marriage and she and her partner share custody of Martha's 11-yearold sister.

Table 10. Working-class White Mothers

	Janet	Martha	Sadie
Age	40	22	36
Highest Degree	AA	high school	AA
Job Title	supervisor at a water treatment plant	retail store worker; janitor	civil servant – dept. of corrections
Partner Status	partnered	partnered	partnered
Individual Income	$55,000 - $59,999	$0 - $9,999	$25,000 - $29,999
Household Income	$70,000 or higher	$40,000 - $44,999	$65,000 - $69,999
Pool Income with Other Household Members?	Less than 50%	Completely	Completely
Religious Affiliation	none	none	Christian/Protestant
Number of Children	2	currently trying to get pregnant; guardian of her 11-year-old sister ; partner has 3 children	2

Table 11 shows the demographics for the middle-class White mothers. This group is the largest group of mothers I interviewed. The age range is between 29 and 45 years. With the exceptions of Grace and Carly, all the participants have bachelor's or

Table 11. Middle-Class White Mothers				
	Carly	Grace	June	Kathy
Age	37	29	45	41
Highest Degree	high school	AA	MA	MA
Job Title	stay at home mom	RN – currently stay at home mom	software engineer	domestic violence worker
Partner Status	partnered	partnered	partnered	partnered
Individual Income	$0 - $9,999	$0 - $9,999	$65,000 - $69,999	$40,000 - $44,999
Household Income	$70,000 or higher	$55,000 - $59,999	$70,000 or higher	$70,000 or higher
Pool Income with Other Household Members?	completely	completely	completely	less than %50
Religious Affiliation	Jewish/Spiritual	Catholic	none	none
Number of Children	2	1	1	3

Table 11. (cont'd)			
	Lilly	Patricia	Rita
Age	37	45	42
Highest Degree	MA		BA
Job Title	social worker	public health consultant	CPA
Partner Status	partnered	partnered	single
Individual Income	$20,000 - $24,999	$50,000 - $54,999	$40,000 - $44,999
Household Income	$60,000 - $64,999	$70,000 or higher	$40,000 - $44,999
Pool Income with Other Household Members?	completely	more than %50	single income household
Religious Affiliation	Catholic	Christian/Protestant	none
Number of Children	3	2	1

master's degrees. Grace has an associate's degree and is an RN. Her partner is a lawyer. Carly has a high school degree and is a stay-at-home mother. Her partner is a physician. The remaining participants all have professional careers. All the participants have a partner, except for Rita. Kathy's partner is Beth from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group. With the exceptions of Carly and Grace who are not in the paid work force, individual incomes range from $20,000 to $70,000 a year. Considering pooled household incomes, the income range is $40,000 to over $70,000. Three participants have no

religious affiliations, while the remaining four participants have a variety of religious affiliations. The number of children that participants have ranges from one to three.

I. Formulating Orientations Toward Motherhood

Similar to childfree lesbians, lesbian mothers draw on childhood experiences and other social factors to formulate early orientations. However, whereas childfree lesbians constructed orientations away from motherhood, many lesbian mothers developed orientations toward motherhood out of their mothers' experiences, past family experiences, and the changing nature of motherhood and families in larger society. Lesbian mothers in the study did not discuss previous experiences with children in shaping their mothering ideology. This may be because unlike childfree lesbians, only one lesbian mother helped raise a younger sibling. In fact, lesbian mothers came from families with fewer siblings than childfree lesbians. Whereas many childfree lesbians grew up in families with more than four siblings, only one lesbian mother discussed having more than one sibling in her family. Furthermore, lesbian mothers did not discuss raising their partners' children because most of their partners did not have any children.

While lesbian mothers do not draw on past experiences with children in formulating orientations, they draw on two factors upon which childfree lesbians do not draw: 1) past family experiences; and 2) the changing nature of motherhood and families that show diverse examples of families and mothers.

A. Interpreting their Mothers' Experiences and Opportunities

With a few exceptions, most lesbian mothers interpret their own mothers' experiences as fulfilling and desirable, leading them to construct an orientation toward

motherhood. Regardless of race and class, lesbian mothers define mothers as nurturing, loving, supporting, and primary-care givers. Whereas childfree lesbians shy away from the responsibilities of motherhood, lesbian mothers embrace it. For example, Patricia from the middle-class White group explained with great warmth in her voice, motherhood is "a pretty big thing, isn't it? It's like everything from the beginning of the day to the end of the day." As Patricia's definition of mother suggests, for most lesbian mothers being a mother means being important to someone and having an identity that lesbian mothers readily accept.

While most lesbian mothers from all four focus groups hold positive definitions of motherhood, they interpret their mothers' experiences differently by race and class, particularly because their mothers' experiences differ by race and class. In particular, four of the lesbian mothers of color (regardless of class) were raised by single mothers. Clearly single-motherhood is not just a woman of color phenomenon. However, research shows that historical and current economical factors that separate women of color from men has shaped an ideology in which marriage is not a necessary prerequisite for motherhood (Blum and Deussen 1996; Jarrett 1994). While two of the single mothers had never been married, two of the mothers were widowed, thus forcing them into single motherhood. Regardless of the reason for single-parenthood, the participants raised by single mothers gained an understanding of motherhood as flexible, covering a wide variety of roles and responsibilities. For example, Desiree, a middle-class Latina, stated:

> I was raised by a single parent, and I think she...she never married and it was just...she's very independent. I could never imagine her marrying now or ever...when I was younger or in the future and...uh...she just...women could do it. She did everything. She took care of everything.

Other lesbian mothers of color raised by single mothers had similar experiences. The

result is that lesbians from female-headed households are able to accept gender roles of motherhood because those gender roles show them how motherhood can be flexible and not restrictive or oppressive to women.

While lesbian mothers of color discuss motherhood as flexible, middle-class White lesbian mothers are similar to their childfree counterparts in that they had been raised by mothers who did not work outside the home. Furthermore, their mothers taught them that mothers should stay at home. As explained in Chapter 5, the economic and racial privileges of middle-class White women have historically allowed them to stay at home with their children. Whereas childfree lesbians reject the gender role of stay-at-home mother because they see it as oppressive, an important number of White middle-class lesbian mothers accept it. It is unclear why some lesbians reject and others accept this traditional gender role. It is possible that this gender role combined with other early experiences (such as experiences with children, discrimination, and society's changing definition of motherhood and families) creates different orientations toward motherhood. For example, Grace from the middle-class White group was trained as a nurse but had decided to become a stay-at-home mother. She might have combined her beliefs about mothers staying at home with more flexible definitions of motherhood, allowing her to accommodate her desire to mother and work:

> But my mother was home with us and I think that that's how I view, that's always how I've always viewed that I should be home. I, I've wanted to be home until I was home.

Grace put her job as a nurse on hold to take care of her and her partner's son. Her partner's high income allows Grace to mother according to her beliefs about mothers. However, after being a stay-at-home mother for two and a half years, Grace is ready to

move back into the paid workforce. Her acceptance of her mother's experiences helped shape her own beliefs about mothers as stay-at-home caregivers. However, as she experienced the constraints of this gender role and as her child grew older, she no longer wants to be a stay-at-home mom and wants to pursue her career as a nurse. Thus, Grace combined her acceptance of staying at home with a flexible belief of motherhood that many childfree lesbians do not envision.

Similar to Grace, Carly from the middle-class White group stated that because of her partner's high income and focused career goals, she stays at home:

> ...we decided that I would stay home and raise the kids and she would work, and so it worked out really well for us because of our ideas about having kids which is that, um, I guess that the way I grew up I believe that one parent needs to be home with the kids. And since having kids, I've kind of changed that, um, I would love more than anything to go out and have at least a part time job, but, I love my kids and, and I have a hard time thinking about going out and getting a job and not being there for them all the time, you know, so, I'm constantly in a battle with that.

Not having an established career upon which to rely, Carly's return to the workforce seems more difficult to her than it does to Grace. However, her acceptance of the gender role that mothers stay at home allows her to remain oriented toward motherhood, particularly given her partners' financial stability. And although neither Carly nor Grace regrets their decisions to have children, they both express a desire to move out of the gender role they once easily accepted.

Unlike lesbian mothers in the other three focus groups, working-class White lesbians did not offer a lengthy discussion about their mothers' or past family experiences. Janet stated that her mother had died when Janet was a teenager. Before she died, Janet's mother had "figured out" and accepted that Janet is a lesbian. Sadie did not mention anything about her mother. The only working-class White lesbian who

discussed her mother in any detail was Martha. Martha made it clear that her negative family experience growing-up shaped her beliefs about motherhood and her decision to fill a void from her childhood. Martha was adopted when she was young. Her birth mother was a drug addict. Although she was not particularly close with her adoptive siblings, she had a good relationship with her adoptive mother, which may have helped her formulate an orientation toward motherhood.

Although most participants had positive interpretations of motherhood, a few lesbians from the two middle-class groups had negative interpretations of their mothers' experiences. These participants reported that when they were younger, they could not see having children. They said they did not want to emulate their mothers' lives, because mothering denied their mothers personal happiness. These middle-class lesbian mothers interpreted their mothers' lives similarly to how middle-class childfree lesbians interpreted their mothers' experiences: as too great a responsibility that denies women the pursuit of personal goals. For example, June from the middle-class White group stated that seeing how her own mother lived, she had originally decided not to become a mother herself:

> I had always sworn up and down that I would not be a mother. I didn't want my mother's life. My mother wasn't, she wasn't very happy being at home and being a mother...and so I swore up and down that I didn't want my mother's life.

June's and other participants' negative interpretations of motherhood led some lesbians to develop an undecided or ambivalent orientation toward motherhood. Thus, through interpretations of experiences born out of social location, lesbians formulate ideational orientations toward and beliefs about motherhood. However, through pivotal factors that I discuss below, some lesbians who are orientated away from motherhood early in their

lives later renegotiate their ideas about motherhood and ultimately become mothers.

B. Past Family Experiences

In addition to interpreting motherhood as flexible and desirable, lesbian mothers discussed the importance of past family experiences in shaping orientations toward motherhood. However, experiences differed by race and class. In particular, working-class lesbians-of-color had positive family experiences that they wanted to recreate in later life. White lesbians in general had negative experiences that they wanted to "correct" as mothers. Middle-class lesbians-of-color had a variety of family experiences that they did not discuss in detail.

First, working-class lesbians-of-color discussed positive family experiences that contribute to a positive view of motherhood and of family in general. For example, Diane from the working-class lesbian-of-color group stated:

> I just always wanted...you know I wanted what everyone else had. For years I wanted...I mean I actually said it. You know I wanted a house, I wanted a white fence. I wanted...you know kids and a dog, and...you know the whole family thing. You know? I think, for me, it has to do with my childhood. I want to relive the childhood with my child. You know? And, that's fun. There's a lot of enjoyment.

For Diane the idea of family, as well as her own family experience being raised by a single mother, helped form a positive view of motherhood and family that led her to be orientated toward motherhood. Kizzy from the working-class lesbian-of-color group echoed Diane's desire to recreate her childhood experiences. However, Kizzy explained this desire as it relates to an extended African-American family and a sense of community:

> KIZZY: I know some of the parts where....say well people get raised by their grandmothers, by their aunts, by different people. I think that's pretty widespread as far as I've seen in the Black community because....I mean it's just normal. I mean it

might...the person might not even be related to you. You have things where you say...so and so is my play mother or my play brother or play sister so there's this idea that it's not just blood that can tie people together but you can decide who you want to be your family, and take them in that way...

DIANE: I agree with Kizzy as far as the Black community...you know for years it's...it's been the family raising you. It's not just your parents. Your uncle will come in...you know and people on the street...um...you know if...if...if as a child I was seen throwing rocks at a window and...um...Susan Jones that lives down the street she would be on the phone calling my mother to tell me, "Did you know your daughter?"....you know so it's...it's a group effort to raise the children. It was. It's not anymore.

Kizzy and Diane's discussion raises three important points. First, Kizzy's discussion of the flexible definition of mother within African-American families helps African-American lesbians form positive views of motherhood. Previous literature supports this finding that African-American communities have flexible definitions of mother (Collins 1990). Second, Kizzy's definition of mother shows that as an African-American, she learned that families do not simply consist of biological ties. Rather, "fictive kin" (Dill 1994) allow her as a lesbian to construct a flexible definition of family. Third, Diane's response shows how strongly connected family and community are for her as an African-American. It shows how she views that connection as a positive influence on children, one that she would like to continue in her adult life. The connection between family and community that both Kizzy and Diane experienced as children strongly shaped both of their orientations toward motherhood.

Unlike lesbians-of-color, White lesbians discussed family experiences. Surprisingly, negative family experiences oriented them toward motherhood. Perhaps in an effort to compensate for negative childhood experiences, middle-class White lesbian mothers transformed negative experiences into a positive view of what mothers can and "ought" to be. That is, negative family experiences created an emotional void that lesbians

wanted to fill by becoming mothers. For example, Carly from the White middle-class group stated that she wanted to mother in order to right the wrongs of her childhood:

> in my family there was, they just had kids, you know. And it wasn't that they loved us or they wanted us around or anything, um. When I was growing up it was, kids were seen and not heard. You know, and I wanted six kids just so that I could treat them differently.

Carly's statement shows how she wanted to fill a void in her own childhood experience. By mothering her two children in a more loving manner than she experienced, Carly is able to live up to her idea of mother as nurturer and at least partially make up for past family experiences. Thus, out of real experiences, lesbians form beliefs and values about motherhood.

C. The Changing Nature of Motherhood and Families

Not only do past experiences and interpretations orient lesbians toward motherhood, but so does the changing nature of motherhood and families in larger society. Many lesbian mothers draw on outside information and observations showing how the roles of mother and the structure of families are becoming more diverse. No matter how lesbian mothers interpreted their own mothers' lives as young children, they had incorporated positive images of what it means to be a mother from changing societal definitions and examples. As discussed in Chapter 2, lesbians are making mothering decisions in a contradictory historical moment. On the one hand, conservative family values crusaders are creating a harsh social climate for lesbians who want to become mothers. On the other hand, societal changes and progressive responses to those changes are creating a social climate that supports lesbians' decisions to become mothers. Lesbian mothers in the study, regardless of race and class, tapped into changing examples

of definitions of motherhood and families to form positive views of motherhood. Perhaps race and class were not salient because in the late 1990s, all families, regardless of race and class, were changing as a result of a changing economy and shifting demographics (Baca Zinn and Eitzen 2001).

To illustrate the influence of the changing nature of motherhood and family, Desiree explained how she defines mother:

> I think...um...society changing so much... my definition of mother is very flexible. Like I knew it could be what I wanted...whether I wanted to work outside the home or not...whether I wanted to be a lesbian mother or not...whether I want to be a soccer mom or not. It could be anything. It could be.I could kind of make it fit for me regardless of my family of origin...

Desiree's comment shows that her orientation toward motherhood comes not only out of her interpretations of her mother's experiences, but also out of a changing society that is expanding its definition of mother. It shows how real changes in larger society shape lesbians' beliefs about and orientations toward motherhood.

Not only does the changing nature motherhood in society shape lesbians' orientations, but so does the changing structure of families in society. Two different views of families shape lesbians' orientations toward motherhood. First, as with motherhood, lesbians draw on societal examples of families having a changing and flexible structure. Lesbians see families as having any structure that does not necessarily include both women and men. In defining family, Sadie from the working-class White group responded:

> there's all kinds of single parents out there...both men and women, grandparents raising kids, uncles...Society has just basically had to adjust. You know? It's...it's just there. It's just how it is.

Sadie's comment echoes Desiree's comment about motherhood: families are changing in

many ways and society is adjusting to those changes.

Second, lesbian mothers draw on societal changes of families, they also draw on societal definitions of families as including children. That is, while families can be constructed out of biological or social ties, out of one, two, or even three parents (i.e., two mothers and a father), most lesbian mothers in the study believe that a group of people must have children to be a family. This sentiment was stated strongly in all groups, regardless of race and class. Miriam and Anita from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group discussed family and children:

> MIRIAM: ...I really believe strongly that family is important, and I couldn't see my life without one. I...I think it's important. I think it's...like a family I don't see two adults as a family so I guess I kind of always didn't really think about how or when or whatever, but I always wanted to have kids. I mean I think...like I said I think a lot about it more now, but I just think having kids is really, really important to me. It would have...even though I wasn't very conscious about it, it would've happened at some point.
>
> ANITA: I guess I feel the same way about I wanted a family, and kids make a family even if...even as a single parent it would have been that way.

Both Miriam and Anita's comments illustrate the belief that children make a family. The desire to have a family and therefore the desire to have children greatly shaped lesbian mothers' orientations toward motherhood. In this way, social values about motherhood and families shape lesbians' values as well.

