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**SHARED PARENTING
IN A CHANGING WORLD OF WORK:
LESBIAN COUPLES' TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD
AND THEIR DIVISION OF LABOR**

by

Renate Reimann

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Sociology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
The City University of New York

1998

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Sociology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

**SHARED PARENTING
IN A CHANGING WORLD OF WORK:
LESBIAN COUPLES' TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD
AND THEIR DIVISION OF LABOR**

by

Renate Reimann

Adviser: Professor Julia Wrigley

The effects of biological motherhood, early childcare requirements, gender inequality, and power imbalances on parents' transition to parenthood and their division of labor are much contested issues. This dissertation explores these questions in a unique context - lesbian parenthood - where biological and practical requirements can be analytically separated from gender effects.

The analysis is based on a study of 25 lesbian couples' transition to parenthood and their division of labor. Each couple had at least one biological child under the age of six and all children were born within the context of the couples' relationship. I conducted

in-depth interviews with each partner and with the couple, and all participants filled out short questionnaires at the time of the interview and at 18 to 24 months after the interview.

The distinction between the biological and non-biological mother affected couples in three domains of motherhood: public, relational, and personal motherhood. Comothers countered public ignorance, social and legal invisibility, and the lack of biological connection to the child by sharing primary childcare and establishing a distinct parenting role within the family.

Mutual acknowledgment of the right to financial independence and commitment to paid work, shared values supporting the desirability of childcare and the importance of housework characterized the lesbian couples in this study. Same-sex gender dynamics, feminist attitudes, and the desire to equally parent and mother their children formed the basis for shared or joint motherhood and a predominantly egalitarian division of labor.

The labor intensity of early childcare and the need for financial security led to a variety of work arrangements, including long-term specialization into homemaker and breadwinner (28%). Specialization, however, was independent of biological motherhood. Desire to be with the child, economic considerations, and strong commitments to equality and shared motherhood rather than biological requirements informed decisions about leave strategies and long-term paid work arrangements.

Work arrangements were generally flexible and shifted whenever labor force or childcare requirements changed. Flexibility also characterized the division of specific household and childcare tasks. Overall, time/availability proved to be the best predictor

of involvement in family work.

To my mother,

Frieda Reimann,

and in memory of my late father,

Albert Reimann (1916-1993)

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1. THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD AND THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN FAMILIES

Both family life and work life are currently undergoing drastic changes. While an overwhelming majority of women and men continue to marry – albeit later in life – the likelihood of divorce remains at about 50%. Childbearing patterns reflect parallel trends. Most women will bear children but they have fewer offspring than their mothers and the first birth occurs at a later age.

At the same time, more women than ever are employed – including mothers of young children. Women who have postponed childbearing until their thirties are especially likely to have invested heavily into their education and their occupational advancement. To protect these investments, the majority of mothers return to work within months of giving birth. Thus, the dual-earner family has become common even in middle-class American life (Spain & Bianchi, 1996).

Whether financial need or personal choice lead to both partners' employment, today's parents face hard choices regarding their commitments to work and family. Couples who favor equality in their relationships and aspire to child-centered family life are especially likely to search for models that allow both partners to advance in their occupations without neglecting the welfare of their children (Ehrensaft, 1990; Schwartz, 1995).

Although an increasing number of heterosexual couples strives for equality in their relationships and in parenting, many find it difficult to maintain an egalitarian division of work in the face of sharply increased work requirements due to the needs of

young children (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Hays, 1996; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996). Unable to sustain high commitments to both family and work, many couples fall back upon a more gendered division of labor with fathers focusing on paid work and mothers concentrating on domestic work (Mahony, 1995). However rational these choices are at the time, prolonged reliance on highly gendered work arrangements tends to leave women and children more vulnerable in cases of divorce and other family disruptions.

Mothers in same-sex relationships are as affected by the increased demands of work and family as heterosexual parents. As with their opposite-sex counterparts, they feel the pressure of what Sharon Hays (1996) has termed “the ideology of intensive mothering.” This ideal calls for parents to be extremely focused on their children emotionally as well as interact with them whenever in their presence.

Lesbian mothers are also subject to a work culture that values and rewards employees who exclusively focus on their jobs. Professionals and management personnel, in particular, are expected to spend far more than forty hours a week at work. Others who are paid by the hour often seek overtime to increase or simply maintain their living standards. As a result, most Americans are experiencing acute time pressures (Hochschild, 1997).

Since gender figures so prominently in the transition to parenthood and the division of work, a closer look at same-sex parents provides an opportunity to disentangle gender processes from other factors such as biological motherhood. This dissertation analyzes the transition to parenthood and the division of labor of lesbian couples. In order to account for the impact of biological motherhood on parenting

patterns, the sample only included families where the children were the biological offspring of one of the women. These families resemble most other nuclear families except for the parental gender composition. This research offers a unique approach to the study of families isolating gender issues from other important processes in family life.

Given the considerable literature on the transition to parenthood in heterosexual couples and their division of labor before and after becoming parents and the parallels between lesbian and opposite-sex parents, a review of existing research can provide guidelines for the study of lesbian mothers. In addition, the explanatory power of theoretical approaches that have dominated the study of heterosexual couples can be tested on families in which same-sex rather than opposite-sex gender dynamics are at work. The results of such investigation will help refine research on lesbian and heterosexual couples and offer new insights for those interested in moving beyond firmly entrenched “traditional” opposite-sex gender dynamics.

Below, I will first assess three major theoretical frameworks employed in the study of heterosexual couples’ transition to parenthood and their division of labor and research resulting from those approaches. Subsequently, I will develop hypotheses flowing from these theoretical frameworks with respect to lesbian families, compare them to the existing research on lesbian couples and families, and lay out a research agenda for this study.

1.1. HETEROSEXUAL FAMILIES AND THEIR DIVISION OF LABOR

1.1.1. HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES BECOMING PARENTS

Until recently the vast majority of heterosexual married couples simply assumed that they would have children unless they encountered insurmountable infertility problems. The decrease in the number of children couples produce and the rise in chosen childlessness has raised much concern among conservatives (Popenoe, 1993). Other commentators view this development as rooted in larger socioeconomic trends including women's increased labor force participation, increases in marital disruption and single parenthood, greater material and emotional investments in children ("intensive mothering"), and the greater acceptability of childlessness (Coontz 1992 & 1997; Hays, 1996; Stacey, 1996).

In fact, the majority of studies on the psychological well-being of adults conducted in the 1970s and 1980s found that parents were less satisfied with their lives than non-parents (McLanahan & Adams, 1987). Dissatisfactions among parents result primarily from economic and time constraints. In *The Time Bind*, the sociologist Arlie Hochschild (1997) describes many contradictory sentiments prevalent in today's society. On the one hand, managers as well as employees stress the importance of increased commitment to family life. Yet, the current work ethic – especially corporate culture – measures commitment to work by the quantity of hours spent on the job. Thus, whichever way parents and families turn, they feel pressured to perform more and at higher levels. As a result, few can escape the experience of an ever-increasing time crunch. In addition, the speed-up experienced at home has turned many aspects of family

life into work and experiences of sociability and “objectively” measured accomplishment lets many turn to work for a sense of personal satisfaction.

The most challenging and stressful time for most parents is the first few years of a child’s life. Besides the emotional intensity of initial baby care and the transition from a dyadic to triadic family unit, the increased labor demands produced by infants can put great stress on both partners. Most parents experience a rapid decline of marital satisfaction after a brief honeymoon period immediately following the birth of the child (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Levy-Shiff, 1994; McLanahan & Adams, 1987; Wallace & Gotlib, 1990).

Women who are highly committed to their work are especially likely to experience a drop in satisfaction. Many mothers expecting their first child assume that fathers will perform a larger proportion of family work than they actually are prepared to do (Belsky, 1985 & 1994; Kalmuss et al., 1992; Ruble et al., 1988). Conversely, when fathers are actively involved in childcare, the transition to parenthood proves to be less stressful.

In spite of the apparent gender differences regarding the changes associated with the arrival of the first baby, the most consistent and powerful predicting variable for both spouses was found to be paternal involvement with the baby: A higher level of paternal involvement, especially in caregiving, was associated with more limited decline in marital satisfaction. (Levy-Shiff, 1994: 598)

Thus, exploring the reasons behind the division of labor in families is of particular importance when trying to understand the state of families with children in contemporary society.

1.1.2. PARENTHOOD AND THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN HETEROSEXUAL FAMILIES

The persistence of inequality in the division of housework and childcare in heterosexual couples has been documented in numerous studies (Baber & Allen, 1992; Blau & Ferber, 1992; South & Spitze, 1994; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Repeatedly, gender emerges as the main predictor for the performance of and responsibility for family work (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; Hochschild, 1989; Mederer, 1993; Peterson & Gerson, 1992). Pregnancy and young children tend to further accentuate “traditional” gender roles and the sexual division of labor in heterosexual couples (Atkinson & Huston, 1984; Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; LaRossa, 1981 & 1989; MacDermid et al., 1990; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996; Ruble et al., 1988).

Despite the increase in labor force participation of women in general – and mothers with young children in particular (Blau & Ferber, 1992; Gerson, 1985) – most heterosexual women are still the primary providers of family work. As men have not significantly increased their participation in housework and childcare (Berardo et al., 1987), this situation results in a heavier work burden and greater psychological pressure on heterosexual women with young children and in a considerable leisure gap between women and men (Hochschild, 1989). In turn, most working women with young children have to reduce their time and energy investments in their jobs and risk losing occupational opportunities (Gerson, 1985).

1.1.2.1. THE NEW HOME ECONOMICS

“Traditional” neoclassical economic theory as applied in the *New Home Economics* argues that the root cause of women’s disproportionate involvement in family work is the result of women’s childbearing role. Because women can bear children they are best qualified to take responsibility for child-rearing and household maintenance out of biological necessity and rational choice considerations (Blau & Ferber, 1992; Peterson & Gerson 1992).

Women not only have a heavy biological commitment to the production and feeding of children, but they also are biologically committed to the care of children in other, more subtle ways. Moreover, women have been willing to spend much time and energy caring for their children because they want their heavy biological investment in production to be worthwhile. (Becker, 1981, 23)

Thus, the distribution of household chores and responsibilities among women and men in heterosexual couples becomes more gender specific when children are involved (LaRossa, 1981; Coverman & Sheley, 1986). Commonly, mothers become the child/ren’s primary caregivers and reduce or discontinue their participation in the labor force. Once they spend less time on an outside job, more and more responsibilities tend to fall to them (Mahony, 1995).

The assumption behind “traditional” marital arrangements is that women’s increased reproductive labor is compensated for by decreased participation in the labor force thus resulting in *equity* between husband and wife. In this century, this has only been true for middle- and upper-class women and some privileged working-class women. Nowadays, many married middle class mothers also have to earn income in

order to support their family's standard of living. Yet, despite the changing realities of women's productive and reproductive lives, they continue to do most of and be responsible for childcare and household maintenance.

Unlike feminist theories, neoclassical theory does not consider the "traditional" arrangements to be a problem. On the contrary,

the simple neoclassical model suggests that there are considerable efficiency gains to the traditional division of labor in which the husband specializes in market work and the wife specializes in home work (Blau & Ferber, 1992, 35).

Specialization and exchange are viewed as rational strategies to maximize economic utility in families.

Feminists like Heidi Hartmann (1987) have criticized the neoclassical argument because it is based on the assumption that a family is "a single-minded, indivisible, utility-maximizing unit" (Blau & Ferber, 1992, 35) ignoring conflicts of interest among family members. Blau and Ferber further object that the model presumes that the levels of housework and childcare are constant. Yet, lower fertility rates and increased life expectancy have decreased the economic significance of childbearing and childrearing in women's lives. Consequently, the "traditional" division of labor in heterosexual couples into the male breadwinner and the female homemaker has rather negative economic consequences for women. Lastly, Blau and Ferber point out that the simple neoclassical model falsely assumes that all men and all women have gender specific skills that will match up independent of the individual's aptitudes. Or in same-sex couples, it assumes that skills will overlap too much and thus minimize comparative advantage.

Fenstermaker Berk (1985) in her discussion of “traditional” conceptual frameworks voices additional concerns. She argues that the New Home Economics and especially Becker exclude joint production, that is the pleasure component of producing goods and services, from their analysis. In the same vein the model does not take the complexities and mutability of individual tastes into account. Often decision-making relies more on personal tastes and anticipated pleasures than on economic utility.

Despite its shortcomings, economic analysis provides a framework that allows us to look at the concrete material aspects of family labor (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985). Feminist economists Blau & Ferber (1992) suggest broadening the simple neoclassical model into a more *feminist economic analysis of families*. They call for a more sophisticated economic model that includes divergent interests of family members and drastically changed demographic and economic realities. In addition, they propose to expand the simple neoclassical model in two ways.

1. We point out that there are other types of economic benefits to forming families besides specialization. Thus, couples may discard specialization and still reap economic gains from living in families.
2. We examine the disadvantages of the traditional division of labor, particularly for women, which are not considered in the simple neoclassical model. (35)

“Traditional” forms of specialization can be particularly costly for women when relationships dissolve. Women are often unable to financially support themselves and their children. Having the skills to run a household *and* earn a living allows for greater independence from one's partner, while it also allows people to be more flexible in the division of labor or to perform tasks together.

1.1.2.2. THE POWER PERSPECTIVE

The most influential sociological model explaining the unequal division of labor in heterosexual couples is the "family power" framework. Resource theories (Blood & Wolfe, 1960) and exchange theories have been central to the study of family power (McDonald, 1980; Szinovacz, 1987). Resource theories mainly rely on socioeconomic resources as the primary predictors of power relationships in couples, while exchange theories expand the list of resources and put them to work (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976).

This approach identifies power as the main component in the division of labor. Postulating that different kinds of tasks in housework and childcare are more desirable than others, whoever has more power can pick and choose what s/he likes to do best and avoid tasks s/he dislikes. Given the general devaluation of daily, repetitive tasks with no clear boundaries and minimal leisure components such as cleaning, one can hypothesize that the partner with more power is able to avoid these tasks (Coleman, 1991).

Although this rationale has a lot of common sense appeal, conceptualizing and measuring power has proven to be quite problematic. To only measure socioeconomic status differences between partners overlooks the importance of ideological resources (McDonald, 1980). Furthermore, to solely focus on outcome measures such as who has final say in decisions or who wins specific conflicts neglects important dimensions of power such as the power to repress conflict or decision-making (Komter, 1989).

Furthermore, with respect to family work, Fenstermaker Berk (1985) identifies two implicit assumptions that are problematic. One, that household labor is a "source of disutility." Thus, paid labor is automatically elevated to the more desirable work, which

is not necessarily the case. Consequently, it also ignores the fact – as does the neoclassical economic model – that people can derive pleasure from performing household tasks and childcare. Without taking into account the utility of actual household labor and the pleasure people draw from taking care of their homes and families, the model lacks predictive power in many ways.

Blumberg and Coleman (1989) retain socioeconomic power as a central concept in their *"Model of Prediction of Gender Balance and Power Within Contemporary U.S. Marriages"* (figure 1, p. 232). However, they propose to add discount factors at the macro- and micro-level that can influence the effectiveness of a woman's overall economic power. Coleman (1991) applies the model to the division of housework in married couples, proposing that the "net economic power" would predict men's involvement in household tasks.

Mahony (1995) powerfully argues that both economic and ideological factors interact to complicate equality in heterosexual couples once they have children. According to Mahony, the "headstart effect" referring to mothers' stronger emotional attachment to their newborns based on the experience of pregnancy and birth as well as on cultural expectations of maternal bonding, is one of the main mechanisms pulling formerly egalitarian couples into gender specific unequal division of work. Once mothers concentrate more on childcare than paid work, they also become more involved in housework. This leads to greater dependency on their male partner's income. Overall, women's bargaining power is more affected by children than men's. Thus, the structural realities of a gender stratified labor market combined with powerful gender and

parenting ideologies pull women and men back into more “traditional” arrangements even if their original personal beliefs and practices were strongly egalitarian.

1.1.2.3. GENDER PERSPECTIVE

While neoclassical theory stresses the importance of biological motherhood and economic utility and power theorists focus on socioeconomic factors, other researchers such as Fenstermaker Berk (1985) and Hochschild (1989) have shown that gender is the most powerful factor in explaining the unequal division of labor in heterosexual households. As Ferree (1990) poignantly states:

The gender perspective points to the symbolic construction of housework as "women's work" and as an expression of both love and subordination. This explains, as economic models fail to do, why women and men so often collaborate to maintain a system that objectively imposes unequal burdens on women. (877)

While early studies have focused on gender roles and gender socialization, current research employs more interactive perspectives (Ferree, 1990), such as West and Fenstermaker's (1993) "doing gender" approach. It explains why even in dual-earner households women perform many of the actual tasks and remain the managers of the household (Mederer, 1993) and that women do more housework than men regardless of their living arrangements and that the gender gap is highest in marriage¹ (South and Spitze, 1994).

Yet structural constraints and opportunities are fundamental to the division of labor and partially explain shifts in gender and family ideology (Gerson, 1985; Hertz, 1986). Hertz (1986) found that the division of labor was more equal in the dual-career

couples she studied because of comparable time and work demands placed on both partners. However, she also recognizes that

until the status of housework is elevated or, more important, until fathering acquires an equivalent normative meaning for men, women will continue to be responsible for childrearing. (209)

This sentiment reverberates through the literature on the transition to parenthood in heterosexual families: the division of labor becomes more “traditional” with the arrival of children (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Kalmuss et al., 1992; LaRossa, 1981 & 1989; MacDermid et al., 1990; Ruble et al., 1988). Perkins and DeMeis (1996) showed that, even in young, college-educated, dual-earner couples, the arrival of children dramatically increased the gender gap between parents that was minimal between childless partners.

Within the gender perspective the role of ideology, especially feminist attitudes, has received much attention. While most researchers agree with Gerson (1985) and Hertz (1986) that the material realities – which generally privilege men's role in the work place – greatly influence the division of labor in families, they also acknowledge the role gender ideology plays (Coltrane, 1989). But interactive rather than linear causal models may explain best the influence material realities have over gender ideology and vice versa. While some couples, especially those with young children, might spiral into more “traditional” behaviors and attitudes, others, like the participants in Hertz's study (1986), might develop more egalitarian practices and gender ideologies.

1.2. PARENTHOOD AND THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN NUCLEAR FAMILIES

1.2.1. LESBIAN COUPLES BECOMING PARENTS – A NEW KIND OF NUCLEAR FAMILY

The term *lesbian nuclear family* describes a very specific kind of lesbian family that consists of a lesbian couple and their children -- families of the so-called lesbian baby boom. In this case, I will further narrow the lens by only discussing lesbian couples who had children biologically. They are relatively rare compared to single lesbian families or joined lesbian families with children from prior heterosexual or homosexual relationships. This type of lesbian nuclear family closely resembles intact heterosexual nuclear families. They have two adult parents, one being the birthmother, and all their children were conceived within the context of the couple's relationship. Both parents consider the children *their* children and raise them as a parental unit.

The growing number of lesbian couples who choose to become parents biologically confront the same emotional and practical concerns as heterosexual parents do. Yet lesbian parents, especially those of the lesbian baby boom, regularly encounter prejudice and discrimination because they are viewed as “unfit mothers.” Comothers² are routinely denied public recognition as parents and birthmothers are perceived as single mothers without partners. While lesbian couples face more social disapproval and legal discrimination on their path to parenthood than do heterosexual couples, they have more options in other ways. For example, lesbian couples can usually choose who the biological mother will be and select the biological father from a variety of donors.

Motherhood, the quintessential expression of femininity in many societies, pushes lesbian parents into a highly policed, gendered arena (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Often motherhood in conjunction with lesbianism has been viewed as mutually exclusive culturally and as a reason for legal intervention (Falk, 1989). According to Lewin (1993), the single mothers in her sample often experienced conflicts between their identities as mothers and as lesbians because of the fear of repercussions from their social environment, especially fathers, and because of the lack of understanding from lovers.

Since the couples in my study decided to have children together, they avoided conflicts typical for joint families. However, having two equally committed mothers can result in different sets of problems.

Practically every aspect of heterosexual parenting roles is associated with either masculinity or femininity. Yet if all female parenting behaviors are of the role of mother, who is the second female parent? The lesbian couple must construct a clear set of dual female parenting roles, within a social frame that suggest this cannot be done. (Slater, 1995, 49)

Thus, lesbian couples face the unique opportunity and challenge to develop models of parenthood and the division of labor that are independent of “traditional” gender expectations.

1.2.2. THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN FAMILIES

When *neoclassical economic theory* is applied to lesbian nuclear families, a number of hypotheses about their division of labor emerge. In most cases, lesbians have a choice in deciding who will be the birthmother. Since being pregnant and giving birth disrupts

labor force participation for at least a few months, one would expect the partner with less economic power to bear the child. Financially, the family could more easily absorb the full or partial income loss of the person who earns less. In other cases, occupational investments could be the primary grounds for decision making. Whoever is more likely to benefit from uninterrupted career development would be more likely to be the comother. Given the reasoning above, one might also predict that the birthmother would be the primary caretaker of the child as well as perform the majority of household chores.

The scant research done on lesbian cohabiting couples and the division of labor indicates that lesbian couples tend to be more egalitarian and flexible in their work arrangements than heterosexual or gay cohabiting couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kurdek, 1993; Reilly & Lynch, 1990). Similarly, other evidence points to the fact that lesbian nuclear families share household and childcare labor quite equally (McClandish, 1987; Nelson, 1996; Patterson, 1995a & 1995b; Rohrbaugh, 1989; Sullivan, 1996). These findings suggest that other factors than biological motherhood or economic utility considerations might exert more influence on work arrangements.

Using a *power perspective*, on the other hand, would suggest that the partner with the most power would have more say in who will be the birthmother and who will take care of tasks associated with childcare and housework. The greater the socioeconomic differences the larger the power differences. Or, to frame it from an exchange point of view, the more exchange resources one partner has to offer the more likely her voice will be heard in negotiations concerning the transition to parenthood and

the division of labor.

Earlier research has found no evidence that socioeconomic differences have an effect on equality in the division of labor in lesbian couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Lynch & Reilly, 1985/86; Reilly & Lynch, 1990). Kurdek & Schmitt (1987), however, discovered fewer age, income, and education differences among lesbian couples than among the married, cohabiting heterosexual, and gay couples in their study. If lesbian couples, indeed, are fairly similar in their socioeconomic resources prior to having children, how does the transition to parenthood affect the power balance?

Furthermore, following Mahony's reasoning (1995), does the higher emotional attachment of the birthmother create similar dynamics in lesbian couples as it does in heterosexual couples? Research to date has been inconclusive. Although most studies find significant differences in early emotional bonding between birthmothers and comothers due to carrying and birthing the child, the long-term effects on mother-child relationships and the division of labor are unclear (Nelson, 1996).

Last, if using a *gender perspective*, predictions become harder. One could argue that both partners being women cancels out gender as a predictor. On the other hand, both being women could increase conflict over who is considered the "real mother," who has more say in parenting and family work decisions, or who will be responsible for the family's financial well-being. Furthermore, how does ideological commitment affect lesbian relationships?

Although the three models described above have no immediate explanatory power when it comes to lesbian families they are helpful in pointing to important aspects

of the phenomenon. The feminist economic model stresses the importance of concrete economic behavior on the part of individuals in families. Furthermore, it allows a closer look at the interactions between household labor and paid labor. In the absence of sex difference, comparative advantage and opportunity costs are not predetermined by gender, thus, exposing other factors that regulate how economic utility is assessed.

Blumberg and Coleman's power approach points to the importance of socio-economic as well as ideological factors, such as personal and cultural gender role ideologies. These beliefs affect women's labor force participation and choice of occupation as well as attitudes toward housework and childcare. Although ideological factors might influence lesbian couples in different ways than heterosexual couples, I still expect ideological factors and agreement or disagreement about values and norms to be significant in the division of power and labor in these couples.

While gender as a *structural* factor might be negligible in its effect on the division of labor, gender as an *interactional* factor could be significant for intra-couple transactions (West & Fenstermaker, 1993). Issues of social accountability so central to heterosexual families (Coltrane, 1989; West & Fenstermaker, 1993), play out very differently in lesbian households. Because both partners are women they would be perceived as equally responsible for proper housekeeping.

How each individual views her role in relation to household labor and employment will have profound consequences for the division of labor in the relationship. It is commonly assumed that, on average, lesbians are more feminist than heterosexual women (Patterson, 1995a). Whether a lesbian has a strong feminist

orientation or not will also influence the division labor and power. For example, strong egalitarian convictions might override considerations of economic utility. Rejection of the “traditional” feminine gender role can redefine the importance of housework and employment for women. Attitudes toward motherhood and parenting will be crucial in lesbian couples when it comes to making decisions about who will be the birthmother.

Will there be a primary caregiver for the child? If yes, who will it be?

The consequences of discrimination and strategies to avoid discrimination are also important factors in the division of labor and power in families. In the case of lesbian families, the degree of "outness", being open about one's sexual orientation, will shape many decisions about family arrangements.

Last but not least, the simple fact of personal likes and dislikes, as pointed out by Fenstermaker Berk (1985) can shape people's lives to a much greater extend than theoretically accounted for. Whether a person is conscious of the roots of her predilection or not, it will influence many important decisions. When it comes to housework and childcare, individuals tend to have quite strong preferences or distastes for specific tasks.

Lesbian and heterosexual parents face many similar and some unique day to day challenges and joys raising their children. Biological, power, and gender issues affect all parents. Yet, does gender similarity change the reality, meaning, and consequences of biological motherhood, socioeconomic power, and gender ideologies?

1.3. ENDNOTES

1. South and Spitze (1994) compared men and women's time spent on housework in six different living arrangements: never married and living with parents, never married and living independently, cohabiting, married, divorced, and widowed.

2. Whenever it was necessary to make a distinction between the two partners, I used the term *comother* for the non-birthing partner and *birthmother* for the biological mother of a child. In all other cases, I refer to both partners as parents or mothers. I chose the term *comother* for the non-biological mother because it encompasses the social as well as biological implications while stressing the partnership aspect of parenting.

2. METHODS AND SAMPLE

2.1. GENERAL METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK: GROUNDED THEORY

At the inception of this study in 1992, very little systematic information about lesbian couples and their children was available. Most of the accounts were anecdotal and samples tended to be small – under ten couples. Given the dearth of knowledge, the need for collecting a wide range of data on a larger, yet manageable, sample became evident. Qualitative methods such as in-depth, open-ended interviews and participant observation seemed most appropriate under the circumstances.

In addition to providing rich descriptions of lesbian couples' transition to parenthood and their division of labor, I was interested in generating theory that could account for the unique social positioning of lesbian families and capture the complexities of same-sex gender dynamics. The controversial social and political nature of lesbian motherhood and the relative invisibility of the population called for an approach that would allow theoretical concepts to emerge from the collected data themselves.

Thus, I employed grounded theory which provided an over-arching method that fit the intentions of this project. Grounded theory was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), and further refined over the years by the same authors and their colleagues (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Gilgun et al., 1992). Strauss and Corbin define grounded theory as follows:

A grounded theory is one that is inductively derived from the study of the phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to that phenomenon. Therefore, data collection, analysis, and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other. (1990, 23)

Grounded theory in its "purest" form contends that all categories and theoretical formulations should directly grow out of field work. However, as discussed in the review above, the literature on the transition to parenthood and the division of labor in heterosexual families as well as the literature on lesbian families already provides the researcher with many helpful categories and theoretical frameworks.

2.2. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

Grounded theory thrives on the complexity and richness of qualitative data. Studies of families are of particular complexity because they involve two or more individuals who share emotional, social, and material bonds that are of intense personal value and, at the same time, highly regulated by law and custom. The profound personal and political nature of families becomes especially obvious when studying so-called non-traditional families.

Lesbian nuclear families evoke both outright contempt and unconditional endorsement. To counter prejudice and oversimplification, meticulous data collection is of the utmost importance. I decided to use a variety of methods. The principle source of information were in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each partner. In addition, I interviewed the couples together, administered short questionnaires to each participant at the time of the interviews and 18-24 months post interview, and used the time spent with the families for participant observation.

2.2.1. INTERVIEWS

The individual interviews followed a seven page interview guide (see Appendix I) that included questions about children, relationship history, housework and childcare, employment, money, families of origin, friends, neighbors, membership in groups, decision-making patterns, conflict management, sex, and expectations about the future.

In fear of over structuring the interviews, I decided to test the impact of using the interview guide on the quality and breadth of generated data. I conducted the first four interviews without the interview guide and the second four interviews with the guide. Interestingly, the early conversational style generated basically the same information the interview guide elicited. However, the interviews took longer and the material was less dense. Therefore, I decided to use the guide consistently but leave room for participants to follow their own train of thought.

The lengths of interviews ranged from one hour to two and a half hours with an average of 90 minutes. All interviews were audio-taped and later transcribed in their entirety. All participants signed release forms that assured their anonymity.

Subsequent to the individual interviews I talked to both partners together. Various research projects, including the American Couples study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), have employed this threefold interviewing method. While individual interviews provide the respondents with the necessary privacy and confidentiality to address issues that are contested among partners or embarrassing in some way, couple interviews offer an opportunity to create shared meaning and negotiate controversial topics. As Daly points out:

Unlike other kinds of identities, in which individuals can strive for an identity independent of others, parenthood is usually contingent on a *shared* construction of reality. (1992: 107)

During the first couple interviews, I followed Bennett and McAvity's suggestion to cover material that was "similar in subject matter and parallel in organization to that collected earlier in the individual sessions" (1985: 81). This approach turned out to be rather tedious and did not elicit different information.

However, I did not want to abandon couple interviews altogether. As Allan (1980) points out, the value of joint sessions lies not only in the information gathered but in the possibility to observe couples' interactions. In this case, children were often present because they were too young to be left alone. The interactions between the mothers and the child/ren as well as with each other added important insights into family dynamics.

To make the couple sessions more interesting, I devised a different interview guide (see Appendix II). As the study progressed, I only used the questions that restated issues that were already discussed in the individual sessions if there was conflict or contradiction in that area. Otherwise I concentrated on items that generated new information such as the couples' consideration of non-nuclear family forms.

The couple interviews tended to be much shorter than the individual interviews – 30 minutes on average. In many cases the presence of the child distracted the parents from the interview. In addition, early on I realized that it was easiest to schedule all three interviews on one day or evening because of parents' tight schedules and my limited travel funds. As a result, however, everybody, including myself, was tired and less

focused at the end of the day.

The advantage of spending many hours with one family was increased intimacy and a frank atmosphere toward the end of the day. Often I spent informal time with the participants sharing a meal or a break. Since these moments were more relaxed, participants would play with their children, tell stories about their family life, talk about their weekends, or just chat about daily events. These were wonderful opportunities for *participant observations*. I took extensive field notes on these interactions.

2.2.2. QUESTIONNAIRES

Demographic data, although critical to any sociological analysis, do not easily flow from an open-ended interview format. To avoid tedious questions, I constructed a questionnaire (see Appendix III) that would provide easy access to demographic information such as date of birth, educational levels, and income.

For triangulation purposes, I also included items concerning the transition to parenthood and how many hours per week participants spent on housework, childcare, paid labor, and schooling and how they divided up specific housework and childcare tasks. This part of the questionnaire borrowed heavily from the Blumstein and Schwartz's (1983) extensive quantitative instrument. To not overburden the respondents, the questionnaire was brief.

2.2.3. FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRES

Young children's developmental changes strongly impact on the division of labor and the

experiences of parenthood. Instead of entirely relying on parents' recollections of earlier phases in their childrearing lives, I decided to include a longitudinal component in the study. Originally, I had intended to reinterview a subsample of couples after 12 months.

By the time I had concluded the first wave of interviews, issues of equality and flexibility in work arrangements over time had emerged from the ongoing data analysis as central themes. To test my hypotheses I needed comparable data for the whole sample. Thus, I decided to send out follow-up questionnaires rather than to reinterview only a few couples.

The follow-up questionnaires (see Appendix IV) included all the original items, plus open-ended questions about basic life changes. In February of 1996, I sent a questionnaire to each participant. The original interviews had taken place between one and a half and two years prior to that date. Thirteen couples returned their questionnaires without any further follow-up – two of which had separated since the interview.¹ An additional six families responded after sending out another set of questionnaires in May of 1996. The response rate was 76%.

In a final attempt to motivate the participants to return the questionnaires, I called the remaining six couples in August of 1996. The calls established that all families were doing well. All promised to respond shortly but failed to do so. I presumed that their lack of interest stemmed from their understanding that not much had changed since the time of the interviews.

2.3. SAMPLE

Since I was interested in studying the effects of biological motherhood in nuclear family settings, the sample consisted entirely of lesbian couples who had children conceived during their relationship.² One of the women was the biological mother of each child. They considered themselves a family and there were no children from prior relationships living in the household.

At least one child was under the age of six at the time of the initial interviews. Although childcare and housework demands decrease as the children get older, children remain highly dependent on their parents' care and attention until they start formal schooling. Limiting the sample to families with children of that age had the additional advantage of minimizing variance created by cohort differences, changing social norms and environments.

Grounded theory calls for open sampling, which offers the most inclusive approach to selecting cases. Strauss and Corbin define open sampling as follows:

The aim of sampling here is to uncover as many potentially relevant categories as possible, along with their properties and dimensions... The sampling is open to those persons, places, situations that will provide the greatest opportunity to gather the most relevant data about the phenomenon under investigation. (1990: 181)

Open sampling in the case of lesbian mothers is of particular importance because so little is known about their transition to parenthood and their division of labor.

On the other hand, sampling presents a particular problem in lesbian and gay studies. Because of continued wide-spread discrimination against lesbians and gay men, not everyone is open about his or her sexual orientation. Thus, there are no reliable

means to predict the number of homosexual individuals or their distribution along social and economic lines.

Students of homosexuality concede that identification is practically impossible due to the hidden nature of the homosexual population. Instead of drawing samples randomly from a complete universe, we are obliged to take them from the most accessible sources. (Donovan, 1992: 28)

Information about lesbian and gay families is even less available because of the ever-present threat of losing custody of one's children to former spouses or family members. Thus, existing estimates of lesbian and gay families and their children vary greatly and tend to be vague. DiLapi (1989) reports estimates of over two million lesbian mothers and approximately 1.5 million children that live in families with lesbian mothers. With respect to gay men, Bozett (1989) reports estimates between 1.1 and 2.3 million gay fathers in the United States. Gender-bias makes it less likely that children permanently reside with their gay fathers. Therefore, it is impossible to gauge how many children actually live in gay households.

The most accessible sources for this study were couples identified through personal contacts and participants in associations of lesbian and gay families in the larger New York Metropolitan Area and other cities in the Northeast. A more liberal climate and higher availability of social resources in urban environments such as New York City enables lesbian and gay families to be more visible and, thus, more accessible to study. Although discrimination remains high, lesbian and gay families have access to more social and legal resources to counteract and reduce the consequences of discrimination. Controlling for region and urbanization also allows more variation on other important

variables, such as race/ethnicity, class, personal ideology (e.g. feminism) and degree of "outness."

To locate the participants, I employed four different methods. Six of the participating couples were identified through personal contacts. Ten couples responded to an advertisement about the study in Kids' Talk, the newsletter of Center Kids, The Family Project of the Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center in New York City. In addition, I contacted four couples at functions for lesbian and gay families that were sponsored by Center Kids or The Lesbian and Gay Parents Coalition International. And finally, five couples were referred by other participating families. Referrals were restricted to one couple per family.

The couples I contacted at social events exhibited relatively high levels of conflict in their families. Interestingly, the couples who responded to my advertisement were more polarized. Either they were very satisfied with their family life or had experienced stress in their transition to parenthood and/or their division of labor. Self-selection, as in most qualitative sampling approaches, poses a serious problem. Using various contact methods was an attempt to reduce that danger.

Grounded theory calls for theoretical sampling, that is "...sampling on the basis of concepts that have proven theoretical relevance to the evolving theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990:177). Although it is extremely difficult to identify lesbian families, I did reach theoretical saturation after interviewing 25 couples, meaning that

(1) no new or relevant data seem to emerge regarding a category; (2) the category development is dense, insofar as all of the paradigm elements are accounted for, along with variation and process; (3) the relationships

between categories are well established and validated. (Straus & Corbin, 1990:188)

In the final sample (see Table 2.1.), all couples had one or more children under the age of six years. The average age of the youngest child was 23 months while the

Table 2.1.: Sample Profile

Number of Participants	25 couples (n=50)
Number of Children	1 child (n=40); 2 children (n=10)
Age of Youngest Child	23 months (mean); 14 months (median)
Sex of Children	female (n=15); male (n=15)
Years With Current Partner	9 (mean and median)
Age of Participants	38 (mean and median)
Years of Education	18 (mean and median)
Highest Degree Earned	Doctorate or Professional (14); Masters (13); Bachelors (13); Associates (5); High School (5)
Annual Individual Income	\$53,000 (mean); \$47,500 (median)
Annual Family Income	\$106,000 (mean); \$90,000 (median)
Employment Status	68% full-time; 18% part-time; 8% unemployed; 6% on parental leave
Racial/Ethnic Composition	European descent (45); African descent (2); Multiracial descent(2); Asian descent (1)
Feminist Self-Identification	super feminist (21); feminist (9); not feminist but support equality (8); not feminist at all (6)
Political Affiliation	Democrat (80%); Other (20%)
Religious Affiliation	Jewish (13); Catholic (12); Protestant (12); no religion (9); Atheist (2); New Age (1)
Place of Residence	Brooklyn (18); Manhattan (8); Long Island (8); Other (6); Upstate New York (4); New Jersey (4); Queens (2)
Type of Housing	Own House (26); Own Apartment (12); Apartment Rental (12)
Contact Method	Newsletter Ad (20); Personal Contact (12); Referrals from Other Participants (10); Social Events (8)

median was only 14 months. One parent was the biological mother of each child. All

children were conceived within the context of the couple's relationship. Both partners were generally committed to a two-parent model with relatively strong family boundaries. Five couples had two children, all others had one. Eighteen of the children were under two years old. The remaining twelve ranged in age between three and eight. All but one birthmother had breastfed her child/ren.

The respondents were highly educated (10% high school, 10% associates, 26% bachelors, 26% masters, 28% professional or doctorate degrees) and 68% worked full-time (18% part-time, 6% on leave, 8% unemployed). Their average income per family was \$106,000 per year while the median income was \$90,000. These figures are especially high given the lack of access to at least one male wage. Thirteen couples lived in houses they owned. Six families resided in condominiums; another six occupied rented apartments. Except for one Chinese American (2%), one African American (2%) and three Caribbean American respondents (6%), all participants were European American (90%). The respondents ranged in age between 27 to 49 years with a mean and median of 38 years.

Ideologically, the participants were generally on the left politically (approximately 80% were Democrats), more than half were religiously active, and 73% identified as feminist. While about the same number of birthmothers (50%) and comothers (46%) were *strongly* committed to feminist beliefs, those who did not consider themselves feminists in any way were more likely to be comothers (36% of comothers vs. 18% of birthmothers).

This sample is obviously not representative of the general population, nor is it typical for the lesbian community or even lesbian mothers (Allen & Demo, 1995). However, many studies of lesbian baby boom families show similar compositions³ (Patterson, 1995a & 1995b; Sullivan, 1996). The high levels of education, income, political liberalism, feminist convictions and racial homogeneity might be partly due to the urban environments that have been studied – mainly New York and San Francisco – and partly to the very deliberate process of becoming a parent. Twenty-four out of 25 couples used donor insemination – a method that requires knowledge and, in most cases, money and the willingness to involve outside institutions. Also, most mothers were in their thirties by the time they had their first baby. Like heterosexual middle-class women, many postponed childbearing until they were occupationally settled and had reached a point of financial security and personal maturity.

However, for the specific purpose of understanding the role of biological motherhood, rational choice, power, and gender *within* the nuclear family structure but *outside* the framework of gender inequality, these families can add much to our understanding of the dynamics involved in the transition to parenthood and the division of labor. This is not to say that class, race/ethnicity, and location are inconsequential. On the contrary, more research is needed in these areas to understand the influence of these variables on the transition to parenthood and in the division of labor in families and on many other family choices. Yet, as with studies of dual-career, white, urban couples, the atypical case can often illuminate underlying social patterns.

2.4. ENDNOTES

1. The rate of separation (8%) in this study roughly corresponds with the break-up rate Cowan and Cowan (1990) found in their transition to parenthood study. Nineteen percent of the parents they studied had separated at the end of seven years.
2. To avoid the complications of blended families and the power and identification differences between (birth)mothers and stepmothers (Nelson, 1996), I restricted the sample to nuclear families.
3. This impression was also supported by personal discussions with Terry Boggis of Center Kids in New York, and other researchers who work with this population.

PART I

LESBIAN COUPLES' TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD

3. BECOMING LESBIAN PARENTS

3.1. LEGAL MATTERS AND THEIR SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES

Lesbian and gay families still face de facto as well as de jure discrimination. The role of children in escalating legal discrimination is exemplified in numerous court battles.¹ Even in Scandinavian countries in which marriage between adults of the same sex is legal, adoption of children by same-sex couples is not. In addition, lesbian and gay families with children are routinely confronted with heterosexist assumptions and homophobic assaults.

At this time, same sex partners are barred from legal marriage in the United States and domestic partnership policies are rare and only partially provide protection and benefits (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995). Lesbian families do not enjoy automatic access to such privileges as family insurance, taxation and inheritance benefits, or protection for both partners in case of the dissolution of the relationship (Martin, 1993). Similarly, the integrity of lesbian nuclear families is threatened by court rulings taking away custody from lesbian birthmothers and withholding the right to second parent adoption from comothers².

Second parent adoption by comothers – which have been approved in only a few places (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995) – is of the utmost importance with respect to family integrity. As a parent with no legal recourse, a comother has no valid claim to custody or visitation rights in case the couple dissolves their union. In turn, birthmothers are unable to force comothers into honoring their parental responsibilities. Secondly, if the biological and, thus, legal mother becomes incompetent or dies, the birthmother's

family or social service agencies have the authority to take away the child/ren from the comother (Martin, 1993).

The legal insecurities of lesbian nuclear families are matched by social invisibility and outright discrimination. In general, stereotypes about homosexuality include that lesbians are unfit mothers and should not be allowed to raise children – even their own (DiLapi, 1989; Falk, 1989; Rivera, 1987). In addition, a comother's status as mother is often ignored or questioned (Patterson, 1995b).

Motherhood is generally considered the supreme achievement of feminine virtue. However, the borders of "true motherhood" are heavily policed by cultural norms. Not just any mother deserves the full protection of the state and society.

According to current ideologies, then the ideal circumstances in which to have and rear children are with mother and father being over 20 years of age (but not too old, that is, not above 40), married before birth and for the duration of childhood. (Phoenix and Woollett, 1991:15)

Like single mothers lesbian mothers are "bad mothers" by definition because they fall outside the norm of marriage.³ Choosing a woman rather than a man as her spouse and intimate partner adds the specter of homosexuality to unwed motherhood.

Homosexuality automatically defines lesbian mothers as not only bad but "unfit mothers."

Courts make two general assumptions about lesbian mothers themselves. First, courts often express the belief that all homosexual individuals, including lesbian mothers, are mentally ill... Second, it is commonly assumed that lesbian women are less maternal than their heterosexual counterparts and, thus, are poor mothers. (Falk, 1989:942)

Even mothers who conceived their children within the context of heterosexual

relationships lose their status as "good mothers" as soon as they become lesbians.

Lesbian couples who decide to become parents encounter two more complications to social and legal acceptance. First, formerly heterosexual mothers fall from grace because of their changed sexual orientation. Lesbians who decide to have children add, according to society, evil intent to an otherwise already immoral situation. They consciously contradict social and legal sentiments on the issue of lesbian motherhood. Thus, lesbian couples who have children together inspire the most intense social and legal controversies.

Second, the cultural and legal emphasis on genetic connections between children and their parents – which is not shared by all cultures – adds another dimension of invisibility and discrimination for comothers. Birthmothers – especially in the absence of a legal father – have substantial rights based on their biological connection to their child/ren. Comothers generally lack the biological claim to their offspring.⁴

Third, commonly held motherhood ideology only assigns "true motherhood" to one person, generally the birthmother, thus creating a "motherhood hierarchy." Any other claim to motherhood, as in shared motherhood, smacks of substitute parenthood and creates the need to legitimize the relationship to the child.

Fourth, motherhood is deeply embedded in heterosexist ideology. Routinely, mothers are assumed to be heterosexual by definition. If no father is present, women with children are presumed to be single. Thus, lesbian mothers with partners regularly have to educate others about their lesbianism and their relationships.

Despite these formidable obstacles, an ever increasing number of lesbian couples

are joining the so-called "lesbian baby boom" and are creating a new social phenomenon of cultural and political significance. As the increasing divorce of sexuality from reproduction has changed the face of modern parenthood, the divorce of reproduction from heterosexuality has the potential to leave an indelible mark on the conception of contemporary parenthood. Having two people sharing motherhood opens new ways of conceiving parenthood, not only for lesbians but also for heterosexual couples who look for models of parenthood that transcend "traditional" notions of the gendered nature of procreation.

3.2. THE DECISION

As for many other couples, the transition to parenthood for lesbian couples begins with the decision to have a child (Nelson, 1996). When lesbians decide to have children, they have to overcome many concerns little known to heterosexual couples. For example, the strength of heterosexual ideology around motherhood made one birthmother seriously question her sexual choices.

Elizabeth: Right before we moved back from [the Midwest] we split up. I thought that, maybe, I wanted to be straight. I really wasn't sure who I was or even if I could have children with a woman.

Loretta, another birthmother, even considered marrying a man because it seemed very difficult to have a child within a lesbian relationship.

I had this burning desire to have a child. I was going to die if I didn't have a kid. At some point, in the back of my mind I had considered marrying a man, if I didn't come up with some idea or some way to do it.

The advent of easier access to alternative insemination, increased support for women's

control over their bodies independent of men, and increased public acceptance of homosexuality paved the way for the lesbian babyboom and for women like Loretta.

The close association of motherhood with heterosexuality figured prominently into other mother's prior disinterest in having children. Some women who had come out very early in life and before the 1980s had thoroughly internalized the message that being a lesbian by definition meant having no children (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995).

Christine (comother): I realized that I was a lesbian when I was 13. Thinking that I was a lesbian automatically meant that there would be no children in my life. And I never felt any kind of sadness. I never felt that I wanted it and couldn't, or couldn't figure out how to. It was just the way it was.

Or as Nina, another comother, put it, "It [motherhood] wasn't really part of the lesbian lifestyle," before the 1980's (Lewin, 1994). On the contrary, lesbianism offered women the option of a freely chosen childless life (Polikoff, 1987).

Most women struggled with the questions of whether it was right to bring a child into a homophobic world. Danielle described how her own family reinforced these nagging feelings of guilt.

[My father] told me all the things that I didn't want to hear because it's the little voices in the back of your head what society tells you She's going to be unhappy. You have no right to do this. It's very selfish How do you think you can be a good parent?

In the end, however, all basically came to the same conclusion as Dana

My theory was that there are many little children in the world who are malnourished and Renee won't be. There are small children who don't have two parents. Yeah, she is the child of two mothers. But I think in the earlier years she won't take as much garbage as later on when children had the opportunity to learn bigotry and prejudice. What we are aiming for is something like the Little Red School House in the Village. Even if it

will cost us a bunch of money to do it, she will go so she will have a good environment.

Conscious choices of where to live and which schools to enroll their children in were primary mechanisms of protecting their children from early exposure to homophobic environments.

3.3. PLANNING PARENTHOOD

Once the decision to have a child was made, most parents meticulously planned the transition to parenthood. Since lesbians are not prone to unintended pregnancies, all couples in my sample carefully mapped out every step toward parenthood. Most couples devised a plan of action to create a child-friendly environment before they tried to get pregnant. They paid much attention to material as well as emotional factors.

Sheila: I had a list of all the things I wanted to accomplish before I got pregnant. I wanted Lucy to come out to her mother. I wanted to make some more money. I wanted to have health insurance and life insurance, disability insurance. And I wanted to talk to my parents about the idea of my having a child because I didn't want to show up one day and say I'm pregnant and then have to deal with whatever their reaction would be.

Occupational choices and career development played an important role in deciding about the timing of having a child. Amanda, a comother, explained how she was preparing to become the birthmother of their second child:

I have to have a job first in order to have a child. I have to have insurance. Once I get the job I'll probably wait a few months and then start trying. It will be at least a couple of years.

Surprisingly, I found very little conflict over whose work or career should have primacy at any given moment. When one partner took off time from work to be with the child/ren

it was either seen as a privilege or the couple had decided to take turns providing for the child full-time.

The starting point for most decisions in this area was the assumption that both partners' paid work commitments were equally important. This became clear in one case in which this assumption was violated. Shirley, a birthmother of twins, was the main provider in the family – she made \$65,000 while her partner grossed \$25,000. When she suggested that the comother might want to become the primary caregiver for their children, she encountered strong resistance.

I actually wanted [Jackie] to stay home because of the cost of daycare and the benefit to the children. I was thinking that it would be a very admirable thing to stay home and raise the kids. But she wasn't really interested at all. I was surprised that it offended her.

From a rational choice perspective, Shirley's proposal was an effective way to maximize utility through specialization into homemaker and breadwinner. In this case, efficiency considerations ran counter to Jackie's basic sentiments. Generally, however, maximizing utility and optimizing individual choice were not mutually exclusive.

The interviews suggest that the ease with which couples usually were able to design their employment and family care arrangements was based on shared value systems rooted in feminism and egalitarian parenting ideology. For both partners paid work had been a central part of their identity and family work was seen as rewarding and challenging by both. Neither the home nor the workplace per se offered more beneficial experiences which resulted in great flexibility in the division of labor and minimized the impact of biological motherhood.

Two of the most discussed and consequential issues in the transition to parenthood were who would carry the child and the choice of sperm donor.

3.4. A MATTER OF DESIRE: TO BE OR NOT TO BE A BIRTHMOTHER

Unless one or both partners experiences fertility problems, lesbian couples have the unique advantage of having a choice of who will carry a child. The choice of who would be the birthmother was primarily a result of the desire to bear a child⁵ rather than of economic considerations. For many having a child had been a life-long dream. Some had associated this dream with being married to a man. Others, like Mindy, had disassociated motherhood from marriage early on.

I never really thought that I would get married but I surely thought about having children. I remember, when I was in high school, I had an Empire dress. I saved it for when I would have children because I could wear it when I was pregnant.

Like many heterosexual women (Gerson, 1985), a number of participants had felt so strongly about becoming mothers that they only had entered their current relationships after their partners showed strong interest in having children. In Helen's case, a prior lesbian relationship had deteriorated because of her former partner's unwillingness to commit to parenthood.

When I was about 33, I did realize that I did want to have a child. Unfortunately, my current lover did not. Ultimately, that led to a break-up. We were together seven years and that was hard. Then [it took a] a few years looking for a relationship with someone who wanted to raise a child.

In six cases both partners were interested in bearing a child. In one family both

mothers had given birth to one girl each. The remaining five couples had one child and were planning to have another by the comother. In these instances age became the deciding factor along with the strength of desire. Economic considerations were rarely mentioned and were clearly secondary in the decision-making process of who would bear the first child. Financial matters became more important, however, when couples thought about having another one. Delores put it this way:

Sometimes I look at him and he is such a great kid and I think, "Oh, two would be twice as fun." And then I think, "You must be out of your mind." No, I don't think we will have another one. Actually, financially I am sure we couldn't do it.

Given the strength of motherhood ideology in connection with gender identity, I anticipated significant conflict over the decision of who would carry the first child (Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Lewin (1993) also had found in her study of single heterosexual and mostly single lesbian mothers that motherhood was a central identity for women in both groups. Instead of having conflict around birthmotherhood, many couples in my study struggled with the decision to have a child at all. As mentioned above, some women had not seriously considered motherhood as part of their lesbian life choices.

In nine families, both partners had equally strong feelings about having children. In another eight couples, birthmothers had to coax their partners into expanding their families. Two birthmothers even agreed to carry the primary responsibility for the child and for childcare in order to gain their lovers' support. In these two cases, Mahony's argument (1995) was supported: the one-sided desire for a child left the birthmothers

with primary responsibility for the baby. Yet, in one case the comother balanced the birthmothers primary responsibility for childcare by running the household. In the other case, the birthmother became the “fall-back” mom but the comother shared motherhood responsibilities in all other ways. Thus, the stronger original desire for a child did not lead to the birthmothers’ increased responsibility for all family work.

Another two couples were at the brink of dissolving their relationship over the issue of children.⁶ Lillian explained how difficult their decision-making process had been.

The way I got this baby was that I said, "Okay, we won't have to be equal. I'll do more of the work. I really have to have this baby." It got pretty ugly. We separated for a while. We were totally involved but I lived a mile away. I thought things through and so did Tracey. At the end of that we got back together and did the getting pregnant.

While for the majority of parents motherhood was a chief adult aspiration, these eight comothers were clearly opposed to having children. However, after much deliberation and soul searching they decided to support their partner's decision to have a child. In their narratives, many stressed that after the early tribulations they clearly enjoyed having children. Wendy, the comother of a one-year-old, put it this way,

It was really Angela's dream. At first, I was completely closed to it. I just never considered it a possibility. Now I can't imagine life without her. You just fall in love with the baby. I would hate to have to choose between Angela and the baby.

In support of Ruddick's (1983) notion of maternal thinking, mothering behavior produced strong maternal identities even in cases where there was opposition to having a child in the first place. This finding is even more meaningful because it is shared mothering rather than primary mothering as in heterosexual or single parent households.

That is, the child would not be without a mother if the coparent refused to take on a mothering role. A result of both parents' strong maternal commitment was a very child-centered family life (Coltrane, 1989 & 1996; Ehrensaft, 1990).

3.5. CONFLICTING INTERESTS: HOW TO CHOOSE A DONOR

Once a couple had decided on who would carry the child, the question of choosing a donor moved center stage. Since lesbians are not prone to unintended pregnancies, the question of method of conception had to be addressed. In this sample, all couples but one chose alternative insemination.

The couple who used heterosexual intercourse to conceive had chosen a former boyfriend of the birthmother to father their child but otherwise be uninvolved in the upbringing of their daughter. Getting pregnant through heterosexual intercourse normalized the experience because it adhered to heterosexual motherhood standards. Louise, the birthmother, was concerned with the potential difficulties involved in explaining donor insemination.

We always agreed that we would have it naturally without artificial insemination, with someone that we knew. It turned out to be an old boyfriend of mine. She knows about him as opposed to artificial insemination. I could just see myself – at her age – trying to explain to her what [AI] was. Explaining sex to a child is hard enough.

On the other hand, heterosexual intimacy threatened the primacy of the couple's lesbian relationship. Louise, the birthmother, had flown out to see the donor for a weekend. When asked whether she was comfortable with this method of conception, Anne, the comother, answered:

I can't say that I felt good about it. I had to tell myself that the reason we were doing this was so that we could have a family together and have a person involved. It wasn't a matter of a sexual attraction or an emotional or any other kind of attraction with this person. But it was a rough weekend. [laughing] It was difficult in my mind to think where she was and what she was doing.

Fortunately, Louise conceived on the first try avoiding any further emotional stress.

The choice of alternative insemination involved other difficult decisions – such as whether to use a known or unknown donor. The conflict most mothers felt when using an unknown donor centered around the potential need of their children to know their biological father. The widely publicized anguish of adults who found out later in life that they were adopted as children (Martin, 1993) and increased awareness of the profound impact of secrecy on adults who were conceived through donor insemination (Orenstein, 1995), had also sensitized these women. Ruth, the birthmother of a two-year-old, remarked:

Because of the health issues, the health background check and the legal issues, we decided to go with the sperm bank. And I think the other way, on the other side, would be for Hudson to know who his father is. And that's one of the things he will have to deal with in life. We can't undo that, we made our choice. I think that is probably the hardest thing on his end.

Most parents at least considered using a known donor for the child's benefit.

Veronica: I liked the idea of knowing who it was for Kay's sake. If at some point she wanted to know where the other half of her heritage came from then she would have that option available to her.

In the end, six couples (24%) did choose a known donor to father their child.

A number of couples had considered and used both options. Some started out with frozen semen from sperm banks and switched to fresh semen of a known donor

because they experienced difficulties conceiving with frozen sperm. Others took the reverse route because the women had trouble getting pregnant and the donors tired of the monthly trip to the couples' homes.

Madeline: The first year, we had a known donor. He finally got tired out. It's a tough call. He was single at the time and had fallen in love. He lived on in Manhattan and we were in Brooklyn. It was an added hassle. When he wanted to stop trying, we went to a bank.

The criteria for choosing specific characteristics in a donor provided an interesting example of how the couples in this study viewed the role of biology – in this case genetics – in the reproductive process. While these women generally down-played the role of biological motherhood in their attempt to share motherhood, they were very conscious of issues of heredity with regard to donors. Physical characteristics, ethnicity, and education ranked highest on the list of criteria. But personality traits evidenced in hobbies and political outlooks also played a role for choosing a specific donor.

Angela: Height, color of eyes - definitely had to be blue. Kind of tall. He is six feet. Wendy is 5'10" and skinny. And he had to be a nice guy. He was an only child, a college student. He seemed to like his parents. He wanted peace in the world. He wanted to be in Germany when the wall came down. He just sounded like a nice guy.

The care with which mothers generally chose the donors indicated how seriously they took the role of heredity.

The fact that most couples matched the comothers characteristics with those of the donor showed another way in which cultural assumptions about biological parenthood influenced donor selection. Matching allowed comothers to indirectly participate in the biological process giving them a generic biological connection with the

child. In one case, ethnic matching had an unexpected twist.

Susan: Basically we used my background. My background was German and Irish. [...] My grandmother died while Ruth was pregnant. My brother's boyfriend was there and he said "What nationality was she?" I said, "Oh, she was German." My father said, "No, actually she was Dutch." And Ruth and I looked at each other - "She was Dutch?" And here we had based it all on that ridiculous idea that I was German.

Matching also had an important social function. Family resemblance eased social interactions because people can safely assume certain types of relationships. When comothers are in public with their children who vaguely resemble them, intrusive questions about family relationships are less likely.

Interracial and mixed-race couples reported an additional concern – the "nanny" issue. One reason for matching the donor with the comothers' ethnic heritage was to minimize the likelihood that the comother would be mistaken for the nanny in public.

Lucy explained:

We wanted a Chinese donor so that the kid would hopefully look at least half Asian. That when I would take him out and say that he is my son people would not say, "Oh, no way." If we had a caucasian donor and the baby would have blond hair and blue eyes and I'd take the baby out they would think, "Oh, this is the maid. This is the nanny."

However, these strategies were not always successful and comothers faced a complex mix of heterosexism and racism.