II. Pivotal Factors in Deciding to Become a Mother

Lesbians' orientations toward motherhood are challenged and altered as lesbians move through adulthood. Similar to childfree lesbians, lesbian mothers are faced with both structural and ideational factors such as work and financial issues, social networks, intimate relationships, experiences within lesbian relationships, the logistics of obtaining

a child, and sexual discrimination, that provide a structure of opportunities and constraints through which lesbian mothers negotiate to make their mothering decisions. However, unlike with lesbians oriented toward remaining childfree or who are ambivalent toward motherhood, sexual discrimination and other roadblocks do not often deter lesbians who are strongly oriented toward motherhood from becoming mothers. Lesbians oriented toward motherhood draw on structural systems of support, values about motherhood, and their own desires to have children in order to remain on mothering paths.

A. Work and Financial Issues

As with childfree women, lesbians' decisions to become mothers are greatly affected by work and financial issues. Whether work and financial issues serve as a support or constraint for lesbian mothers depends largely on class. In particular, work supports middle-class lesbians and constrains working-class lesbians. Because middle-class lesbian mothers are mostly in well-paying managerial positions that compliment their educational training, work supports middle-class lesbian mothers in two ways: 1) by providing an opportunity for them to achieve their desired career goals early enough in life for them to feel ready to prioritize children above work; and 2) by offering them financial security and flexible work schedules so that they can afford to have children.

First, regardless of race, middle-class lesbians express their readiness to have children because they are able to achieve their desired goals early in their careers. This is because their jobs are connected to their educational training and the careers they want to pursue. That is, their class privilege allows them to obtain their educational degrees and pursue careers related to those degrees. After working in those jobs over an extended period of

time, most middle-class lesbian mothers have achieved their career goals, thus allowing them to consider pursuing personal goals of becoming mothers. Furthermore, achieving their career goals in middle-class positions gives them the financial security they need to have children. For example, Beth from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group explained that she and her partner Kathy (in the middle-class White group) established their careers early on and were financially secure when they decided to have children:

> Kathy and I have been together for quite awhile so we both were career folks, and we had kids later in life...Kathy was 30 when the twins were born, and I was 40 when our third child was born so we were in a much different place....Work was never an issue cause again later we were both older, we were both already in career paths, and the jobs just flexed with the kids.

Beth's main point is that she and Kathy both had established careers and secure, flexible jobs which gave them the ability to comfortably decide to have children. Having such secure jobs and finances is part of middle-class privilege that supports and reinforces middle-class lesbian mothers' orientations toward motherhood.

Second, as Beth's comment suggests, in addition to providing careers and financial security to middle-class lesbian mothers, work also supports middle-class lesbians' orientations toward motherhood by providing them with the flexibility in their work schedules that they need to balance work and motherhood. For example, June from the middle-class White group explained that once she and her partner reached their career aspirations, they were not only financially secure, but they were also willing to put their careers "on the back burner." Her experience exhibits middle-class privilege because June was able to quit her preferred job and take a more flexible job working from home. Job flexibility was a privilege that June expressed:

> I think the fact that we're both... in our mid 40s, and at a point where our careers...we've kind of been there, done that. We've both gone to school and

> both have pretty decent jobs, and...have kind of obtained some goals that we probably wanted to do 20 years ago, and... the fact that...we're more financially secure than we were 20 years ago, it makes...it just makes life a lot easier, and I do think it had a lot to do with [our decision]. I mean 10 years ago, we wouldn't have been able to do it probably financially, and so I think that that has...I think it's really helped. I, personally...was working at the university, and when I knew that we were starting to look at adoption...I quit my job, and I took a job where I could work from home...um...and I....you know it's not a great job and I never would have done it if I wasn't gonna have a child, but it's definitely rearranged our priorities, and...and the jobs are...obviously, they're...you know they're secondary to anything else now, and...um...they're really...I think our careers...my partner is...my partner's very career-minded. I even think that...her career has been really put on the back burner since we had a child and, Lord knows mine has. And...and I do think that...especially at this age and being able to kinda say, "Well...um...you know we're not still in graduate school, we're not still working crazy hours, and we're not still you know trying to make ends meet so much" ...really, really did affect...really had a lot of affect on us.

June's story shows how her previous job and financial security allowed her career to become secondary to children. Because they had already achieved their desired career aspirations and because they had financial security, June and her partner were willing to make that sacrifice. Furthermore, because she had a good education and a solid career already established, switching jobs from one with a rigid schedule to one with a more flexible schedule was due to a class privilege in work and education.

In addition to June, other middle-class participants discussed job flexibility and the financial ability to reduce their work hours. For example, Rita is a single middle-class White participant stated that when she decided to adopt a child, she was working long hours. She looked for a job with reduced hours that would better fit with her parenting schedule:

> If I hadn't been able to find a job where I could work part-time...I don't think I would've made the decision [to be a mother]. I don't think I could've been a full-time plus working, single mother. I just decided that. So it did make a big difference to me...how many hours I would work and how much stress there would be in the job made a big difference as to whether I would've even had a child.

Working as a CPA and having a marketable career gives Rita and most other middle-class participants the flexibility to maintain their careers in a way that accommodate their mothering responsibilities. Having the ability to negotiate their careers while remaining financially stable supports middle-class participants' orientations toward motherhood and materially allows them to become mothers.

Although most middle-class lesbian mothers are financially secure in stable careers, several middle-class participants have less financial stability and income. However, because they have college and professional degrees, they are able to take advantage of a number of work opportunities that support their orientations toward motherhood. For example, Desiree and Miriam were in the middle-class lesbian-of-color group but came from working-class backgrounds. They decided to have children at a time when neither was earning much money and Desiree was tired of being in law school:

> we had moved away from [home]....We had no friends. I was in law school. I hated it. Miriam had a job she hated. We're like...hmmm...what should we do? We don't have much money. We have health care. Hmm...don't really like people at law school. Let's make someone who we could really hang out with. I'm not kidding!

While Desiree's comment sounds flippant and unconnected to work issues, it suggests a similarity to research on heterosexual women where declining work aspirations lead women into motherhood (Gerson 1985). Furthermore, the fact that both Desiree and Miriam were confident that they could find jobs to sustain them was partially due to their educational training and current class positions. Both Miriam and Desiree felt strongly that at least one parent stay home with their child. As Miriam explained, because she was less career-oriented and did not have a job, they decided she would stay at home:

> I didn't know what I wanted to do so it didn't really...I mean I guess that helped the decision a little 'cause I knew that I wasn't going to be like some powerful career or something, so...I mean if you're thinking about kids getting in the way of your career I wasn't like really a career-minded person, so...I think...I guess that would've helped the decision or probably decided differently had I been...we're just...we luckily have the same values about kids and daycare and stuff, and so we've always just been flexible. Whoever's at work the other one's not...or work days, work nights or whatever...we've always made it work so we could be with them. So our careers have to be flexible.

Miriam explained, therefore, that even not having very much money, she and Desiree were able to become mothers because they are able to have flexible careers. Furthermore, Miriam acknowledged that her lack of drive for a career affected her decision. Desiree was more career-oriented and wanted to pursue her career as an attorney. The combination of personalities (an ideational feature) and educational training (a structural feature) allowed Desiree and Miriam to find flexible and financially stable jobs that supported their orientations toward motherhood.

While work supports middle-class lesbian mothers' orientations toward motherhood and provides them with a material structure of opportunities in which to realize that orientation, work constrains working-class lesbians' orientations toward motherhood. Working-class jobs often lack financial security and flexibility, and do not support career goals or educational aspirations.

First, working-class jobs do not always provide working-class lesbians with adequate financial stability to fulfill orientations toward motherhood. Although some working-class participants stated that they had good paying, stable jobs, others said that a lack of finances is a major barrier to having children. In such cases, working-class lesbians often waited to be more financially secure before having children. As Pam from the childfree lesbian group explained in Chapter 5, the problem of delaying decisions to

become mothers is that lesbians risk becoming too old before they become financially stable. Similar to Pam, Diane from the working-class lesbian-of-color group delayed having children because she could not afford them. Had it not been for finding a younger partner with orientations toward motherhood, Diane's lack of financial security may have squelched her aspirations to become a mother:

> I would not choose to have a child if I was unemployed and on welfare. You know I wouldn't do that. Children are very expensive and all your money goes to the child....and I would want to be able to provide everything for the child so unless I had a decent job I wouldn't do that, and in the past if I didn't have a good job I would work two and three jobs to make it up and then there's no time. So that's not going to work either cause I don't want...you know my child raised by a babysitter...after I started working and I went to school, and there was all this other business to take care of, and then my income was not where I thought stable enough where I could...you know raise a child, and I kept waiting and waiting, and time kept going on.

At 44, Diane thought she had lost her opportunity to mother. However, since she and Kizzy became partners, she feels that she has a "second chance." Because Kizzy wants children and is younger than Diane, Diane is hopeful that she will still become a mother.

The second way in which work constrains working-class lesbians' orientations toward motherhood is through the lack of flexibility lesbians need to balance motherhood and work. For example, Joy from the working-class lesbian-of-color group understands that she will have to give up one of her evening jobs if she is to become a mother. While Joy has a secure job with benefits that she works during the day, she is also a professional party giver in the evenings. She knows that while her day job can accommodate motherhood, her evening job cannot. She says that when she is ready to have children, she will have to give up that job:

> I'm a...a party giver here. It's going to be kind of hard to be a...be a party giver and have...have a baby too or be at the party when you're 7 months pregnant or something like that. It's just...you know striving to achieve more and knowing

> that to do that I may have to work 2 jobs. This...it's not going to match with...when you're...you know when you have kids, but I would give that all up and just be okay, and be okay with just being okay if I had children.

Joy's statement that she is willing to give up her career, or at least put it on the "back burner" in order to have children, is a sentiment that other working-class participants share. However, putting children first means forgoing part of her income, which as not easy for all working-class lesbians to do, as Diane indicated earlier. Furthermore, it is because of their working-class positions that these lesbians need to work more than one job to earn enough money to live comfortably and/or to pursue career goals.

Third, work constrains working-class lesbians' desires to become mothers by not supporting career and educational goals. A main difference between working-class and middle-class participants is that while middle-class lesbians' jobs compliment their educational and career goals, working-class jobs have little to do with their career aspirations. Many of the working-class participants have good paying jobs that do not lead to the participants' aspired careers. The result is that working-class lesbians must choose between furthering their careers (e.g., going back to school), keeping their current jobs, and having children. For example, Janet from the working-class White group stated:

> my partner and I both have very good jobs. I mean they are working-class jobs...I identify as working-class...um...we both...we could afford to have as many children as we wanted....but school....um....my partner had already finished her bachelor's,...but I didn't. My job I had to work shift work, so it was hard to go to school and...you know working a midnight shift or a relief shift where I'm working all three shifts in a week, and....um....I made the choice to stay at that job rather than quit and go back to school. Um...but I always wanted to finish school...

Janet did eventually finish school. She received her associate's degree after her children were old enough to occupy their time without constant supervision. And while Janet was

able to maintain her job and become a mother, being a mother meant she had to at least temporarily decide between having children and finishing her degree. No middle-class lesbians in the study to my knowledge had to make such sacrifices because their jobs were also their desired careers.

Both middle-class and working-class participants made sacrifices at work in order to become mothers. As studies on heterosexual women have found (Gerson 1985; Morell 1993), work creates a system of opportunity for middle-class women by allowing them to attain career goals, to be financially secure, and to have a flexible work schedule. Work creates a system of constraints for working-class lesbian mothers by not providing financial security, flexibility, or avenues for obtaining career goals. The result is that working-class mothers may delay having a child, rely on other support such as intimate partners, and sacrifice or delay career goals in order to become mothers.

B. Social Networks

A second pivotal factor for lesbian mothers is social networks. Lesbian mothers discussed the importance of two support networks in their decisions to becoming mothers: 1) networks of families and communities; and 2) lesbian mother networks. Although childfree lesbians also discussed these two networks, interactions within these two networks differ for childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers, particularly regarding race and class. Unlike White childfree lesbians who only discussed lesbian networks, White lesbian mothers discussed both lesbian networks and family/community networks. Similarly, middle-class childfree lesbians-of-color only discussed family/community networks, while lesbian mothers of color discussed both lesbian and family/community networks. The implication is that in order for lesbians to decide to become mothers, they

needed the support of multiple networks. In the cases where one network does not provide adequate support, a second network might provide support, thus helping lesbians with an orientation toward motherhood become mothers. Finally, whereas childfree lesbians-of-color do not seem integrated into lesbian networks, lesbian mothers of color appear to be integrated in lesbian mother networks.

Just as the discussion of social networks differ between lesbian mothers and childfree lesbians, so do the discussion of social networks by lesbian mothers of different racial-ethnic and class backgrounds. In particular, discussions of networks of families and communities of origin vary greatly by race, but not by class. Discussions of lesbian mother networks differ by both class and race. Finally, whether each of these networks supports or constrains lesbians' orientations toward motherhood varies by race and class.

1. Networks of Families and Communities of Origin

A main social network that lesbian mothers discuss is a network of families and communities of origin. An integral part of lesbian mothers' discussion of family and community networks is a discussion of coming out. Being able to come out to family and community is important to lesbian mothers because they feel that if they want to have children within lesbian relationships and maintain support of family and community, then they need to reveal their sexual identities to those families and communities. Responses of families to lesbians coming out are positively related to how supportive that family is for the participant. That is, the more comfortable a family or community is with open lesbian identities, the more comfortable and supportive they are of a lesbian's decision to become a mother. Conversely, families that are uncomfortable with lesbian identities tend to constrain lesbians' orientations toward motherhood. How supportive a family or

community is both of "out" sexual identities and of lesbian motherhood varies greatly by race. In particular, families and communities of color both support and constrain orientations toward motherhood, while White families and communities mostly support lesbians orientations toward motherhood.

As with childfree lesbians-of-color, most lesbian mothers of color discussed how families and communities of origin are supportive of many aspects of their lives, but not of their sexual identities. Many of the lesbians-of-color had difficult experiences coming out to their families. As in the literature on queers of color (Mays, Cochran, and Rhue 1993; Morales 1990; Silvera 1995), lesbian mothers of color discussed homophobia and "don't ask, don't tell" policies in which lesbians can remain in their communities if they do not discuss their sexual identities. As explained in Chapter 2, heightened homophobia in communities of color is a strategy people of color use to resist racist beliefs about sexuality. In addition, communities of color with strong religious ties tend to adopt homophobic notions espoused by those religions.

One reason for the difficulty in coming out to family is that it means also coming out to community. As with the experiences of childfree lesbians-of-color, lesbian mothers of color describe their families of origin as tightly connected to larger communities, often times religious ones. Therefore, coming out to family means coming out to community, which makes coming out a difficult task. Anita from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group found the connections between family and community to be particularly difficult because neither her family nor her community were supportive of her sexual identity or her desire to mother:

> the communities that I belong to were...their view of mother and everything was more traditional and... I grew up with my step-dad being a minister and the whole

> church thing, and...um...it was really, really difficult for me to get past...um...accepting my being a lesbian, then getting to the point of telling anybody in my family that I....that I...um...and...um...they...they could be accepting of me adopting a child as a single mother, but for me adopting a child with a partner or having a child with...you know being...co-parenting with another woman was you know taboo or whatever...It's just...it took a long time for me to be willing to...um...take the risk of being put out of that community. Um....nuclear family and church. ...the church was a little bit easier... but not really because I had always belonged to the same church as my parents and it was...you know it was really difficult. But... knowing their view of motherhood... I knew that I....I had to make that decision if I was going to be a mother, and so basically that's what I ended up doing, but it took a long time....several years...

Anita's family of origin now tolerates her immediate family and comes to her family events such as her children's birthdays. However, her family of origin does not view her immediate family as having the same status as a heterosexual family. Anita's experience illustrates the human agency some lesbians-of-color need to challenge the beliefs of both family of origin and church community in order to become a mother. In Anita's case, she found support among friends and lesbian networks that helped her take a risk other lesbians may not be willing to take. However, her family's heterosexist views of sexuality and lesbian families delayed her decision to become a mother.

Other lesbians-of-color in the study also experienced a structure of constraints in coming out to families and communities or origin, but were not alienated from those communities provided they kept quiet about their sexuality. For example, Desiree from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group was told by her community of origin not to discuss her lesbian relationship:

> the Mexican community I remember very much being a part of it...coming out as Mexican and feeling very much a part of it and then people kind of telling me when I met Miriam...they were like you know as long as you don't say it....as long as you're just still a part of the community...as long as you don't make an issue of it you're in, you're still in, and people were still cool with me and stuff...