While biological and personal circumstances dictated the choice of donor in some case, often powerful emotional and legal concerns governed the final decision about known or unknown donors (Martin, 1993; Rubenstein, 1993). Generally, the women I interviewed were very protective of their family boundaries. They were hesitant to grant

any "outsider" a say in family decisions.⁷ Amanda, the comother of a one-year-old, described their decision-making process as follows:

We went through different alternatives, looked at different options, thought seriously about using a known donor and interviewed a few people. And for some reason or another it was never quite right. Either they wanted to have more involvement than we wanted them to have. Or they wanted to have less. So, we could never quite find a perfect match. And after hearing some horror stories from people ... that people had their kids taken away. We just decided not go that route.

Beyond the serious legal insecurities, a known donor introduced the idea that a family with two mothers somehow would be incomplete. The continuous efforts to fight heterosexual definitions of proper parenting led many to the conscious choice of an unknown donor. Victoria, the birthmother of a two-year-old, explained their reasoning:

We had several offers from different friends of ours who volunteered their sperm. But in the end, we decided that you don't know what's gonna happen down the road and we felt that it was more symbolic that this was an undertaking of me and Kathleen as opposed to me and Kathleen and somebody else to do it anonymously through a sperm bank.

Motherhood hierarchy based on the legal and emotional focus on biology and heterosexual nuclear family patterns pushed many comothers to categorically insist on unknown donors. Marilyn, a birthmother, explained their reasoning behind an unknown donor.

I would have preferred a known donor only because I don't have much family. Just to have another person who is connected to Christopher would have been great. But I did understand Jennifer's point. Jennifer's concern was to become the third parent rather than the other parent.

As heterosexual couples and single women who employ alternative insemination (Wikler & Wikler, 1991), the mothers in my study very acutely felt how the ideology of

"the traditional family," notions of the biological primacy, and their own interests in protecting their family integrity, collided. The precarious legal and emotional situation of comothers was a direct result of bio-centric and heterosexist definitions of family (Rubenstein, 1993). Anonymous sperm reduced the legal threats to family integrity while symbolically presenting the family as a complete unit.

3.6. LEGAL CONCERNS

While donors were one potential source of interference in the family, the legal and social insecurity of lesbian families also affected their own relationships as well as their connections with their families of origin. For many, legal documents became one major attempt to protect comothers' parental rights and, in some instances, birthmothers' and children's financial needs in case of the dissolution of the parental relationship.

3.6.1. WILLS AND BILLS

The legal vulnerability of lesbian families prompted most couples to accumulate an extensive collection of legal documents. Most couples had wills leaving their property to their partners and children. Many birthmothers explicitly stated in separate documents or in their wills that in case of their death or incompetence they wished the comother to become the legal parent. However, they were painfully aware that the provisions they made for their children could be overturned in court.

The only thing that we have done right now is in the event of my death I have written a statement and had it notarized. Really, that's all we can do legally. There is really nothing else - and a will. That's all I have, saying

that I want her to be his surrogate parent. But there is nothing that really stands. Any of my relatives could claim him because they are biological relatives. (Janet, birthmother)

Some parents had no legal papers indicating their wishes. For some it was just a matter of "getting around to it." Their infant or toddler at home severely limited their time and energy. Loretta, the birthmother of a four-year-old, pointed out, "We've been just getting to the daily routine of things. We've been just struggling day by day." Her partner Jennie added:

That's something we started working on. See, our financial situation wasn't that great right at the time when he was born. Loretta was still in school. And all this - we started working on it. Her uncle was actually helping us financially. We had to hire a lawyer but he passed away before the thing really was done.

The cost of legal work was an important factor for families with relatively low incomes. In general, those with limited financial resources were more vulnerable to outside intervention.⁸

3.6.2. SECOND PARENT ADOPTION

While wills were within the reach of most parents, only one comother had been able to adopt her child. At the time of the interviews, the New York Court of Appeals was deliberating an important decision on second parent adoptions by non-married partners – heterosexual or homosexual. On November 2nd, 1995, the court ruled that non-married couples could adopt the children of their partners. Most families in my study were New York State residents. All couples indicated great interest in second parent adoption. Some had already started the process but had put it on hold because of the pending

decision in the New York Court of Appeals.

In addition to the uncertain legal situation, the costs associated with second parent adoptions were prohibitive for some. For Emily, a comother of two daughters, both factors were intertwined:

The only thing I would consider looking into it - you go to a judge and you go through hundreds and hundreds of dollars and you get a lawyer to present you. And I could actually adopt the children and have them be Cindy's and mine, both. But you're talking \$4,000 - \$5,000 to do this. It's very expensive. And I don't think it's in the budget. Unless you are a professional and have money to just burn... And the other risk that I have been told about this is that you would spend those thousands and thousands of dollars and depending on the judge, it will either go through or it won't. There is no guarantee.

Emily expressed a widespread sentiment among mothers in states in which second parent adoption for lesbian and gay couples is not guaranteed. Furthermore, many parents feared that it would become increasingly difficult to adopt if their petition had been denied before.

In the follow-up questionnaire, one Manhattan couple indicated that just recently the comother had been able to adopt her daughter. The birthmother noted that "This was a year-long difficult process. Rather intensive, *very* expensive and nerve-wracking at the end." Despite the enormous financial and emotional costs, most families were very anxious about adopting as soon as possible.

Second parent adoption was of even greater interest to couples who had used known donors than to those who had opted for unknown donors. Socially as well as legally the issue of the genetic father poses one of the most complex questions lesbian families face. As discussed above, a known donor introduces the potential for outside

interference by the sperm donor. Married couples who use donor insemination are protected by marriage law because the husband automatically becomes the legal father. In the absence of a "husband," the sperm donor can claim paternity rights even though the child has two parents and he has stated disinterest at an earlier time.⁹

Many couples decided to use unknown donors in order to avoid potential legal battles with donors. Cindy, the birthmother of two, voiced the concerns of many:

We didn't want to have any repercussions down the road - anybody claiming her or anybody's family claiming rights on our kids.

The couples who used known donors were especially keen on adopting early on. Helen, the birthmother of a one-year-old, explained:

The initial recommendation of our lawyer was that we complete our family and then proceed [with the adoption]. Colleen is more anxious to formalize it earlier. But it doesn't really seem practical because it is relatively expensive. And I would like to formalize it because it would legally terminate the donor's rights. Which would be - people have had problems with donors, known donors - it would eliminate that.

The numerous legal and social implications of having known donors led many couples to agonize over this decision. But known donors were not the only source of legal insecurity. Families of origin posed even greater potential threats, especially to the rights of comothers in the event of birthmothers' incompetence or death.

3.7. IN-LAWS AND OUT-LAWS

The majority of mothers had close relationships with their families of origin. Some grandparents were supportive from the first moment and extended all the help they were able to give. Supportive attitudes sometimes came as a surprise. Louise was very happy

about her father's positive reaction to her pregnancy. His political stance on other issues suggested a more negative response.

And my father is very conservative. He is probably a racist. He is a racist! He has some weird attitudes about women. He is Republican, kind of. But when I called him on Father's Day, the time when I was pregnant, he didn't even hesitate. He just said, "Is that what you want?" And I said, "Yes, it is very important to me." He said, "Well then, I know you will be very happy. And I'm really happy for you."

Most, however, experienced some degree of crisis when they told their parents and families about having a child with their partners. Parents often voiced the same concerns as the general public. Most had grown to accept their daughters relationship with another woman. Bearing and raising a child together, however, met with much more resistance. Danielle, the birthmother of a one-year-old, described how her father's reaction reiterated heterosexist assumptions about lesbian motherhood.

And when I went over to tell him, I was just shaking because I knew that he would be very upset. He told me all the things that I didn't want to hear because it's the little voices in the back of your head what society tells you. "She's going to be unhappy. You have no right to do this. It's very selfish. How do you think you can be a good parent." All that stuff. And he even asked me, "How far along are you?" and implied that he could talk me into having an abortion or something. I was really irate. I was supposed to stay for dinner and I just left.

Conflicts with parents often created stress and strain on a couple's relationship. The emotional cost of family friction forced the mothers to develop a variety of mechanisms to minimize the negative effects of parental disapproval on themselves and their children.

Three types of strategies emerged from the interviews. Most couples *confronted* their families with the truth about their children and relationships. Many experienced a period of crisis before they established or reestablished a comfortable relationship with

their parents and siblings. Only a few couples tried to *avoid* the whole issue of lesbian parenthood by obscuring the nature of their relationship or withholding information about their child/ren. They hoped for tacit acceptance or at least absence of conflict. This coping strategy tended to be temporary because of the potential negative consequences for the family unit and the well-being of the children. Lastly, in some cases the conflict around lesbian motherhood could not be resolved and *withdrawal* became the only alternative.

3.8. "WHAT IF WE BREAK UP?"

Whether one advocates state legal intervention or self-regulatory systems such as gay and lesbian mediation projects,¹⁰ the possibility of conflict around potential separations reverberated through many relationships. The prospect of ending the relationship created great anxiety in most women. Wills brought up difficult issues around death and trust invested in families of origin. Dealing with the possibility of the break-up of a relationship tested the couple's ability and willingness to assess how much faith they had in their partners and whether that faith was warranted.

The social as well as legal privileging of birthmothers as "real mothers" introduced a form of structural inequality into the relationship with each other as well as with the child. Of all the families in my study, Marilyn and Jennifer found negotiating a coparenting agreement¹¹ most trying. Being a lawyer, Jennifer initiated drawing up documents regarding their relationship with each other and with their future child. When they discussed the coparenting agreement fundamental differences emerged.

Jennifer: When issues came up we realized how differently we thought about these things. It was a blow to both of us. I had just assumed – that since it just recently had become a possibility in New York to have a second parent adoption without cutting off the biological mother's rights, parental rights – that it would be something that we would do. This is not an assumption that Marilyn made. And it made us really examine our relationship to each other. Basically, what I discovered is that Marilyn thinks of him as *her* child.

Once their son was born and the comother had bonded with him, tensions began to ease. However, "That issue is sort of still floating around somewhere." And Marilyn agreed that "it has become a very compelling, unspoken issue in our relationship. The fact that it is unresolved looms large." At the time of the follow-up, conflicts over second parent adoption – which had become available in the meantime – were ever present. This was the most extreme case of power imbalance due to biological motherhood. Yet, no one remained untouched by the enormous impact of the multiple meanings of biology.

The shared routines of everyday lives tended to obscure the inherent structural inequality with regard to the child/ren. Most women implied that they had written or verbal coparenting agreements but refrained from detailed discussions. Couples who experienced conflict and stress preferred to concentrate on commitment and positive changes in their relationships.

Colleen: Everything that needs changing is more or less changing. If things continue as they are, I can't really ask for anything more.

Couple therapy became a tool for many to confront relationship dissatisfactions and conflicts.

Once problems escalated to the point of potential separation, emotions ran high. Jean and Julia expressed great trepidations about the future of their relationship. Jean

explained how painful it was for her to seriously consider a "divorce."

I hope we can work it out. I really do. We got married. We are not letting go of anything lightly. And God, it's a nightmare to think about a divorce at this point. And there is Jefferson. It's really hard too. I don't think I know what is going to happen over the next year.

The couple since separated. Jean, the birthmother, is Jefferson's legal parent and primary caregiver. They maintain contact for their son's sake, but Julia, the comother, "has stopped contributing financially toward Jefferson's care."¹²

Lesbian couples with children experience the same emotional pain and practical burdens of separation as other couples – heterosexual or homosexual. Unlike partners without children they have to consider the welfare of their sons and daughters. And unlike married couples with children, birthmothers are rarely obliged to grant comothers custody or visitation rights while comothers can generally shirk their parental responsibilities without any repercussions.¹³

Emily, the comother of two, spoke very frankly about her expectations in case of the dissolution of her relationship with Cindy. She was extremely skeptical about coparenting agreements.

I also won't spend a few hundred dollars trying to get something drawn up trying to protect me, "If Cindy and you break up, you have visitations rights." All that stuff won't protect me. I think what people have to rely on - and I think that goes for straight people too - they have to rely on that if in fact they do break up, that both people are mature enough to realize that you do what is best for the children. To sever ties on either end would be detrimental to the children.

Her high expectations of Cindy did not prevent the comother from being extremely self-protective. Although she saw herself as the provider in the family, Emily felt reluctant to

commit to regular child support payments.

[My friend] said, "Don't bring up [money]. Stick with the visitation stuff." And knowing Cindy, she is so proud that she probably wouldn't mention money... [Instead of paying regular child support] I'd rather spend my money on them and take them out to buy clothes. I'd rather give them money for vacation to go somewhere. I'd rather pay for ballet lessons or swim lessons... Since I am the absentee parent – mostly – I would like to be the, "Emi got me swimming lessons." But I would be the absentee one. I would be the one who would get the raw end of the deal here. And I think that's more fair.

These statements powerfully describe the tensions and contradictions inherent in the situation.

Like issues around sperm donors and families of origin, the prospect of separation brought the fragility of comothers' status within their families to the fore. Non-biological mothers constantly faced the potential need for self-explanation and legitimation.

Christine: There are a lot of issues around being the non-biological mother and how to deal with that. And we thought about that before and we continue to talk about it because it continues to be, you know, the reality of it. Who I am in this family? And not so much in this house but in this family in this world. That's always an ongoing topic.

Biological mothers, on the other hand, had to counter the invisibility of their relationships. The potent cultural assumption that mothers are by definition heterosexual invalidates other intimate choices and can create identity conflicts.

3.9. ENDNOTES

1. The Sharon Bottom's case in Virginia is one of the widely publicized examples. Sharon's mother is suing for custody of her grandson because Sharon's lesbianism supposedly makes her a "bad mother." Another illustration is the legal controversy over gay and lesbian marriage. The Hawaii Supreme Court is expected to decide about legalizing homosexual marriage some time this year. Since Congress passed the "Defense of Marriage Act" in 1996 restricting same-sex couples access to marriage, a ruling in favor of legalizing marriage will surely result in further legal and social struggle over the legitimacy of lesbian and gay unions
2. "Hennepin County, MN (Minneapolis) has just reversed their interpretation of the second-parent adoption law to disallow any unmarried persons the right to petition for second-parent adoptions. The couple, who are the focus of the case, had both adopted their first two children. The third child will have only one legal mother. This is a result of a new chief judge in Family Court." (*Parent's Network*, 1995)
3. This is true mainly because legal marriage is not accessible to same-sex couples. If lesbian and gay marriage were legal I predict that large number of couples with children would get married.
4. Some couples decide to use sperm from a close relative of the comother (Martin, 1993). Many others match the basic genetic makeup of the comother with that of the donor. Since most mothers share the general cultural believe about the importance of genetics, they tend to carefully screen potential sperm donors.
5. One birthmother clearly had no desire to bear a child. However, her partner was facing insurmountable fertility problems which prompted her to carry the child. In another case, both mothers were uninterested in bearing a child. After lengthy discussions, one of them agreed to be the birthmother because adoption seemed too complicated to them.
6. A comparison of this sample with couples in which women who desired to have children did not prevail and those who never considered having children would offer more insight into the dynamics of the decision-making process.
7. Many other lesbian mothers prefer more open arrangements. Some coparent with gay men or prefer group settings that include a variety of people.
8. Robson (1994) discussed the implicit class-based assumptions about proper family arrangements and their effects on lesbian and gay relationships.
9. Thomas Steel, a gay man who sued Robin Young, a lesbian, for paternity rights to their biological daughter, Ry Russo-Young. Young had been raising the child born in 1981, with Sandra Russo. Steel, who originally agreed that he would have no parental rights or obligations, sued Young for paternity rights in 1991, but the court denied his petition. In February of 1994, the case was brought before the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court (*The New Yorker*, June 20, 1994, 36-7).

10. Martin quotes Paula Ettlebrick as proposing, "We've got to create a lesbian and gay ethic if we're going to do this. Rule number one is if you agree to parent a child with your partner, you've got to follow through on that agreement" (1993, 160).

11. Coparenting agreements detail child custody and child support provisions in case of the dissolution of the parents' relationship.

12. I have not been able to reinterview Jean and Julia since their separation. The information given here stems from a follow-up questionnaire Jean, the birthmother, had returned.

13. A number of cases involving visitation rights of comothers have been decided by courts. In *Alison D. v. Virginia M.* the court found "that a lesbian non-biological mother was not within the definition of parent and so had no standing to bring a petition for visitation against the child's biological mother." (Robson, 1994) Only a few decisions supported limited parental rights and obligations of comothers.

4. MOTHERHOOD IN ACTION

As discussed above, lesbian couples directly or indirectly question the heterosexual monopoly on parenthood, reinterpret the role of biology and sexuality in the procreative process, and lay claim to shared motherhood. Because motherhood is one of the most fundamental social and personal identities it is produced and reproduced on many levels.

4.1. DOMAINS OF MOTHERHOOD: PUBLIC, RELATIONAL, AND PERSONAL

As with the participants in Lewin's study (1993), both birthmothers and comothers identified strongly as mothers. Lillian, a birthmother, experienced her identity development as, "I moved out of my narrow focus from 'I'm a lesbian' to 'I'm a lesbian and a mother and I have these other connections.'" While birthmotherhood can draw on rich cultural and social resources, comotherhood is a still tenuous concept.¹

I suggest that there are three analytically distinct domains of motherhood that inform the experience of comotherhood and birthmotherhood: public motherhood, relational motherhood, and personal motherhood.² *Public motherhood* addresses how the law and social customs define motherhood as well as how motherhood is publicly reproduced through social interaction. *Relational motherhood* refers to the definition of motherhood shared by parents and their children as well as its symbolic reproduction through everyday contact. For example, Ruddick (1983) showed how the experience of nurturing a child can create mothering attitudes and behaviors independent of biology or gender. Lastly, *personal motherhood* is similar to the idea of motherhood as identity. It

is part of a person's sense of self and purpose and is reproduced through interaction with other identities and lived experience.

All three domains of motherhood are positively linked and reinforce each other when mothers fit the culturally supported notion of "good mothers." Women who are, by definition, deemed "bad mothers," such as single mothers, teenage mothers, welfare mothers, and lesbian mothers, experience various degrees of conflict between the different domains (DiLapi, 1989; Phoenix & Woollett, 1991). Lesbian comothers face an even more difficult situation because they are often not viewed as mothers at all (Slater, 1995). Below I will discuss how the women in my study experienced the three domains of motherhood.

4.1.1. PUBLIC MOTHERHOOD

As discussed in the previous chapter, legally as well as socially, comothers are mostly invisible and have no clearly defined public parenting role (Falk, 1989; Martin, 1993). The absence of a biological connection between the comother and her child/ren (24 of 25) made them extremely vulnerable legally. This was one reason why many chose anonymous donors.

In addition to legal insecurities, everyday interactions with strangers and institutions could prove quite stressful. Commonly held motherhood ideology only assigns "true motherhood" to one person, generally the birthmother, thus creating a "motherhood hierarchy." Any other claim to motherhood, as in shared motherhood, is suspect – a kind of substitute parenthood – and creates the need to legitimize the

relationship to the child. Thus, in social situations, some comothers felt insecure about their relationship with their children.

For example, strangers may stop lesbian parents on the street, in the supermarket, or at a restaurant and will ask who "*the mother*" is. Cybill explained why such encounters are emotionally taxing:

I have no trouble when I'm alone with Jack and somebody asks me, "Is he yours?" And I say, "Yes." When I'm with Janet, if anybody asks, I point to her. It's odd. But that's why the adoption is important too. It would make me more comfortable with that.

Legal validation is an option that can alleviate some of the pressure. However, second parent adoptions³ are still rare and costly. Only one couple in the study had been able to do it at the time of the interviews.

Another strategy to minimize the need for public explanations included child and comother sharing a last name to avoid questions from health care professionals, teachers, and representatives from various other institutions.

Lillian: Her last name is Tracey's. I thought that would make up for the biological identification. Having the same last name nobody would ever question Tracey picking her up. And I look so much like her that I don't think anybody would ever question me. Unless I would say, "Your father is here," nobody would question it. [laughing]

Comothers who did not share last names routinely carried statements signed by the birthmother giving comothers medical power of attorney for the child.

Issues of accountability and information management loom large in situations in which negative and/or false cultural assumptions are not mediated by personal relationships (Goffman, 1963). To counter her invisibility, Wendy, a comother, admitted

that she became more “proprietary” in public picking up her daughter more often and carrying her. Similar to what Blaisure and Allen (1995) observed in feminist heterosexual couples, lesbian parents committed “public acts of equality” showing the world that both were equal mothers.

Motherhood hierarchy can, of course, also affect birthmothers when comothers are the primary caregivers or the primary contact in certain social encounters. Loretta, a birthmother, related a story that illustrates how assumptions of heterosexuality and motherhood hierarchy can be intertwined.

We had met a play group early on. They were all straight couples. At first Jennie used to bring Steven to the group. I don't know what Jennie said about her husband. [laughing] And then one day, on Saturday, there was a birthday party and I had to bring him. "What do you mean you are his mother? It's Jennie." [laughing] It took them a while to get over that.

Birthmothers' experience of motherhood hierarchy was generally more amusing than deeply threatening to their motherhood. Often they took pride and joy in the fact that their partners were viewed as the "real mother." Teresa, a birthmother, gave a typical example.

In the summer, people saw Nina with Maya all the time and I was at work. They would meet her as the mother first. Then I come along and they are, "Who are you?" That's really nice and refreshing.

Comothers, unlike birthmothers, could not wave the biological wand and make all doubts about legitimate motherhood disappear. Generally, their repertoire did not even include legal magic.

Public motherhood, thus, represents social and legal aspects of motherhood that can be daunting for families who do not fit the “morally” prescribed heterosexual two-

parent family in which mothers do the primary mothering. Fathers who are primary caregivers to their children experience even greater obstacles than comothers when claiming their role as mothering parent in the public domain (Mahony, 1995). Whenever the claim to public motherhood is tenuous, other dimensions of motherhood and mothering become even more important.

4.1.2. RELATIONAL MOTHERHOOD

In the face of public ignorance and sometimes hostility, the home became a place of refuge for many families. Yet, without clearly defined expectations for comothers, non-biological mothers often felt insecure about their status as mothers (Stiglitz, 1990).

Having two equally committed mothers can result in different sets of problems.

Practically every aspect of heterosexual parenting roles is associated with either masculinity or femininity. Yet if all female parenting behaviors are of the role of mother, who is the second female parent? The lesbian couple must construct a clear set of dual female parenting roles, within a social frame that suggest this cannot be done (Slater, 1995, 49).

Thus, lesbian couples face the unique opportunity and challenge of developing models of parenthood and motherhood that are independent of “traditional” gender expectations.

At the same time, they have to find ways to overcome insecurities born out of lack of cultural and legal support for comothers (McCandlish, 1987).

Gabrielle: My biggest fear was that I wouldn't be her mother. But now that I'm with her and I see the way she looks at me when I come in the door – you don't really foresee that. She just adores us.

Just as fathers, comothers, by definition, are not as emotionally bonded with their newborns as birthmothers. The difference in early emotional attachment often leads to

more gender stratified behavior in heterosexual families which increases mothers' responsibilities for family work and fathers' commitment to financially supporting the family (Mahony, 1995).

The mothers in this study rarely went down this path. Even the couples in which the birthmother was the primary caregiver for extended periods of time, comothers were actively involved in routine childcare. In the absence of the attachment forged through bearing and nursing a baby, comothers developed many other ways of thoroughly bonding with the child. A strong sense of relational motherhood ensued from regular interaction between the mothers and the children (Ruddick, 1983).

During the early months of the child's life, feeding the baby and giving the bath were important ways of bonding between mother and child. Especially comothers who were working full-time while their partner's were home with the baby, felt the need to create times and spaces that were set aside for interaction with the child.

Danielle (birthmother and full-time caregiver): Amanda gets as much interaction and fun with Chris [as I do]. They take a bath together every night. So they have time that's their's.

As Alexandra, a comother, points out, birthmothers use similar techniques when they are the ones who are gone all day.

When Virginia was home with him and I wasn't, I was the one that did the bathing. And now [that she is working and I stay home with him] she does it more often.

Although most mothers took conscious steps to ensure bonding with their children, much of their interactions with the child were motivated by sheer necessity or pleasure.

As discussed earlier, one basic trend in childrearing, especially among middle-

class families, is toward “intensive mothering” (Hays, 1996), creating extremely child-centered environments. Interviewees in this study also acknowledged the importance of intensive mothering and child-centeredness. Yet, instead of birthmothers focusing on their children at the expense of their partners, the participants stressed “family time” and “togetherness,” characteristics of many lesbian relationships (Slater, 1995), which expanded child-centeredness into family-centeredness.

Sharing the responsibility for proper mothering reinforced the mothers’ commitments to equality in parenting. Veronica's description of their bath routine made this connection obvious.

When she takes a bath Betty runs the water. We both spend time with her in the bathroom. I wash her but Betty runs the water. And Betty always takes her and puts a towel on her. It's the same thing all the time. We do a lot of things together. We enjoy it.

These acts of shared motherhood carry important symbolic significance for the participants in the bathing ritual. Each has an important, yet distinct, role in accomplishing a necessary everyday childcare task. Thus, simple daily routines became occasions to strengthen each parent's sense of motherhood and family

In addition, the quote points to the importance of the pleasure component in early shared childcare. While Hochschild (1997) paints a picture of harried mothers often happy to escape the overwhelming demands at home, most of these mothers were able to draw more satisfaction from childcare. I submit that part of their greater enjoyment lay in their team approach to mothering which gave both a sense of parenting competence without having to carry sole responsibility for childcare.

There were, however, a few cases in which comothers either felt excluded because of the intensity of birthmother-infant relationship or were less available for other reasons. Dorothy, the comother of a three-year-old remembered:

I ended up spending a lot of time at work and not wanting to come home the first two months. I couldn't even motivate myself to go home. It was cold and boring at home. We had a difference of opinion about stuff. The first week or two, I wanted to have a lot of company over because it was the holidays. But Madeline just said that she couldn't stand seeing people and having people in the house.

After that initial period however, Dorothy was taking at least equal if not more responsibility for childcare. At the time of the interview, she was exclusively responsible for Freddy's daycare.

The fact that couples shared mothering their children did not automatically imply that they did not perceive differences in their parenting identity (Nelson, 1996). While comothers clearly identified as mothers, they also acknowledged that their relationship differed from their partner's relationship with the child. Some saw the primary reason in the childbearing and nursing experience – especially during the early months.

Danielle: I think that a lot of things have given us a different relationship. When they are little [breastfeeding] is the one thing that comforts them the most. I could comfort her very easily and Amanda couldn't because that's what she [the child] wanted. So they were more distant in the beginning. But now that she is into playing and stuff and other things besides that, I don't think it affects her as much.

But later on in the conversation, Danielle added:

But I think at least as much as the breastfeeding, the fact that Amanda works full-time and that I don't work is the major thing. She is just so much more used to me. But again, the older she gets the less that seems to matter because on the weekends and in the evenings Amanda is with her a lot.

Most mothers agreed that strong relational motherhood can be established in many ways. Although birthmothers had a “head start” on bonding with the child, over time comothers established close relationships with their children through other means.

In earlier studies (Rohrbaugh, 1989; Stiglitz, 1990), lesbian mothers described more conflict around relational motherhood and defining each mother's role in the family. Interestingly, the parents I interviewed described their experiences as less problematic – although not conflict-free. This change might be an indication of subculturally developed models of coparenting that have surfaced with the relative normalization of lesbian baby boom families in gay-friendly urban centers. Many of the families in my study were members of lesbian and gay family support and lobbying groups that have sprung up all over the country. These groups offered a safe space to exchange parenting experiences and to confront difficult family dynamics.

4.1.3. PERSONAL MOTHERHOOD

Both, comothers and birthmothers, experienced identity shifts that moved parenthood to the center of their sense of self. For comothers, the question of how the child would address her often reflected a growing sense of motherhood.

Betty: At first, I thought that she could call me Betty and then she wouldn't always have to come out talking about her home life. But once I held that little baby in my arms - I don't think that if I had physically had her that I could love her anymore than I do. I wanted to be mom or mommy or something. I just didn't want to be "Betty, my mother's friend." I feel that this is my daughter.

Alexandra closely linked the need to be called mommy with not being the birthmother:

"For me, I'm not willing to give up [being called mommy]. Virginia is more flexible, maybe she can be because she is the birthmother." Some comothers did not insist on being called mom but appreciated having a special name that was not just their first name. The issue of naming, also partly reflected in the use of the comother's last name, reveals the importance of seeing oneself in the mother role.

In addition, the narratives revealed that most comothers did not primarily conceptualize themselves as parents but as mothers. Gender specific identification demonstrated that having a child was an extremely gendered experience. Tracey, the comother of a two-year-old, described her process as follows:

Once I agreed to be her mom, I was there from the very beginning because I knew that that would be the only way I could do it. I could have played around with other ideas like I could be more like a *father*. I knew that it probably wouldn't work out that way - that I would be another mom. [my emphasis]

This finding supports the results of other studies that found a powerful resurgence of "traditional" female and male gender expectations and behaviors in many heterosexual new parents (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996) While in heterosexual couples partners become more differentiated, in lesbian couples some gender effects are neutralized while others become more actualized

4.2. TWO MOTHERS: DOUBLE THE TROUBLE OR HALF THE PAIN?

Lesbians cannot base their assignment of relational, sexual, economic, or parenting roles on gender differences between the partners. As two women, lesbian couples build from a clean slate, negotiating from scratch all aspects of the partners' roles. Individual ability, interest, and tolerances form the basis for the complex construction of these couples'

relational roles. (Slater, 1995:47)

Lesbians experience more freedom than heterosexual couples in designing the basic material and emotional relationship structures. Especially, when it came to the division of labor, shared motherhood and similar attitudes toward housework and childcare greatly eased organization of household and childcare tasks (see Chapters 6-8). Yet, lesbian couples also face some important constraints. Materially, the mothers struggled with gender discrimination in the workplace and had to make difficult decisions about levels of disclosure of their sexual identity (see next chapter).

Emotionally, other constraints are unique to lesbian relationships. Research of lesbian relationships frequently identifies “fusion” as a major issue (Laird, 1993). Slater describes fusion as follows:

The partners place a high value on emotional closeness and time spent together as a couple, they emphasize their commonalities, and they may experience anxiety around areas of persistent difference. (64)

This stress on emotional intimacy and high levels of communication allows partners to form high level of dyadic attachment (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987). The arrival of a child fundamentally changes the structure of the adult intimate relationship turning attention away from the couple and focusing more on the child (Nelson, 1996). Although the process is very similar to the experience of heterosexual couples (Belsky & Kelly, 1994), lesbian relationships are affected differently in that they tend to have higher levels of emotional closeness prior to having children and both are likely to experience a fairly equal strong pull toward intensive mothering.

Expectations around intensive mothering led many couples to value family-

centeredness and “togetherness.” In most cases, the move from relationship focus to family focus was beneficial to the entire family. Many family rituals gave all members of the a sense of belonging and stressed the importance of family fun (Slater, 1995).

Elizabeth: We try to make Sunday family day. We do a family hug. Like this morning, Tracey is normally on the baseball field. We go to parks. We spend a lot of time at the beach with the kids. We all read together. Like Tracey and I will read to the two of them and then Jonathan will read a book to the little one. During the week we have play dates but on the weekend we try not to do that. We have pajama days when we will just pull out the sofa and watch videos. Nobody has to get dressed and they love that.

For many, “togetherness” was always a positive experience and an important way to fight the “time bind.”

Anne: A lot of things we also do because we don't get as much time together as we like. We do everything together when we get the time to do it. We like to go to the beach a lot... We were all in the kitchen cooking last night. And Melissa's specialty now is bread. She makes it while I'm cooking and Louise will do the salad. So we'll all get in there and do it.

For others, however, spending all their free time together started to have negative consequences (Laird, 1993; Slater, 1995).

Virginia: I don't really want to leave him on the weekend. And Alexandra doesn't want to leave him either. So, we stay together on the weekend pretty much. I think we might have to make an effort to change that a little bit. We have kind of separate friends to a certain extent. And I do feel like I'm neglecting [them] – not exactly neglecting but the dynamics are shifting with my friends in a way that makes me unhappy.

The loss of independence was a problem for some.

A much bigger issue, however, was the decline in couples' adult relationships.

Many mentioned the warnings they had received from parents with older children not to

neglect their own relationship. Gabrielle was not too convinced that adult-only time was really necessary. Yet, she and her partner recently had started to go on dates once a week.

Gabrielle: We have date night now. It's once a week but only has been for three weeks. Only because I heard of all those people who were breaking up. I love my life. What we are doing now is raising a child. In ten years she'll be running off with her friends. We'll have our time. We are together when we take care of her together. We do the date night because I think you are supposed to because it's important for couples to do.

Most partners, however, experienced conflict around having left behind their adult relationship in favor of extreme child-centeredness in their relationships.

Jean: I think there is some jealousy involved in my relationship with Jefferson. I think she feels neglected. She'll only identify this as me being obsessed with him and ignoring her. Whereas I see it as having a normal relationship, as concerned and caring for my child. And yet, there is something that is not lost but there is only so much energy a person has. And some of what used to go toward her is now going toward him. I think she misses that and it's hard for her.

Jean and Julia had separated by the time of the follow-up interview. Most couples, however, who experienced some sense of loss around their own relationship tried to address the issue and work through it.

The most pronounced area of conflict in these parents' intimate relationships was sexuality. Many experienced a sharp drop in frequency and or quality of sexual encounters after the child was born. For some sexual discontent and incompatibility had been a long-standing problem.

Mindy: During all these years, we had better periods and we had worse periods. But for more than a few months it's never felt perfectly comfortable. Maybe there were short periods that we were in the same

place. But I feel that there is a level of acceptance that this is a standing conflict. And knowing that makes it easier. Somehow we will live with it. We have lived with it this long and it hasn't destroyed us.

Other couples saw the decline in their sexual lives mainly as a function of insufficient time and energy. With time, they hoped to return to prior levels of sexual activity.

Kathleen: There were weeks and weeks that would go by and we were just too tired. If someone would say to me, "Would you rather sleep or have sex?" I would pick the sleep, definitely, pick the sleeping. I was even too tired to function. Sex was not a priority. But I'm glad that's kind of changing.

Thus, two women encounter many of the same problems opposite-sex couples encounter. Some issues, however, are unique to lesbian mothers. The emotional closeness between partners and their shared gender socialization toward caregiving can ease the transition to parenthood because both have similar expectations about their involvement in parenthood. On the other hand, the similarity can also be detrimental when family-centeredness comes at the expense of individual selves and the couple's adult intimate relationship. Thus, two mothers are both: double the trouble and half the pain.

4.3. THE CASE OF BREASTFEEDING: IDYLL AND REALITY

Breastfeeding – besides pregnancy – the most intimate biological link between mother and child, points to the stress a child can put on the parents' intimate relationship, the differences between birthmothers and comothers introduced by biology, and the material and symbolic influence it has on the three domains of motherhood.

With respect to mothers' sexual life, breastfeeding often decreased birthmothers'

interest in sex.

Sheila: Certainly having a baby changes things. I used to be the one who would always initiate things. But after I had the baby I found that I was completely uninterested. It's a kind of physical, hormonal thing, especially breastfeeding regularly. There is something about breastfeeding, "Sex? I don't want to do that!"

Sex was the most poignant arena in which the intimacy between birthmother and child produced by breastfeeding impacted on parents' relationships. During the first few months of the baby's life, the long hours and emotional intensity of breastfeeding left nursing birthmothers often too exhausted to pay any attention to their partners. In most cases, comothers were equally tired and unable to interact on deeper levels with their partners. Sometimes, however, comothers did feel left out and left alone.

Although the impact of breastfeeding profoundly affected parents' relationships, it had even more complex effects on the experience of the mother-child relationship. As touched on earlier, breastfeeding exemplifies the impact of early childcare on the domains of motherhood for both birthmothers and comothers. Most parents in this study, like their heterosexual counterparts (Ehrensaft, 1990), felt very strongly that breastfeeding was important for the healthy development of the child. Except for one mother, all breastfed their children. Nineteen mothers nursed their babies between two weeks and 24 months with an average of eight months and in eight cases the birthmothers were breastfeeding at the time of the interview. Given the intensive nature of nursing, it was necessary to spend at least the first few months at home with the child. Nursing newborns were often fixated on the birthmothers and responded badly to their absence. Although most birthmothers favored nursing their children, not all enjoyed the

experience without reservations. For some birthmothers, the intensive nature of nursing became burdensome after a few months. Helen explained:

I enjoyed it. But there were times when it made me feel like a prisoner because for the first three months she wouldn't take a bottle. And I couldn't be away from her for more than two hours without risking her totally suffering.

In a few other cases the baby had trouble nursing, turning breastfeeding into an arduous chore. Despite the inconveniences and problems they faced, most birthmothers experienced breastfeeding as rewarding.

Loretta: It was a very nurturing, motherly kind of thing. I think everybody benefitted from it. I felt that I was enjoying motherhood to the fullest experience that I could have. I enjoyed nursing him.

Interestingly, the birthmothers in my sample expressed negative sentiments toward breastfeeding as freely as positive ones. Negative aspects of nursing included a sense of being "on call" 24 hours a day and physical discomfort (LaRossa & LaRossa, 1989). By stressing negative breastfeeding experiences, birthmothers "did shared motherhood" by trying to downplay the importance of biology for their partners' sake. Sheila was one of the few birthmothers who expressed the feeling that her biological link to her son made her more his mother.

I think that there is also a kind of deeper emotional level where since I gave birth to him and the long time I was breastfeeding I felt like I was his mother. Lucy is his mother too in a different way.

Her willingness to verbalize this feeling might be due to the fact that her partner had no interest in being a birthmother and only agreed to having a child if Sheila would be the primary caregiver. By clearly establishing a primary mother, Sheila and Lucy easily fell

into two distinct parenting roles that did not challenge one another. Sheila was more responsible for the child while Lucy managed the household.

On the other hand, the differences in the accounts of Helen and Colleen show how a comother's frustrated desire to bear children can have a strong effect on how a couple experiences and interprets breastfeeding.

Helen: At times in the beginning, she was a little jealous because she would make comments like, "I can't feed her. I wish I could feed her." I felt a little bad although I felt that breastfeeding was important. She didn't make too much of a scene over it although it made it more clear to her that it wasn't her biological child. That probably accentuated that.

Interviewer: Has Helen's breastfeeding been difficult for you?

Colleen: Never. In the beginning, I wanted to feed her. I did feed her eventually. I spent other time with her. Now the baby is really bonding with me because I'm home.

In Colleen's case, the experience of infertility added to her frustrations around breastfeeding. By downplaying the impact of nursing and stressing other aspects of relational motherhood such as feeding and being the primary caregiver, she was able to assert her own sense of competence and equality as a mother.

Nursing a child is a unique possibility for strengthening a sense of relational motherhood. Birthmothers as well as comothers were very conscious of the intense bonding experience nursing created.

Sheila (birthmother): I enjoyed the feeling that I was important to him. There is something so special and wonderful about that. You are totally bonding and you are providing what he needs even beyond the nutritional stuff.

Corinne (comother): I felt that they had this incredible bond and he loves it. He gets so much joy out of breastfeeding. And she is clearly his favorite. They bond more.

Like many fathers (Ehrensaft, 1990; Schwartz, 1995) and comothers in other studies (Rohrbaugh, 1989; Slater, 1995; Stiglitz, 1990), some parents in my sample felt that breastfeeding made equal parenting of an infant difficult if not impossible.

Lillian (birthmother): We knew that it wouldn't exactly promote us being equal parents. On the other hand, Tracy was saying, "I don't want to do equal. I want to have flexibility." But after two weeks, we just bagged it. Tracy realized that she was really hurt and upset about not being part of that and wanting to feed her. And it certainly wasn't any great gift to my life [because it was extremely painful].

Tracey (comother): [She breastfed] for a very short time. One of the reasons was that I couldn't reconcile how I was supposed to deal with the fact that I couldn't feed this child.

In addition to a sense of inequality, the inability to nurse was very frustrating for comothers because they felt unable to comfort the infant when s/he was hungry. This frustration might have challenged some comothers' gender identity because mothers are culturally expected to be able to feed their children.

At the same time, comothers, like fathers, were also very conscious of the benefits of breastfeeding. Amanda, a comother, pointed out, "Actually, it has been a blessing because it quiets her down in so many situations where you really want her to quiet down." And many comothers were more than happy not to have to nurse their child at night. Corinne, a comother, had no trouble admitting that

At three and four in the morning I was really glad he refused to take a bottle. Even if I would get up to bring him to her, I could go back to sleep. But she had to do the breastfeeding.

As shown above, nursing has multiple meanings and often is experienced positively as well as negatively. But not only does breastfeeding affect the relationship

between mothers and their children, it also strongly impacts the relationship between partners.

The partners must learn to sustain their intimacy with less time, less uninterrupted attention, and less energy available for their connection as lovers. These stresses are familiar to most parents; however, since lesbian partners often build their relationships on exactly these elements the latter couples may especially feel the impact of the relational changes that accompany parenting. (Slater, 1995:95)

For example, nursing mothers often had very little interest in sexual encounters, which sometimes led to stress in the relationship. In addition, the experience of being on call 24 hours a day was often so draining emotionally and physically that nursing mothers felt there was little left to give to their partners.

The emotional as well as functional intensity of breastfeeding, however, was short-lived. Once breastfeeding became supplemental or the baby was weaned, the birthmothers experienced much greater freedom in their choices – one being to go back to work.

4.4. ENDNOTES

1. One of the most crucial debates in legal theory as well as social scientific circles currently revolves around the question of who is a parent and what constitutes parenting behavior. (Charlotte Patterson, author of many articles on lesbian and gay parenting, and personal communication)
2. A sphere does not imply ideological, political, legal, or behavioral consistency or the absence of conflict between various definitions and enactments of motherhood. These distinctions rather help to analyze different levels of mothers' experiences.
3. Second parent adoption refers to adoptions in which the unmarried partner of a legal parent is granted full parental rights to the child without the custodial parent losing her/his privileges.

PART II

LESBIAN PARENTS' DIVISION OF LABOR

5. MOTHERS AT WORK: PAID LABOR ARRANGEMENTS

One central area of research in the transition to parenthood is the division of labor. Children, especially the first child, fundamentally alter not only the couples' emotional and relational landscapes, but also introduce expanded and different work requirements. While this has been true throughout time and region, families in contemporary American society find themselves confronted with a host of issues unique to modern, western cultures: One or both partners, high time and energy commitments to outside paid labor (Spain & Bianchi, 1996), the ideology of intensive parenting (Hays, 1996), and increased expectations of equality between partners (Perkins & DeMeis, 1996).

The often contradictory expectations of complete commitment to the job and providing a child-centered and loving family environment leave many parents scrambling for time, energy, and sanity (Coontz, 1997; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1997; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Unlike many other western countries, the United States offers very little public family support. Thus, most families have to rely on individual solutions to social problems. Two-parent lesbian families experience the same material and emotional constraints as two-parent heterosexual ones. They are even more disadvantaged because they are not eligible for many public programs because comothers are rarely legal parents and couples do not have access to marriage benefits (Rubenstein, 1993).

Yet, lesbian parents are generally highly committed to shared motherhood/parenthood and to equality in their relationships. Commitment, of course, does not automatically translate into the desired action. Still, research on lesbian couples and parents has found greater equality in their division of work than in any other type of

couple relationship (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kurdek, 1993; Nelson, 1996; Sullivan, 1996).

This study, thus, is designed to establish degrees of equality in lesbian families and aims to identify principles and mechanisms that contribute to lesbian couples' success in devising egalitarian divisions of work. Below, I will discuss, in detail, the division of housework, and childcare (Chapters 6 & 7), and the explanatory power of the theoretical frameworks (Chapter 8) laid out in Chapter 1. Before turning to those issues, I will address the division of paid labor in this chapter.

Despite the young age of their children (68% of the youngest children at home were under two years old), 68% (n=34) of the participants worked full-time, 18% (n=9) part-time, and 6% (n=3) were on leave, and 8% (n=4) were unemployed. The high levels of labor market participation – 86% of mothers worked at the time of the interviews – indicated stronger commitments to paid labor compared to other mothers with young children (Spain & Bianchi, 1996) and paralleled that of lesbians in general (Dunne, 1997).

This high commitment to work was motivated both by the desire to work and to be financially independent (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Dunne, 1997; Morgan & Brown, 1991). Although many mothers indicated that they would prefer to stay at home with their child/ren, most thought that it would be desirable only if they also would be active in some other ways. Furthermore, many welcomed the return to work after their maternity or parental leaves (see below).

The desire for financial independence also played an important role. Some

women felt no need to be financially independent of their partners, but most placed great value on controlling all or part of their resources.

Lillian: I'm not sure we ever will [pool our money] because we are both into having a lot of autonomy and control. We did a little bit of that for a while. At some point Tracey was unemployed for a bit, between jobs. But neither one of us liked keeping an eye on what the other is spending.

Delores: It's definitely important to have my own income. There was a time when Cordelia was making much more than I made and she was paying much more of the bills with the understanding that I would pay her back when I could. And when I got on my feet and was more financially secure I did. Both of us are fairly independent types and don't want to be taken care of in that way.

It was not uncommon that partners would lend each other money with the understanding they it would be paid back eventually.

Beyond the desire to control one's own financial resources, some mothers experienced anxiety around the possibility of having to be the sole or primary breadwinner.

Corinne: It makes me crazy that she is paying more. Part of the reason why it makes me crazy is because, god forbid, she ever lost her job and I had to carry the full financial burden that responsibility would be overwhelming. She is not doing that because I'm still paying half the rent and stuff like that. I just wish it were different.

Even half of the women who had been the sole or main financial providers for their families for extended periods of time often wished they did not have to carry so much of the economic burden. All women were prepared and able to provide for themselves, unlike some heterosexual women who abandoned their occupational ambitions when they became mothers. Yet, none of the women, birthmothers or comothers, felt great aspirations to be the sole breadwinner unlike many fathers who consider it their job to

provide.

Gender sameness has two major consequences in lesbian households: while none of the partners expects to be taken of, none is prepared to carry the sole financial burden as a matter of course. Thus, gender socialization is neutralized with respect to expectation of financial dependence but gender socialization becomes more salient with respect to sole financial responsibility for the family. I suggest that both effects either push or pull lesbians into the labor force in greater numbers than heterosexual women.

Not surprisingly, contrary to the hypotheses put forth by the new home economics, birthmothers did not differ at all from comothers in their level of labor force participation (see Table 5.1.). Even part-time work was as common among birthmothers as it was among comothers. Thus, both birthmothers and comothers had to negotiate the difficult terrain of sexual politics on the job.

Table 5.1.: Employment Status By Birthmother Of First Child

		Birthmother of First Child		Total
		yes	no	
Employment Status	full-time	17	17	34
	part-time	4	5	9
	on maternity leave	2	1	3
	unemployed	2	2	4
Total		25	25	50

Below, I will discuss three paid labor concerns that are of particular importance to lesbian mothers: level of disclosure of lesbian mother status, formal and informal employer support, and mothers' parental leave and long-term work arrangements.

5.1. OUT AT WORK

Lesbians in the labor force encounter all the basic issues heterosexual women face – e.g. gender segregated occupations, lower comparable incomes than men, and more obstacles to advancement in predominantly male occupations (Reskin & Roos, 1990). Lesbians, in general, and lesbians of color in particular, also have to consider to what extent they feel comfortable disclosing their sexual orientation at work (Badgett, 1996; Ellis, 1996; Ellis & Riggle, 1995 & 1996; Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Levine & Leonard, 1984; Rosabal, 1996; Schneider, 1986).

5.1.1. OUT AS A LESBIAN

Almost 50% of the participants in this study were completely "out" on the job while 12% (n=6) had not disclosed their lesbianism to anybody at work.¹ Those who were not entirely out at work tended to work in male dominated fields (Schneider, 1986). As women they already felt vulnerable and did not want to risk further discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. Susan, the comother of a two-year-old and foreman on construction sites, manages her sexual identity on the job in this way:

[I am not out] to everybody but I am out to my boss. I'm not generally [out] to the regular run of the mill coworker. It's not seen as appropriate. But people know that I have a child and that I raise him with somebody else. I don't make an issue of it. [sighing] But people who want to know, know. If you want to figure it out you're gonna figure it out. But if you don't want to figure it out, you have a back door - you don't have to figure it out.

Many of the women who were not completely out relied on what I would like to call the *open closet door policy*. That is, these women stayed "in the closet" but left the door

open for those willing to venture out and come in. For example, they would not hide the fact that they were living with another woman but also did not refer to her as "my lover" or "my partner."

Anne, a comother who worked in another heavily male dominated industry, described a typical encounter.

With work, for the most part, people don't know whether I'm gay. In fact, I just had a guy ask me the other day - this is somebody I must have known for 15 years. He came up to me at this job I'm on, "So, did you get married yet?" [laughing] I'm shocked with these people. Because after a while most people once they get to know me - I don't hide anything about my life. But I don't come up and talk about, "Oh, my lover dadadada." But if you know me for more than a week you know that I have a daughter, that I live with Louise. And if you can't put two and two together then that's too bad. Some people can't put it together like this guy. When he asked me that I said no. But when I got out of the car I was thinking that I am kind of married - although not legally married.

The "open closet door" policy eases psychological pressure for many who are not comfortable talking explicitly about their "lovers." However, often people they encountered on the job stubbornly ignored the subtle hints the women provided.

Women of color are at even greater risk of discrimination at work (Badgett, 1996; Rosabal, 1996). Coming out to their coworkers and superiors increases the potential for bias. Corinne, a lawyer and comother of a one-year-old, explained her reluctance to come out at work as follows:

I'm black. I'm a woman. I get enough negativity based on those things. I am in an environment where being a white male is a premium. I felt like I didn't need to have that other liability.

However, being of color did not always translate into being closeted. Many other factors influenced the level of disclosure such as work environment and personal relationships

on the job.

Another characteristic often negatively correlated with disclosure is the level of income. Schneider (1986) found that women in higher income brackets were less likely to be open about their lesbianism (Ellis & Riggle, 1995). Badgett (1996) reports that in another survey, researchers found an inverted V relationship – i.e. those with annual income levels around \$50,000 were most likely to be out to coworkers while disclosure decreased for those making more or less.

I didn't find a clear income pattern that corresponded with level of disclosure. The most profound deterrent for coming out was anticipated discrimination. The risk seemed too profound to some. Loretta, a birthmother, voiced the concerns of many others who were not out at work.

No. I've never been out at any job... They know that I have a child. I guess it's bad. I took a lot of classes in college that told me otherwise - that I shouldn't be this way, not close off so much of myself. But I really feel that if I came out, it would really destroy my career [in human resource management].

The most difficult aspect of anticipated discrimination if coming out lies in its non-verifiable nature. Many participants acknowledge that much of their resistance might be a product of internalized homophobia.² Yet, Levine & Leonard (1984) found that 25% of their sample reported actual discrimination while 60% anticipated discrimination if they were to come out. While figures of actual discrimination vary, the fact remains that formal and informal discrimination is a daily reality for many lesbians.

An often overlooked issue in questions around coming out is the level of commitment to a particular job. Some participants talked about cost-benefit

considerations when contemplating disclosure (Badgett, 1996).

Danielle: If I take contract work at [an institution] and I just go there for groups, I'm not gonna tell anybody. There is no point in it. It would be career suicide, I guess. But if it were a job that I would be invested in, then I would. Because I wouldn't want to be going there if I was going there a lot of hours a week.

Danielle had been very open about her personal life on previous jobs although it had been difficult. For her the emotional cost of having to hide her affective life clearly outweighed the benefits of passing once she really intended to stay in a job.

5.1.2. OUT AS A MOTHER

Lesbian mothers, especially those with young children, find themselves in an even more complicated situation. As mothers, they need to be more "out" because they have to claim benefits and require additional support. On the other hand, they become more vulnerable to discrimination because, as mothers and lesbians, they may be seen as less desirable employees.

Motherhood hierarchy and heterosexist assumptions play out differently for birthmothers than comothers in this instance of public motherhood. While birthmothers routinely claim their motherhood status, their lesbian identity becomes publicly less visible. Mindy related the following episode in which the open closet door policy and heterosexist assumptions about motherhood led her colleague to ignore her lesbian family arrangements.

I took another appointment recently and I decided at least let me come out to this group and I basically thought I was coming out...But the guy didn't get it. He said, "Well, your personal life is your personal life." And

then never asked me about it again. And now when he talks about it, it's clear that he blocked this information out.

I came to tell him that I was pregnant three or four months after he had offered me a position there. I said, "I want you to understand that this is not great timing but I am 39. It has to happen now. I want you to understand that I am not doing it as a single parent. The woman I have been living with for 14, 15 years will be raising the child with me. Don't look at me as a single parent." Since then he says, "Oh, do you have somebody to take care of the kid?" He just didn't get it.

Seeing one's efforts to come out frustrated to such extent can be extremely stressful psychologically. But not being able to share important aspects one's life also take their toll.

Mindy: Sometimes it feels bad to not be out. I don't like people assuming that I am a single parent. I don't like misperceptions. But I have done it for so long and I have worked in environments in which it would have been unacceptable to be out - clearly. There was a lot of rampant homophobia. I've just gotten used to it. And I have enough people that I am out to that it doesn't drive me crazy. I can talk with them about it.

Mindy's statement supported Ellis and Riggle's (1995) finding of a strong connection between openness and satisfaction with co-workers. Satisfaction with co-workers in turn is an important aspect of overall job satisfaction.

While birthmothers often had to fight for the acknowledgment of their lesbianism, comothers confronted their invisibility as mothers especially when they were largely closeted. But even when they were very open about their personal lives, motherhood hierarchy assumptions interfered with their perception as mothers. Cordelia, the comother of a one-year-old, vividly described her boss' reaction to asking for parental leave.

I had been out, very out. And they knew that Delores was trying to get pregnant and they knew within the first three weeks that she was

pregnant. When I specifically asked for the leave, my boss seemed a little surprised. I don't know if she was surprised because she was thinking that Delores would do it all or whether she was surprised because she has an ability to ignore things she doesn't really want to cope with.

In the end, it was no issue for her get parental leave and then reduce her hours to part-time. Her office heavily depended on her and was willing to be flexible in order to keep her.

5.2. FORMAL AND INFORMAL EMPLOYER SUPPORT FOR LESBIAN FAMILIES

Like Cordelia, many others were able to take advantage of informal as well as formal employer support. While birthmothers' formal benefits were clearly defined, the comothers' situation was often more tenuous. Did they qualify for parental leave as "mothers", as "fathers," or not at all? Cordelia was treated as a "father:"

I asked for six weeks. My office has an archaic parental leave provision that mothers are allowed more time than fathers. And I asked for more time than fathers are allowed. The question was did I have it in terms of accrued leave.

Overall, however, her employer was very supportive. As in the situation with many other gay or lesbian employees various personal and situational factors influenced her acknowledgment as mother (Friskopp & Silverstein, 1995; Woods, 1993).

They have been very supportive. They had a [baby] shower for us. Everybody asked about the baby. I think the head of the association is also gay but he is not political. Because everybody assumed or knew that he was gay I don't think that there was ever a question that they would try to not [give it to me]. It's also a very small organization and they do see me as very valuable. For that reason, there also wasn't a question. I think if they didn't like me it might have been different.

Most comothers, however, did not apply for parental leave but rather took vacation time or arranged their schedules to stay with their partners.

Another rare form of formal support was health care benefits for partners – or children in the case of comothers. Family insurance is of particular importance if only one partner is employed full-time. Health insurance costs are substantial for self-insured individuals or families.

In only two cases, the whole family was covered by the comother's health insurance. Vera, the comother of a four-year-old, finally had been able to secure health insurance for her family. Her partner Bonnie described the lengthy process.

City employees got [family insurance for domestic partners]. Where she works is not a City agency and it's not a federal agency. But on a practical level it is a City agency. They said that they would abide by the City guidelines. It took them a year to get their act together. They had to bid it out and get guidelines down. When they offered it to Vera I didn't believe it. "I bet they offered it to you without thinking it through. And they will not cover Ellen because she is not your biological child." Lo and behold, she gets the paper and it doesn't cover Ellen. She threatened to sue them. They will cover me also. It's much better insurance than I have too. It saves us a lot of money.

Another two comothers had covered their children for a limited period of time but because it became more cost efficient they switched the insurance back to the birthmothers.

Anne was trying hard to convince her union to extend domestic partnership benefits to same-sex couples. The union was stalling the process.

I am going through something with my union right now to get her covered under my insurance. They just don't know what to do at this point. They are stalling right now. Because it's a homophobic union. It's run by men. It's a man's business or world. I don't think they know what

to do.

To get other members' support for domestic partner benefits, she talked to heterosexual colleagues who were not married to their significant others.

I met a couple of men that do live in that situation who have partner of 20 odd years who just never married. When I told them that I was looking at domestic partnership they said, "We'll be right there for you. If you need any support we'll be there for you." In fact, there are a lot of people in the union who told me that. It's just dealing with the board and the executives in the union. [...]

The board was afraid that domestic partnership benefits would be too costly for the union and kept tabling the issue indefinitely (Spielman & Winfeld, 1996).

As important as formal benefits were for these women, informal support often played a crucial role in easing the transition to parenthood and the division of labor in these families. Gloria and Regina worked for the same employer. They had been very open about their decision to parent and the office was extremely supportive emotionally.

Gloria: Work, they have been so embracing. I didn't say anything for a long time about Regina. But when I was pregnant I went door to door to all my colleagues and said, "I need to talk to you. Something is happening. This is how it is going to be. I just want you to know it " And we got flowers and support and hugs.

The employer's practical support was also quite unusual. They were able to continue working full-time but compress their hours.

Regina: We both work full days Mondays and Thursdays. Tuesday and Fridays is when we each work half a day. On Wednesday, Gloria's stepmother watches them [while I work in the morning]. Gloria goes to work before I do. I'm responsible for the kids until the babysitters get here. Gloria's leaves work before I do, so when she comes home she takes care of them.

Gloria: Childcare, for two days a week Regina's mother and aunt watch

the girls. One morning my stepmother [watches them]. Regina and I both work three and a half days.

This way the children only needed childcare half of the week.

Informal employer support, however, is not always available. In most cases, the mothers had to be very inventive about their work arrangements to maximize their time at home. Below, I analyze in detail how partners coordinated their parental leaves and occupational development.

5.3. PARENTAL LEAVE TAKING STRATEGIES AND FORMS OF SPECIALIZATION

The couples in my study tried to minimize negative economic consequences of having children in accordance with rational choice principles. Yet, as mentioned earlier, whenever there were serious conflicts between maximizing economic utility and being with their children, the children tended to win out. All participants stressed how important it was for the child to have a full-time mother for as long as possible – exhibiting high levels of child-centeredness. The couples' relatively high income probably allowed them to be more flexible in their work arrangements than families with less income. On the other hand, relative affluence was a result of participants' many years of occupational investment making it less likely for individual women to sacrifice years of career development.

Choices regarding the division of labor led couples to several different family arrangements with only four (16%) families following the logic of the new home

economics by specializing long-term into homemaker and provider. However, temporary specialization as well as various levels of specialization did occur in most families.