Because of the response of her community, Desiree understood that she would not be alienated from the Mexican community as long as she did not explicitly come out as a lesbian. Both Desiree's and Anita's experiences within Mexican American communities are similar to the experiences of Latinas documented in the literature where local communities do not accept overt lesbian behavior and disclosure (Greene 1994). Unlike Anita, however, Desiree's mother is more accepting of her sexuality. Therefore, Desiree is able to find family support, even if her racial-ethnic community is not supportive. Her mother's support may outweigh the constraints placed on her by her Mexican American community, thus helping her to decide to become a mother.

Similar to Desiree's experience, Kizzy and Joy from the working-class lesbian-of-color group have a "don't ask, don't tell" policy with their families. They said certain members of their families of origin know they are lesbians, but no one discusses it. Kizzy said that she is not sure how her mother will respond to her wanting to have children because her mother does not approve of DI. Diane from the working-class lesbian-of-color group receives support from her family of origin but not from her religious community. As she stated:

> I've always been out there's no other choice. If you know me, you know me as out. There's no other choice. I've never been in. That's not an option.... Except for church. I'm dealing with that.

The experiences of lesbian mothers of color is that while they have all come against some systems of constraint, they are also supported by systems of support that helped them decide to become mothers.

Whereas lesbians-of-color often find families and communities to at least partially constrain their orientations toward motherhood, many White lesbian mothers receive

support from families of origin. The families and communities of White lesbians seem less intertwined as those of lesbians-of-color. Therefore White lesbian mothers do not risk losing as much as lesbians-of-color in coming out to their families. Having strong family support facilitates White lesbians' decisions to become mothers. While some White lesbians come out to their families of origin at younger ages, many decide to come out when they begin to seriously consider motherhood. Coming out to families of origin is a strategy White lesbians use to increase their support networks. For example, Grace from the middle-class White group decided to come out to her parents when she decided to have children:

> Uh, coming out. I felt like I needed to come out to my family and friends. ... I'd been in a relationship for 2, 2 ½ years, my partner and I. She had tried to have children. She was, it was her doing it on her own as a single parent. And I went through the struggle of can I do this? Can I live like this? I decided, yes I could, but I needed to come out in order to do it. And I was ready to have children right, right then. And um, but first I felt like I had to come out to my family and my friends and, and that was difficult for me to [do] ... It's gone fine and I still have the same friends and same family. It's gone great, actually, but it was a scary thing.

Grace's comment shows how important family support is to lesbians wanting to have children. Her experience demonstrates that lesbians wanting children are willing to risk their families' adverse reactions. The overall response by the families of particularly middle-class White participants, however, was positive.

While middle-class White participants find support from their families of origin, working-class White lesbians' find that their families of origin provide neither support nor constraints. Rather, they are somewhat neutral to both coming out and decisions to become mothers. For example, in discussing coming out, Martha from the working-class White group stated, "I have (come out). It went pretty good. I only had one family member say I'll go to counseling with you when you're ready to change." Martha's

comment suggests that coming out went as well as she might have expected given her family's homophobic beliefs. Similarly, in discussing her mothering decision, Janet stated,

> ...people always ask about my family. It's not necessarily supportive as they don't seem to care one way or the other. They're just....everybody has a family and this is yours. I'm fairly fortunate in that respect.

While the responses of Martha and Janet's families do not seem supportive of diverse sexual identities or decisions to mother, they do not pose barriers in becoming mothers either. It is clear from Martha and Janet's comments that they do not see their families as hindering their decisions to become mothers. However, they also do not see their families as a source of support.

The above discussion shows that the type of support or constraints families and communities provide for lesbians oriented toward motherhood depends largely on race. For the White lesbians I interviewed, coming out to family is perhaps stressful but does not deter or delay mothering decisions. Furthermore, White participants (particularly middle-class) generally have positive experiences with families of origin, and therefore a supportive family network. For lesbians-of-color, however, coming out to family often means coming out to community. As with the case of Desiree, many lesbians-of-color are told not to discuss their sexuality within their communities or origin. This "don't ask, don't tell" practice leaves a racial support network intact, but does not offer much support for lesbians' sexual identities. On the whole, however, lesbian mothers regardless of race need to find support within some network, either family, community, or peers (as discussed below), to be able to decide to become mothers.

2. Lesbian Mother Networks

Perhaps more so than family and community networks, lesbian mother networks are a strong influence on many lesbians to become mothers. Like family and community networks, however, lesbian mother networks are not available to all lesbians. While family and community networks differ largely by race, the availability of lesbian networks differs mostly by class and to a lesser degree by race. More specifically, lesbian networks are not really available to working-class lesbians-of-color and therefore do not create a system of opportunities through which to become mothers. Lesbian networks are more available working-class White lesbians. Finally, lesbian networks are readily available to middle-class lesbians, regardless of race, and create a system of support and opportunity for middle-class lesbians to become mothers.

First, Joy, Kizzy, and Diane from the working-class lesbian-of-color group are not integrated into or supported by any formal lesbian mother networks or groups. As with working-class childfree lesbians-of-color, Joy is integrated into a network of childfree lesbians and gay men. However, she only knows of a few lesbian mothers and is not closely connected with any of them. Kizzy and Diane have lesbian friends who are trying to have children, so they are able to tap into them as a source of support. However, they are not part of a formal support group. The lack of support has made it difficult for them to locate "gay-friendly" doctors:

> It seems to me very much piecemeal. You have to find out whatever you can find out wherever you can. 'Cause I was looking on the Internet, and had this one search engine that claims to be able...have a listing of gay-friendly doctors and so I looked for...for [our area], and it didn't. I was just like, "Oh." I think a more formal network even if it was just a support group or somebody who was willing to...um...be a resource would be...would be more...would be good.

Given my own experience with and integration into formal lesbian mother networks in

the area, I was surprised by Kizzy's statement that finding pertinent information was "piecemeal" and lacked a formal structure. Kizzy and Diane were equally surprised when I told them that formal networks exist in their area. As working-class lesbians-of-color, middle-class White networks are invisible and inaccessible to them. Because Kizzy and Diane are not integrated into any formal lesbian mother networks, the Internet is a great resource for them. As discussed in Chapter 4, given all the information concerning lesbian motherhood that is available online, lesbians can find important information without being integrated into support networks. However, it is questionable whether or not online resources provide the same kind of support as face-to-face support.

Whereas most working-class lesbian-of-color are not well integrated into a lesbian mother network, two of the three working-class White participants are. Sadie and Janet from the working-class White group are active participants in formal lesbian mother groups. Janet has been integrated in the lesbian community for many years and became integrated into the lesbian mother community after she and her partner had their first son. Because they recognized a growing interest in mothering in the lesbian community, Janet and her partner helped organize a formal lesbian mother's support group:

> There was a group of us that were trying to get pregnant or had just had children, or....and we decided we wanted to get together every month for support, and we had been doing that up to the last year? But, when we first started there were maybe eight women, four families....um....and one single parent... meeting, and... I think there were two children at the time. And now there are 14 women, close to 30-some children.

Janet's comment shows how rapidly the lesbian mother community in her area is growing. It also shows the human agency lesbian mothers use to create support networks for themselves.

Regarding lesbian networks, Martha is the one exception to the working-class

White group. Martha stated that she is not integrated into a lesbian mother network. Because of this, it was difficult for her to find a doctor to help her with DI, just as it had been for Kizzy and Diane. When I asked Martha what events led up to her decision to be a mother she responded:

> I've just....ever since I was young I've...I've wanted to have kids, and...um...actually it was after meeting you that...when you told me about the artificial insemination through [the doctor you used] that gave me, "Okay, I definitely have an option of someone that's okay with doing this to go and try it." So...it was about....it was actually knowing of a doctor willing to do it. I called around and talked to probably about 10 or 15 people and they just weren't willing to do it unless it was a father going to be the donor.

My being well connected into a lesbian mother network helped Martha because I was able to pass on information I had gathered from the network to her. However, her lack of integration means that she spent a lot of time and energy trying to locate something that middle-class lesbians and some of the working-class White lesbians can easily find. Her lack of integration and therefore lack of access to important knowledge delayed her actually trying to become a mother. It is possible that such a lack of integration deters some lesbians from becoming mothers.

With no exceptions, all of the middle-class lesbians regardless of race were integrated and supported by formal lesbian support networks. Formal social networks greatly facilitate middle-class lesbians' decisions to become mothers by offering them important information and emotional support in making their decisions. For example, Kathy, who was among the first lesbians in the community to have children, discussed how even the few lesbian mothers she knew helped shape her decision:

> I'm in a moms group, I'm in two moms groups and one is a lesbian parenting one and one is a mixed one. And in the mixed one, there's 11 families.. four of them are lesbian families but the others are not. If I was not in this, this college-based community that had a large lesbian community that I'd been a part of that I knew

> people were, at that time it was just insemination, although since then there's been a lot of adoptions. If I didn't have that right here locally, I might not have, if I had been in [a more isolated town] at the time it might not have even crossed our paths "till way past the clock was ticking. I don't know. So I think it had an impact where I lived and kind of the trends of the lesbian community in this country, um, definitely had an impact. Right place, right time, kind of thing.

Other lesbians in the middle-class groups expressed similar sentiments – that because there are many lesbians in the area having children, and because those lesbians are well organized, lesbian networks provide a structure of opportunities through which lesbians can become mothers. Because of social networks for lesbian mothers in areas well populated with other lesbian mothers, having children do not feel like a continuous battle. Furthermore, the great support of other lesbian mothers helps make up for the lack of family and community support that some lesbians feel. That is, even if other communities do not support some lesbians, being supported by the lesbian mother community is enough to keep lesbians on the path to motherhood. For example, Anita from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group who experienced great resistance from her family and community had received much support from the lesbian community:

> For me, because my family wasn't that supportive...it was my friends, and it was very important to me to hang out with...um...I got into the lesbian moms group before I got [my first son], and it was part torture...part...you know great to be around lesbian moms and...and all the kids, but it was a long 1-1/2 years before I got [my first son]....um...and it was....you know continued to be wonderful to have that...you know group of people...um...after I got [my first son].

Anita continued to explain how her children have complicated medical problems. And while some of her heterosexual friends thought she was "nuts" for adopting so many special needs children, her friends within the lesbian community continue to support her. As she explained, she had "a good group of friends that stayed close, and... kind of...finally kind of normalized my life...my family...."

Anita's explanation summarizes the effects of having strong lesbian mother networks. Networks of lesbian mothers provide lesbians with support for one another. They fill in when family, community, and friends are not supportive. And finally, they normalize each other's lives and families in ways that allow lesbians to feel secure and integrated into a healthy community in which to raise children. Whether supported by family, community, or lesbian networks, lesbians who are oriented toward motherhood require some support network in order to decide to become mothers. That is, their orientations alone do not provide enough support to keep lesbians on mothering paths. Lesbians need real systems or networks of support to help them realize their desires to become mothers. As Kizzy from the working-class lesbian-of-color group stated, the absence of a strong social support delayed her decision to become a mother:

> most of my decision not to become a parent was because I felt like I didn't have a real support system so that has always been sort of a prerequisite in my mind to belong to a larger community and to have a larger support system so I felt like I have a little bit more of that now, so I think that's helpful.

Kizzy stated that now that she feels more integrated into a community, she is ready to start trying to have children. The sense of integration and the real opportunities that social networks provide help lesbians oriented toward motherhood to actualize those orientations. The lack of such support for working-class lesbians-of-color contributes to them delaying their decisions to become mothers. The lack of support from lesbian mother networks also suggests one possible reason that few working-class lesbians-of-color are able to actualize their desires to become mothers. It also may be one reason that I had difficulty finding working-class lesbian mothers to participate in the study.

C. Intimate Relationships

As with heterosexual women and childfree lesbians, partners greatly influence the decisions of lesbians to become mothers. This is true both for lesbians who are oriented toward motherhood and for those who are undecided. Lesbian mothers in the study discussed how intimate partners either supported already existing orientations toward motherhood or encouraged them to become mothers because they themselves wanted children. Several lesbian mothers stated that one of the main reasons they became mothers was because their partners had wanted children.

In discussing intimate partners, lesbian mothers fall into three categories: 1) women who would not have children if they were not partnered; 2) women who would be happy to remain childfree, but who are swayed into motherhood by their partners; and 3) women who would have children with or without a partner. The first two categories differ from the third category in two important ways. First, the first two categories suggest that intimate partners provide a structure of opportunity for lesbians to become mothers. In addition, the first two categories do not differ by race and class. In contrast, the last category of women indicates an absence of support by intimate partners to become mothers. Furthermore, most of the lesbians who fall into this third category are from the middle-class. Most likely the financial ability to support children without a partner influenced their convictions that they could be single mothers.

In the first category of lesbian mothers, many participants responded that they would not have become mothers if they were not partnered. This category is similar to the childfree group who also stated that they do not want to be single parents. However, lesbians who ultimately become mothers manage to find the "right partner" at the "right

time." For example, Patricia from the middle-class White group stated:

> I went back and forth as a young person. I was not going to have kids ever. I would never be a good mother. And I really didn't want kids. And I think that as I got older and I started reaching sort of the biological clock point where it starts the countdown and I, I was a single for a really long time, and um, I thought well maybe I'll have a kid by myself and that just seemed like that was, it was sort of so hard that I couldn't really envision it. And then when I met my current partner she really wanted kids. And it was clear in her mind that she had never been in a relationship where she felt like that was a solid enough relationship and stable enough too, to do that. So, but I, we've been together now nine years and when we first got together, probably within the first six or eight months we started talking about that concept and that if we stayed together that was something we wanted to do.

Patricia's story is very similar to stories told by childfree participants about not finding the right partner at the right time. However, Patricia and her partner did find each other in time to have children together. Whereas Patricia considered single motherhood, many others did not. In fact, whether or not a partner wants children is a critical question for many lesbians oriented toward motherhood. For example, Lilly from the middle-class White group stated that when she and her partner were deciding to move in together "it was the make or break question to me: Well if [having children] is okay then we'll get together. Otherwise, no." Lilly would have left her partner if her partner had said she did not want children. However, Lilly and other participants who had similar responses managed to meet partners who wanted to mother. Being able to find the "right" partner may be connected to the large network of lesbian mothers in the area in which I conducted this study.

The second category of participants had a more ambivalent or undecided orientation toward mother than the first and were mostly swayed to become mothers by their partners. For example, Miriam from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group stated:

> I always liked kids and without thinking it consciously, I think I just thought maybe I would never have any or maybe I would hook up with someone who

> already had some and that would be cool, but it just never really....I never considered being a mother until my partner brought it up. That's the first time I really thought about it....do I want it or not.

Miriam's statement shows that while she expected to have children in her life, she did not necessarily plan on becoming a mother. It was not until her partner, Desiree, raised the subject that Miriam really considered becoming a mother.

Carly from the middle-class White group also held an undecided or ambivalent orientation toward motherhood before she met her current partner. When she was younger, Carly had given up the thought of becoming a mother because she did not think lesbians could have children. Not only did her partner inform her otherwise, but her partner's desire to have children was a driving force for Carly becoming a mother:

> ... we decided to get married. And in that process we went through a lot of thinking about our likes and dislikes and, um, and what we had in common and what we didn't have in common, um, discovered that we both wanted kids. And I think that she wanted kids more than I did, um, and I think about it now and I think that I kind of just went along. And I was perfectly happy with it, there's, don't get me wrong about that... [but] I don't think that I would ever have had kids if I didn't have a partner.

As with Miriam, Carly was happy with her mothering decision and had thought about mothering prior to meeting her partner. However, it is likely that if Carly had been partnered with a woman who did not want children, she would have remained childfree.

The final category relating to intimate partners consists of lesbian mothers who would have had, or actually do have, children without a partner. With the exception of Sadie who had become a mother after she received an emergency phone call from a social service agent asking her to take in two children of a distant relative, the participants who fall into this category are in middle-class groups. The two single parents, Anita and Rita, both made conscious decisions to be single mothers, choosing

motherhood over partners. Anita was partnered at the time she adopted her first child, but that relationship did not last:

> I had been in this relationship for seven years, and for a couple of years we had talked about...or I had talked about wanting to have a child, and it was like no, no, no, no. And it just...you know I would make agreements. Okay, I'll wait a year. You know and then we'll talk about it again. Well, it was always the same so...I went ahead, and once I decided to look into adoption I went ahead and did that, and...um...I actually had [my first child] for several months...almost a year in that relationship, and it wasn't working out. It was definitely single parenting...trying to make this relationship work, and what became more important to me was parenting...being a mom, and...um...I remember saying....I remember the corner we were on as I said this....I'm ready for another child, and she said, "Well, you better find another girlfriend." And I said, "Okay," and that was pretty much it.

Although Anita was a single mother for a while, she later met a women with whom she is currently partnered. Anita's partner has her own grown children and co-mothers the four children Anita adopted. Thus, while Anita currently has support from an intimate partner, she did not have that kind of support while making the decision to become a mother.

Whereas Anita left a relationship to be a mother, Rita from the middle-class White group decided not to wait to have children until she was partnered because she thought that might never happen:

> I had always thought I wanted to have kids. And I thought I'd be in a relationship before I did it, but when I went through my last break up I couldn't see how I was going to get involved with somebody and have enough time to have that be stable and then, and then have kids at a time in my life where I felt comfortable with it.

Rita would have preferred to have been partnered. But she said that given her history of relationships and how much energy they took to maintain, she finds there is an advantage to being single. Not only can she put all her energy into her child, but she can make her own parenting decisions, thus avoiding arguments that develop in two-parent

relationships.

While Anita and Rita did not receive support from an intimate partner, their middle-class status placed them in privileged work and financial situations and enabled them to become single mothers. They both have stable, flexible jobs with good incomes. Thus, they used the support of one factor (work) to compensate for the lack of support from another factor (intimate partners) in deciding to become mothers.

D. Renegotiation of Gender Roles

Perhaps not surprisingly, lesbian mothers overwhelming view lesbian motherhood as a positive venture. But lesbians also experience lesbian relationships in ways that allow them to renegotiate gender roles and make motherhood a more palatable endeavor. Thus the combination of positive ideas about motherhood and positive experiences within lesbian relationships allow lesbians who might have been oriented toward remaining childfree to become mothers.

1. Ideas about Lesbian Motherhood

Lesbian mothers view lesbian motherhood as good for children, good for society, and good for lesbians. The view that lesbian motherhood is good for children and society is not specific to race and class. However, the view that children are good for lesbians comes out of a middle-class White discussion. Participants discussed how lesbian motherhood is good for children and society in their discussion of whether or not lesbians are transforming motherhood or assimilating into heterosexual definitions of mother. As with childfree lesbians, this question generated a lot of discussion. Most lesbian mothers believe that lesbian families are helping children be more sensitive to gender issues and

other issues of diversity, and to be stronger individuals. They also believe that lesbian mothers are helping to broaden society's definition of family. For example, Anita from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group discussed how her family teaches outsiders that lesbian-headed families are healthy and "normal":

> As the stereotype of a lesbian and a lesbian being a mother.... from my experience, from my family, from my community I think I am changing....to my mom's point of....from their perspective looking in, I think I'm helping to educate them. Kind of show them that in their world...um...you know if they were having doubts that how could I possibly being a lesbian be a mom. You know look at these...um...the values that...that you know I'd be showing my children...that you know morals and...you know I've pointed out to my mom especially because she's the one willing to talk about it in my family about....you know she'd say but how is it going to be? You know...you know she's worried about my daughter. Um...you know if that what she sees then that's what she's going to become. It's like you know I'm not going to teach her to become a lesbian or to become a heterosexual. I'm teaching her how to be true to herself, how to you know have self-esteem, to love herself, to love...you know her family, to...to be a good person who will function in society...you know but be true to herself. That's what I'm teaching her and I'm loving her, and...you know and...my mom was like oh... and so I think for...some people looking in I am changing that role. I have never believed that it would be different...that I would be different being a lesbian, but I think for relative people looking in on our family I think it is changing it.

Anita's comment is important because it shows that she views her family as normal, but understands that outsiders see her family differently. However, she feels that exposure to her family is changing other people's beliefs about motherhood and family. She also discusses how her mothering helps her daughter to be a better person. As Anita's comment exemplifies, lesbian mothers believe that lesbians are good mothers because they teach their children to be emotionally strong. Also, lesbian mothers believe that they teach children to be more sensitive to issues of discrimination and diversity. Finally, lesbian mothers believe that they are good mothers because they make intentional choices to become mothers. They discussed how their intentional choices

make motherhood a healthier endeavor for lesbians than for heterosexual women. The very notion that motherhood is a choice places lesbian motherhood in a positive light for many lesbian mothers. As Kathy from the middle-class White group explained:

> I mean if you're a lesbian parent you are making a definite, concrete...often year-long...years, years financial drain, emotional drain decision to become a parent whether it's through adopting or having a child biologically, and....I think that that's a real change from a lot of women's experiences, and that some women are threatened by that you know. Um...because they didn't have a choice. ...so I think that that right there...um...kind of makes us think of motherhood as different...a choice...there's a choice. Wow, what a concept!

Kathy sees choice and intentionality as something that makes lesbian motherhood attractive because it removes motherhood from being a potentially unwanted obligation for women. She also thinks that lesbian motherhood can help change the meaning of motherhood from an obligation to a choice.

In addition to expressing how lesbian motherhood is healthy for children and society, middle-class White participants discussed how lesbian mothering is good for lesbians because it allows lesbians to mother within an egalitarian household. Perhaps this discussion comes out of the middle-class White group because middle-class White women have claimed that historically motherhood has been a source of oppression for women (Allen 1983; Polatnick 1996; Rich 1976). Thus middle-class White lesbians are relieved to find egalitarian relationships in which both parents share household and childcare responsibilities equally. For example, Lilly sees being a lesbian mother as a position of change and envy. Lilly believes that lesbians gain from being in same-sex parenting relationships:

> LILLY: I don't if anybody else gets this, but a lot of straight women act like, "Wow you guys have it all." You know you got it...you now...
>
> ____: You've got a wife. (laughter)

LILLY: You know she'll actually put the kids to bed? I mean or you know....

JUNE: She knows when the doctor's appointments are. Wow! (laughter)

LILLY: Exactly. I mean they're like, "Wow this would be so great to have a partner who is kind of an equal and all..." and I think....I mean they want an equal partner, but you know like...and you hear men all the time say, "Well, I gotta go baby sit my kids which is like oh how irritating you know...it's your kids, but you know that people feel like gosh we have it all. The other thing is I think...I don't know lesbians are one of the strongest people I know and you know you've got all these kids who are being raised in that environment and they're strong kids. They just are. They're you know...um...being encouraged to do a lot of things and think.

Lilly's conversation illustrates three important points. First, it shows that lesbian mothers share mothering responsibilities, which is good for lesbian mothers. In this way, Lilly sees lesbian motherhood as healthy for lesbians. Second, Lilly reiterates how strong lesbians are and how their strength has a positive influence on children. Finally, Lilly presents lesbian mothers as the envy of heterosexual women because lesbian mothers offer an egalitarian example of parenting.

The belief that lesbian motherhood has a positive influence on children, society, and lesbians themselves reinforces lesbians' positive view of motherhood. It also helps lesbians with negative views of motherhood rethink those views.

2. Experiences within Lesbian Relationships

In addition to lesbians' positive ideas about lesbian motherhood, lesbians' actual experiences within lesbian relationships also affect their decisions to become mothers. As lesbians experience intimate lesbian relationships, many realize that there are qualitatively significant differences between lesbian and heterosexual relationships. Lesbian mothers in this study found lesbian relationships to have more egalitarian and flexible divisions of labor, as well as more freedom to pursue personal goals, than in

heterosexual relationships.

As media by and for lesbians suggest, the egalitarian and flexible nature of lesbian relationships allows lesbians to revisit and renegotiate negative views of motherhood gender roles within families. Because lesbian relationships help lesbian mothers rethink motherhood, they support lesbians' decisions to become mothers. Lesbians from the two middle-class groups most strongly renegotiated views of motherhood because they most strongly viewed motherhood as oppressive to women. For example, June from the middle-class White group, who had "sworn up and down that she didn't want her mother's life" was able to rethink her view of motherhood because as an adult in a lesbian relationship, she understood that her mother and she did not live in the same family structure. As Junes explained,

> ...when I was about 27 it hit me, and, um it took another 13 years, but, um, I think that [my mother's] idea and my idea of motherhood is somewhat similar, but, um, her life and her way of being a mother was, um, very much, you know, what I didn't want to do.

June changed her mind about becoming a mother when she realized that she could mother in a different way from her own mother; that is, June could mother as a lesbian within a lesbian relationship. To her that meant more freedom and choice as a mother than her mother had. She was able to renegotiate her view of her own mothers' experiences by redefining motherhood within a lesbian context. Thus, lesbians' real lived experiences reshape their beliefs about motherhood.

Because lesbian mothers come to understood lesbian relationships to be non-gendered and more flexible than heterosexual relationships, being a lesbian mother becomes acceptable to them. For example, Beth discussed how the flexible roles between her and her partner vary by personality, not by gender:

> We both cook. Kathy mows the lawn. I'm supposed to weed. See...supposed to. You know we have very distinct things. I like to cook. You know she likes to do this on the other. I like grocery shopping. She can't stand it. I mean so you end up dividing labor...

Beth's comment suggests that it is the very nature of non-gendered egalitarian lesbian relationships that allowed her to renegotiate any of her negative views of motherhood. Eliminating the threat of strict gender roles allowed her and other lesbians to rethink what it means to be a mother. In fact, it was only until Beth and her partner realized that they could be mothers as lesbians that they really considered having children.

Miriam and Desiree from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group echoed Beth's comments. In a conversation during the focus group, Desiree and Miriam discussed whether or not lesbian and heterosexual relationships are really that different from each other:

> DESIREE: There're differences but they're not based on gender....I see our best friends...the men do all the cooking, they do laundry, they're the neat ones. Our girlfriends are spoiled. I'm like man I would've gone with a man if they were that good when I was out there looking for them. I mean they have good men. They have really good men..
>
> MIRIAM: But I think like...mothers have always been different things, but there's a stereotype that kind of pretends like mothers are one way but...because we're both women it kind of points out the fact that...you know mothers can be different ways...I mean like you say the mothers that we know don't cook and clean, but that's not paid attention to because they're married to a man, and people see them as a man and a wife, and they assume that things are the way they think they are but they're not really that way. You don't go into people's marriages and into their house and see what the mothers do and the fathers do, but I think that...I don't know. [Lesbians just make it] more obvious.
>
> DESIREE: And because we're women...our decisions...we've really gone back-and-forth. One worked full time, one stayed home, one's evening...I mean we fluctuate a lot. We're a little bit "woo-hoo" but...I think we have more flexibility. There's not an expectation that I will always be the bread winner. I don't feel that. In a couple years I could say you know what? Boom. And I think we have that a little bit more, whereas the men in our friendship group...I don't think they'd ever feel like they couldn't work whereas the women more...you know

> there's certain things that I think are still there whereas for us...they aren't as rigid because there are two women. Yeah, I think so.

Desiree and Miriam make two important points. First, as Miriam states, what really happens and what people think happens in heterosexual households may be different. Second, Desiree hits on an important point that in heterosexual households men may be more reluctant to give up their paid work. Thus, even though some heterosexual households may not follow strict gendered divisions of labor, some gendered "rules" still apply. However, the participants' experience is that paid labor is negotiable in lesbian households. Lesbians' experiences of lesbian relationships as being more flexible than heterosexual ones allow lesbians who reject heterosexual gender roles to accept becoming a lesbian mother. Kathy, who is Beth's partner and who participated in the middle-class White group really brought this point home when she said:

> when I had kids it was within the lesbian framework. It wasn't like trying to make a wish come true and fit...kind of an image I had and always wanted to get to of...um...within the male-female context. It was totally reframed because it was stripped. I mean 15-16 on I just thought, "No kids." And then you know at 26...27 I'm like "Whoah, maybe there's a reality to this with two women." And so having kids for me was within the context of with a female partner.

Kathy decided to have children after she realized that she could be a mother as a lesbian and with a lesbian partner. Kathy also expressed that in her experience a lesbian relationship "changes that whole role thing" that exists in heterosexual couples; that is, lesbians are able to negotiate roles with more ease and fairness than heterosexual couples. It is unlikely that Kathy would have had children if she had to adhere to heterosexual definitions of mother. Thus, although some lesbian mothers reject heterosexual gender roles early on, they are able to renegotiate those roles to fit a more suitable role within a lesbian context. By helping lesbians renegotiate the structural gendered nature of

families, experiences of and ideas about lesbian motherhood place middle-class lesbians' onto mothering paths that they would have avoided had they been in heterosexual relationships.

E. Help in Obtaining Children

No matter how much lesbians want to become mothers, unless they use fresh sperm from a known donor or have intercourse with a man, they must interact with either the medical or legal system. These systems are crucial to the actualization of lesbians' desires to become mothers. Lesbians in this study with orientations toward motherhood found that medical and legal systems mostly create a structure of opportunity by providing reproductive technologies and legal services. However, at times they create a structure of constraint by charging high prices for reproductive technologies and maintaining a heterosexist bias that makes it difficult for lesbians to find "gay-friendly" physicians.

1. Medical Help

Working with medical professionals is crucial for lesbians to become mothers. Depending on race and class, the medical profession both supports and deters lesbians' who are thinking about becoming mothers. Of the 17 lesbian mother participants, nine had either birthed, tried to birth, or was with a partner who had birthed a child through DI. Of those nine who had used DI, four are from the middle-class White group, three are from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group, and two are from the working-class White group. Furthermore, of the three who are in the middle-class lesbian-of-color group, two (Miriam and Desiree) had used DI from a known donor, thus bypassing any medical help. None of the three working-class lesbian mothers had tried using DI. Joy

had tried getting pregnant through heterosexual intercourse. Kizzy and Diane were planning on using DI but had not yet started the process. Thus, of the seven participants who had used physician-assisted DI, four are middle-class Whites, one is a middle-class lesbian-of-color, and two are working-class Whites.

The breakdown of physician-assisted DI usage among lesbian mothers suggests that physician-assisted DI is predominantly a White pursuit with a middle-class bias. Physician-assisted DI use may be a predominantly middle-class White means of obtaining a child because of problems finding a physician who will work with lesbians, the high cost of reproductive technologies, and a general mistrust among lesbians-of-color of the medical profession. Thus, for middle-class and White lesbians who can find gay-friendly physicians and afford reproductive technologies, medical systems provide a support by helping lesbians get pregnant, offering legal protection against custody battles by providing anonymous donors, and screening sperm for major diseases such as HIV/AIDS. However, medical systems constrain the options of lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbians by making it difficult for poorly-networked lesbians to find gay-friendly physicians and by charging high fees for goods and services. Lesbian mothers discussed three aspects of medical systems that illustrate the disparity in support by race and class: 1) access to lesbian-friendly physicians; 2) the fears and advantages of working with physicians; and 3) health insurance and the cost of reproductive technologies.

First, as discussed in the section on social networks above, access to and trust of lesbian-friendly physicians who perform DI constrain the options of working-class lesbians and lesbians-of-color, but create opportunities for middle-class and White lesbians. In particular, finding a physician is not easy for working-class lesbians who are

not well integrated into lesbian mother networks. For example, as Martha from the working-class White group stated, she found a physician by happenstance through a conversation with me. Similarly, Joy from the working-class lesbian-of-color group said that she had tried getting pregnant through a heterosexual relationship. After not getting pregnant, and feeling badly that she had tried to "trick" a man into getting her pregnant, she decided to use DI. She said that it had not been easy to find a physician. Thus, finding a physician who can actually help her get pregnant "has become a light over the tunnel...."

Unlike working-class lesbians and lesbians-of-color, finding a physician is not difficult for well-networked middle-class lesbians who trust medical systems. Lesbian mother networks provide vital information about which physicians to use. As Patricia from the middle-class White group explained, through a lesbian mothers' group in which she was involved, she found a physician near her who not only would do DI, but was very lesbian-friendly:

> I think...um...well, in somewhat of a positive way I knew that there were....at least one OB/GYN physician in town here who was a fertility specialist who was supportive so that was...we had already made the decision, but it helped the decision along 'cause I knew that there was service available here locally that would be supportive, and that we wouldn't have to hassle with him. And, in fact, when I went in for my visit with him he brought in... some med student or somebody was along, and I didn't quite know how to say you know...what my status was, and he said something about...he said partner, first of all, he didn't say your husband...he said your partner or whatever, your relationship status, and I kind of stumbled with it and he goes, "I take it your partner's a woman then?" And it was sort of like, "Oh thanks..."

Patricia's comment illustrates how having a gay-friendly physician available supports her process of becoming a mother. Furthermore, her experience with physicians was

positive. Even the language that the physician and his assistant used showed Patricia that they were sensitive to lesbians' relationships.