Models of the division of paid labor during early parenthood varied along three analytical dimensions: (a) leave-taking strategies; (b) levels of specialization resulting from length of leave; (c) levels of specialization due to job flexibility. Biological imperatives – primarily the birthmother's need for recuperation and the child's feeding requirements – did influence the couples' decisions about parental leaves and other changes in paid work. However, decisions about the length of maternal or parental leaves and the return to part-time or full-time work were often independent of biological necessities. Instead, they were based on the desire to be full-time with the child, the perception of the baby's needs, the positive and negative experiences around full-time caregiving, the availability of parental employer benefits, commitments to paid labor, and the need for a second income.

5.3.1. LEAVE-TAKING STRATEGIES

Two leave-taking strategies emerged from the analysis. First, the *overlap strategy* involved both partners taking off from work at the same time. The majority of the couples (18 or 72%) used this method. Some biological mothers had difficult births and needed their partners to take care of the baby and the house while they recuperated. Other couples viewed it as an opportunity to create a sense of family, share the delight of having a newborn, and provide an opportunity for the comother to bond with the child early on.

Birthmothers generally stayed home longer while comothers returned to work after a few weeks. Comothers' early return to work was most often necessitated by financial pressures and/or job requirements. Only two comothers mentioned having difficulty arranging for parental leaves. On the other hand, many birthmothers' desire to have a child implied the hope to be able to stay with the child full-time for as long as possible. Veronica and Gabrielle were willing to lose 60% of their family income and move to a remote, lesbian-unfriendly neighborhood in order to allow Veronica to stay home for a year. Like many fathers (Belsky & Kelly, 1994), Gabrielle, the comother, felt, "Obviously, she does more [childcare] than I do because she is home with the baby. But I almost feel that that is my gift to her that she can stay home with her."

The overlap strategy invoked strong cultural notions of the interdependence of biological and relational motherhood which turned comothers into "second mothers" – at least temporarily. An intricate web created by birthmothers' desires to be full-time mothers, strong cultural notions of the importance of a full-time parent during the early months of a child's life, the need for financial security, and basic biological requirements drew many lesbian couples into fairly conventional leave patterns.

Others resisted the notion of primacy of biological motherhood by using a *consecutive leave-taking strategy*, where partners took successive parental leaves. Seven couples (28%) used this method to minimize paid labor disruptions for each partner while allowing extended full-time family childcare and individual bonding of both parents with the baby. Like the other women in this study, these mothers shared the strong commitment to providing extended care for the child.

Corinne (comother): He was four months and I went back when he was a little over seven months. We were really reluctant to leave him with a sitter alone. And I really wanted that time off to bond.

Relational and personal motherhood played important roles for women who chose this arrangement. First, as the temporary primary caregiver each developed a sense of competence and responsibility as the mother of her child. Unlike in the overlapping strategy, both parents had experienced the joys and burdens of full-time childcare and being the main provider. Many mentioned that sharing that experience had deepened their rapport. In addition, both partners learned to respect and appreciate the ability of their partners to mother.

The consecutive leave strategy could create a safeguard against what Schwartz (1995) has termed the "siren call of motherhood," birthmothers' resistance toward sharing child responsibilities with a partner. The willingness to temporarily give up control of the baby and trust that the partner will take good care of her/him is a necessary condition for equal parenting. Consecutive leaves empowered birthmothers as well as comothers to recognize themselves and each other as competent and reliable caregivers – an important aspect of relational and personal motherhood. Simply being of the same gender or sharing feminist values did not automatically result in equally sharing parenting of an infant. Although all birthmothers acknowledged their partners as mothers of their children, there were degrees of willingness to give up control over the child during the early months.

5.3.2. LEVELS OF SPECIALIZATION DUE TO LENGTH OF LEAVE

Another analytical dimension of the division of labor is specialization that results from the length of parental leave. These distinctions follow the rationale of the New Home Economics: specialization becomes more pronounced and more rational the longer one person is primarily responsible for family or paid work because a partner becomes more economically efficient in her area of responsibility. I distinguish three levels of specialization: no specialization (leaves of less than six months); short-term specialization (leaves of six to twelve months); long-term specialization (more than twelve months of discontinued employment). Thirteen couples (52%) did not specialize in this sense, while seven (28%) chose short-term specialization, and in five families (20%) specialization was long-term.

In four out of five cases, extended specialization followed the homemaker/breadwinner model with the birthmother being the homemaker and the comother the primary provider (Sullivan, 1996). When birthmothers returned to paid work it was part-time and/or the income was viewed as supplementary. This strategy supports the primacy of biological motherhood and relegates participation in the other partner's primary sphere to the "helper role" (Coltrane, 1989).

Interestingly, in absolute terms, three out of the four comothers in these families did not consider themselves strongly committed to feminism and they were also less feminist relative to their partners. A woman who is focused on her work and on supporting a family would be generally be considered a "feminist" in heterosexual contexts. In same-sex relationships, however, concentration on work did not imply

feminist self-identification. As a result, less commitment to equality allowed these women to take on the provider role more easily while viewing the birthmother as the primary mother.

In addition, these same three comothers loved to cook and they shared cooking at least equally with their partners. DeVault (1987) has pointed out that feeding the family is one aspect of "women's work" that involves creating and maintaining a sense of family through practical as well as symbolic work. It is important to distinguish between various types of cooking. Some people are gourmet cooks who enjoy it as an art but are not responsible for the day-to-day feeding rituals, while for others cooking is simply a necessity of life they take on with more or less fervor.

These three comothers were involved in the day to day aspects of cooking but also enjoyed its relaxing aspects. Elizabeth and Tracey exemplified this particular aspect of the division of labor.

Elizabeth (birthmother): Tracey cooks a lot. Now I'm almost working full-time. But I cook four times and she cooks three times. Or we go out maybe once and I cook a little less.

Tracey (comother): I like cooking. When we have people over I do all the cooking and the cleaning. I put all the dishes into the dishwasher. Elizabeth is the entertainer. It's my job to get everything done and it's her job to entertain.

Cindy (birthmother): I must be honest with you, I don't cook. She usually does the cooking. I mean, maybe if she's really tired she'll leave me a note in the morning.

Emily (comother): Cindy doesn't like cooking too much... For me, my mother was a fabulous cook. And she taught cooking. So, I'm used to eating well. So, I cook mostly.

I would suggest that by doing feeding work, these comothers were able to reassert their

femininity and establish a strong relational bond with their families in addition to their primary role as providers.

Loretta and Jenny also decided on long-term specialization in order to provide a full-time mother for their son and advance their educational development. Unlike the other four couples, they employed the consecutive leave strategy. Loretta, the birthmother, had quit her job, went back to school for her bachelors degree and took primary care of their son for the first two years. After that point, she returned to full-time employment while her partner went to college and was the primary caregiver for the next two years. Taking turns was advantageous to both mothers professionally, but it also strengthened both partners' relational and personal motherhood experience. Even their sense of public motherhood was increased – especially for the comother. As the primary caregiver, comothers were automatically assumed to be "the mother" (see Chapter 4). By privileging the mother identity it invoked heterosexist assumptions and rendered a parent's lesbian identity invisible.

Seven couples chose *short-term specialization*. In all seven cases, birthmothers took between six and 12 months of leave while all but one of their partners worked full-time. Three took advantage of very generous maternity benefits; the remaining four had quit their jobs to be with their children. While three of the mothers were on leave at the time of the interview, four had already returned to full-time employment. The young age of the children made it difficult to predict the enduring effects of short-term specialization.

No specialization: The majority of couples (52%) did not take extended parental

leaves. And six of the 13 couples employed the consecutive leave strategy. Because of the short term and consecutive leave arrangements in almost half the cases, one might predict that the couples valued both partners' paid work equally and that each was highly committed to her job.

Many indicated that they had been very happy about going back to work.

Virginia, a birthmother, admitted:

I learned that I'm not the kind of mother who wants to be home all day with the baby. I was restless enough in my job before Langston that I thought I was going to resent going back. It has been very surprising to me how much having Langston has made me appreciate my job. I was so starved for adult company and for intellectual engagement that I was just in seventh heaven for at least a month.

Two other factors accounted for their high levels of work orientation. Most participants had decided to have children toward the end of their childbearing age. They had committed themselves to their occupational advancement for many years, and most felt very secure in their work.

Last but not least, most families depended on the second income to maintain their living standards. During their childless years, most couples had become accustomed to a very comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Ruth, a birthmother, described the dilemma many families faced.

[If] we could have the kind of money we have and I didn't have to work, I'd go for it [not working]. It would be more important to me to have more time with Hudson than to be independent financially. But still between us we want to have it.

Hertz (1986) found a similar dynamic in her sample – affluence created the need for more money to maintain the standard of living.

5.3.3. FLEXIBILITY AT WORK

While length of leave is one indicator of specialization, another more lasting dimension is the amount of flexibility a job offers in order to tend to family obligations. Most women's professional identities remained strong but many made long-term paid labor adjustments to spend more time with their children. Adjustments ranged from working at home to going part-time or taking less demanding jobs. As Schwartz (1995) pointed out in her study of heterosexual egalitarian couples, flexible work schedules were of the utmost importance in maintaining equality in the division of work. Demand/response capability (Coverman, 1985) or time/availability is crucial in the sense that only a parent who is present can equally share in housework and childcare responsibilities. Time/availability was the best predictor for time spent on domestic labor in these families.

Four of the couples in the "no specialization" category had arranged for the comother (3) or the birthmother (1) to work at home. Two comothers worked full-time but had the flexibility to provide some of the childcare during the day while the other two split their time between two part-time jobs, one at home and one outside the home. Part-time work in general offered more flexibility to respond to ever changing childcare demands. Other arrangements included one partner going to work later while the other would come home earlier.

5.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF PAID LABOR

As pointed out above, the overall decisions about paid labor commitments of both partners were based on financial need, the partners' personal preferences and the

children's needs. Those three factors created complex emotional demands on many mothers.

Four couples had opted for a “traditional” division of labor. The birthmothers stayed home with the child/ren for extended periods of time and only returned to work after years of full-time homemaking.³ As in the case of Cindy, the birthmother of two girls, being a mother and homemaker was central to her identity. Her wish to have a third child reflected her deep commitment to motherhood.

Right now I just want to be a mom. I want to enjoy them because I know that I won't be young forever. I'm 34 now. I don't want to be 40 or 45 and say to Emily, "Gee, you know, I really wished we had a third." And then, you know, you can't have it then.

This couple was one of four families who followed the neoclassical economic line of argument. When asked about the reasoning behind their division of work, Emily, the comother, answered the following:

Cindy happens to be the one who had the children. And then she was breastfeeding. And then Veronica breastfed until she was about two years old. So, my career kept on going and her career sadly ended.

Elizabeth and Tracy had a similar arrangement. Elizabeth, a paralegal and birthmother of two sons (eight and six years old), had taken extensive leaves with the birth of each child. Her partner Tracy had been the main breadwinner since the children came along.

However, having more than one child did not automatically result in a more “traditional” division of work. Mindy and Christine just had their second baby. Mindy, the birthmother, was a professional and scheduled to return to work within a few weeks. At that time, Christine would take on somewhat more of the childcare because of her

shorter hours. Shirley and Jackie, mothers of twins, had both returned to full-time work within three months of their children's birth.

Women in families in which both partners worked had a variety of experiences with and attitudes toward paid work. Cybill, a self-employed comother who worked at home, described how her attitude toward being a full-time mother to her four-year-old son changed over time.

I would never have considered, six months ago or maybe a year, that I would just be happy staying home. But I tell you I would right now... And Janet too. When I first was going to be [self-employed], I said to Janet, "One day I'll make enough money and you can just stay home." And she was like, "I will never do that. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be dependent." But I think she is probably to the point too where if that were financially [feasible she would stay home].

While sharing this sentiment, Ruth, the birthmother of a two-year-old, also voiced concerns about a more "traditional" division of work.

Part of me really gravitates to wishing I could just be the conventional mother. You know, I would love ... [to] stay home, take care of Hudson, cook, clean and that. I say that but I'm not sure how much I'd really want it, if I did it. I might have a tremendous amount of resentment. I think what we are living is more about sharing.

At the other end of the spectrum, Kathleen, the comother of a two-year-old, felt more strongly committed to her work. As a freelancer she had been able to be the main caregiver of her daughter. However, she could not imagine herself just staying home exclusively taking care of the baby.

If [my partner] made \$100,000 a year and I didn't really have to work and could just stay home, I probably would want to do something... I think I would be bored staying home all day. But one of the reasons that I have been able to be at home as long as I have is that things are constantly changing with the renovation [of the house].

In Amanda's case, work was a central part of her identity. The comother of a one-year-old was planning to be the birthmother of their second child within the next year or two. A major prerequisite for starting inseminations was a good job.

I want the job first. My career is very important to me. It matters to me where I work. I want to work the job that I want.

The majority of mothers enjoyed their work but they also missed their children. Most mothers were equally committed to their work and their children. The pronounced flexibility in paid work arrangements allowed most mothers to stay home with their children for at least a couple of months.

In sum, the mothers in this study varied greatly in their attempts and their success to minimize the impact of having children on their work lives while simultaneously providing care for their children. The most successful and efficient strategy to protect both mothers' occupational investments and the child's interest in full-time parental care was a consecutive leave strategy. Since extended leaves for comothers were not always easy to arrange – often due to being “closeted” as lesbians and/or as mothers – more flexible work schedules offered another way to extend parental childcare.

Decisions about paid labor arrangements had many direct consequences for the division of family work. The next chapter will discuss in detail how lesbian mothers dealt with the many demands at home.

5.5. ENDNOTES

1. This number is slightly higher than reported in most studies. Ellis and Riggle (1995) reported that 38% of their respondents were completely open about their homosexuality, while Schneider (1986) only found 16% of her sample being entirely open about their lesbianism. The difference between Schneider's and Ellis and Riggle's data are most likely due to their different samples as well as the changing times. The reason for even higher levels of disclosure in my study are probably a result of the necessities of motherhood and the urban character of the sample.

2. "Most children internalize society's ideology of sex and gender at an early age. As a result, gay women and men usually experience some degree of negative feeling toward themselves when they first recognize their own homosexuality in adolescence or adulthood. This sense of what is usually called *internalized homophobia* often makes the process of identity formation more difficult." (Herek, 1995:335)

3. In four other families, the comothers were the primary caregivers of their children. At the time of the interview all of them were working part-time and/or out of their homes.

6. KEEPING THE HOME FIRES BURNING: THE DIVISION OF HOUSEWORK AND CHILDCARE

Considering the time crunch families currently face (Hochschild, 1997), the high levels of labor force participation of mothers in this sample (86% worked full-time or part-time) plus the fact that 68% of the families had children under 2, put even more pressure on the quality and efficiency of family work.

Not surprisingly, most mothers acutely felt the time pressure they were under. Families experienced the transition from parental leave or part-time work to full-time as particularly painful. When both partners worked full-time, little time remained in the day to spend with the child without neglecting the home.

Ruth: It is so hard for me to tell you this because we are really unhappy about how much time we get with him during the week now. I felt much better when I was working part-time. When I was working part-time I was going to work from about 12 to 4. So, I had all morning with him. And he was a lot younger too and sometimes he would even nap during part of the time. When I was working part-time I would do more of the cleaning and stuff. And now we are feeling really lack of time for cleaning. So we are thinking about hiring somebody now that we are having two incomes. Weekend is just grocery shopping, mowing the lawn, cleaning this, cleaning that. And so if you want to go play, you lose that cleaning time.

Leisure – especially personal moments – was the biggest loser in the struggle for time. For example, although Jennie was staying home full-time with their four-year-old son Steven, at the end of the day she needed a break from childcare. Her partner, however, also felt that she deserved a rest after a long day at work.

Jennie: We did have a fight recently. I was real tired. She came home, she had her dinner and then she went into the bedroom and I didn't see her for the rest of the night. That night, like I felt I needed a break and

she went in there and she worked out. And, I don't know, I felt she didn't even tell me that she was going to work out or she needed time for herself. It was like total non-communication that night. And I was feeling tired and felt like going to bed. And I was losing patience and I feel bad when I'm not patient with him. So, we ended up having a fight. And then we started talking about it.

As in this case, time pressure sometimes resulted in conflicts between partners. This type of conflict is not uncommon in any kind of family. Whenever communication broke down, the risk of turning pressure into conflict increased. Like many other lesbian couples, however, these mothers were able to reduce some of the stress by sharing work. (Dunne, 1997; Kurdek, 1993; Nelson, 1996; Sullivan, 1996).

Below I will discuss how important flexibility was in the management and accomplishment of tasks. In addition, I will elaborate on how principles such as fairness, shared responsibility, cooperation, communication, solidarity, and pleasure were implicated in dealing with the multiple demands at home and at work.

6.1. TAKING TURNS: FLEXIBILITY AT HOME

The most striking feature in the division of labor in these families was the level of flexibility they exhibited. As described in the previous chapter, many aimed for flexibility in their employment arrangements. Flexibility was even more evident and desired at home. Task accomplishment as well as the more long-term division of housework and childcare underwent constant changes and reevaluations.

6.1.1. TASK-ORIENTATION VERSUS ROLE-ORIENTATION

Task accomplishment in housework and childcare fell into three categories: task-orientation, role orientation and a mixture of both. I define *role-orientation* as the habit of assigning a task or a set of interrelated tasks to only one person for extended periods of time (see Table 6.1.). In turn, this person is solely responsible for the accomplishment of the task or tasks.

Lillian: I am the morning mother. I'm always up at 7. Then I get the baby up, get her out of her crib. Just like I am the morning mom - Tracey and I had to structure it so much - I'm also the kitchen-mom. I do the dishes and keep the table clean. I'm always running the dishwasher. I pick up the counters.

Six (24%) of the 25 couples preferred this rather stable and prenegotiated system of the division of work. Although at times one of the partners would jump in and help out, most of the basic responsibilities were clearly assigned.

On the other hand, *task-orientation*, as I define it, involves both partners' attention to the work that needs to be done and the joint or alternating accomplishment of tasks (see Table 6.1.).

Lucy: As far as cleaning, we don't have a schedule. We don't vacuum every Monday. It's as needed. Mostly, "Oh, we are having a guest or we are having a party." Then we have to clean, and vacuum and mop... It's really unstructured. Like who feeds him? Whoever is around.

Janet: If there are daily things that need to be done, whoever is available or home that morning will do it. That's basically how we do it... In the beginning, we were just such new parents. We were like, "You try it." And then, "You try it." The baby goes back and forth because you don't know how to stop him crying. So, we really shared. It was really 50% each then too.

Thus, task accomplishment became primarily a function of who is "around," the urgency

of any given task, and the partners' availability and ability rather than preestablished role assignments.

Table 6.1.: Properties Of Task-Orientation And Role-Orientation

	TASK-ORIENTATION	ROLE-ORIENTATION
PRIMARY MANAGER	no	yes
PRIMARY PERFORMER	no	yes
STABILITY OVER TIME	no	yes
TASK SPECIFIC	no	yes

Five (20%) of the 25 couples based their division of housework and childcare primarily on this rationale. In all cases, both mothers had similar paid labor commitments and thus were available to do chores at about the same rate.

Most couples (n=14) used a *mixture* of role-orientation and task-orientation depending on the nature of chores, their pleasure components, and personal preferences. Recurring *household* chores like cleaning which was most conflict-ridden and least desirable to many women, tended to be shared more than clearly defined and more often desired chores such as grocery shopping and laundry. No one mother did all the cleaning in her house while in three couples one person was solely responsible for either shopping or laundry.

Whenever there were tasks assigned to or accomplished by just one person, it tended to be balanced by the other's responsibility for something else. Laundry and shopping, in particular, lent themselves to trade-offs that were viewed as fair and reasonable. One couple devised elaborate systems to ensure a fair division of work.

Teresa: She now does all the major grocery shop[ping] and I always do the laundry. And I usually order the green grocer stuff. Although we still discuss each week who is cooking what when and then we have to make up the list in advance.

The reasons for taking sole responsibility for certain aspects of housework were often based on personal preferences. Either one really enjoyed doing something such as the laundry or the other truly disliked something else.

Tracey: A lot of the things that I do all the time I like to do. I like to be in charge of the laundry because I like folding clothes, I like clothes. I really like organizing the house. I don't mind housework, even.

Victoria: Kathleen, when she was growing up, her chore was always the dishes, putting them in the dishwasher, washing them, unloading the dishwasher. She particularly hates that job. So, I have assumed that job.

Here, solidarity in the form of accommodation of the other persons' predilections emerges as a powerful principle in the division of work. Often, idiosyncratic personal preferences easily fell into comfortable patterns and eased the division of labor.

Louise: We've never thought of dividing it up [in specific ways]. But there are jobs that I never do, and jobs that Anne never does. Anne never cleans the bathroom. I do that. I would say I do more cleaning than she does. She does more cooking. If she is out [of work], she does almost all the cooking.

Her partner Anne agreed with Louise's assessment:

Nobody was ever assigned to the bathroom. But the bathroom is her job. Or if we're cleaning rooms, the upstairs has become hers and I do the downstairs. And nobody ever said how that happened but it just happened.

Unlike the upstairs/downstairs anecdote in Hochschild's study (1989) where a respondent explained that she and her husband shared the cleaning equally while in reality she was responsible for the living quarters and he maintained the garage, the work

requirements in this case were about equal for both areas.

Household tasks became a major source of conflict, however, if partners' ways of performing tasks was very different and/or their standards of orderliness and cleanliness greatly diverged. Danielle and Amanda were constantly at the verge of conflict because Danielle wanted things done in very specific ways.

Amanda: She is very compulsive, very obsessive compulsive, procrastinates a lot. Everything has to be done “perfectionally,” just this way. So sometimes I just don't get involved because she ends up doing it anyway... It's like when I go in and load the dishwasher she comes behind me and unloads the whole thing because the plate isn't just right.

Interviewer: How does it make you feel?

Amanda: It makes me feel like I don't want to do it anymore. So I've got to the point that a lot of things I don't do because I know she would redo it anyway.

For couples like Amanda and Danielle, having a small child added enormous pressure because of the greatly increased amount of housework and the added childcare requirements.

Childcare tasks followed similar lines. Generally, however, childcare was seen as very desirable by both partners and was shared to a greater extent than household tasks – except for breastfeeding.

Corinne: We both like [childcare]. I like putting him to sleep at night which is sort of traumatic when I'm not around. We read him stories. And now it's more of a challenge because you can't just read him one phrase. You have to read it three or four times. It takes a while. He doesn't want to go to sleep and when he starts screaming it's a little more of a chore. I really like doing that part.

And we both really love giving him his bath. He has a great time. And we try to do it together as a family. Whenever I'm home we'll do that. If not Natalie does it alone. And now we started eating together which is fun too. We used to always feed him first. It was too much of a hassle.

Both mothers valued their interaction with the child/ren even when it involved more unpleasant tasks such as changing diapers.

The general enjoyment of childcare was based on the fact that it was shared labor. During times when one person was solely responsible for the child, conflict or resentment would erupt when the other was unwilling to "take over." This was especially true at the end of the day in families in which one of the partners was the full-time caregiver.

Alexandra: I sometimes feel that in the evenings and on the weekends that I'm still taking care of him. But she does do her share. It's just hard. She can't immediately take him. She's just back from work. She has to change or whatever. But, yeah, especially lately, I've been kind of thinking, "Here. It's your turn."

Nighttime duties was another more conflict prone area. Many couples devised systems of equally sharing this task to avoid conflict and resentment.

Madeline: The night time stuff has always been really 50/50. I mean, I'm really pleased with that. And he is not been a kid who sleeps through. What happens is, one of us will jump for him. And when we get tired by early morning that same night or after four days in a row, then we'll decide, "It's your turn." Like sometimes I wake her up and say, you got to do it I can't. And she'll get up.

Other couples coordinated nighttime responsibility with their work schedules.

Delores: Many nights one of us is in charge of getting up in the middle of the night. Tuesday night and Wednesday, she does it because Thursday and Wednesday she is off. That gives me a chance to sleep for work. Whoever is on for the night gets him up and gets him ready while the other takes a shower and gets ready. And you hand him off and the other person gets ready.

Except for Wednesday morning and Thursday morning when she and Ben stay in bed and I just get myself ready and go to work. Thursday night when I come home - because she had him for two days in a row - I come in and immediately take charge of him so she can do stuff and just

rest. And I am also on duty Thursday night through Friday morning. And also mostly Friday nights and Saturday mornings. So, we each sort of have three nights on and three nights off. And the last one, whoever is in the best position to do it. "I'm exhausted, can you?" "Yeah, okay."

This arrangement represents a time-based mix of role and task orientation by assigning sole responsibility to one person but alternating roles almost daily. Such arrangements provided the advantage of clear cut responsibilities while not overloading one person with a strenuous task for long intervals.

The very conscious nature of the division of work was a hallmark of most couples in this study. This deliberate decision-making was especially important in areas where no "natural patterns" emerged.

6.1.2. CHANGES OVER TIME

Changes over longer periods of time demonstrated another aspect of flexibility in the division of labor. While the flexibility in task accomplishment was quite impressive, the tendency to change work arrangements and task assignments over time was even more striking. Changes over time fell into four different categories: changing personal preferences, child developmental adjustments, seasonal work schedules, and long-term trade-offs.

Personal Preferences: These changes were prompted by a variety of reasons. Sometimes one person simply was tired of doing a certain chore or became impatient with the other's lack of participation or responsibility.

Mindy: It tends to fall into a rhythm and then we talk about it. Sometimes she has been doing this for three months straight, "You don't seem to be

doing this. Is it something you don't want to do?" Or, "I have been doing this for three months. It's your turn to do it." If we are starting to feel stressed at all about a household responsibility it usually gets settled.

Changing personal preferences exemplifies how role-orientation in the division of labor does not imply that role assignments are entirely stable over time. In some cases, bill paying was one task that fell to one person for extended periods of time but then would be taken over by the other.

Vera: I've been doing all the bills. For a long time Bonnie balanced the checkbook and took care of that stuff. For her it was that she wanted to know what was going on. Then when she went to school that was just one thing that she couldn't do anymore. And I put it all on the computer. She is just now getting into it because she has a little time off. That has been solely my responsibility for a while.

As in Vera and Bonnie's case, changing preferences were often tied into changing paid work arrangements. Because of the time pressures, even pleasurable tasks became a burden.

Child developmental adjustments: At other times, changing childcare requirements initiated new routines: "In the first year, there are so many changes in the child's growth that we had to adjust to" (Nina). One of the most critical transitions was weaning a child. While the birthmother was nursing, the division of labor often revolved around it.

Christine: If she has to nurse and something has to be done, then I do that. While she is nursing there is probably a little more of a burden on me for getting some things done.

During the weaning period, many comothers were solely responsible for night time duties. Since the babies identified the birthmother with nursing, night time weaning was

easiest when the birthmother stayed away from the child. Ruth, the birthmother of a two-year-old, described their nighttime changes.

I got up more often with Hudson during the night and that was somewhat associated with the nursing. And then it changed. Actually, for a long time Susan got up. Still, when Hudson needs someone to go into him – because we are still kind of weaning him – she'll go in. Because then he doesn't have the confusion with the breast.

Once the child was weaned, new patterns emerged.

Interviewer: Is one of you more responsible for childcare?

Delores: Not really. Since I've stopped nursing, no. When I was nursing she would get up and change him in the middle of the night when he needed his diaper changed. That was kind of her job. Cordelia tends to feed him more.

Changing childcare needs were often accompanied by changing paid work arrangements. Maternity or parental leaves ended and the division of labor had to be renegotiated and reorganized.

Cybill: At first she was staying home. She had accumulated a lot of time, took vacation. So, she really established the routines in the beginning because I was getting into my [business]. And I really was out of the house a lot... When she went back to work we did have a babysitter and she used to bring him at 7:30 in the morning. And I picked him up at 12:30. We probably were with him equally at that time.

Since Cybill was working out of her home at the time of the interview, she was the "fall-back mom" for many expected and unexpected events in their son's life. Cybill and Janet also were affected by seasonally dependent work loads. Like other accountants, financial planners, and tax preparers in this study, Cybill had to work many hours overtime during tax season.

Seasonal Work Schedules: A number of couples had developed two or more

different work routines because of seasonally changing paid labor commitments. Some followed the rhythms of the academic year and others those of various business cycles.

Anne worked in the entertainment industry and had extremely challenging schedules when she was on a project. However, for two to three months of the year she would be out of work. As a result, their division of labor fluctuated greatly with Anne's job status.

Louise: So when [Anne] is home everything runs very smoothly. There is food, and cleaning chores and everything is okay. But then, when she goes to work - like she is working now - we have to put things together a little bit differently.

Anne: If I'm not working then I usually would be the primary caretaker. Waking her up, getting her breakfast, taking her to school, getting her back from school, and then spending the afternoon, taking care of the house, the cleaning, the picking-up after the morning. I like to cook. I usually do all the cooking.

Since Louise worked three days a week, reshuffling the responsibilities was possible without too much stress.

Nina and Teresa found it more difficult at first to adjust to Nina's busy academic schedule during classes and Teresa's full-time job.

Teresa: When we are both busy and stressed out and we do our little negotiations about who does the bath, who does this, who does that, we have fights about, "I'm burned out. I would like to take a leave this week." The other one goes, "No, I'm burned out. You have to pick up more this week." We look at each other and go, "We need a wife " There are times in the heat of the semester when you wish there would be someone else who could do some of this.

Resentment and a sense of being overwhelmed overcame Teresa the first time she was solely responsible for their daughter for a couple of weeks. But there were also

substantial benefits to Nina's times off when she concentrated on the child and the household.