The second aspect of medical systems that lesbian mothers discussed is the fears and advantages of involving medical professionals in obtaining children. While many middle-class White lesbians discussed the benefits of DI, lesbians-of-color from both groups discussed how using DI or any medically-assisted technology to obtain a child was not an option for them because of their mistrust of medical systems. None of the lesbians-of-color discussed connections between their mistrust of medical systems and issues of race. However, with the exception of Janet from the White middle-class group, only lesbian mothers of color discussed mistrust. For example, Miriam and Desiree from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group discussed how they were well-networked and could find a lesbian-friendly doctor. However, their views of the medical system steered them away from using physician-assisted DI and toward using a known donor:

> We had kind of talked...went to a [lesbian mothers] group at [a friend's] house... and people were talking about the doctor's office gave them the wrong numbered sperm and they came out with a different one and got it inseminated with it...some mishap; flying sperm around, and half of it being dead and having to pay for it, and we walked out, got in the car. I remember...Miriam opened the door...and we looked over at each other and said, "Should we go see John?" That was [Miriam's] best friend from high school. And we're like, "Yep, let's go ask him." We just knew what it meant. That was it. We were done. We went and asked John. I don't remember talking to him but it was kind of made like that. 'Cause I just remember just thinking [working with doctors] sounds too complicated, too out of control, too... just those logistical stuff.

While Desiree's understanding of the medical system moved her away from using medically-assisted reproductive options, she was still able to maintain her path toward motherhood. As she discusses, she was oriented toward motherhood, she had other

sources of support for being a mother, and her partner, Miriam, had a friend who was willing to be a donor. These factors counteract any barriers that medical systems create.

Similarly, Kizzy from the working-class lesbian-of-color group discussed how she was hesitant to work with medical professionals. She said that not only is finding a physician who is willing to work with lesbians difficult, but she was not sure how much she wanted medical systems to get involved with the birth of her child:

> I've had quite a bit of experience with the medical community over the past...well year-and-a-half now.... just trying to diagnose whatever health problems I have yet diagnosed....so I haven't had really good experiences with the...the medical community at all...I need to find a lesbian friendly gynecologist so it's a question of...okay how to go about doing that. That's a big question. And, I wouldn't mind dealing with a...a lesbian friendly gynecologist, but one of my big things is...figuring as far as the birth of the child I know that I don't have...this past hospital experience that I've had I don't...I don't necessarily want to go to a hospital...um...and have the whole traditional birth experience through the hospital. I know I don't want to do that. So I feel pretty strongly about that.

Kizzy stated that if she cannot find a lesbian-friendly doctor or someone to homebirth her child, she will not try to get pregnant. Thus, for Kizzy and other lesbians-of-color, medical systems provide can create barriers and constraints that deter them from becoming mothers.

While lesbians-of-color tend to mistrust physicians and the medical system in general, White lesbians do not seem to hesitate in using medical services. None of the White lesbians in the study discussed negative experiences with, or sexual discrimination by, physicians. This suggests that White lesbians are comfortable working with physicians. Middle-class and White Lesbians who can find and who are comfortable working with physicians discussed two benefits of medical systems that supported their use of DI and their orientations toward motherhood: 1) By using an unknown donor, lesbians felt protected against potential future custody battles, and 2) By using sperm

banks, lesbians felt protected from HIV/AIDS. Because lesbians can draw on anonymous donors from sperm banks, they do not have to fear legal recourse from biological fathers. Many participants stated that they chose sperm banks because of the anonymous nature of the donors. For example, Carly and her partner chose to inseminate at a doctor's office because they knew in the future they would want to do a second-parent adoption. The court proceedings for second-parent adoptions require proof that there is no known father:

> when we decided to have children we weren't sure...um...we knew that legally...we had to have a physician inseminate instead of just doing it at home... because we wanted to do it as legally as possible so that if there was ever an opportunity for me to adopt the kids then we wanted to have proof right from the get-go that... it was artificial insemination right. So... we found a doctor who was more than happy to help inseminate, and that...that was really lucky because a lot of the... doctors in [the area we were living in were] very conservative and so that helped.

For Carly, not only was finding a gay-friendly physician important, but reproductive technology was also important because it provides an "alibi" for the sperm that contributed to the creation of Carly and her partner's first child. That is, it is proof that Carly and her partner do not know who the father of their child is. The security of unknown donors, as well as the benefits of getting pregnant, make reproductive technologies a big source of positive support in the processes lesbians' go through to become mothers.

In addition, DI use protects lesbians by providing a comprehensive screening system that eliminates concerns about using HIV-infected sperm. Across all four focus groups participants stated that the screening for HIV/AIDS affected their choice of donors, but not their decision to mother. Many participants chose sperm from banks rather than from male friends because they were scared of becoming infected. Kathy's

experience of trying to get pregnant prior to the implementation of stringent regulations of sperm banks illustrates such fear:

> Back when I was...um...doing it...it was the mid ''80s is when I first started looking into it, and actually when I started the process that was pre-law...before the law that stated that you had to have frozen sperm, and there was a period that I was going to a [fertility] place...um...using fresh sperm, and I was going there for six months...but I was having so much anxiety... about the fact that I could be using contaminated sperm that....I ...actually had night sweats I was so anxious about...I was waking up in the middle of the night with sweat...I was physically sweating, and I thought, "Oh my God I do have AIDS." I just was like so anxious, and...like when I went into it I wasn't as aware of HIV/AIDS as much, but when I was in the process of it I was terrified that I could be...you know exposing myself to it until I went to a place that had frozen sperm only and was like hopefully doing good monitoring...um...but it affected my process definitely.

Kathy understands what it was like to use sperm when sperm was not being tested and therefore does not take HIV/AIDS testing for granted. She recognizes how the advancement of reproductive technologies affected the process of her becoming a mother. However, for many other lesbian mother participants who started getting pregnant after new laws required sperm banks to test for major diseases, their response to the question, "Did the HIV/AIDS epidemic affect your decision," was "No, I didn't really think about it." Lesbians do not really think about HIV/AIDS in making their decision because they no longer have to. Sperm banks eliminate the threat of contracting HIV/AIDS through inseminations. Thus, without it even being a conscious factor, reproductive technologies support paths to motherhood.

The final aspect of medical systems that lesbian mothers discussed is the cost of reproductive technologies and health insurance coverage of those costs. For lesbians with good health coverage, costs do not pose much of a constraint. Most lesbian mothers in my study, regardless of race or class, had jobs with health benefits. However, for lesbians with fertility problems, even the best of health insurance does not usually cover

all expenses. For example, Beth reported that she and her partner Kathy had health insurance when they were trying to have children. Both of them had fertility problems which led to the use of more expensive medical procedures. As Beth explained:

> ... it was real interesting because we were in a HMO [and] while they will cover... any of the pills the, any of the medical tests...the HCGs...the whole nine yards they won't cover the insemination itself which again became our own cost.

Given Beth and Kathy' middle-class privilege, covering the extra cost was not "a big deal." However, for working-class lesbians or lesbians without comprehensive health insurance and high incomes, costs of reproductive technologies can be cost prohibitive. For example, while Janet from the working-class White group has a stable job with health benefits, but she acknowledges that cost can be a problem for some people:

> Um... for alternative insemination...it's expensive. Um... I guess that's a relative thing. It's...um... you can spend an awful lot of resources trying to get pregnant. And...depending on how high-tech you want to go, and how successful your efforts are obviously. But...um....the fact that we had already been in our positions for ten years each... you know, well... really financially it wasn't a problem like it is for a lot of people. For us, it wasn't.

Despite Janet's working-class position, she and her partner have health benefits and are financially secure. However, not all working-class lesbians are so fortunate, as Janet recognizes. Thus, for lesbians who come from stable financial backgrounds with good health insurance, cost does not deter lesbians from becoming mothers. However, the medical system creates constraints for lesbians who do not have insurance and who cannot afford to pay. Thus, the medical system can cause lesbians to delay motherhood or to decide to remain childfree.

Whereas medical systems deter some lesbians and therefore stifleaspirations to become mothers, for many middle-class and White lesbians, medical technology and physicians provide the support they need to turn desires for motherhood into reality.

Beth from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group expressed how her childhood aspirations had been squelched and then re-ignited when she and her partner Kathy realized that there are medical means available that allow lesbians to have children:

> kids were the farthest thing at that point from your mind until we both started to recognize that this is a possibility....that you don't have to give up those childhood dreams because you're a lesbian. You don't have to give those things up.

Beth's statement exemplifies how lesbians' orientations toward motherhood wax and wane as lesbians address the many factors that exist throughout their lives. Depending on social location, medical systems alter, delay, or facilitate lesbians' paths to motherhood.

2. Legal Help

In addition to medical help, lesbian mothers also find that legal systems both a support and constrain their decision-making processes. Only four of the lesbian mothers I interviewed had adopted children: Anita from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group, Lilly and Rita from the middle-class White group, and Sadie from the working-class White group. As with lesbians who had birthed children through physician-assisted DI, most of the participants who had adopted children are middle-class and White. The White bias in adoption may be due to a general mistrust of the legal system by lesbians-of-color. The middle-class bias may be due to a desire by legal professionals to place children within middle-class homes, as Lilly explains below.

As discussed in Chapter 2, without positive support of the legal system, becoming a mother through adoption is very difficult. Lesbian mothers in the study discussed two main aspects of legal systems that either supported or deterred their orientations toward motherhood: 1) finding a gay-friendly agency or lawyer with whom to work; and 2) mistrust of the legal system. These two aspects vary by race and class.

First, most lesbian mothers found that many people within the legal system support their orientations toward motherhood. However, finding such people is not always easy. Lesbians learn through lesbian mother support networks about which legal professionals to work with and who to avoid. For example, Rita from the middle-class White group had a positive experience in adopting her child. She discussed the importance of being well networked in order to find gay-friendly agencies. She acknowledges that legal workers can make adoption more difficult for lesbians if they want to:

> I think it made it easier that I did find an agency that I knew was... was open to [me being a lesbian]. Um...although I wasn't out in the process cause I didn't have a partner, but I knew ahead of time that...that wouldn't be a problem cause I had dealt with some attorneys who...they actually recommended this agency so...um...I think it made it easier....I think it could have made it...the opposite way could have made it a lot harder if they...I mean they don't...they don't even ask the question...um...and I think they could have if they wanted to be tough about it and if they wanted to eliminate lesbians from the process that they easily could 'cause I wouldn't have lied, but they just didn't even ask. And I know other people...it's the same thing. They just don't even ask.

Rita's comment not only shows how being well-networked helps lesbians find gay-friendly legal agents, but it also shows how once found, gay-friendly legal professionals support lesbians' desires to become mothers. They do so by only asking necessary questions and not forcing lesbians to come out even if their sexual identity seems obvious.

Lilly offered a second example of how legal professionals can support lesbians' orientations toward motherhood. At the time of the interview, Lilly from the middle-class White group and her partner were in the process of adopting three children. They found that the legal system worked in their favor:

> we're in the process right now of the adoption and getting the kids, and we've had really supportive experiences from everybody we've dealt with. I can't even think of an exception in that....um...the one thing that came up...we've been very open

> throughout the process and uh...it was interesting. At one point we were subpoenaed to testify on behalf of the children's testimony, and... the lawyer who was really cool, but he said, "I'm just going to have one of you come up. I don't want them to know that they're in a home with...um...two women" ....but he was trying to be real protective that....okay, we're not going to make any possibility that the parents would find this out. ...and we didn't even think of it. In fact, our social worker said, "Well, this will be the first time they know they're with... Caucasian people." And we're like, "Wait. There may be another thing they're learning today, too." You know it was just really funny...um...'cause people were making it like it was no big deal until that lawyer who said I want to make sure we can protect the situation as best we can so...everybody's been really helpful. Um...and as I was saying earlier you know the...there was a guy from the State Office ... and he's really supportive of... gay parents adopting and wants to meet with us and talk about how can we facilitate this more without getting in trouble with the legislature....

Lilly's story illustrates how some people within the legal system, from social workers to lawyers to state officials, are working to help lesbians adopt children. Lilly believes that the legal system is helpful because there are so many children in need of homes and so many lesbians who are willing and financially able to provide those homes. The result is that middle-class lesbians are finding that legal agencies create opportunities for lesbians to realize their desires to become mothers.

While Rita and Lilly were able to access gay-friendly legal professionals, Patricia from the middle-class White group reminded everyone that if not well informed, lesbians may face legal barriers. In trying to adopt their second child, Patricia and her partner decided to check into an agency other than the one recommended to them by lesbian mothers. At a public meeting held by the agency, Patricia asked one of the

> staff people ...how do you deal with same-sex partner families, and she got totally flustered, like just way flustered...didn't know what to say, didn't have no...like really..."Well, I don't know. I don't think we've ever dealt with that before." ... and then she said, "Well I just...we're going to have to get back with you. I'll have to give you a call back." And so I left my name and my work phone number, not my home phone number, but I left my name and my number and they never called so... I was glad that we already knew somebody from another agency.

Patricia's experience shows that not all agencies support lesbians' desires to adopt children. This experience echoes the experience of other lesbians documented in the literature (Martin 1993). It also shows the importance of being well-networked in order to find a gay-friendly agency. The fact that three out of the four lesbian mothers in the study who adopted children are from the middle-class emphasizes the connection between networks and finding supportive legal help. Because many working-class lesbians are not integrated into lesbian mother networks, finding gay-friendly legal agencies and professionals may be more difficult for them than it is for middle-class lesbians.

The second aspect of legal systems that lesbian mothers discussed is a mistrust of legal systems. While being well-networked and knowing who to work with supports many middle-class and White lesbians' desires to mother, a general mistrust of legal systems can deter working-class lesbians and lesbians-of-color's from obtaining legal help. For those people, neither adoption nor second-parent adoption appeared to be real options. For example, Janet from the working-class White group discussed how she resents the fact that second-parent adoption requires a home study. In addition, she does not trust the legal system enough to get involved with it:

> I've tried to stay below the...below the radar of the courts, and the medical community, and so far have been fairly fortunate...I mean, we're living how we want to live without getting terribly involved in the courts...

Desiree and Miriam from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group echo Janet's mistrust of legal and medical systems. The origin of their mistrust is based on their knowledge of past racial, gender, and sexual discrimination within the courts, as Desiree explained:

> I remember telling people in law school...my lesbian professor...we weren't going to involve the court system. I thought we should and Miriam said no.

> When have they ever treated women, people of color, or lesbian/gay people fairly? Just stay away from it. So here I am in law school and an attorney, and I haven't done anything legally. And I think our bottom line is we trust the kid's dad, and once you get the system involved...the system is involved.

Desiree's statement shows how sexual, racial, and gender discrimination in the courts thwarted any interest she and Miriam had in going through a second-parent adoption. Miriam's mistrust of medical and legal systems translates into the belief that institutional support is necessary for creating families:

> I'm not into it. I'm just not like a legal official...paperwork-guided person or whatever. If you want to have a family you have a family....you want to ...do whatever you want to do. It has nothing to do with any legal or medical [issues].

Desiree and Miriam were the only lesbians in the study, however, who managed to bypass both legal and medical systems in becoming mothers. They inseminated at home using fresh sperm from a known donor and they decided not to involve courts to legalize their family connections. However, all other participants with children used the services and help of legal and medical systems to become mothers. Their experiences show that medical and legal systems create systems of support and opportunity that help lesbians achieve their goals of becoming mothers. Furthermore, the participants' experiences suggest that without institutional support, becoming a mother is very difficult for many lesbians.

F. Sexual Discrimination

The last pivotal factor that lesbians discussed is sexual discrimination. As with childfree lesbians, sexual discrimination creates a barrier through which lesbians must pass in order to become mothers. However, whereas sexual discrimination deterred lesbians in the childfree groups from becoming mothers, it did not deter lesbians who

were oriented toward motherhood from achieving that goal. Lesbians oriented toward motherhood rely on other factors that support their orientations. For example, Patricia from the middle-class White group describes a situation that happened while she was at work:

> I do public speaking and I do training for my job and one of the topics I talk about is homosexuality. And I don't come out as a trainer, I don't say anything about myself. And I think that when I'm dressed up at work I think a lot of people don't get any vibes off me, so I had an experience when we trying to get pregnant where I was in a training group and we were talking, we were doing this value statement exercise about homosexuality: gay men and lesbians should be allowed to get married. And this one woman just went off, totally off, and... she said, "You know we've got all those lesbians up [where I live] and they're raising kids and it's just sick. It's just sick. They all ought to be terminated." And that was the word she used....It was a big reality check for me. It was like, "oh shoot, I didn't think people like that still existed."

Although Patricia was surprised and sickened by this display of homophobia, it did not deter her from becoming a mother. Support from her partner, her family, a lesbian mother network, and the medical and legal community far outweighed one woman's homophobic comment.