Nina: The philosophy is that a lot of the time Teresa is doing more than I am, especially during what she calls "the grading zone," during the exam period. I become a bitch. If it is such a week and she does a whole lot more, I am not really worried about it and neither is she. We realize that there will be a week when I have my Spring Break or the Winter break when I have five weeks off. I have so much time off...

The first year when we had the "grading zone" stuff, she was really anxious that she was feeling exploited. I said, "Really, if you just think about it, in two weeks, I'm gonna be done. And through the summer, I will be [home] full-time. Just hang in there."

Once the couples adjusted to the different types of schedules and the changing needs of their children, these arrangements worked reasonably well. The high pressure times were more stressful. They were richly compensated, however, during the leisurely down times when family life became the center once more.

Long-term Trade-offs: Rather than having returning cycles in the division of labor, in cases of long-term trade-offs, one or the other would take off substantial amounts of time or reduce her paid work schedule to be with the child and then reverse the pattern. Using a consecutive leave strategy – as seven of the couples did – was one of the main forms of long-term trade-offs.

With the increased childcare responsibilities, housework obligations multiplied as well. When associated with parental leaves, expanded household duties sometimes became a source of conflict. Many stressed that they stayed home to be with the child and not to perform chores. On average, women on parental leave spent less time on housework than those who were unemployed or worked part-time. In fact, they

abhorred feeling like the "housewife." Danielle, a birthmother on extended parental leave, put it this way, "We get into trouble when it feels like I'm staying home to clean the house all the time."

Because of their feminist consciousness, many participants viewed childcare and, to a lesser extent, housework as an important area of self-expression and fulfillment. Yet, whenever a mother felt like "a housewife" implying that her work was devalued in some way, conflicts had a more emotional edge. Both attitudes toward domestic labor often coexisted peacefully. However, sometimes they caused internal identity conflicts in interviewees or external conflicts between partners.

Another occasion of change over time was when one mother became self-employed and was able to work at home or she would go part-time to spend more time with the child.

Victoria: When Leslie was first born I got five months off. So, for the first two weeks Kathleen took off. Then Kathleen went back to work for three and a half months. Then the month before I had to go back to work, Kathleen quit her job... And then I had to go back to work and Kathleen pretty much stayed at home... She was always freelancing.

A year after returning to work, Victoria decided to change careers and quit her job.

Victoria: I just left my job. Depending on what happens - if I get another job outside the house quickly Kathleen will probably try to stay home more. If I don't get one so quickly Kathleen might try to find an office job. But it may be that we will be at home like this for a while. Kathleen can work out of the house. Maybe, the three of us are home working in a different way.

Shifts in paid labor arrangements also necessitated adjustments in family work.

Kathleen: I've been doing it a little bit more. It shifts. If I'm working and I'm busy then I'm not really doing that much housework except on the

weekends. If I'm home I'll be doing much more housework. I have been doing the laundry lately. Victoria is changing her career and all that and she started doing the laundry. It's kind of shifting right now. If you had asked me these questions six months ago it would have been much clearer.

The case of Kathleen and Victoria clearly illustrated how changing time commitments to employment immediately resulted in the reorganization of household duties.

The ease with which this couple was able to rearrange work commitments – paid work as well as childcare and housework – was quite remarkable. Not all couples were able to be as flexible. However, many did change the division of labor during the first few years of their child's life.

6.1.3. FOLLOW-UP RESULTS

The pervasiveness of flexibility over time was also reflected in the results of the follow-up questionnaires. Only eight out of 34 participants were still working the same number of hours in paid labor at the time of the follow-up compared to before. Even more strikingly, only two continued spending the same time on childcare and one was constant on housework. Thus, hourly commitments to family work and paid work had significantly changed within a two year period.

Task accomplishment supported the impression that work arrangements were extremely adaptable to changing family circumstances. While 11 out of 34 women who participated in the follow-up study reported the same arrangement of overall childcare task performance as before, only four continued to perform the same amount of overall household tasks. Thus, household duties were subject to continuous reorganization.

Chores that underwent changing arrangements in 50% or more of the participants included laundry and playing with the child. While laundry was characterized by a strong role-orientation, playing was largely shared equally. In addition, at least 30% of participants changed their involvement in each chore.

On the couple level, reorganization of task accomplishment was even more prominent. Almost all chores saw a changed arrangement in more than half the couples. Furthermore, some tasks were drastically more shared during the follow-up: Taking the child to appointments (7 vs. 4), punishing the child (9 vs. 6), cleaning (8 vs. 5), and taking care of the garden (13 vs. 6).

6.2. PRINCIPLES OF THE DIVISION OF LABOR

Why were these couples able to adjust their division of work with such ease and frequency? Structurally, the couples' middle-class lifestyle provided them with many options unavailable to families with fewer resources (see Chapter 7). Although their privileged social class position was closely tied to their ability to decrease stress by paying for childcare and cleaning services, a number of underlying assumptions and principles in the division of labor also eased the burden of family work. First, *fairness* in the division of labor was at the heart of many decisions about work. Second, *shared responsibility* was an important prerequisite for ensuring fairness. Third, *cooperation* helped couples to achieve fairness and shared responsibility. Fourth, good *communication* patterns allowed couples to recognize each others' contributions and quickly address issues that were causing conflict. In addition, *solidarity*, the altruistic

counterpart of fairness, lightened the burden of family work and strengthened their commitment to each other. Last, whenever possible, couples divided work based on the *pleasure principle*.

6.2.1. DOING THEIR FAIR SHARE

One of the most basic criteria for the division of labor was its overall fairness. Most couples aimed for equality in housework and childcare performance and responsibility. The participants' feminist and egalitarian ideology as well as similar paid labor commitments were the basic motivators for fairness in the division of labor.

Many women in this study stressed fairness aspects of their division of overall labor or of certain tasks.

Gloria: I usually cook. But that's fair because Regina does the dishes. That's something that we worked out. Sometimes she really has to do something else and then I'll clean. That's pretty equitable.

As in Gloria and Regina's case cooking and doing the dishes generally were seen as fair trade-offs. Many couples especially those in which one was a more gifted or passionate cook the other would do the clean-up. As mentioned earlier, for some primary breadwinners cooking became an occasion to reassert their nurturing capacity as women and as mothers.

Simply comparing the aggregate hours spent on housework and childcare, however, overlooks the importance of other aspects of the definition of fairness. For example, the pleasure component of each task could take precedence over the time commitment in the assessment of fairness.

Teresa: Now either you bathe the kid, and get her into her pajamas, read her a bed story, sing her the song, get her down and then the other person just comes in for a good night kiss. Or you do the dishes. ... And whoever is washing Nina also has to dump the cat pan which is in her bathroom at the time. So, like bathing Nina is more fun, the cat pan is kind of poky. Doing the dishes takes less time but it's not as fun as bathing Nina. So, that's sort of the trade-off.

In most cases, perceived or actual inequality in the division of housework and childcare by one of the partners resulted in dissatisfaction and tension and often prompted the renegotiation of work arrangements. When asked about who gets up at night to tend to the child, Ruth, the birthmother of a two-year-old, answered:

We take turns. We decided that one way to take turns is just to decide before we go to bed whose night it's going to be. We don't always say that. So then for a while – for a long time – I would hear him quicker. I don't know if that's a biological thing or maybe I sleep lighter. I would hear him and get up and felt that *that's not okay* [my emphasis]. She said to me I'll go. We just established turns.

In another couple, Jean, the birthmother, had been dissatisfied with the division of shopping and cooking.

In our whole relationship up until the last couple of months, I say, I did about 60-70% of the shopping and about 70% of the cooking. I wasn't happy with that and we have been working on that. Jackie is probably now – the last couple of months – doing about 70-80% of the cooking. Shopping, she is doing about half of it now.

In some instances, even slight deviations from an overall 50/50 arrangement were grounds for discontent.

Fairness issues also surfaced in couples who had chosen a breadwinner/homemaker model in the division of labor. Elizabeth had been dissatisfied with the consequences of her role as primary homemaker. As much as she valued

Tracey's breadwinning ability, she resented having to do housework until late at night.

Elizabeth: Now that we have a housekeeper I don't feel resentful. I'm also the kind of person who at night - and I work all day too - I just keep walking around and there is always stuff that needs to get done. I really won't sit until nine or ten. Whereas Tracey, she is so stressed in her job during day that after dinner she just has to vege out on the couch. Yeah, it pisses me off a little bit. I respect where she is coming from. But if I wouldn't do all the stuff it wouldn't get done. And we really would be in a bad way.

The recent hire of a housekeeper reduced Elizabeth' frustration partially. However, there was still a strong sense of resentment around housework issues. Her partner, Tracey, acknowledged that the division of family was not quite fair anymore.

Elizabeth has a much more hectic schedule than she used to. But she is home when the kids come home from school. But while they are in school she is constantly working. It has changed. It's not fair anymore that Elizabeth is doing the housework plus working and doing everything else. I'm probably doing more than I have done in the past.

As in many other couples, procuring household services became the solution to this problem.

Lucy and Sheila faced a different and unique challenge to fairness. Both thought the other one was doing too much and felt they had to compensate for it.

Sheila: Each one of us feels that the other one is doing more. When you asked me whether it is a problem that Lucy spends one day a week with her mother – it is. But the flip side of that is that it makes her feel a little guilty so she feels that she has to work doubly hard when she is around here. Which isn't necessarily good because we will do more and more and more for each other, the baby, the apartment. I want to do my fair share. I feel that she does so much that I have to work just to keep up with her.

While this is an unusual situation, it does point to a wider phenomenon. On a number of occasions, participants underestimated their own or overestimated their partners'

contribution to certain household tasks. Gender socialization might be the primary source of these misperceptions or misrepresentations.

I only encountered one case in which the birthmother, Madeline, worked full-time as a self-employed accountant, did most of the housework, and half the childcare without seriously questioning the arrangement.

I run the household... I have a lot more flexibility in my time than she does because she has a full-time job and I am self-employed. So it gives me the ability to get home at 4:30 pm on a given day and go do the grocery shopping for the week or whatever. ... And she has a major piece on Freddy because she takes him to the babysitter four days a week. And picks him up. And probably one to two days a week I'm not home when she gets home.

From the beginning of their relationship, the birthmother had taken care of the household because of the comother's disinterest in housework and especially cooking. In the eyes of the birthmother her partner was simply unable to run a household efficiently – whereas she was a very good housekeeper and cook herself.

She hinted at the fact that the work load was overwhelming at times, especially, when they – at her partner's request – invited friends over for weekends and dinners. Yet, the birthmother seemed to have resigned herself to the fact that either she would do the work or they had to hire somebody which also ended up being her responsibility. This couple's arrangement is reminiscent of heterosexual couples in which the birthmother remains responsible for much of the housework while the father takes on more of the childcare chores in order to compensate her full-time work commitment (cf. Gerson, 1993).

6.2.2. SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Flexibility in the division of labor was accompanied by an equal sharing of responsibility for the work that needed to be done. Mederer (1993) found that household management was more highly gendered in heterosexual couples than actual task performance implying that shared responsibility might be harder to achieve than equal task performance.

Furthermore, Gerson (1993) reported that the involved fathers in her sample also tended to stress flexibility in work arrangements. However:

The stress on fluid, interchangeable responsibilities left unresolved the question of how much time they would commit and how much responsibility they would assume. They could use this vagueness to avoid certain tasks. (219)

I did not find that any participant in my study tried to avoid certain tasks by stressing flexibility. There was conflict however, when one partner felt left alone with certain housework or childcare tasks.

Shared responsibility – an important aspect of task-orientation – requires comparable commitment on both sides to performing *and* managing household and childcare tasks. Victoria and Kathleen were able to greatly profit from shared responsibility.

Kathleen: I think that Victoria and I have a very intuitive relationship in the sense that we always balancing each other out. Like when I'm really tired and I'm not focussed she is picking up more of the work or focussing on the things that need to get done. Or if she is really tired I will pick up more. I don't think either of us feels put upon.

Shared responsibility at its best requires that both partners are aware of imminent chores, agree on the importance of these chores, and are willing and able to perform the task.

Not every couple in every situation fulfilled all conditions of the ideal type of shared responsibility. Because shared responsibility like fairness was a basic value for many, conflict resulted from frustrated expectations.

I found that pronounced task-orientation and flexibility in task performance occasionally led to dissatisfaction because the partners were not always fully aware of what the other had done – as in Wendy and Angela's case.

Wendy: When Angela cleans, she is a very good cleaner. [But] the house isn't as clean as it [could be] - I don't know, it's not that bad. You see, I don't even notice that I'm terrible. Angela probably vacuums when I'm not around.

While Wendy was dissatisfied with the work arrangement because she felt that Angela was not doing her fair share, Angela was very comfortable with the situation.

Angela: When I have the time I do what I can. And when Wendy has the time, she'll do what she can. Sometimes she'll do the work and not tell me. And sometimes I do the work and not tell her.

Lack of communication was the greatest hurdle to the successful use of task-orientation. Most couples, however, did not experience persistent conflict over shared responsibility.

Role-orientation in task performances had even higher conflict potential with regard to responsibility. Many women who were responsible for certain tasks for long periods of time resented the constant pressure to be in charge. For example, Veronica was tired of doing all the vacation planning in her family.

Sometimes I feel a little overwhelmed and I tell her, "I don't want to do *everything*." Sometimes when I'm not particularly in the mood to do something I don't want to do it. Maybe, I don't mind getting us there but I don't want to plan every meal. Sometimes it takes me lashing out before Betty will jump in. Once I do that she will do things.

Similar feelings emerged when one mother felt she was left alone with childcare responsibilities. As in many heterosexual couples, this issue especially affected families in which one person was staying home with the child full-time. Looking back, Shirley remembered her frustration with Jackie when she was first on maternity leave.

I would be doing all this stuff and Jackie would not be doing the stuff. "Do you live here? How can you not know what to do?" "What do you mean? What do I have to do?" She would just lay there or fall asleep. And I was thinking when the kids went to sleep she should get to work and help me because I am home all day and I will be home all day. In the beginning, there was more venting about the amount of work there was with the kids.

Once Shirley returned to work, the work loads evened out and the responsibilities were more equally shared.

6.2.3. COOPERATION

Cooperation on tasks proved to be of particular importance. It was one way to ensure shared responsibility for the work as well as fairness of its division. Successful cooperation tremendously increased the satisfaction with the division of labor overall or at least certain aspects of it.

Couples who cooperated on cleaning chores – the most conflict producing household task – tended to be more satisfied than those who did not.

Victoria: I would generally say that we do housework at the same time Like we'll have a big tidy-up together. And I prefer to do the bathrooms and the kitchen. Kathleen prefers to do the rest of the house.

As a result, when I asked her partner, Kathleen, if she would like to change anything in their division of housework she answered without any hesitation, "No. I'm perfectly

happy with it."

Cordelia would have also preferred doing housework at the same time as her partner.

We fight about housework. I am absolutely happiest when it comes to housework when I am doing something and she is doing something simultaneously. When I am doing something and she is watching TV I have a hard time not getting mad. Particularly, because I am thinking I would rather be doing this. I don't necessarily notice when she is doing something and I am reading. It's not equal on that. I'm definitely not fair.

Even though she was aware that Delores was working at other times, the sense of spending time on chores together made a big difference in Cordelia's experience of fairness.

Cooperation is an especially important part of housework and childcare performance when the children are very young. Most couples reported switching childcare and household duties back and forth in order to get things done.

Virginia: We usually have people over during the weekend and then we both clean the house. We clean the house on the weekend even when we don't have people over. That's a division of labor: whoever doesn't have the baby is cleaning. Or if he is sleeping we both clean.

Similarly, Christine and Mindy cooperated on the food shopping.

Christine: Food shopping? She would start and I'd meet her at three o'clock [at the store]. I get the car and meet her there and help her finish shopping. When it's late and we got stuck on line, I would drop her off to get Joshua and take the groceries home or vice versa. A lot of it is - at the moment you decide how it's gonna go.

The child centeredness in many families often required both partners to be at home in order to accomplish household tasks.

Natalie: We spend a lot of one-on-one time with him at the sacrifice of

household chores. We get more stuff done when we are both together because if one is with the baby then - let's say a typical Saturday is like one of us makes breakfast and the other one will take care of the baby.

In turn, cooperation turned child centeredness into family centeredness. Sometimes participants complained that they spent too much time together. However, most were unwilling to give up time with the child or the partner (Nelson, 1996; Slater, 1995).

Another area that generally required cooperation was entertaining friends or family. Elizabeth and Tracey greatly enjoyed inviting people over because they collaborated well when hosting.

Elizabeth: When it's her mother's birthday she'll cook and I'll do the cleaning or vice versa. We work well together as far as entertaining.

For a long time Wendy and Angela had a difficult time whenever they had visitors. Wendy tended to do most of the work and became resentful when Angela was oblivious to all the tasks involved in entertaining.

Wendy: Whenever people came over it used to drive me crazy. She'd do nothing and I would do everything. And we actually had fights about that. Now at least Angela knows to ask if she can help.

As fairness and shared responsibility, successful cooperation required agreement on basic task performances and high levels of communication.

6.2.4. COMMUNICATION

All couples stressed the importance of good communication in their division of work.

When asked if they discuss the division of work on a regular basis Ruth said the following:

Yes, on an ongoing basis. Like I just told Susan I vacuumed. We might say, it's Saturday morning, I take care of Hudson so you can clean up. We take turns with who is watching him and who is doing a specific task. And we will say the laundry really needs get to be folded, I'll do that.

One couple used Saturdays to plan the next week's meal plan, childcare arrangements, house cleaning duties, etc. In another family the birthmother was on maternity leave and the comother was a doctoral student with fairly flexible hours. Instead of having a prearranged division of work, they talked about each task when it came up.

Communication was not restricted to the discussion of the work itself. In many cases, couples only spoke about the division of work when they felt tension around a certain issue. When asked whether they regularly discussed housework matters, Alexandra answered:

Nothing in an routine way. It comes up more out when resentment surfaces and I'll say, "I need you to vacuum." Or, "These are the things that we need to do. How should we divide them up?" We reinvent the wheel every time we do it. There is nothing standard.

High levels of flexibility, task-orientation, and a keen sense of equality at home required more on-going communication than less flexible arrangements based on role-orientation and equity.

Despite great communication demands, most women were quite happy with the more demanding arrangements (Slater, 1995). When asked whether she would like to change some aspect of their work arrangements, Anne said:

No. No. We have a pretty open relationship. It's important to be able to say what you like and what you don't like. So that if there's something that's bothering me, something I don't like, I tell her about it. And the

same thing with Louise. If she doesn't like the way it's going, she'll tell me about it and then we'll do something about it.

Although most other couples had a harder time compromising, in the end they tended to find workable solutions or were able to agree on disagreeing.

Some couples, however, kept their communication needs to a minimum despite their very flexible arrangements. Here, effectively shared responsibility reduced the need for extensive discussions.

Interviewer: Do you discuss how to divide up things?

Natalie: No. Whoever sees something [does it]. The only time we discuss things is when we have to do it together. We have family come over and have to clean the whole house then we'll do it. Otherwise, no.

Interviewer: Would you prefer more communication?

Natalie: No. I was worried that she was doing more than I. And I clean out the garbage because I realized she has been doing it for a month then I try to catch up. Before she gets around to do it I do it. We never really talk about it.

In this quote, Natalie introduced another principle in the division of work many couples followed – solidarity.

6.2.5. SOLIDARITY

Shared caretaking sensitized these couples to the stresses and strains of early childcare.

In many ways, solidarity is the altruistic counterpart of fairness. As formal justice often remains hollow without substantive justice, fairness without solidarity can lack a human face.

Being overwhelmed after two days of full-time childcare, Angela needed Wendy to take over.

Wendy: Well, in the baby chores, I try to do more when I'm home because now I'm gone. Monday and Tuesday I'm gone. I'm at school. So I try to do almost everything on Wednesday because I know what it feels like to have the baby by yourself for the entire day. That happened to me. And by the end of the day, as much as I love the baby, it's like, "Get out of my hair."

Sleep deprivation, another commonly associated stressor with early childcare, made the thought of sleeping in ever more attractive. Some couples took turns on weekends to allow each other to catch up on sleep.

Gabrielle: And we try to let the other one [rest]. Like one day [of the weekend] Veronica will get up and I sleep a little. And the next day we will switch. Even when we are away we do that.

Julia: Saturdays I let [Jean] sleep late because when Jefferson wakes up at night he wants to eat. I wake up but I'm not up feeding him and Jean is up. So on the weekends, I feel I should try to [let her sleep in]. I usually take him out to the groceries or to the library, down to [the main street] or to my mother's or something.

In early childcare, there are many moments when mothers' needs become secondary. Having two people committed to sharing childcare and supporting each other can provide well deserved little breaks.

Corinne: Sometimes she is feeding him and I'll say, "Your food is getting cold." So I take over. Halfway through we might switch so the other doesn't have to eat cold food.

Colleen: And then we prepare the bath - [Helen] often takes a bath with the baby. So, while they are doing that, I clean up the dishes. And then I take the baby from her and towel her off.

One day she had to take care of something at her desk. And I said, "You don't have to take a bath with the baby now. Let me do it." And before Jodie goes to bed, she wants to nurse again. So, that requires Helen.

These occasions of solidarity were mentioned mostly as one aspect of early infant care.

Whether acts of solidarity become less frequent or less memorable later on deserves further attention.

6.2.6. THE PLEASURE PRINCIPLE

As mentioned earlier, fairness is not simply a matter of time spent on housework or childcare. Personal preferences and other experiences of pleasure often have a more profound effect on the satisfaction with the division of work than simple aggregate numbers.

The pleasure principle often surfaced in connection with solidarity in cases of strong aversions.

Susan: The cat litter. Originally, when she became pregnant she couldn't do the cat litter at all. So I did it. And when she had Hudson I said "You can do cat litter now." And then she doesn't like doing it either but she is a much better sport about it than I am.

Janet: Just any kind of problem that has to be dealt with over the phone, she does. I don't like the phone. I don't like arguing with people. I think, she is much better at being diplomatic and that sort of thing. She'll get the bill reduced or whatever it is that we have to do.

Often one partner really loved doing a specific task like cooking or shopping. As discussed earlier, "natural" patterns associated with role-orientation emerged from having complementing preferences. More research on idiosyncratic predilections and their effects on the division of labor might offer new explanations on why some people are terribly dissatisfied with generally accepted standards and others happily endure the most socially devalued activities.

In addition to the pleasure of performing desirable tasks or avoiding undesirable

ones, many interviewees stressed the pleasures of working and being together.

Veronica: When she takes a bath Gabrielle runs the water. We both spend time with her in the bathroom. I wash her but Gabrielle runs the water. And Gabrielle always takes her and puts a towel on her. It's the same thing all the time. We do a lot of things together. We enjoy it. Gabrielle would be happy if I would disappear but she is happier if I'm there.

When couples were able to take pleasure in each other's presence while doing necessary family work, they were much more satisfied with their division of work and their lives than those who felt more conflicted about time together.

In sum, flexibility in the management and accomplishment of tasks and principles such as fairness, shared responsibility, cooperation, communication, solidarity, and pleasure in the division of labor, greatly eased the division of work at home. As pointed out above, these negotiations were by no means conflict-free. Shared commitments to equality and stress on communication even heightened the potential for open confrontation. Flexibility and willingness to adjust to changing work demands, on the other hand, made changes in the division of labor less stressful and more efficient. Thus, despite open discontent among many partners about the division of work, most also felt that they could solve their conflicts or at least minimize the effects of their differences.

As I will elaborate in the next chapter, despite the immense commitments of time to childcare, these families could not have functioned without the help of childcare providers and housekeepers as well as the support of their families and friends. While most couples spend much less time and energy on housework than on childcare, housekeepers often helped to reduce stress and strain on vastly overworked mothers.

7. OUTSIDE SUPPORT FOR AN INSIDE JOB

7.1. HIRED HELP: “CAN’T DO WITHOUT IT”

7.1.1. PAID CHILDCARE

As so many other dual-income couples with young children, more than half of the mothers in this study depended heavily on outside help for childcare (Johanson et al., 1996; Lerner, 1994; Marks & McLanahan, 1993; Peterson & Gerson, 1992; Uttal, 1996; Wrigley, 1995). In families in which one partner was on leave at the time of the interview (n=5), two couples had part-time childcare. Overall, 13 families relied on one or both partners to provide half or more of the daily childcare. The remaining 12 couples used providers who would come to their homes (n=5) or drop off the children at family daycare (n=4), and daycare centers (n=3). Although 13 families relied primarily on parental care, eight of these couples also used various combinations of childcare support such as a regular part-time babysitters when mothers were unavailable.

Most would have preferred to stay home with the child as opposed to hiring a caregiver. Some, however, clearly indicated that they found childcare too boring or that the caregiver was better equipped to entertain the child.

Marilyn: She [the nanny] is a blessing for him. She is very playful. She is very gentle and very kind. She has two or three other friends who do the same thing and take the kids around. They have a party every day. They take the kids to the park or to the museum. There are always people around. They have just these hysterical days. He has a much better day with her than he would ever have with me if I were home all day.

Marilyn did not have the patience or inclination to be surrounded by “Fisher Price toys” all day long. This was a problem many mothers who were used to stimulating adult work

environments experienced. As discussed earlier, they were happy to return to work and enjoy their children during their time off.

Once paid childcare became unavoidable, the choice of childcare moved center stage. The distinction between homecare, family daycare, daycare centers, and preschool arrangements is well documented in the literature (Johanson et al., 1996). The young age of most children in the families prompted these mothers to look for very personalized care such as nannies and nearby family daycare.

Given the average high family income of the respondents – \$90,000 median annual income ranging from \$35,000 to \$280,000 – it is not surprising that five couples used full-time nannies (20%). Wrigley (1995) reported that in 1991 40% of parents with an annual income of more than \$75,000 had hired a child caregiver to come to their homes at one point in the past. When not controlling for income only 7.5% of children under age one were taken care of by non-relatives in the children's homes (Crispell, 1994).

Interestingly, in this sample, the level of income did not correlate with any specific choice of childcare. More affluent women were as likely as others to choose nannies or other types of childcare. Women with higher incomes, however, were more likely to have full-time childcare. The direction of the relationship was unclear: does full-time childcare free up women to make more money or does more money allow women to pay for more childcare?

While income did not correspond with specific daycare arrangements, location and type of housing did. Quite unexpectedly, those who rented apartments were far

more likely to hire nannies (6 out of 10 families) than those who owned their place of residence (8 out of 30). Even more significantly, 50% (n=6) of the couples who lived in New York City relied on nanny care while mothers residing outside of New York City predominantly used other forms of childcare (87.5%, n=7). Also, having a nanny was associated with working more total weekly hours – that is the sum of weekly hours of paid labor, schooling, childcare, and housework – than those using other childcare arrangements. The level of urbanization resulting in the availability of low-cost, non-residential, full-time and part-time nannies and the lack of affordable quality daycare centers for very young children partly explain this phenomenon.

Another variable significantly associated with childcare arrangements was the level of education. Those who had more than 17 years of education (n=27) were far more likely to have full-time childcare support than those with less education. Furthermore, 86% of those who had nannies were more highly educated. On the other hand, the length of couples' relationships was negatively correlated with full-time childcare as well as with hiring nannies.

One other noteworthy result reflected on the distinction between individual level correlations and couple level associations. On the individual level, using full-time childcare had no clear influence on the weekly hours spent on childcare. On the couple level, however, there was a significant decrease in hours a couple spent on childcare when they had a full-time childcare provider.

Feminism was also significantly associated with hiring full-time childcare providers. Sixteen of 18 women who took advantage of full-time childcare were

feminists as opposed to 14 out of 26 who did not. The correlation was even stronger at the time of the follow-up: 18 of 21 feminists hired full-time providers versus four of 11 non-feminists. The strength of feminist identification, however, was not associated with any specific type of care.

While most mothers were satisfied with their current childcare arrangements, they were anticipating changes once the children were older. Child developmental issues became more central to the decision-making about childcare. Susan envisioned her two-year-old son's transition from family daycare to a daycare center some time soon.

There are things that we wished they did more. We wished they did more books. But - right now it's fine. When he gets to be two and a half we'll look for something bigger. Not a preschool - but more of a daycare. With more kids, more stimulation, trips to the park. But right now he has the back yard. That's like a park to him.

At an early age, individualized personal attention and a "warm" environment were more important than intellectual stimulation.

While the nature and intensity of interaction between caregivers and children is central to the analysis of childcare choices, the relationship between caregivers and parents also plays an important role (Johansen et al., 1996; Uttal, 1996, Wrigley, 1995). In the interviews, mothers who used daycare centers never mentioned any personal relationship with the daycare providers. Their interactions with the centers seemed more "rational" and utilitarian compared to the accounts of mothers who had nannies or used family daycare. They mostly talked about the logistics involved in dropping the children off and picking them up.

Jackie: I get them dressed and give them bottles and get

everything ready. And she leaves the house by 7:30. I help her down with the kids. She takes them to school and I pick them up from daycare after work.

Delores: We take him into daycare. Lately, we've been doing it together. The daycare place is close to my work. We go in together and Cordelia would take the subway to work which is right next to where I work. At the end of the day, at about 5:30 we pick him up and come home.

The highly institutionalized and regulated nature of daycare centers relieved mothers from the necessity to personally assess the qualifications of specific childcare providers. In addition, since the children were generally preverbal, they did not inform mothers about specific teachers or require personal knowledge of them.