While sexual discrimination does not deter lesbians from becoming mothers, it does affect them enough to develop strategies of resistance. One strategy that lesbian mothers develop to confront sexual discrimination is to come out. Coming out forces people and institutions to address their own homophobia. It is a strategy that helps lesbians determine who are their friends and foes are. Diane from the working-class lesbian-of-color group explained how she uses coming out to shield herself and her family from sexual discrimination:

> ... if we are strong about [being a lesbian family] and matter of fact, and this is the way it is....deal with it, in my experiences...um...that works. ... if you're raising a child in a lesbian household and you're in the closet what's that telling the child? You know....Oh, it's okay in the house, but...you know when we go outside don't

call me that. That's not right. You know? That just makes it...makes it like it's wrong. You know we should be ashamed. It's not like that. It shouldn't be like that.

Diane came out because it "works for her" in terms of her own identity and in addressing other people's homophobia. Diane also thinks coming out is a good strategy to teach children that being part of a lesbian family is a source of pride.

A second way many lesbian mothers resist sexual discrimination is by moving into communities that are accepting of lesbian families. For example, June from the middle-class White group has a child who is deaf. She and her family live in a conservative town. She described her fears of living there based both on her family structure and on her child's disability:

> I mean we are part of society and all that stuff does kind of sink in. You know, you hear [about discrimination] and you think about it and, oh are they going to crucify [my daughter] because she has two mothers? and for us, um, we live out in the middle of nowhere too, and um, we've been thinking about moving for a variety of reasons but one of them is just so she'll, she'll be part of a community and she won't be the only one. ...She's also deaf so she has issues about schooling but, um, just, just finding a community I think is important. I mean, probably for yourself as well as your kids, but um, when we were thinking about having kids we were always thought about where are we going to live to have the kids. You know I live out in ... a very conservative little, little town, and um, the schools are bad so I wouldn't have her go there. If the schools were good we might stay, but, we're definitely going to think about buying, you know, in a community where she won't be [hassled]...

Other lesbian mothers echoed June's fears and relied on strategy of selecting more friendly communities in which to live. Of course the ability to move depends on financial resources, but the desire to find friendly communities was expressed by lesbians from all groups. For example, Diane from the working-class lesbian-of-color group stated that she feared that her child would face discrimination based on race, gender, and sexuality:

> You're...you're black, and if...and if it's a girl you're female, and your parents are lesbians you know...it's just...it's just one more thing.

Diane's response was to look for a community that would readily accept her family. However, as Diane's partner Kizzy explained, finding such a community may be difficult:

> ... they have a couple of more Afrocentric schools in this area...charter schools. And I think well, I would like to have my child have a more Afrocentric education, but a big thing would be how would I....be received as a lesbian parent. Would that be different?

The discrimination that Diane and Kizzy face versus the discrimination that White participants face differs. However, lesbians' response to that discrimination is to search for a more accepting community.

The final strategy that lesbian mothers use to resist sexual discrimination is to draw on positive beliefs about lesbian motherhood to show outsiders how lesbian-headed families are good for society. Not only does this strategy of resistance show the joy lesbian mothers get out of being mothers, but it also shows the intentional nature of their decisions. For example, Anita from the middle-class lesbian-of-color group who had faced much adversity from family, friends, and her community in becoming a mother stated:

> with my family [of origin] it's basically I'm there.... ...I'm invited to family events and you know my family comes to my house for my kids' birthdays, but it's very, very different ....my family is not of the same....in my family's eyes, my family is not at the same....Oh, what do you call it? The same rank or level or.... Yeah, as my brothers families. I mean those are "real families"...you know mom and dad and kids. Mom, dad, and kids. And mine is ...me and my lesbian partner and you know? And it doesn't feel good, but ... our choice of family is a lot different. I mean we have a wonderful family of choice, very loving, very supportive, very good for my kids in our family.

Anita contrasts her family of origin to her immediate family, making it clear that she has very positive feelings about her immediate family, (i.e., the one she has created), and

more negative feelings about her family of origin. And while other lesbians do not have such negative experiences with their families of origin, many feel that they are intentionally creating positive family experiences for themselves and their children. In some ways, lesbian mothers feel that the creation of positive family experiences counters the sexual discrimination they may experience.

Chapter Summary

This chapter examined the findings from four focus groups with lesbian mothers. My analysis suggests that lesbian mothers develop different orientations toward motherhood and remaining childfree through events and experiences in their early lives. Interpreting their mothers' experiences, evaluating their own past family experiences, and understanding the changing nature of motherhood and families in society leads lesbian mothers to develop a combination of two orientations toward motherhood: 1) a desire for motherhood; and 2) an indecision toward motherhood or remaining childfree. As lesbian mothers continue through their lives, six main factors (work and financial issues, social networks, intimate relationships, renegotiation of gender roles, medical and legal issues, and sexual discrimination) support and challenge lesbians' early orientations. While some of these factors contain ideational features, all of the factors rely heavily on structural features. Lesbian mothers draw on their early orientations and values concerning motherhood to negotiate these structural and ideational factors and ultimately decide to become mothers.

Although the basic decision-making process is similar for lesbians of diverse class and race backgrounds, how pivotal factors support and constrain different groups of lesbians varies by social location. As with childfree lesbians, variations by social

location result from how race, class, gender, and sexuality fundamentally organize the lives of different groups of lesbians. The effects of race, class, gender, and sexuality are evident in all aspects of the decision-making process. Race, class, and gender organize lesbians' mothers' childhood experiences in ways that lead many to formulate orientations toward motherhood. As lesbian mothers continue through life, pivotal factors shaped by race, class, gender, and sexuality create different structures of opportunities and constraints for different groups of lesbians. To become mothers, however, the structures of opportunity must out-weigh the structures of constraints. That is, an early orientation toward motherhood is not enough to overcome barriers to motherhood presented by sexual, as well as race, class, and gender structures. Lesbians need real systems of support to help them make intentional decisions to become mothers. As Lilly from the middle-class White group stated:

> what I hear in common [in the focus group] is there's something about the way we are that we just want children, and we were gonna get...we were gonna have children or adopt children almost no matter what the situation is.

What Lilly is saying is that for lesbians who are oriented toward motherhood, who have careers that support the balance between work and motherhood, who have the means to find and pay for gay-friendly physicians and legal agencies, who have family and community support, and who can either afford to be single-parents or who find the right partner at the right time, very little else can stand in their way of becoming mothers.

Chapter 7

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of my study is to examine how lesbians decide to become mothers or remain childfree. I am particularly interested in two main research questions: 1) How the decisions of lesbians to become mothers or to remain childfree are embedded in social, cultural, and personal processes; and 2) What role race, class, gender, and sexuality play in shaping these processes. In this chapter, I answer my two main research questions by discussing three major findings. Then I discuss the sociological implications of these findings. Finally, I suggest future research based on my study.

I. Major Findings

As discussed in Chapters 4 through 6, the data reveal many findings concerning lesbians' decisions to become mothers and remain childfree. However, there are three major findings that answer the two main research questions and that highlight key issues raised by the study. The first finding is that while the structure of lesbians' and heterosexual women's decision-making processes are similar, the substance of the processes differs because of social location. The second finding is that sexuality, together with race, class, and gender, matters in shaping lesbians' decision-making processes. The third finding is that the interaction between structure and agency is key to lesbians' decision-making process. Lesbians use their agency to resist sexual discrimination and to make intentional mothering decisions.

It is difficult to discuss these findings separate from one another. Therefore, the following discussion highlights all three findings by comparing the decision-making

processes of lesbians with those of heterosexual women. As I discussed previously, my study draws heavily on the work and concepts of Gerson's 1985 study on heterosexual women's decision-making processes regarding motherhood and work. In comparing my study with Gerson's, I found that while the structure of the decision-making process is the very similar for lesbians and heterosexual women, the substance of the process is different because the process is based on social location. That is, lesbians and heterosexual women go through a similar decision-making process, but how they experience that process differs by race, class, gender, and sexuality.

As Figure 1 shows and looking to Gerson's (1985) work, I found that similar to heterosexual women, lesbians form orientations toward or away from motherhood and remaining childfree early in life based on childhood experiences and interpretations of those experiences. Gerson discusses these early orientations as "baselines for adult life" (p. 20) that direct women's desires toward a "domestic" or "nondomestic" life. In Gerson's study early life experiences include childhood socialization (particularly mother-daughter dynamics), parental expectations, family dynamics, and the wider social milieu (e.g., cultural values) (Gerson 1985:44-59). Gerson examines how gender roles and expectations, as well as class status and mother's relationship to work, shape early life experiences and heterosexual women's interpretations of those experiences. Similar to Gerson, I found that lesbians' interpretations of their mother's experiences, experiences with children (particularly for childfree lesbians), and the changing nature of motherhood and families in larger society (particularly for lesbian mothers), shape lesbians' early life experiences and in turn, their orientations toward motherhood or remaining childfree. I also found that gender and class, as well as race, shape the

experiences and lesbians' interpretations of those experiences.

For example, many lesbians-of-color in my study come from single-mother households and grew up believing that mothers can have multiple and flexible roles. This belief leads lesbians from such households to be oriented toward motherhood. However, because of historical factors based on racial discrimination (Collins 1990), lesbians of color in my study also see motherhood as a source of power and a responsibility in maintaining families and communities of color. This view leads some lesbians-of-color to interpret their mothers' lives as having overwhelming responsibility. To distance themselves from such responsibility, some lesbians-of-color develop orientations toward remaining childfree. In addition, because race and class privilege have historically allowed (or forced) middle-class White women to stay at home and raise children, many middle-class White lesbians view their mothers' lives as oppressive. Many interpret their mothers' lives as denying opportunities to pursue educational and career goals. While some middle-class White lesbians accept the gender role of stay-at-home mom, many do not – leading them to be orientated toward remaining childfree. Finally, because mothers in working-class White families struggle financially and emotionally to keep their families together (Rubin 1992), they teach their daughters to be strong and independent. This leads some lesbians to have orientations toward personal and economic freedom. Thus, lesbians of diverse racial-ethnic and class backgrounds interpret their mothers' experiences and opportunities differently based on how their mothers' experiences and opportunities are shaped by race, class, and gender. That is, lesbians' ideational interpretations and orientations develop out of structurally induced experiences.

While many of the early childhood experiences and interpretations of those

experiences are similar for lesbians and heterosexual women, unlike studies on heterosexual women, I found that racial discrimination leads some lesbians-of-color, particularly African-American lesbians, to develop orientations toward remaining childfree. Perhaps the most disturbing finding of the study was that African-American lesbians from the middle-class childfree groups remain childfree partly because they cannot see raising children, particularly female children, in a racist, sexist, and heterosexist world. Racial discrimination from the outside world, coupled with homophobia within communities of color, lead some lesbians to be oriented away from motherhood at early ages. This finding illustrates how race can fundamentally change the substance of the decision-making process.

Whatever the basis for the development of different orientations, Gerson found that early orientations are not good predictors of real outcomes in adult life. Gender, class, and women's relationship to work greatly shape whether or not heterosexual women become mothers or remain childfree. More specifically, marital stability, husband's wages, women's experiences in the labor force, and support networks for domestic wives, shape women's mothering decisions (Gerson 1985:193-195).

I too found that real life factors in adult lesbians' lives reshape and alter the paths that lesbians thought they would take, or wanted to take, based on their early orientations. Gerson calls these factors, "turning points" (p. 69). Turning points create a "structure of opportunities" that trigger change "in women's life directions" (p. 70). Although Gerson acknowledges the influence of ideational features (e.g., values, ideas, and psychological factors), the turning points Gerson discusses are predominantly structural in nature. The factors I found to be salient for shaping lesbians' decision-making processes contain

more of a combination of structural and ideational features than the factors Gerson examines. I call these "pivotal factors" to distinguish from Gerson's more structural turning points.

The main ideational pivotal factor in lesbians' decision-making processes concerns the renegotiation of gender roles. As I discussed in Chapter 6, many White middle-class lesbians are oriented toward remaining childfree as girls because they interpret motherhood as oppressive to women. However, in adult life, many develop positive views of lesbian motherhood and experience egalitarian lesbian relationships. Thus, in adult lives, lesbians are able to renegotiate their views of motherhood. That is, while they see heterosexual motherhood as oppressive to women, their ideas about and experiences with egalitarian lesbian relationships help them develop a view of lesbian motherhood as healthy for themselves and society. Thus, a combination of ideational features (i.e., views of lesbian motherhood) and structural features (non-gendered egalitarian lesbian relationships) alter their early orientations and place them on paths to motherhood.

This finding not only highlights an ideational feature, but it also highlights how sexuality, together with gender, fundamentally organizes lesbians' decision-making processes. I found that sexuality shapes lesbians' decision-making processes in different ways than it does for heterosexual women. That is, sexuality presents a different structure of opportunities and constraints for different groups of women. As the above discussion suggests, sexuality together with gender can help lesbians' become mothers. The egalitarian division of labor in lesbian relationships allows some lesbians to move into motherhood more comfortably than some heterosexual women. Partnered lesbians

expect that they will have a co-mother with whom they can share mothering and household responsibilities. As research on the division of labor in heterosexual households suggests (Hochschild 1989), heterosexual women do not necessarily receive, or even expect to receive, such support from their male partners.

Unlike the relationship between sexuality and gender, sexuality in general tends to deter lesbians from becoming mothers. For the most part, sexuality fundamentally organizes heterosexist policies and homophobic ideology such that many lesbians decide either decide not to become mothers or are not materially able to become mothers. For example, one of the most glaring findings that came out of my research is that childfree lesbians' experiences with sexual discrimination steers them toward remaining childfree. Heterosexist family policy and homophobic ideology leads some lesbians to dismiss motherhood because they believe it is unfair to raise children in a homophobic and heterosexist world. In addition, sexuality shapes decision-making processes differently for lesbians than for heterosexual women because lesbians do not receive the same medical and legal support as heterosexual women. The denial of same-sex adoption, domestic partner benefits, and medical assistance to lesbians lead some lesbians to remain childfree. As Andrea from the middle-class White childfree group stated, the effort it takes to obtain a child given the heterosexist bias in legal and medical institutions steers many lesbians onto childfree paths.

Similar to sexuality in general, as discussed earlier sexuality together with race (and gender) leads some lesbians to dismiss motherhood because lesbians-of-color do not want to subject children to racial and sexual discrimination. Sexuality together with race also deters lesbians-of-color from becoming mothers because they do not receive the

necessary support from social networks. Homophobia in communities of color and racism in lesbian communities leaves lesbians-of-color with less support than White lesbians for becoming mothers.

While sexuality together with gender steers lesbians toward motherhood and sexuality alone and sexuality together with race steer lesbians toward remaining childfree, the effect of sexuality together with class varies by class position. For example, middle-class lesbians who are in steady jobs with good benefits, and who are partnered with women in similar positions, are not as affected as working-class lesbians by the lack of domestic partnership benefits, health benefits, or the high cost of fertility clinics. Working-class lesbians who do not have stable or high-paying jobs, who do not have domestic partner or health benefits, and who are partnered with women in similar unstable financial situations, are greatly deterred from becoming mothers because they cannot afford it.

Thus, sexuality, together with race, class, and gender, organizes how pivotal factors shape decision-making processes. But sexuality together with race, class, and gender also organizes what factors are pivotal are important in the decision-making process. For example, studies on the decision-making processes of heterosexual women do not discuss the renegotiation of gender roles, medical and legal support, and sexual discrimination (or even sexual privilege) as salient. However, because of differences in the social world organized by sexuality, these factors are pivotal for lesbians. Furthermore, although work, social networks, intimate relationships, and age are salient factors for both lesbians and heterosexual women (Gerson 1985; McMahon 1995;

Veevers 1980), the substance of these factors differs by social location, as seen in the previous discussion about class issues and work.

Although pivotal factors (based on social location) may alter the orientations and/or paths concerning motherhood and remaining childfree, one of the major differences I found between lesbians and heterosexual women is that more women in my study are able to remain on paths set forth by their early orientations than in Gerson's study. That is, lesbians strongly oriented one way or the other negotiate pivotal factors in ways that allow them to remain on the paths they were earlier oriented toward. Drawing on their early orientations, lesbians negotiate social and cultural factors to make intentional decisions to become mothers or remain childfree. Clearly this is not true for all lesbians. And clearly pivotal factors provide structures of opportunity and constraint in which lesbians make their decisions. However, lesbians exert an enormous amount of agency to shape their decisions in two ways. First, both childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers resist sexual discrimination by creating social networks to meet their individual and group needs. The creation of networks is best exemplified through popular media by and for lesbians. In my content analysis of popular lesbian media, I found that lesbians develop networks of economic and work-related support, social networks, avenues for political activism, ways to address health and safety issues, entertainment, religious needs, and medical and legal support. These networks and systems of support suggest that lesbians resist sexual discrimination by creating their own means of improving their material, social, and cultural , ways of fighting back against heterosexist policy and homophobic ideology, and finding ways to improve their quality of their lives. Although there is not much media by and for lesbians that address issues of race and class, lesbian

media offer support to lesbians in general, and lesbian mothers specifically, and show how lesbians have created support networks that undermines politically, socially, and culturally conservative policies and ideology.