Mothers who used family daycare, on the other hand, always stressed the personal and sometimes familial nature of their relationship with the caregiver. They knew the providers well and felt obliged to invest time and energy in a personal relationship. In some cases it was easy because the caregiver was a family member or a close friend or neighbor. In others, the interactions centered around the rituals of dropping the child off or picking him/her up.

Two families in particular described their almost familial relationship with their older, white caregivers. As Wrigley (1995) pointed out with respect to live-in nannies, "class peer" relationships with childcare providers of the same race and similar class background often involve the integration of the provider into the employer's family. A familial daycare arrangement also seemed to call for integration. In these cases, however, the employer was integrated into the provider's family.

Dorothy: Then depending on his mood and my mood, I might spend ten

minutes or more there in the morning. And usually it takes a lot of time to pick him up. Joanne is terrific and we like her very much. One of the reasons we like her so much is that it's not like she works for me. She gives him breakfast, lunch, and dinner during the days he's there. I might find him with only one shoe on eating dinner or needing a diaper change or having to change his clothes. You have to catch him and take him to the other room and change the diaper and find the shoes and find the socks and find his jacket and wash out his bottle and refill the bottle. And that's just the tasks you have to do. She'll say, "Why don't you sit down and have something to eat?" Or there is something to talk about. I might even spend over half an hour there in the evening. It's really nice. I like her a lot and I think she likes me a lot. And her mother likes me.

Joanne, the childcare provider, also invited them to family celebrations such as weddings, birthday parties, and religious holidays. The intimate knowledge of the providers' lives inspired personal trust and compensated for the lack of institutional controls. "I know s/he is in goods hands" reverberated throughout these accounts.

The couples who hired a nanny experienced the same issues Wrigley (1995) found to be so prevalent in her study. Most mothers had very mixed experiences with nannies and some were very unhappy with their caregivers. For many parents safety was one major concern. Madeline recounted her problems with her former nanny.

We had someone coming in. We weren't thrilled with her. The chemistry wasn't there. She would just sit for hours on end and not talk to him or interact with him. We figured he was an infant and we would find something. There were some other basic safety measures we asked her to take and she didn't.

I got freaked when she told me that she had taken out Freddy over to Main Street and evidently a whole bunch of them hung out. She said, "I gave Freddy to somebody else and started to walk away and Freddy cried." She was telling me that, "Isn't it great that he recognizes me?" She was young.

Another couple was looking for a new nanny at the time of the interviews. The current one had been unreliable and, according to the parents, had endangered the welfare of the

child on several occasions.

When parents were satisfied with the caregiver whether a nanny or a family daycare provider, occasionally mothers became “jealous” of the close relationship between their children and the caregivers. Susan admitted:

We find sometimes that we are jealous of his relationship with her. We were on vacation for two weeks and we came back about a week ago. And when he saw Lena he went running up the street. He really missed her. He was just very happy to see her.

Mothers often found themselves torn between enjoying their children’s emotional attachment to their caregivers while simultaneously being envious of that relationship.

The issues discussed above are common concerns and problems dual-income families with children experience. In the case of lesbian families, mothers have to also face the possibility of homophobia. The women in my study rarely discussed their lesbianism with their caregivers but believed in the power of a positive lived example. None of them had experienced overt hostility and most long-term caregivers seemed to be quite comfortable with their lesbian employers. This approach avoided open confrontation but sometimes the caregivers remained ambiguous about the comother’s public motherhood.

Susan (comother): I'm not sure what she knows or what she feels about our relationship. I know that sometimes she will refer to me as mommy And then other times she'll say to Hudson, “You're gonna see mommy now.” And I am standing right there. But we are very open about that Hudson has two moms and this is mommy Susan.

Not surprisingly, the participants who expressly mentioned the issue were those using family daycare and who had a quasi-familial relationship with the caregiver. Because of

the subordinate status of nannies, the employers lifestyle was not open to discussion.

Childcare was not the only service families acquired. To a lesser extent than childcare, mothers hired cleaning services to reduce their housework responsibilities.

7.1.2. “ONE WAY THAT WE ORGANIZE OUR HOUSEWORK IS THAT WE HAVE A CLEANING PERSON”

Dual-earner families do not only face the challenge of securing childcare but also to keep up with the housework. Eleven (44%) of the 25 couples in the interviews paid for cleaning services. Jean described their decision-making process as follows:

Cleaning, we decided a couples of months ago, that we were too exhausted, life was too complicated, we could not spend our weekends [cleaning]. The apartment would take a whole day to clean. So we hired somebody to come in. And she comes every two weeks and spends about five hours. We pay her and it's well worth it.

Faced with the ever present demands of an infant or toddler, many found that the only way to maintain a pleasing home environment was to hire a cleaning person. While income was not associated with cleaning services, the employment status of both partners was. Those families in which both mothers worked full-time were more likely to rely on hired help than those who were less involved in paid labor. Thus, a housekeeper was less of a social status symbol but rather a rational choice given the women's commitment to paid work.

Generally, participants viewed having somebody come in to clean as a necessity to maintain basic standards without questioning the decision on ideological grounds. Only two couples found the issue problematic in the beginning.

Mindy: We hired a housekeeper. We finally recognized that having two kids in the house and twice as much space as before – it was too much. We both had a funny feeling about it – especially Christine. We felt like "how middle-class of us." But we also realized that something had to give and the stress level was incredible. For both of us it was important that the house is clean and organized.

Jackie: We have a cleaning lady that comes now every two weeks. I didn't really want a cleaning lady at first, "We can do it. Come on. Everybody else can do it." But it just wasn't happening. [Shirley] was very depressed. And the cleaning lady does really good cleaning. We will just vacuum here and there.

Feminism was not statistically significant in relationship to hiring a housekeeper.

However, feminists were less likely to hire a cleaning person (9 out of 30) than non-feminists (8 out of 14).

Most participants, however, viewed paying somebody to do basic cleaning as a rational choice given their limited time and energy resources. This becomes especially obvious when they discussed needing the help but not having the money to afford it.

Virginia: It would be really good to hire somebody to come and clean the house once a week so that we don't spend all our time doing that. I hope that we will be able to work that out after she goes back to work. For right now, I don't think we can justify that because we only have one income.

Not surprisingly, there was a small increase in the number of families that had cleaners at the time of the follow-up (53% versus 44% before).

Although most couples highly valued having a housekeeper, others experienced conflict around the issue. Angela, for example, had fired the cleaner without her partners consent, while Marilyn and Jennifer had very different opinions on what a cleaner should do.

Marilyn: She thinks it's a waste of money because we pick up before the guy gets there because I don't want him to spend his time picking up. She thinks it's crazy. Jim, the guy, and I have this long range view. – We are complete opposites on the Briggs/Meyers temperament test. – Jim and I have this complete picture of getting everything clean like the spice rack. I don't know when that was cleaned last. Jennifer doesn't think that it needs cleaning.

This quote also illustrates a rare occasion of personalized narratives about the housekeeper. Nobody else mentioned the name of the cleaner or the specific tasks s/he performed. Even in families highly sensitized to issues of “women’s work” and the widespread exploitation of women’s labor, housework services remained depersonalized.

Far from depersonalized was the support couples received from family and friends.

7.2. “A LITTLE HELP FROM A FRIEND” – OR A RELATIVE

Most families had support from friends and family members since the child was born. Sometimes parents who lived in other parts of the country came to visit during the first few weeks of the baby’s life to support the new parents. Family members who were nearby helped out in other ways. Unfortunately, not all mothers could take advantage of such support. Since most women were already in their thirties or forties by the time they had their first child, many of their parents were either deceased or too frail to take care of a baby or toddler.

In two cases, family members were regular childcare providers. Cybill’s sister-in-law took care of four-year-old Jack on an almost full-time basis. Janet and Cybill were very happy with the arrangement.

Janet: Cybill's sister [-in-law] is our babysitter. She works her schedule [around mine]. I work a fairly irregular schedule. And basically whenever I'm not home, he is at the babysitter's... And she is family. This is Aunt Lillian to him and the boys are his cousins. And that's how they treat him. She helped us through a lot. We just finished toilette training. Whatever we plan, she'll be consistent and do it the same way in her house.

Lillian was also available for babysitting exchanges in the evenings and on weekends.

Family daycare in this instance was not only quasi-familial but truly familial. Janet and Cybill were satisfied with the arrangement and did not consider changing anything until their son was ready for preschool.

Gloria and Regina also enjoyed the support of their families. "Childcare, for two days a week Regina's mother and aunt watch the girls. One morning my stepmother [watches them]." But their experience had been more mixed. Regina's stepmother had very different values which caused a lot of conflict.

Gloria: Regina and I are not very comfortable with what she teaches the kids. Gross things. She'll say, "Can you say 'cut the cheese?'" And we say to her, "You can't say that." And she gets really upset. "We try to raise the kids to have good manners and be polite." We don't want rough kids. They will get that anyway in school. "Can't I just be myself?" "Well, no. Not in front of the kids."

Furthermore, Regina's mother almost stopped babysitting over a dispute concerning how the children would address Regina.¹

Uneasiness over childrearing values prevented Natalie to refuse her aunt's offer to babysit their baby son. Conflict erupted between the partners because Corinne saw a possibility to save money.

Corinne: For a long time I didn't want to have a caregiver. Natalie's aunt wanted to babysit Melvin. And I thought that was ideal. We could have paid her a lot less. But Natalie just didn't want it. I couldn't figure it out.

She thinks that her aunt's childrearing methods would not correspond with ours. [...] She is more the old school. If Melvin were to touch something too much she probably wouldn't think that it was a bad thing to hit him on his hand. Whereas we would think that it would be absolutely outrageous. It took me a long time to come around to that because I thought that we could not afford \$300 a month.

Their decision to hire a nanny instead allowed them to have more formal control over these types of childrearing decisions.

Overall, however, mothers appreciated when family members were willing to babysit. Trusted family members reduced the sense of risk with regard to the child and did not require payment.

Veronica: We have Gabrielle's aunt and uncle who live nearby. We just started having a date night once a week. She was always saying, "Anytime you want to go out into the City and go out to dinner just leave the baby here." She kept offering and finally I asked Gabrielle, "Do you want her to be the designated babysitter?" Because we don't have that much money left to pay a babysitter.

The mothers also felt more comfortable asking relatives to babysit on short notice. Danielle's stepmother would babysit "in a pinch" as would Anne's mother who also spent one night a week with her grandchild.

Family members were not the only source of babysitting support. Often friends offered to take care of the children. The degree to which friends were available varied greatly among families. Some couples had abundant childcare support from their friends – even more than from their families.

Jackie: We have a great circle of friends. Our closest friends are our biggest babysitters. Not that our families wouldn't babysit. But her mother and father are up in age and her mom is not feeling too well. They can't really handle two of them. And my mom is really sick. She watches them here and there. My brothers have babysat on occasion – they are

young adults – but our friends are always there. They are great, really great.

Other couples did not yet feel comfortable to leave their baby with friends or had basic reservations about friends who were not used to children.

Sheila: Not because they don't offer but because I am a little bit of a neurotic mother. We probably had more offers than we could use. We probably will have more babysitting from people [in the future]. Actually, the lesbian mothers group, we have traded off babysitting somewhat. And that's been nice. Because they have babies and know.

Corinne: Her sister babysits and my mom has a couple of times. That's been kind of tough because we don't have anybody who regularly babysits. Most of our friends don't have kids and I don't trust people who don't have kids.

While Corinne and Sheila decided to reject offers from friends, some mothers were disappointed because the friends who had offered to do childcare early on did not keep their promises.

Teresa: It was funny that people who initially said, "I'll be babysitting," almost nobody who doesn't have kids came through. Straight, gay, the single girl, they just don't do it. Once in awhile they would take her but wouldn't know what to do when she cried and got freaked out. We wanted to go out on a Friday or Saturday night and that's when they wanted to go out. They weren't really prepared to sacrifice a Saturday night. Most of our babysitting is either done paid with Mabel or babysitting exchanges with straight couples. Because they understand kids. They are willing to take your kid on Saturday if they can get one later. Also, there is someone for the kid to play with.

Early enthusiasm on the part of some friends wore off as the child grew older, others found themselves overwhelmed by the task.

Most couples regularly relied on childcare support from friends and relatives. In fact, most mothers became more involved with their families of origin once they had

children. Having a child often shifted friendship networks toward others with children – lesbian and heterosexual.

7.3. ENDNOTES

1. When Gloria and Regina had their first child Lina, they decided that Gloria, the birthmother, would be called “mommy” and the child would address Regina, the comother, as “Ima.” Two years later, when Regina became pregnant with their second child, they decided to continue using the same names in order to not confuse their children. Regina’s mother found this arrangement intolerable. Regina related the following story, “It’s all [how her biological child would address Regina] my mother can think of. We were closing on the house. I was in the midst of [a medical crisis with the baby]. My mother leaves me a note one day after babysitting that she doesn’t want to babysit anymore because she can’t give a natural grandchild to me and call me Ima. She has to call me mommy. I said to her, ‘How in the world? I’m going to have a baby. I’m closing on the house. And you are telling me that you are not going to babysit because the baby is going to call me Ima and not mommy?’ But this is my mother. It’s typical. We ultimately got it resolved. But now she will refer to me as Ima when she talks to Lina but not when she talks Audrey. She won’t call me anything. There is still a little issue with that.”

8. JUST LIKE ANY OTHER FAMILY?: THE VALIDITY OF EXPLANATORY FRAMEWORKS

Above, I described the high levels of flexibility in the division of labor, explored the principles that allowed for such flexibility, and investigated the role outside support played in these families. Now I will discuss to what extent theoretical frameworks such as neoclassical economic theory, gender, and power further the understanding of the division of family work.

8.1. THE MARKET RULES: NEOCLASSICAL ECONOMIC THEORY

8.1. 1. DOES BIOLOGY MATTER?

Neoclassical economic theory implies that birthmothers are by biological necessity best suited to perform childcare and by extension housework (Becker, 1981). Numerous studies on heterosexual families show that mothers indeed tend to be the primary caregivers for their children, in addition to being responsible for running the household. Mothers in heterosexual dual-earner couples who become primarily responsible for childcare underscore the dilemma women face who are invested in their work as well as in their families (Coontz; 1997; Hertz, 1986; Hochschild, 1989 & 1997; Mahony, 1995; Mederer, 1993; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996; Silberstein, 1992 & 1996).

Is there a similar disjunction in lesbian families? Other studies have found that lesbian couples were more egalitarian in their division of housework than similarly located heterosexual couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Dunne, 1997; Kurdek, 1993; Reilly & Lynch, 1990). Lesbian families with children also exhibited greater

equality in family work than commonly observed in heterosexual families (McClandish, 1987; Nelson, 1996; Patterson, 1995a & 1995b; Rohrbaugh, 1989; Sullivan, 1996).

On an aggregate level (see Table 8.1.), birthmothers and comothers in this study spent about the same average time on housework (11.6 versus 10.9 hours per week). Birthmothers reported spending slightly more time on childcare (45.5 versus 41.2 hours per week) while comothers invested slightly more time in paid work (32.5 versus 34.3 hours per week). Large standard deviations, however, indicated that means were not reliable indicators.

Table 8.1.: Weekly Hours Of Work By Birthmother/comother At The Time Of The First And Second Wave Of The Study

	BIRTHMOTHER	COMOTHER
PAID LABOR	32.5* (34.4)**	34.2 (37.6)
CHILDCARE	45.5 (39.4)	41.2 (39.2)
HOUSEWORK	11.6 (10.2)	10.9 (10.5)
TOTAL WORK HOURS	90.5 (86.7)	87.8 (88.3)

* at the time of the interviews; ** at the time of the follow-up study

When comparing couples to each other, large intra-couple work discrepancies emerged. In all three categories – paid work, childcare, and housework – about 40% of the participating couples stated that they spent equal time in these areas. The remaining 60% indicated that either the birthmother (about 30%) or the comother (about 30%) spent substantially more time in one of the work spheres. Weekly estimates tend to be rather vague and lack pinpoint accuracy. While hours in employment are, in most cases, more objective, estimates of childcare and housework also reflect personal commitment

Table 8.2.: Percentage Of Birthmothers' Share Of Family Time Commitment To Different Spheres Of Work (1=First Wave; 2=Second Wave)

	Paid Work	Childcare	Housework	Total Hours
<i>Means</i>	50* (45)**	53 (50)	51 (46)	51 (50)
<i>1***</i>	50 (-)****	37 (-)	47 (-)	44 (-)
<i>2</i>	50 (-)	50 (-)	44 (-)	42 (-)
<i>3</i>	0 (40)	64 (49)	65 (39)	48 (44)
<i>4</i>	38 (-)	55 (-)	67 (-)	50 (-)
<i>5</i>	100 (41)	31 (47)	46 (47)	51 (45)
<i>6</i>	50 (53)	56 (59)	23 (50)	49 (55)
<i>7</i>	43 (50)	38 (52)	50 (55)	42 (52)
<i>8</i>	40 (-)	50 (-)	59 (-)	45 (-)
<i>9</i>	31 (-)	89 (-)	75 (-)	52 (-)
<i>11</i>	50 (50)	57 (64)	60 (59)	53 (57)
<i>12</i>	44 (40)	70 (57)	29 (35)	53 (48)
<i>13</i>	50 (51)	67 (43)	63 (0)	57 (46)
<i>14</i>	75 (73)	30 (44)	33 (38)	44 (55)
<i>15</i>	57 (57)	52 (41)	47 (29)	56 (47)
<i>16</i>	60 (-)	39 (-)	13 (-)	44 (-)
<i>17</i>	55 (-)	53 (-)	50 (-)	53 (-)
<i>18</i>	0 (0)	78 (48)	81 (79)	59 (53)
<i>19</i>	53 (-)	50 (-)	70 (-)	54 (-)
<i>20</i>	60 (65)	39 (27)	33 (31)	51 (45)
<i>21</i>	63 (51)	58 (58)	63 (75)	60 (58)
<i>22</i>	49 (-)	60 (-)	90 (-)	60 (-)
<i>23</i>	100 (43)	59 (56)	33 (25)	53 (46)
<i>24</i>	0 (0)	62 (60)	- (83)	- (47)
<i>27</i>	75 (56)	37 (42)	22 (-)	49 (-)
<i>28</i>	50 (55)	52 (47)	60 (50)	52 (50)

* First wave results; ** Second wave results; *** Couples' code numbers; ***(-) - No answer

and emotional involvement.¹ Thus, biological motherhood did not automatically result in a specific division of labor.

Partners' views of the performance of specific tasks add another dimension to the understanding of equality in arrangements (Ferree, 1990). Birthmothers reported doing slightly more cooking, dishes, gardening, cleaning, and pet care. Comothers, on the other hand, were more likely to take care of the car and the grocery shopping. Laundry, taking care of company, and repairs around the house were shared equally. As discussed earlier, despite the high levels of sharing on an aggregate level, in some couples either the birthmother or the comother was exclusively or primarily responsible for certain household chores.

Childcare tasks, on the other hand, were shared more equally on an aggregate level *and* on the intra-couple level. Both partners played with and disciplined the child, took her/him to bed, and fed him/her equally. Even though some couples reported that one parent performed certain childcare tasks more often, no mother was exclusively responsible for any of them.

On the whole (cf. means in Table 8.2.), both time commitments and task performances indicated that biological mothers performed slightly more of the work than their partners but stayed within a 60/40 split which implies relative equality (Schwartz, 1995). However, on the intra-couple level, many participants specialized in certain work arenas and/or tasks. But neither biological motherhood nor gender role socialization can account for the differences in the performance of labor because birthmothers did dramatically more of the housework and childcare in some couples while comothers did

more family work in others. The pronounced variance between partners' housework commitments independent of birthmotherhood indicated that a biological link did not account for the time spent on household labor. The quantitative data thoroughly supported the results of the qualitative analysis: biological motherhood did not determine the division of family work.

In sum, biological motherhood had an important, yet for most couples, an extremely brief influence on the division of work. Only four out of 25 couples chose a long-term breadwinner/homemaker model based on the birthmothers' primary responsibility for the children. But even in these couples, comothers did perform much of the housework and childcare when they were at home.

8.1.2. ECONOMIC UTILITY AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

If birthmotherhood was not the deciding factor in work arrangement, what did prompt these couples to divide productive and reproductive labor so differently? The New Home Economics, in particular, and neoclassic economic theory, in general, identify economic utility as the main organizing factor in the division of labor (Blau & Ferber, 1992). *Comparative advantage* considers which of the partners is relatively more productive at home and which in the labor market the basis for making decisions about the utility of specific work arrangements.

As discussed earlier, partners' comparative advantage in the labor market was not a consideration when deciding who would bear the child. Rather, desire to carry a child and infertility problems were the main reasons for the choice of birthmother.

Similarly, once the child was born, the less economically productive in paid labor did not automatically become the primary childcare provider. As Shirley and Jackie's case illustrated earlier, even if one partner made substantially less money, each partners' job was viewed equally important irrespective of the level of income. Strong commitments to paid labor and the need for financial independence regularly overrode the logic of comparative advantage.

These arrangements, however, did not imply that mothers disregarded economic utility entirely. For example, in the 12 dual full-time employed couples, birthmothers tended to earn higher incomes than their partners. One might argue that couples in which birthmothers made more money were more likely to be dual full-time employed while couples in which birthmothers made less money were more likely to choose other arrangements. This statistical tendency, however, did not explain why some couples in which birthmothers had higher earning power than comothers chose extended leaves for birthmothers rather than comothers. Thus, there was no clear pattern either pointing toward birthmotherhood nor toward comparative advantage as main organizing principle.

The tendency of lesbian couples to maintain high levels of economic independence (Dunne, 1997) – despite equally high levels of emotional interdependence (Slater, 1995) – undercuts one important assumption of neoclassical economic theory. "... there is the tendency to treat even this multi-person family as a single-minded, indivisible, utility-maximizing unit" (Blau & Ferber, 1992:35). While couples viewed themselves as a family unit with converging economic interests, they stressed each

individual's economic interests either in practical terms or symbolically.

Thus, neoclassical economic theory had no explanatory power with respect to the lesbian mothers in this study. Although there were many instances in which economic rationality guided participants' decision-making, the most fundamental decisions about the choice of birthmother and the basic division of paid labor followed a different rationale.

8.2. DOES POWER MATTER?

Power in families is often difficult to grasp because of the complex interaction between socioeconomic, personal, and relational factors. Therefore, researchers often study these different power dimensions separately or solely focus on socioeconomic indicators because they are the most easily assessable (Komter, 1989; McDonald, 1980; Saflios-Rothschild, 1976; Szinovacz, 1987).

Facing similar problems, I will first focus on socioeconomic resources – mainly income, education, and age. Secondly, based on the discussion in Chapter 5, birthmotherhood can also be conceptualized as a power resource.

8.2.1. SOCIOECONOMIC RESOURCES AS POWER

Studies like the *American Couples* study (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983) consistently find that socioeconomic differences in lesbian couples have less impact on power dynamics and the division of work than in heterosexual or gay couples (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987; Reilly & Lynch, 1990). Even more than any other type of couples, lesbians tend to

neutralize the potential impact of unequal economic and social resources by symbolically and practically stressing equality and by maintaining a certain degree of financial independence (Dunne, 1997).

As shown above, the women in this sample also stressed equality in their relationships. The narratives underscored the importance of fairness, shared responsibility, cooperation, communication, solidarity, and pleasure. The quantitative questionnaire data reflected those basic attitudes as well. Again, on average, neither birthmothers nor comothers performed more than 55% of housework, childcare, paid work, or overall work.

When analyzing the mean percentages of work performed by birthmothers and comothers grouped by their socioeconomic differences², however, an interesting pattern emerged. One might assume that the more similar both partners in a couple in terms of income, age, and education, the more equal their division of work. Yet, quite unexpectedly, those who were similar in income, education, and age (n=5) were most dissimilar in their work arrangements. Birthmothers, on average, performed 39% of the housework, 41% childcare, 67% of the paid labor, and 50% of the total work hours. Those who were dissimilar on one or three counts, showed a reverse yet less extreme pattern. Birthmothers were more responsible for housework and childcare, while comothers took responsibility for paid work. Interestingly, the only category in which birthmothers and comothers did not equally (50%) share the total labor time was the two-differences type. Here birthmothers performed more than 50% of the work in all categories and 54% of the overall labor.

Table 8.3.: Socioeconomic Intra-Couple Differences (Age, Education, Income – First Wave)

	0 Difference	1 Difference	2 Differences	3 Differences
Number of Couples	5	8	7	5
Education Difference in Years*	.6	.12	-1.29	.4
Income Difference*	\$10.000	\$1.875	\$-16.857	\$-19.600
Age Difference in Years*	.4	0	-3.86	.8
Birthmothers' Contribution to Housework in %	39 (43)**	54 (60)	54 (37)	55 (57)
Birthmothers' Contribution to Childcare in %	41 (45)	53 (54)	59 (51)	57 (53)
Birthmothers' Contribution to Paid Labor in %	67 (57)	39 (36)	57 (50)	37 (20)
Birthmothers' Contribution to Total Hours in %	50, n=5 (50, n=5)	50, n=8 (50, n=3)	54, n=7 (50, n=5)	50, n=5 (50, n=2)

* The difference was computed by subtracting the comother's information from the birthmother's

** Number in brackets indicates percentages at follow-up.

In couples with no significant resource differences, birthmothers earned an average of \$10,000 more per year than their partners, were slightly older (0.4 years), and slightly more educated (0.6 years) (see Table 8.3.). Except for one couple, partners in this group had utilized the consecutive leave strategy with three comothers currently being the primary caregivers of their children. One might expect that the comothers would return to full-time paid labor within a few months after the initial interview. About 18 months later, at the time of the follow-up, the differences had indeed decreased but the main tendency remained: birthmothers spend more time on paid work while comothers were somewhat more responsible for childcare and housework.

The only group in which comothers scored consistently higher on socioeconomic resources than birthmothers was the two-difference category. Comothers made

substantially more money (\$17,000), were more educated (1.3 years) and older (3.9 years) than their partners. While the mean income difference was substantial, only 43% were dissimilar in their income – meaning one partner earned more than \$20,000 more the other. They were markedly different, however, in education (86%) and age (71%) compared to the one difference group. Eighteen months later these couples reported spending the same amount of time on childcare and paidwork but birthmothers had sharply reduced their involvement in housework (37%).

In comparison, in the groups with one and three resource differences birthmothers were more responsible for housework (54% & 55%) and childcare (53% and 57%) while comothers spent more time on their jobs (61% & 63%). In both groups the differences were even more pronounced 18 months later, indicating a more long-term effect.

It is important to caution against overgeneralizing these findings because of the small number of cases in each group. Yet, the data suggest that birthmothers, who are more involved in family work early on, continue to do so over time, while couples in which comothers were more responsible for family work in the early months tended to equalize their involvement with time. This finding suggests that resource similarity and comothers' primary caregiving created conditions that allowed couples to return to equality more easily after periods of specializing than resource differences and birthmothers' primary involvement in family work.

It is also noteworthy that the respondents in these two groups – one and three differences – were the least likely to participate in the follow-up. While all zero-

difference couples and five of seven two-difference families responded to the second wave of the study (10 of 12), only five of the 13 remaining couples returned the questionnaires. Speculating about the reasons for such a low response rate in groups one and 3, I would argue that they might have felt less of a need to respond because their situation had remained fundamentally the same. Or, conversely, their situation had changed dramatically and they did not feel comfortable publically acknowledging those shifts.

Another grouping strategy to understand how socioeconomic differences affect the division of labor in couples involved recoding couple work percentages. Couples who fell within the 40/60 split were defined as equally sharing a work sphere (code=0) as opposed to those who did not (code=1). As a result, six couples shared each work sphere – childcare, housework, paidwork – equally, four differed in one area, eight in two areas, and five in all areas of work.

Table 8.4.: Intra-Couple Differences – Socioeconomic (Age, Education, Income) By Work Sphere Differences (Childcare, Housework, Paid Work)

	0 SES Differences	1 SES Difference	2 SES Differences	3 SES Differences	Total Number of Couples
0 Work Differences	1	2	2	1	6
1 Work Difference	2		1	1	4
2 Work Differences	1	3	3	1	8
3 Work Differences	1	2	1	1	5
Missing Data		1		1	2
Total	5	8	7	5	25

When comparing intra-couple work differences, it was quite surprising to find

them unrelated to socioeconomic differences (see Table 8.4.). Couples with no significant income, education, or age differences were as likely to fall into sharing each sphere of work equally as were those with differences in their resources. Thus, socioeconomic equality did not predict equality in responsibility for different types of work or vice versa.

By regrouping couples according to the level of equality in each area of work in combination with birthmotherhood and comotherhood, slight interactions between socioeconomic status and the division of work reemerged (see Table 8.5.). Families in which birthmothers were the primary homemakers and comothers the main breadwinners were labeled “traditional”(n=6) while those exhibiting the reverse patterns were categorized as “reversed traditional” (n=5). Those who shared all types of work within a 40/60 split were termed “egalitarian” (n=6). The remaining eight families fit neither one of the three categories and were labeled “mixed.” While these families were mixed

Table 8.5.: Intra-Couple Differences : Socioeconomic Differences by Overall Work Arrangement

	0 SES Differences	1 SES Differences	2 SES Differences	3 SES Differences	Total Number of Couples
“Traditional”		3	1	2	6
“Egalitarian”	1	2	2	1	6
“Reversed Traditional”	3	2			5
“Mixed”	1	1	4	2	8
Total Number of Couples	5	8	7	5	25

according to their questionnaire answers, their narratives indicated equality in their

division of labor.