The second way that lesbians' exert human agency in the face of structural constraints is by making intentional mothering decisions. Sexuality shapes the intentional nature of the decision-making process and allows lesbians to negotiate structural and ideational factors in ways that heterosexual women cannot. Because of the barriers sexual discrimination creates in work, social networks, and medical and legal systems, and because it is not easy for lesbians to get pregnant or adopt children, lesbian mothers must make intentional decisions to become mothers. Very few, if any, lesbians become mothers by accident (Chabot 1998; Stacey 1996). Lesbians cannot rely on happenstance or societal support to become mothers. Rather, in order to become mothers, lesbians rely on their inner desires and orientations toward motherhood as motivation for finding the necessary resources to become mothers. As my study suggests, finding such resources is much easier for lesbians who are privileged particularly by race and class.

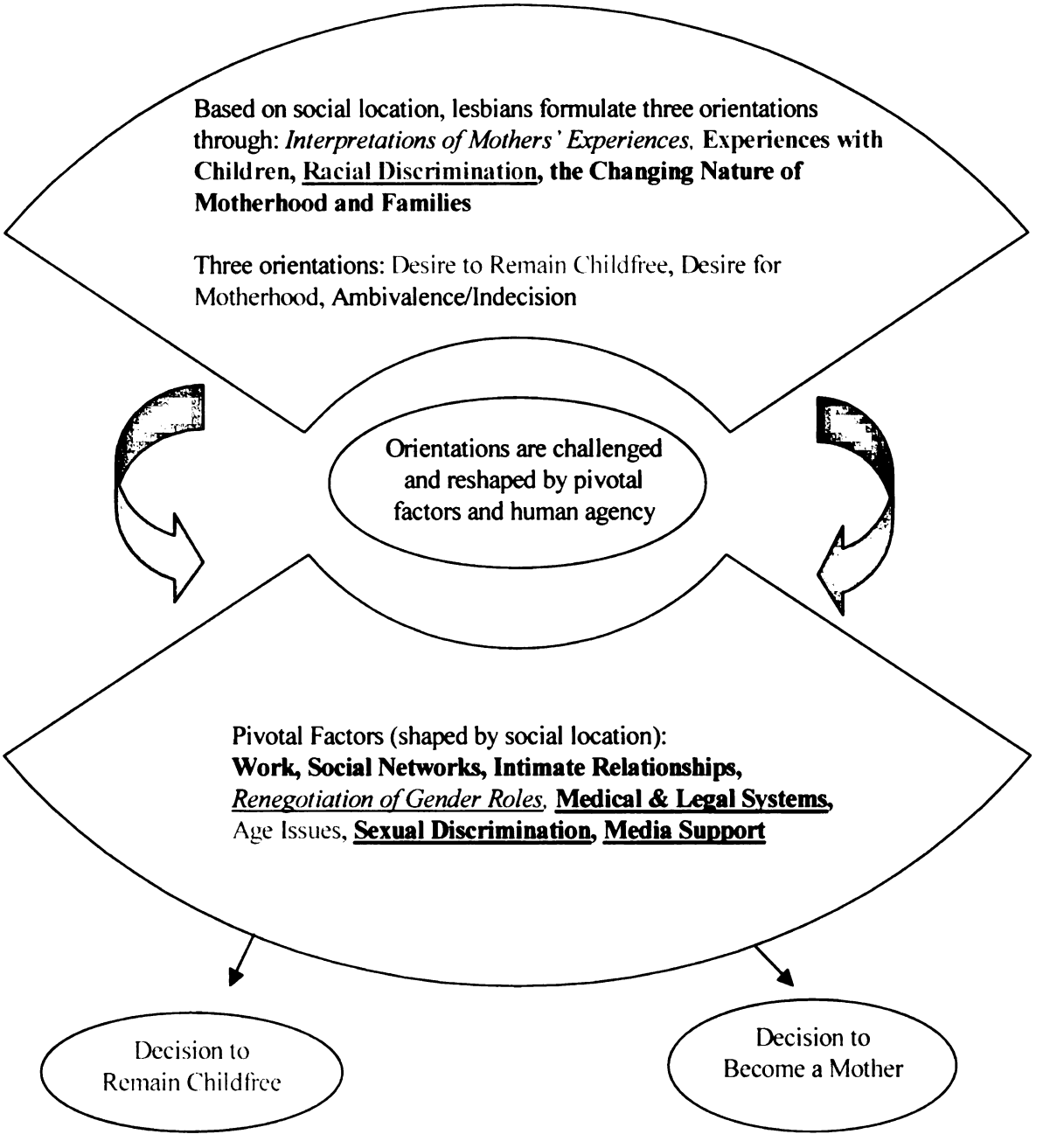
In addition to lesbian mothers, childfree lesbians also make intentional decisions. In the face of the lesbian baby boom, many childfree lesbians hold on to their childhood orientations to remind themselves of why they do not want children and of the benefits of personal and economic freedom. Most childfree lesbians are comfortable with and proud of their mothering decisions. One reason many for this is because childfree lesbians are not really "childfree" at all. Rather, they have strong ties with children in their families of origin, but do not have the responsibility of motherhood. Perhaps because they have

found a balance between personal freedom and connections with children, very few childfree lesbians regret their mothering decisions. In fact, many stated that heterosexual women can learn. Lesbians stated that heterosexual women can learn that motherhood is a choice, not a natural or expected path for all women. In addition, heterosexual women can learn that there are many fulfilling identities and goals women can have outside of motherhood.

To summarize my findings, similar to heterosexual women, lesbians' decisions to become mothers and remain childfree are embedded in social, cultural, and personal processes. Furthermore, social location organized by sexuality, together with race, class, and gender, shape these processes in many different ways. In particular, social location shapes the substance of the decision-making process differently for lesbians than it does for heterosexual women. Because of the way that sexuality fundamentally organizes policy and ideology, lesbians face a series of structural and ideational factors that shape their decisions differently from those of heterosexual women.

Social location also shapes decision-making processes differently for different groups of lesbians. Class and race privilege help lesbians oriented toward motherhood overcome barriers created by sexual discrimination in order to remain on their desired paths. I found that lesbians who are disadvantaged by class and race have more difficulty becoming mothers. Although many lesbians do not want to become mothers, those who do may find it difficult if they do not have adequate support from work, social networks, intimate partners, and legal and medical systems. The difficulties I experienced in recruiting lesbians-of-color and working-class lesbians gives evidence to the difficulties these lesbians have in becoming mothers or even in coming out enough to participate in

Figure 1. Decision Making Process for Childfree Lesbians and Lesbian Mothers



Key to Figure: black = childfree and mother feature, purple = childfree feature, green = mother feature, **bold = structural feature**, *italic = ideational feature*, underline = factor not discussed in other decision-making studies

Images in this thesis/dissertation are presented in color.

my study. Ultimately, lesbians find ways to resist sexual discrimination and make intentional decisions to become mothers or remain childfree. They draw on their early orientations, examine their lives, and negotiate systems of opportunity and constraint as best they can to make their mothering decisions.

II. Implications of Findings

The findings of my study have three implications for family sociology and sociology in general. The first implication is that this study provides evidence that sexuality is a fundamental organizing principle. (The following section is taken largely from Mezey 1998 and Baca Zinn and Eitzen 1996). Fundamental organizing principles, such as race, class, gender, and sexuality, are forms of stratification that organize society. They create hierarchies that offer different opportunities to different people and have three main characteristics. First, they are hierarchies of stratification, or structured inequalities. *Structured* refers to socially patterned stratifications that are based on social, not biological, factors. Second, structured inequalities socially locate groups of people differently so that some have greater or less access to wealth, power, and privilege. Based on their distinctive social locations, people have different life chances and experiences. Finally, structural inequalities are based on relations of power and domination. Because structural inequalities allocate resources on an unequal basis, people with wealth, power, and privilege dominate those with limited access to those resources.

This study provides partial evidence that sexuality is a fundamental organizing principle. Combined with other research, however, this study suggests how sexuality is a

fundamental organizing principle. First, although my study does not address how sexuality is a socially constructed system of stratification, other sociological works do. For example, Seidman (1994) draws on queer theory to discuss how sexuality is not a fixed nature or identity, but rather is highly fluid. No one form of sexuality is naturally privileged over the other. However, hierarchies within society place heterosexuals in a privileged position over homosexuality. Furthermore, Eitzen and Baca Zinn (2000) argue that "[e]ven though sexuality has a biological base, it is also a social construction. Society impinges on this intensely private form of intimacy to shape our ideas about what is erotic... and to determine who are appropriate sexual partners" (p. 283).

If we trust these other sources and assume that sexuality is a structured inequality based on social, not biological factors, my study provides evidence for the second and third characteristics of fundamental organizing principles. In particular, my study shows how sexuality socially locates lesbians and heterosexual women differently so that they have different life chances and experiences. As I discuss throughout this chapter, sexuality is one of the main reasons why the substance of the decision-making process differs for lesbians and heterosexual women. Sexuality alters how lesbians and heterosexual women experience work, medical and legal systems, social networks, and intimate relationships.

My study also shows how sexuality is based on relations of power and domination. Lesbians in my study discussed how they are denied access to heterosexual institutions such as marriage and work benefits. Furthermore, they discussed how homophobic ideology within communities and families of origin force many of them to remain silent about their sexual identities. The combination of institutional

discrimination and cultural homophobia prevents some lesbians from becoming mothers. Thus, sexuality privileges heterosexuals, giving them power to set family policy. It oppresses lesbians and other queers by denying them access to material resources. In short, sexuality stratifies social life based on sexual identity and offers different opportunities to different groups of people. The result is that lesbians and heterosexual women make mothering decisions based on their different access to different material and cultural goods of society. The implication of this finding is that in order for sociologists to truly understand the social world, they must recognize how sexuality organizes that social world.

The second implication is that social theory and research needs to center sexuality as it centers race, class, and gender. As discussed in Chapter 1, queer theorists and sociologists who study sexualities argue that issues concerning sexuality exist in every aspect of people's lives. However, sociologists have yet to incorporate a comprehensive focus on sexualities. Family sociologists in particular are remiss in addressing sexualities at all, let alone diversities within sexualities (Allen & Demo 1995; Demo & Allen 1996).

In using the extended case method that I discussed in Chapter 3, one goal of my study was to reconstruct and strengthen existing theory. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter 1, my research is a synthesis of different theories, including multiracial feminism, queer theory, the sociology of sexualities, and family sociology. I relied on these theoretical bodies to shape my research because none of them alone fully explains the decision-making processes lesbians go through to remain childfree or to become mothers. My study fuses these four existing theoretical bodies by providing empirical evidence that: 1) sexuality shapes individual lives; 2) the experiences of sexuality vary

according to race, class, and gender; and 3) the decisions people make concerning their families are shaped by sexuality together with race, class, and gender. Using my study as a starting point, family sociologists, and sociologists in general, can begin to understand the importance sexuality has on different aspects of the social world.

The final implication is that in making thoughtful, intentional mothering decisions, lesbians provide evidence to counter conservative thinkers' in the family values debate who assume that diverse family forms develop out of deficient values. As I discussed in Chapter 1, conservative thinkers within the family values debate argue that lesbians and gays are forming families because of deviant values. Gieven my findings, I argue that lesbians are making decisions about how to form their families based on many of the same values and experiences as heterosexual women. For example, lesbians form their orientations toward motherhood from their childhood experiences within heterosexual families. Not one of the participants in my study discussed forming values about family and motherhood early on from a homosexual families. With the increased numbers of children in lesbian and gay families, this may change slightly. But lesbians' initial values about family and motherhood come from heterosexual families. It is true that some lesbians draw on models of diverse families in larger society to form orientations, and they draw on ideas about lesbians mothers later in life to make their decisions. However, many of lesbians' values about motherhood develop from the heterosexual, not queer, world.

In addition, with the exception of ideas about lesbian motherhood and homophobic ideology within some families and communities of origin, pivotal factors are largely structural in nature. Thus, lesbians' decision-making processes are shaped

predominantly by structural, not cultural, factors. Thus, it is not cultural deviance that is shaping decision-making processes, but rather real systems of support and constraints that shape lesbians' decision-making processes. This study, therefore, suggests that conservative thinkers need to reconsider how people make mothering decisions.

III. Suggestions for Further Research

My research raises six additional research questions. First, as Stacey and Biblarz (2001) discuss, while previous studies examine the experiences of queer families and their children, they are mostly problematic. Therefore, there is a need for research that systematically examines the intimate relationships and divisions of labor of childfree lesbians and lesbian mothers. As my study suggests, further studies need to examine race and class differences within lesbian households.

Second, a major concern of childfree lesbians I interviewed is that raising children in lesbian households is detrimental to those children. A comparative study of the effects of race, class, gender, and sexual discrimination on different groups of children, including those raised in queer and heterosexual households, would be useful.

Third, a study similar to mine needs to be conducted using broader and larger groups of racial-ethnic minorities, including more Latina, Asian American, and Native American lesbians. A more diverse sample would help reveal greater variations by race in decision-making processes. In addition, a study examining poor lesbians would illuminate mothering and childfree concerns among lesbians with fewer financial means than those lesbians in my study.

Fourth, there is very little research conducted on gay fatherhood and families headed by transgendered women and men. A study similar to this one, or one that looks at the dynamics within other queer families, would greatly add to the family sociology literature.

Fifth, a study on how sexuality shapes heterosexual families would help reveal how some families are privileged by sexuality, not just undermined by it. Previous studies on race (for example, see Frankenburg 1993) have shown that it is important to study how gender and race privilege certain groups. As Michael Messner (1996) argues, sociologists need to "study up" sexual hierarchies, not just down them.

Finally, future studies might examine the connection between ethnicity and religion. In particular, research looking at how ethnicity and religion shape people's ideas about sexuality, family, and children would be useful. While "Christian" values and social spaces are dominant in the us, there are other traditions and locations, as well. A growing literature suggests that Jews have different attitudes about gender and sexuality than do Christians (see for example, Boyarin 1997). Further, Jews have been disproportionately visible as gay activists and have contributed significantly to the literature within queer studies. The same argument may apply to Bhais, Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, and followers of other ethnic/religious/spiritual outlooks, all of which are growing in the U.S. Current literature suggests that ethnicity and religion may shape people's ideas about sexuality and family, as well as offer different types of support to lesbians and other queers.

Conclusion

Although not generalizable to the larger population, my study illustrates several key points. First, it shows how lesbians' decisions to remain childfree and become mothers are far from "natural" or innate impulses dictating women's lives. Rather, remaining childfree or becoming a mother are decisions embedded in complex processes shaped by social, cultural, and personal factors. The decision to remain childfree or become a mother is socially, culturally, and personally constructed. Furthermore, decision-making processes vary by race, class, gender, and sexuality. Oppression and privilege based on race, class, gender, and sexuality play important roles in shaping lesbians' decisions to remain childfree or become mothers.

In designing and conducting my study, I found that comparative research focusing on race, class, gender, and sexuality differences is complicated and often frustrating. It requires complex research designs, innovative sampling and recruitment techniques, and long, mentally exhausting analyses. However, as indicated by my findings, to fully understand social reality, sexuality together with race, class, and gender must be an integral part of research agendas and analyses. In addition, theories that aim at understanding social realities, including family theories, feminist theories, and theories concerning sexualities, must have at their foundations the understanding of race, class, gender, and sexuality as separate but interconnected fundamental organizing principles.

Throughout history, queers, people of color, women, working-class people, and those who cross race, class, gender, and sexual boundaries have been silenced, oppressed, and forgotten. This study does not eradicate their history. However, it offers a small voice to a diverse group of historically oppressed people by providing insight into a

specific aspect of lesbians' lives that helps explain the rise of a new family form at the end of the twentieth century.

Appendix A

Interview Guide for Lesbian Mothers

I'd like to ask you some questions about your personal beliefs, your work experiences, your ties to different communities and family members, and your personal relationships. The questions I am asking serve as a guide, so please feel free to elaborate on any of the questions and to ask your own questions.

1. Lets start out by discussing how you got to be mothers. What events led up to your decision to be a parent?

2. Tell me about your definitions of "mother." What words come to mind when you think about "mother." (e.g., biological, power, social, burdened, etc.) Did how your definitions of mother affect your decision to become a mother yourself?

3. What about your families of origin? What do you think their definitions of mother are? Do/did your parents have ideas of what "proper" mothers are like? Did your families' definitions of mother affect your decision to become a mother yourself?

4. What about any larger communities you belong to (racial, class, religious, lesbian, gay, queer)? What do you think their definitions of mother are? Do/did people in those communities have ideas of what "proper" mothers should be like? Did your communities' definitions of mother affect your decision to become a mother yourself?

5. Did having a partner or not having a partner affect your decision to become a parent?

6. Do any of you have partners of different racial-ethnic, class, or other backgrounds? Is so, has that difference affected your decision to parent? For those with partners of similar backgrounds, have the similarities affected your decisions?

7. Has your employment situation (i.e., having a job, not having a job, future work aspirations) affected your decisions to become parents?

8. What has your experience been with the medical community, if any?

9. Did the anticipated need to work with the medical community affect your decisions to parent?

10. What has been your experience with the legal and social work community, if any?

11. Did the anticipated need to work with the legal and social work community affect your decisions to parent?

12. In choosing alternative insemination, did the choice between known and unknown donors affect your decision to parent?

13. In choosing adoption, did the potential of adopting a special needs child or a child of a different racial-ethnic background from yourself affect your decision to parent?

14. Do you feel integrated into a larger lesbian or gay or queer community? Has your integration or lack of integration affected your decision to mother?

15. What lesbian or gay-centered resources (e.g., support groups, other lesbian parents, etc.) were available to you that made your decision to parent easier or harder?

16. What other resources (e.g., medical personnel, social workers, family members, etc.) were available to you that made your decision to parent easier or harder?

17. What resources have not been available to you and have made this decision more difficult?

18. Have you come out to your family of origin? Has your coming out or staying closeted influenced your decision to parent?

19. Does your family of origin know that you are planning on having children? If so, what has been their reaction? Has that reaction affected your decision to become a mother?

20. By lesbians' becoming parents, do you think that you are changing the nature of motherhood or trying to fit in to some heterosexual definition of motherhood? Did you think about this question before becoming a mother? If so, did it influence your decision to mother?

21. Did financial resources or constraints play a part in making the decision to parent? If so, how?

22. Has the HIV/AIDS epidemic affected your decision to mother in anyway? (e.g., wanting to bring children into a dying gay community, affected donor choices, affected choices about adopting children with HIV/AIDS, etc.).

23. What have been some of the challenges you have faced in making the decision to parent?

24. Has your decision to parent been influenced by your own personal identity as a lesbian, as a woman, as having a career, or as belonging to a particular racial-ethnic or economic class? If so, how?

25. Have you felt any societal pressure to mother or to be childfree? Is so, how has that affected your decision to parent?

26. Did you ever think that by having children, you would be forced to come out in more public situations? If so, did that affect your decision to mother?

27. Do you have anything you would like to add about how you arrived at the decision to mother or about how other lesbians might arrive at the decision to mother?

28. Do you think we've left anything out of this discussion that we should discuss?

29. Do you have any questions you would like to ask of me?

Appendix B

Interview Guide for Childfree Lesbians

I'd like to ask you some questions about your personal beliefs, your work experiences, your ties to different communities and family members, and your personal relationships. The questions I am asking serve as a guide, so please feel free to elaborate on any of the questions and to ask your own questions.

1. The research I am doing looks at how some lesbians decide to have children and other lesbians decide not to have children. Before we get started, I want to ask your opinion about the terms I am using. I have been referring to lesbians with children as "lesbian mothers" and lesbians without children as "childfree" lesbians. Do you think these are appropriate terms, or are there more appropriate terms to use?

2. What events led up to your decision to be childfree? Did you make a conscious decision to remain childfree or has it just turned out that way?

3. Tell me about your definitions of "mother." What words come to mind when you think about "mother." (e.g., biological, power, social, burdened, etc.) Did your definitions of mother affect your decision to be childfree?

4. What about your families of origin? What do you think their definitions of mother are? Do/did your parents have ideas of what "proper" mothers are like? Did your families' definitions of mother affect your decision to be childfree?

5. Do you belong to any larger communities (racial, class, religious, lesbian, gay, queer)? If so, what do you think their definitions of mother are? Do/did people in those communities have ideas of what "proper" mothers should be like? Did your communities' definitions of mother affect your decision to be childfree?

6. Do any of you have partners of different racial-ethnic, class, or other backgrounds? Is so, has that difference affected your decision to be childfree? For those with partners of similar backgrounds, have the similarities affected your decisions?

7. Did having a partner or not having a partner affect your decision to become a parent?

8. Has your employment situation (i.e., having a job, not having a job, future work aspirations) affected your decisions to be childfree?

9. What has your experience been with the medical community, if any?

10. Did the anticipated need to work with the medical community affect your decision to be childfree?

11. What has been your experience with the legal and social work community, if any?

12. Did the anticipated need to work with the legal and social work community affect decision to be childfree?

13. Do you feel integrated into a larger lesbian or gay or queer community? Has your integration or lack of integration affected your decision to be childfree?

14. What lesbian or gay-centered resources (e.g., support groups, other lesbian parents, etc.) were available to you that made your decision to be childfree easier or harder?

15. What other resources (e.g., medical personnel, social workers, family members, etc.) were available to you that made your decision to be childfree easier or harder?

16. What resources have not been available to you and have made this decision more difficult?

17. Have you come out to your family of origin? Has your coming out or staying closeted influenced your decision to remain childfree?

18. Does your family of origin know that you are planning on not having children? If so, what has been their reaction? Has that reaction affected your decision to remain childfree?

19. What have been some of the challenges you have faced in making the decision to remain childfree?

20. Did financial resources or constraints play a part in making the decision to remain childfree? If so, how?

21. Has your decision to remain childfree been influenced by your own personal identity as a lesbian, as a woman, as having a career, or as belonging to a particular racial-ethnic or economic class? If so, how?

22. Have you felt any societal pressure to mother or to remain childfree? Is so, how has that affected your decision to be childfree?

23. Do you think that lesbians who are becoming mothers are changing the nature of motherhood in any ways or are they trying to fit in to a heterosexual definition of motherhood? Did you think about this question before deciding to be childfree?

24. Has the HIV/AIDS epidemic community affected your decision to remain childfree? (e.g., not wanting to bring children into a dying gay community, affected donor choices, affected choices about adopting children with HIV/AIDS, etc.).

25. Did you ever think that by having children, you would be forced to come out in more public situations? If so, did that affect your decision to remain childfree?

26. Do you have anything you would like to add about how you arrived at the decision to remain childfree or about other lesbians might arrive at the decision to be childfree?

27. Do you think we've left anything out of this discussion that we should discuss?

28. Do you have any questions you would like to ask of me?

Appendix C

Confidentiality and Informed Consent for Focus Groups

The purpose of this study is to identify the different reasons why some lesbians are becoming mothers and others are remaining childfree. This qualitative study includes group interviews in which you will be one of several participants. This study looks specifically at the social processes that lesbians go through in their decisions to become mothers or to remain childfree. The interview covers areas of inquiry such as work, experiences with medical and legal systems, ideologies/beliefs, intimate relationships, family relationships, social networks, and personal decisions. This study hopes to gain some insight into how social, cultural, and personal factors influence mothering decisions among lesbians.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have agreed to participate in this study. Please read this form carefully. It outlines your rights as a participant in this doctoral dissertation project.

You will be voluntarily participating in a doctoral dissertation research project that will explore the social processes that lesbians go through in their decisions to become mothers or to remain childfree. Your taking part in the study involves participation in one group interview lasting between two and three hours. You will be reimbursed for traveling and/or babysitting fees that are a direct result of your participation in this study.

You can withdraw participation from this research project at any time. You can also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer.

You can ask questions of the interviewer at any time during the research process.

Your identity will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in all written papers, both published and unpublished, in order to protect anonymity. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

All interviews will be taped. All tapes will be destroyed or erased after the study is complete. The researcher will retain the transcripts of the audio tapes.

This study may be submitted for publication. In the event that it is accepted, all information will be anonymous in order to prevent any identification.

In addition to maintaining your own privacy, by signing this form, you agree not to reveal any of the other participants' names or identifying characteristics to anyone not participating in this study.

At the end of the group interview, you may be asked to participate in an additional individual interview, a request you are free to refuse.

If you have any questions, you can contact the researcher, Nancy J. Mezey, at 517-484-4570. If you have any further concerns regarding your rights as a participant in this study, you can contact David E. Wright, at 517-355-2180.

Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Signature of Research Assistant_____ Date _____

Appendix D

Demographic Questionnaire

You indicate your voluntary agreement to participate by completing and returning this questionnaire. To maintain confidentiality of the information you provide on this questionnaire, pseudonyms will be used in all written papers, both published and unpublished. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law.

You can leave blank any questions on this questionnaire that you do not wish to answer. However, by answering these questions you are providing valuable information for the study. If you have any questions about the questionnaire, you can ask the interviewer at any time.

Name: _____

Demographic Information:

Please check (3) the appropriate response or fill in the answer.

A1. What is your date of birth?

_____ Month _____ Year

A2. What is your racial-ethnic background? (check as many as apply)

1) African-American _____
2) Native American _____
3) Asian American _____
4) Euro-American (Caucasian) _____
5) Hispanic/Latina _____
6) Other (please describe) _____

A3. What is your religious affiliation?

1) None _____
2) Name of Religion _____

A4. Where did you live most of your life up to age sixteen?

1) Large city _____
2) Small city _____
3) Suburb _____
4) Small town _____
5) Rural area _____

A5. In politics, generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as

1) A strong Democrat _____
2) A not very strong Democrat _____
3) An independent, closer to the Democratic party _____
4) An independent, closer to neither party _____
5) An independent, closer to the Republican party _____
6) A not very strong Republican _____
7) A strong Republican _____
8) Other (please specify) _____

A6. In politics, would you say that you are

1) Radical left
2) Liberal
3) Middle-of-the-Road
4) Conservative
5) A strong conservative

A7. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

1) Yes: _____ Strong
_____ Moderate
_____ Somewhat
2) No _____

A8. What is your highest level of education?

1) high school degree/GED ____
2) some college (but no degree) ____
3) associate's degree ____
4) bachelor's degree ____
5) some graduate school but no degree ____
6) master's degree ____
7) doctoral degree ____

A9. Are you currently employed?

1) Yes: _____
Current job: _____

Past two jobs held _____
_____

2) No: _____
Past two jobs held _____
_____

A10. What is your approximate individual annual income?

1.	____	0-$9,999	8.	____	$40,000-$44,999
2.	____	$10,000-$14,999	9.	____	$45,000-$49,999
3.	____	$15,000-$19,999	10.	____	$50,000-$54,999
4.	____	$20,000-$24,999	11.	____	$55,000-$59,999
5.	____	$25,000-$29,999	12.	____	$60,000-$64,999
6.	____	$30,000-$34,999	13.	____	$65,000-$69,999
7.	____	$35,000-$39,999	14.	____	$70,000-higher

A11. What is your approximate household annual income?

1.	____	0-$9,999	8.	____	$40,000-$44,999
2.	____	$10,000-$14,999	9.	____	$45,000-$49,999
3.	____	$15,000-$19,999	10.	____	$50,000-$54,999
4.	____	$20,000-$24,999	11.	____	$55,000-$59,999
5.	____	$25,000-$29,999	12.	____	$60,000-$64,999
6.	____	$30,000-$34,999	13.	____	$65,000-$69,999
7.	____	$35,000-$39,999	14.	____	$70,000-higher

A12. Do you and your other household members pool your incomes?

1. Yes: _____ completely
   _____ mostly
   _____ partially (less than 50% of earnings)
2. No _____

Appendix E

Media Sources Used in Content Analysis

Media by and for Lesbians			
Name of Source	**Web Address**	**Volume(s)/ Issue(s)**	**Month/year of publication or latest access**
Alyson Adventures	http://www.alysonadventures.com/lesbian.htm		July 2001
ASTRAEA Lesbian Action Foundation	http://www.astraea.org/		July 2001
Christian Lesbian.com	http://www.christianlesbian.com		July 2001
Curve Magazine		Vol. 8, No. 5 Vol. 8, No. 6 Vol. 9, No. 2	November 1998 January 1999 May 1999
Deville's Best Lesbian Club	http://devillesprovidence.com/		July 2001
Girlfriend Magazine			July 2001
Lesbian Avengers Chicago	http://www.lesbian.org/chicago-avengers/		July 2001
Lesbian Avengers' Civil Rights Organizing Project	http://www.octobertech.com/october/handbook.nsf/		July 2001
Lesbian Avengers DC	http://www.well.com/user/barmitag/dcavengers.htm		July 2001
Lesbian.org	http://www.lesbian.org		July 2001
Olivia Travel	http://www.oliviatravel.com/frameset.html		July 2001
On Our Backs	http://www.onourbacksmag.com/		July 2001
The Lesbian Shopper	http://www.lesbianshopper.com		July 2001
The World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Jews: Keshet Ga'avah	http://www.wcgljo.org/		July 2001
untitled personal web page	http://www.geocities.com/wilmich_1999/index.html		July 2001

Media by and for Lesbian Mothers			
Name of Source	**Web address**	**Volume(s)/ Issue(s)**	**Month/year of publication or latest access**
Alternative Family Magazine		Vol. 2, No. 1 Vol. 2, No. 2 Vol. 3, No. 1	Summer 1999 Fall 1999 Jan/Feb 2000
Families Like Mine	http://www.familieslikemine.com/		July 2001
Family Pride Coalition	http://www.familypride.org/		July 2001
Lesbian Moms Chat Room and Store	http://www.fortunecity.com/village/etheridge/109/index.html		July 2001
Lesbian Mother's Resource Page	http://members.aol.com/rrosechild/index.htm		July 2001
Lesbian Mothers Support Society	http://www.lesbian.org/lesbian-moms/		July 2001
Momazons		Vol. 4, No. 3 Vol. 5, No. 2 & 3 Vol. 7, No. 1 Vol. 7, No. 2 Vol. 7, No. 3	Aug./Sept. 1996 June/July & Aug./Sept. 1997 April/May 2000 Aug./Sept. 2000 Oct./Nov. 2000
Pacific Reproductive Services	http://www.hellobaby.com/		July 2001
The Family Tree (publication from the Family Pride Coalition		Winter	2000
The Lesbian Mom's Web Page	http://www.lesbian.org/moms/		July 2001

Media by and for Lesbians and Lesbian Mothers			
Name of Source	**Web address**	**Volume(s)/ Issue(s)**	**Month/year of publication or latest access**
The Advocate			June 22, 1999 April 2, 1996
Between the Lines		Issue 103	April 29-May 5, 1999
DT (alias)		all volumes/issues	1999-2001
Gay.com	http://www.gay.com/index.html		July 2001
Lesbian.org	http://www.lesbian.org		July 2001
LesbiaNation	http://www.lesbianation.com		July 2001
Off Our Backs		Vol. 28, No. 5	May 1998
Out			Dec. 1999
Queer Resources Directory	http://www.qrd.org/www/qfamco.html		July 2001
Techno-Dyke	http://www.technodyke.com/chat/default.asp		July 2001
Untitled website	http:/members.tripod.com/~womyn98/moms.html		July 2001
Washington Blade	http://www.washblade.com		July 2001

Media by and for Lesbians-of-color			
Name of Source	**Web address**	**Volume(s)/ Issue(s)**	**Month/year of publication or latest access**
African-American Lesbian Forum	http://forums.delphi.com/n/nav/start.asp?webtag=brownsugar&nav=start&sigdir=Brownsugar&isp=if&pic=in-LASTARRA1391&lgnJR=1		July 2001
Audre Lorde Project Inc.	http://www.alp.org/		July 2001
Blackberri Café*	http://www.blackberricafe.com/bbchtml/menu.htm		July 2001
Blacklight Online*	http://www.blacklightonline.com/		July 2001
Cuervo's Queer Latin@ Website	http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/Heights/6404/		July 2001
Issues! The Magazine for Lesbians-of-color	http://www.issuesmag.com/		July 2001
Making Face, Making Soul: A Chicana Feminist Homepage	http://chicanas.com/chicanas.html		July 2001
National Latina/o Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Organization (LLEGÓ)	http://www.llego.org/main.html		July 2001
'Sup Sabrina?	http://www.kurfew.com/sabrina.htm		July 2001
Venus Magazine Online*	http://www.venusmagazine.com/		July 2001
Women in the Life	http://www.womeninthelife.com/		July 2001
Womyn of Zami	http://www.geocities.com/WestHollywood/9005/		July 2001
Zuna Institute	http://www.zunainstitute.org/		July 2001

* contains references to, links for, or article about lesbian motherhood

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