Comparing intra-couple socioeconomic differences with the level of egalitarianism in their division of work indicated that the more resource differences the more couples were likely to favor a “traditional” division of work. Conversely, only couples with zero or one resource difference favored a “reversed traditional” division of work. The two-difference category once again was the most puzzling. Four out of seven couples reported a mixed division of labor. While the one and three-difference categories were more likely to favor a “traditional” arrangement, the significant difference in age and education in the 2-category seemed to result in no clear patterns.

Furthermore, in the other categories, 17 out of 18 couples resource differences only favored one of the partners. In the two-difference group, in three of the seven couples both birthmother and comother had one significant resource advantage over the other – age or education over income. In these families, couples followed a “traditional” (n=1), egalitarian (n=1), or mixed (n=1) pattern. In the remaining four couples, all comothers were more educated and older but earned a similar income. Since their interviews reflected a conscious egalitarian division of labor but questionnaire estimates resulted in mixed classification, comothers’ education and age advantage did not translate into an unequal division of work but different interpretations of how they estimated their contributions.³

This hypothesis was supported by a close link between feminism and education and feminism and egalitarianism. Those with less than 17 years of education were significantly more likely to identify as non-feminists (11 of 14) than those with more

education. Furthermore, in the “reversed traditional” and mixed category, 21 out of 23 women identified as feminists whereas in the other two categories only nine out of 20 considered themselves feminists. Feminist attitudes, on the other hand, were also associated with relatively higher levels of overall conflict in relationships. This finding supported the hypothesis that differences in interpretation rather than differences in actual work performance were at the heart of divergent estimates.

Individual task performance in couples followed a similar pattern. Couples with no significant resource differences shared most tasks equally or comothers were more likely to perform tasks. The two-difference category shared almost all tasks equally while in the remaining groups (one or three differences), birthmothers were more likely to report doing a task more often.

Similarly, birthmothers performed more of the household and childcare tasks in “traditional” couples while comothers did more in “reversed traditional” families. Interestingly, birthmothers reported doing more cleaning, cooking, shopping, and laundry in egalitarian families despite the fact that they spent about the same weekly hours on housework. In “mixed” couples both partners shared routine household tasks more equally, but birthmothers reported more involvement in taking care of pets, doing laundry and dishes, and taking care of the garden.

Furthermore, in the interviews, mothers who had significantly more socioeconomic power compared to their partners were more likely to show dissatisfaction with the division of work and their relationships than their mates. Even though most repeatedly affirmed that the division of work was fair, more critical notes

surfaced during the interviews. In striking contrast, the less powerful partners strongly asserted their satisfaction with the division of labor and their relationships.

Both Shirley and Jackie were very happy with their relationship and their motherhood experience. Yet, Shirley who was ten years older than her partner, had five more years of education, and made \$40,000 more than Jackie, tended to criticize her partner more often.

Shirley: I keep the latch on the bathroom door for the kids but also to keep the door closed so they learn not to walk in on you in the bathroom. And I come home and the latch is not on. I tell her, "Don't forget the lock." But I don't want to always criticize because I'm always like, "Do this and do that."

Jackie: We have a really great relationship. We have never had any huge arguments. The most upset I've ever seen Shirley get was when the kids first were here. And she had to go out at night. And she was always worried about leaving me with them. I said, "Don't worry about it. No problem. A piece of cake. Just do as it comes along." This one night she got upset, "The baby is crying. The baby is crying." She said, "I'll take one with me." And she wanted me to say, "Don't worry about it." But I said, "Alright. Go ahead." She was really mad, slammed the door. She was so mad. She canceled her appointment.

I suggest that along with many other couples in the two and three-difference category, the more powerful partner had less to lose when voicing her dissatisfaction. Also, being more educated and generally more verbally expressive, she felt more comfortable verbally processing her complaints. Once again, more socioeconomic resources did not automatically translate into doing less housework or childcare but rather gave the more powerful mother license to criticize and protest. In a similar vein, the two couples who had separated by the time of the second wave both had significant resource differences and those more powerful had been more critical of their

relationships.

In addition, the couple above, Shirley and Jackie, framed their disagreements as being based on personality differences – Jackie being the more “easy going” while Shirley was more “rigid.” While socioeconomic differences per se did not result in heightened conflict over personality differences, those who reported a mixed division of labor were most likely to experience personality conflicts in their relationships.

8.2.2. BIRTHMOTHERHOOD AS POWER

As discussed in Chapter 4, birthmotherhood is culturally, socially, and legally privileged over comotherhood. The power society bestows on birthmothers can lead to a resource disadvantage of comothers. Since all comothers were strongly attached to their children, their lack of legal, social, and cultural recognition could not be equalized by a lesser commitment to their children.

Birthmothers’ tendency to report more involvement in task accomplishment in egalitarian and “mixed” couples points to the possibility that birthmotherhood created a sense of greater involvement in domestic tasks even though they did not report more weekly hours in childcare or housework. Furthermore, as socioeconomically more powerful partners tended to be less satisfied with work arrangements, birthmotherhood interpreted as a power resource, might have provided birthmothers with a greater sense of family work accomplishment.

As discussed earlier, most mothers tried to minimize the impact of the social and biological power birthmotherhood provided. In a few instances, however, mothers were

very frank about the power of birthmotherhood.

Wendy (comother): In a way it works out because I have the money she has the baby. [laughing] It keeps the power balance equal. I apologize for being a lawyer but I think in these terms. I think Samantha is mine and she thinks my money is hers. But legally that's not the way it is. Legally, I have all the money and legally she has Samantha. If there ever was any kind of break-up between us that's the leverage we both have. In a weird sort of way it works out.

While Wendy had all the socioeconomic resources in the family, Julia, another comother, had neither access to more socioeconomic resources nor to the power of birthmotherhood.

Julia (comother): The most difficult to deal with, I think, is that Jean is definitely more of Jefferson's mother than I am. I think that she is so into Jefferson that it makes it hard for us to do things.

Whenever mothers openly acknowledged power differences resulting from birthmotherhood, they were also more likely to experience intense conflict in the relationship. Thus, absence of acknowledgment of the power difference the birthmotherhood status introduced into the relationship was an indicator of couples' successful attempts to minimize these differences.

The power of birthmotherhood and its interaction with socioeconomic power was illustrated by couples' bill-paying habits. The literature on heterosexual families indicates that women are perceived to be in charge of paying the bills even if they do not control the family money (Coltrane, 1996). "Feminine" tasks are usually associated with less power. In this study, however, bill paying was associated with more financial resources.

In ten families, the birthmother was primarily responsible for bills, eight couples

shared the task equally, and five comothers were in charge of bill paying. In families, in which partners earned about the same income (n=11), none of the comothers but seven of the birthmothers were entirely in charge of the money.⁴ On the other hand, the comothers who did take care of money matters made an average of \$67,000 a year while their partners only earned about \$37,000. Yet, birthmothers who were in charge of bills only made \$61,000 as opposed to their partners' \$56,000. Thus, in order to manage the family's economic resources, comothers needed to make substantially more money than birthmothers.

8.2.3. POWER TO THE PEOPLE OR HOW TO MINIMIZE POWER DIFFERENCES

As discussed earlier, most couples tried to lessen the impact of birthmotherhood on family relationships by performing public and private acts of equality, taking equal care of the child, and present both partners as mothers. Similarly, most partners were intent on reducing the influence of socioeconomic resource differences.

By largely avoiding the breadwinner/homemaker model or limiting it to a temporary arrangement, each woman was able to secure economic resources for herself. Even in the four couples in which comothers were the long-term primary financial providers, birthmothers contributed to the family economy. In Cindy and Emily's case it was conceptualized as Cindy "helping out."

Cindy: Basically my salary pays for the non-essential things. It pays the ConEd, the extra things that her salary wouldn't be able to pay for - with taxes and stuff. In cases when we want to go out to eat, when we want to

go to an amusement park, when we want to stay over - things like that.

Although Cindy's income did not only pay for "non-essential things" but also for the electricity bill, Emily clearly was the provider in the family. Both women had a strong sense of the family economy as a joint venture with Cindy taking care of the children and making some money at home and Emily being the one to earn the family income and take responsibility for the bills.

While Emily and Cindy pooled all their income into joint accounts, Louise and Anne had developed a different method of sharing their income. Louise, who was making substantially less than her partner, had refused to pool their money into joint accounts because she felt that it was symbolically important to have different accounts.

Louise: We both have separate accounts, but the money is communal. I have an account. I pay the mortgage with what I make and I pay the extra for Melissa's and my health insurance. That's really all. And Anne pays all the bills, other insurance bills, all the other stuff that comes in. Car payment, anything else. It's absolutely joint money.

Interviewer: Did you ever think of getting a joint account ?

Louise: No, I think the idea of separateness is good - even though it's not at all. You know, we pay everything together.

This tendency to symbolically – and in most other cases concretely – assert each partners' economic independence while at the same time building a strong commitment to interdependence was a staple in the narratives.

Different money pooling methods illustrated the extent to which couples felt comfortable being economically interdependent (Pahl, 1989). Out of the 18 couples who discussed their financial arrangements before they had children, eight couples had entirely separate financial dealings, three reported partial, and seven total pooling of their

resources. Having children increased the need for common money for at the least the child's expenses. Thus, after having a child all but one family either pooled their income partially (n=13) or entirely (n=11).

Those who partially joint their financial resources usually set up joint bank accounts while retaining their individual ones. The practice and rationale behind pooling money varied greatly. Some contributed each 50% to the joint account.

Cordelia: We have one joint checking account that we equally contribute to. That pays for rent or mortgage, utility and pretty much everything else. We put in an equal amount into the grocery fund every week. And we maintain everything else in our own separate accounts. She maintains her own car and I do the same.

Others made their contributions dependent on their current expenses and other requirements such as tax arrangements.

Madeline: We set up a joint account when we had Freddy. Up until then we kept our finances separate. When we had Freddy we each kept our own checking account that our money goes into. And then we each contribute to the joint account as needed. This week I called Dorothy up and said that we are going to be negative \$2,000 when all the bills come "How much do you have? I could put in this much but then I'm gonna need some for taxes." Whoever has the money. And we try to make sure that Dorothy's contribution to the joint account is at least 51%. Because she claims Freddy on her income tax return and so we want to keep it that we have proof that she contributes more than half - it's supported that way.

Fairness and solidarity played an important role in couples who partially pooled their money but had substantial earning gaps. Some couples such as Cordelia and Delores above did not change the 50/50 rule because they had experienced great fluctuations in their incomes in the past and preferred to lend each other money rather than rearrange the contribution ratio. Other couples who were faced with long-term

income differences often pooled their money proportionally.

Jean: I make almost twice as much as Julia. We've never split the bills 50/50 because it wouldn't really be fair. We are not just roommates. If we were just roommates I would not care how much she makes - we would just split. So, the rent is \$1250 - I pay \$775, she pays \$475. And I pay a proportionate amount of our expenses.

Mindy: We pool most of our money. We see what our bills are and we do a 60/40 split. I pay 60% of whatever those expenses are and she pays 40. We don't have a joint savings account but we have a joint checking. Even in terms of our household money, let's say \$300 a week, I pay 60% of that.

As Jean pointed out, the couples are not “roommates” but they are partners affirming their commitment to each other by proportionally sharing their expenses.

Why did so many couples (n=13) only partially pool their income? Those with relatively similar income encountered the least complications by keeping some of their money for themselves. In these cases, having their individual bank accounts and their personal resources provided partners with great financial autonomy and reduced stress when spending patterns varied greatly.

Lucy: We have joint savings and joint checking. And she has her own savings and checking and I have my own savings and checking. She was all for pooling everything together that we just have everything joint. I refused that scheme. I want some autonomy. I want my own money separate. If I want to spend \$400 on a collectable because I like collectables I don't want to have to justify to her that I am being frivolous. Whereas if she wants to go to Barnes and Nobles and spend \$400 bucks on books even though I think that she could have read those books by going to the library - I think it's her [thing]. But she makes the money, it's her money.

Lucy also had financial obligations toward her family she did not want her partner to share.

Sometimes I give money to my father. I don't want her to feel that if we had everything joint why should she give any money to my father. Or if I want to buy something for my father - in my family [...] you don't count every penny with your family.

Even when finances were separate, control issues around money sometimes emerged.

Cordelia: I have some control issues. Her approach to money is easier going than my approach. We struggled around that in the beginning, each trying to control her spending and her funds. That's how we've gotten clearer. She has hers and I have mine and I try to stay out of it. I felt that she was getting way too far into debt about a years ago. And we had a kind of showdown about that and got that fairly straightened out. But I try very hard to stay out of her finances.

Interestingly, pooling all or only some financial resources did not correlate with *money* conflicts⁵ in couples.⁶ Yet, couples who only partially shared their income were more likely to experience more conflict *overall* and more conflict over their relationships and their friends.

Indeed, the more partners were financially independent the more conflicts they experienced. This brought up an important question: How should conflict in relationships be interpreted? Is it an indicator of poor relationship quality or the reverse? I would like to argue that it could be both. If partners experience widespread conflict and are unable to resolve those conflicts, it is an indicator of poor relationship quality. Yet, if conflicts get resolved, the awareness of and open approach to conflict might be an indicator of good relationship quality. In support of this argument, there was no significant relationship between level of conflict and conflict resolution in these couples. Thus, other characteristics must be more indicative of a couple's ability to manage conflict.

For example, while more egalitarian couples articulated more conflict, they also reported better conflict resolution skills.⁷ Thus, conflict in the more egalitarian couples could be viewed similar to conflict in democracies. It is seen as a normal part of a couple's relationships and procedures are in place to resolve these conflicts fairly. The balance of economic power allowed both partners to voice their interests and concerns and freely express their dissatisfactions.

This argument is supported by the fact that "traditional and mixed" couples were more likely to have poor resolution skills while couples who had an egalitarian or "reversed traditional" division of labor reported much better conflict resolution. Similarly, those with no age, education, and income differences and those with two, exhibited better conflict management than those who were in the 1/3 category. Also, families in which both women worked full-time had better skills than those in which none worked full-time.

A parallel pattern emerged when analyzing conflicts over childcare. Those who shared childcare and housework within a 60/40 split, experienced more conflict around childcare.⁸ Both partners' similar sense of responsibility and authority with respect to family work led to more conflict because not one person was automatically assigned power over specific decisions. The need for more joint decision-making created the potential for more conflict.

8.2.4. SUMMARY

Socioeconomic differences only partially explained the actual division of labor in each

family. The strongest connection was found between socioeconomically similar couples and the propensity to choose “reversed traditional” division of labor, i.e. the comother was more involved in family work than her partner, and their avoidance of a “traditional” division of labor.

Secondly, in the group of couples who were different in two resources, mainly education and age, birthmothers tended to be younger and less educated. Since their narratives stressed equality in their division of labor, the differences in their questionnaire responses could be a result of a difference in estimating and experiencing their work hours rather than “real” differences.

Third, as discussed earlier, the mothers in this study exhibited extraordinary flexibility in their work arrangements. Table 8.6. documents the shifts in the division of work between the initial contact and the follow-up study. Only half of the participants in the second wave reported the same patterns.

Table 8.6.: Couples’ Division Of Labor Based On Levels Of Egalitarianism

Couples	Comparison between 1 st & 2 nd Wave	“Traditional” Division	Egalitarian Division	“Reversed Traditional” Division	Mixed Division	Total
First Wave	Constant	2	1	2	3	8
	Changed	2	2	2	2	8
	Dropped out	<u>2</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>2</u>
	Total	6	6	5	8	25
Second Wave	Constant	2	1	2	3	8
	Changed		5	1	2	8
	Total	2	6	3	5	16

As expected, many families had moved into an egalitarian model suggesting that as the child grew older, couples returned to sharing all areas of work more equally.

Finally, while economic independence minimized the influence of economic power, it also intensified the possibility for conflict. Couples with individual accounts and individual investments, that is, those who did not pool all their money, were far more likely to report conflict in more than five areas of their lives than those who did. Other characteristics correlated with high conflict were children under 18 months, full-time paid caregivers, “reversed traditional and mixed” work arrangements, more than 21 hours of housework, conflicts over friends, and less than eight years together. Those best equipped for conflict, on the other hand, were couples with “reversed traditional” arrangements, many friends, joint investments, and no differences in education, income, age or prestige.

Finally, birthmotherhood represented another source of power in relationships as indicated by their greater likelihood of being responsible for money matters. Although bill paying in heterosexual couples does not imply greater power, in this sample only comothers with substantially more income than their partners were solely responsible for bills. Birthmothers’ reports of more involvement in family tasks despite the stress on equality in the narratives and similar hourly estimates also pointed to a sense of power and agency drawn from birthmotherhood.

8.3. DOES “GENDER” MATTER?

The power of birthmotherhood leads directly to the next theoretical framework: gender.

Surpassing the explanatory power of the theoretical approaches discussed above, the gender perspective has proven to be the most reliable predictor of the division of labor in heterosexual families (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; Ferree, 1990; Hochschild, 1989; West & Fenstermaker's, 1993).

Gender in lesbian relationships, however, is a more complex phenomenon than in heterosexual couples. Lesbian partners are of the same biological sex but can differ in their gender identities and in the way they “do gender.” Since I have no self-reported information on the participants' gender identity, I instead analyzed specific tasks that previous studies on heterosexual couples have identified as “gendered.” Specifically, I used Coltrane's list of household chores and their primary performance by either women, men, or both (see Table 8.7.).

In the four couples who exhibited a long-term specialization into breadwinner (comother) and homemaker (birthmother), comothers did more of the “masculine chores” while birthmothers were more likely to perform “feminine tasks.” All other couples showed mixed performances of these tasks.

While gender was generally not important with respect to “masculine” or “feminine” household tasks, motherhood as a highly gendered experience was extremely influential in the division of childcare. “Relational motherhood,” how partners viewed each other as mothers and how mothers related to their children and vice versa, was at the core of many decisions about the division of work. Comothers' invisibility as public mothers and their strong sense of relational motherhood propelled them into bonding with their children through primary care (Nelson, 1996). Consecutive parental leaves and

primary or shared caregiving allowed comothers to meaningfully bond with their children and create two female parenting roles in one family (Slater, 1995).

Table 8.7.: “Gendered” Household Tasks (based on the Coltrane’s [1996:65f] findings)

	“MASCULINE” TASKS	GENDER NEUTRAL TASKS	“FEMININE” TASKS
CLEANING	taking out trash cleaning porch	vacuuming, cleaning tub/shower, making beds, picking up toys, tidying living room, hanging up clothes, washing windows, spring cleaning	mopping, sweeping, dusting, cleaning bathroom sink, cleaning toilet
COOKING	preparing breakfast	preparing lunch, cooking dinner, making snacks, washing dishes, putting dishes away, wiping kitchen counters, putting food away	planning menus, grocery shopping, baking
CLOTHES		shoe care	laundry, hand laundry, ironing, sewing, buying clothes
HOUSEHOLD	household repairs, exterior painting, car maintenance, lawn care	running errands, decorating, interior painting general yardwork, gardening	
FINANCE, SOCIAL	investments	deciding major purchases, paying bills, preparing taxes, handling insurance, planning couple dates	writing or phoning relatives and friends
CHILDREN		all other child related tasks	arranging babysitters

Doing gender in a same-sex parental context neutralizes the difference-enhancing effects of opposite-sex contexts. Thus, there is no tendency to fall back on “traditional” gender roles when children increase work and financial demands. On the other hand, both partners are likely to be more committed to mothering a child. This creates a double

effect: a) the wish to mother strengthens gendered expectations and behaviors; and b) since lesbian mother couples generally share mothering to some degree mothering decreases in importance as a gendered arena. This double gender effect allowed the women in this study to intensify their sense of relational motherhood while at the same time lessen the pressure to perform as “mother.”

Not all couples shared mothering to the same degree, however. What factors determined these differences? Research on heterosexual families points to the importance of ideology, especially gender attitudes, in the division of work (DeMaris & Longmore, 1996; Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994; Piña & Bengston, 1993; Presser, 1994). Feminist beliefs as an expression of “gender attitudes” also influenced the division of work in these lesbian families. As discussed earlier, feminist ideology profoundly impacted on the division of paid work (Chapter 6). One might expect similar influence on family work.

Indeed, feminist attitudes had a strong influence on housework (see Table 8.8.). Feminists with strong commitments spent less time on housework than any other group.

Table 8.8.: Hours Spent On Different Work Spheres By Feminist Attitudes

Feminist	Housework	Childcare	Paid Work	Total Hours
Not (N=6)	12	38	31	80
Not but for Equality (N=8)	17	44	31	91
Yes (N=9)	11	58	29	100
Super (N=21)	10	41	34	88

Yet, less strongly committed feminists spent the most time on childcare and on total

work hours. At the other extreme, non-feminists were low on childcare hours and lowest on total hours. Thus, while feminism decreased the importance of housework and minimized its symbolic value as arena for “doing gender,” it increased the importance of childcare as site of the production of motherhood.

Furthermore, feminism had a consistent effect on the performance of certain household tasks independent of motherhood status or income. On average, non-feminists were much more likely to do the shopping and cooking as well as take care of the car. Feminists, on the other hand, spent consistently more time on childcare and worked more total hours than non-feminists.

Interestingly, while task performances had changed greatly by the time of the follow-up, non-feminists continued to do more of the cooking and shopping than their feminist counterparts. Thus, cooking and shopping could be interpreted as sites for affirming feminine gender identity in non-feminists whereas feminists took less interest in these areas. Despite these differences, the influence of gender ideology remained small and many disparities had lessened or disappeared by the time of the follow-up.

As discussed in the chapter on paid labor, comothers who were long-term primary breadwinners tended to be less feminist. When comparing motherhood status by self-identification as feminist, feminist birthmothers and comothers worked the same number of hours in each work sphere. Non-feminists, on the other hand, varied considerably by motherhood status. Comothers in this group spent more time on paid work (37 vs. 21 hours per week). Birthmothers, in contrast, were more involved in childcare (50 vs. 36 hours per week) and housework (16 vs. 13 hours). Thus, feminist

attitudes significantly impacted on the consequences of birthmotherhood and comotherhood.

The influence of feminist attitudes on the effects of motherhood status on the division of work was impressive. Yet, more research into the exact effects of feminist ideology and gender identity is needed to fully understand their influence on lesbian families.

8.4. WHAT MATTERS MOST?: TIME AND AVAILABILITY

The question remains: What were the best predictors for weekly hours spent on different spheres of work? As seen above, motherhood status did not influence work involvement per se. Socioeconomic power differences did not directly influence how much time each partner spent on various types of work. Couples who were more similar in socioeconomic power, however, were most likely to choose the “reversed traditional” and avoid the “traditional” work arrangements. Furthermore, gender exerted a double effect on these couples. While motherhood pulled them into more gendered behaviors, the need to share motherhood lessened the grip of feminine expectations about family care. Last but not least, feminist attitudes lessened mothers’ interest in housework but increased commitments to paid labor.

Although education and income had slight effects on time spent in different spheres of work⁹, the best indicator for involvement in family work was a mother’s employment status. Individuals who were employed full-time spent less time on housework (9 vs. 17 hours) and childcare (38 vs. 54 hours) but much more time on paid

labor (42 vs. 15 hours) than those who were not full-time employed. Thus, the best predictor of involvement in family work was employment status supporting the *time/availability hypothesis* (Coverman, 1985; Presser, 1994).

Consequently, in full-time dual-earner couples (12), both partners spent about equal time in both paid and domestic work and either shared family responsibilities to a high degree or traded off tasks within each work sphere. In families in which only one partner was full-time employed (10), the other would be primarily responsible for childcare and in most cases housework. In four cases the primary home person was the comother and in another six it was the birthmother.

As expected, egalitarian and mixed couples had similar paid labor commitments – both or nons were employed full-time (13 of 15). While nine of ten couples who had only one partner employed full-time favored a “traditional” or “reversed traditional” arrangements. As with egalitarianism, socioeconomic differences did not have predictable influence on family employment status.

Another factor, however, proved once again to be influential – feminism. Feminism had an important impact on hours spent on various types of work when controlling for employment status. Feminists who were not employed full-time spent more time on paid labor (18 vs. 9 hours per week) but less time on housework (13 vs. 21 hours per week). On the other hand, full-time employed feminists spent more time on childcare than their non-feminist counterparts (41 vs. 35 hours per week). Thus, feminists were less interested in housework but more interested in childcare as sites of family work.

The time/availability hypothesis was further supported by the narratives as discussed in Chapter 6. In fact, organizing responsibilities based on time and availability was at the heart of flexibility in work arrangements. When chores were accomplished based on task orientation, whoever was available for a given task would perform it. Couples reported a strong sense of fairness in their division of work whenever they perceived their partners taking care of the tasks at hand. Dissatisfaction resulted from a lack of response to obvious chores that needed to be done.

Yet, time/availability was not the reason for the fairly equal or equitable division of labor but rather a consequence of conscious planning of the transition to parenthood.¹⁰ The theme of conscious and negotiated decisions about family life exemplified by the transition to motherhood and the division of labor was pervasive throughout the narratives and supported by the questionnaire data. This approach enabled couples to weigh economic costs and benefits against personal preferences and desires as well as reevaluate the balance of needs and desires whenever necessary.

8.5. ENDNOTES

1. I found that the childcare estimate of some birthmothers and a few comothers were inflated. A frequent complaint when filling out the questionnaire was that it was extremely difficult for the participants to estimate total weekly hours. After comparing time spent on the different types of work with the narratives, I created adjusted estimates. As a result, birthmothers still spent more time on childcare but the difference was reduced from 4.36 to 1.12 hours with an average of 36.26 hours per week. The high estimates, however, did indicate that birthmothers strongly identify with their caretaking role. Other studies have found that biological mothers were more strongly identified as mothers (cf. personal motherhood) than non-biological mothers (Patterson, 1995b). Birthparents' stronger desire to become mothers compared to coparents would support such an explanation.

2. I constructed measures of relative similarity for the couples' age, education, and income differences. Couples who did not vary in age more than three years were coded age similar or zero (52%). Those who did not differ in education more than two years were considered education similar [code: zero] (48%). And those whose income stayed within \$20,000 of each other were coded income similar or zero (52%). I, then, constructed a composite measure of these three similarity variables by adding all three recoded variables. Those who were similar in every respect were coded zero, those dissimilar on all measures were coded 3.

Originally, I had included a prestige variable (using the General Social Surveys indicators) in the composite. However, it was closely related to education and did not add any further information. Although, age and education also were correlated, they differentiated those couples with one and two socioeconomic differences.

3. Methodologically, using both quantitative and qualitative information to understand couples' division of work and perception of their contributions allowed for a more complex analysis of intra-couple processes. In small samples, such a strategy might be especially useful because direct comparison of interview material and questionnaire answers is feasible.

4. These results were statistically significant (Pearson Chi-Square = 13.138; $p = .001$)

5. I constructed a composite conflict measure by coding the mention of conflict over each of the following issues: childcare, housework, childrearing, family, friends, money, relationship, sex, and personality differences. Those who indicated conflicts in more than five areas of their lives were recoded (1) as having "a lot of conflict" ($n=30$) and those with four or less conflict areas were assigned (0) "little conflict" ($n=20$). This, of course, is a rather crude measure because it does not reflect the intensity or extent of conflict. Yet, it did reflect the overall conflict experienced in couples.

6. Money conflicts were correlated with differences in socioeconomic status, however. All of those who had no differences had conflicts over money. Thus equality might allow for more money conflicts.

7. Based on each partner's reports of conflict areas, intensity of conflict, existence of permanent conflicts, ability to resolve conflicts, comfort levels around conflict, and emotional states when

arguing, I defined each couple as having poor, fair, or good conflict resolution skills.

8. Housework could not be analyzed in a similar way because 84% of couples reported some kind of conflict over household labor. The high level of reported conflict might be partially due to the focus of the study but most likely reflected the pervasiveness of conflict around housework.

9. Less education (under 17 years) was associated with more housework hours (12 vs. 10), more childcare (45 vs. 40), and less paid labor (32 vs. 36). Those with less income (under \$47,000 annually) spent more hours on housework (14 vs. 9) and childcare (50 vs. 47), and less hours on paid work (30 vs. 37) and reported substantially more total hours (94 vs. 84) than those earning more than \$48,000 a year.

10. This highly conscious approach to family life parallels that of middle-class couples in general. The socially stigmatized nature of lesbian motherhood and the need to arrange access to safe sperm further necessitated an extensive premeditation of parenthood.

9. SOMETHING OLD SOMETHING NEW: NEW EQUITY, SHARED/JOINT MOTHERHOOD, AND THE DOUBLE GENDER EFFECT

The analysis of transition to parenthood and the division of labor of the mothers in this study revealed two distinct features. Lesbian parents shared mothering to a high degree and they exhibited great variety and flexibility in their division of paid labor, childcare, and housework. Below I will develop three important concepts that further explore these two characteristics: the double gender effect, shared versus joint motherhood and new equity.

9.1. NEW EQUITY VERSUS “TRADITIONAL EQUITY” AND “STRICT” EQUALITY

In the previous chapters, protection of partners' paid labor investments, flexibility in the division of labor, and various principles in the division of labor were the prominent themes. The analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of various models of the division of work will be discussed in this chapter.

Two models of the division of labor are commonly used in classifying types of work arrangements: equity and equality. Equity, in this context specifying a “traditional” work arrangement, is defined as a long-term, stable arrangement in which the comother is the primary breadwinner and the birthmother is the primary homemaker. Four couples in this study fit this model. Equality, on the other hand, is the long-term, stable sharing of each area of work within a 60/40 split. According to the interviews, about eight couples followed an egalitarian logic.

The remaining 13 couples fell outside these two classifications. They had moved between equity and equality, birthmothers were not the primary family workers, and, in a few cases, one mother was more responsible for childcare while the other did more of the housework. Therefore, I want to propose a third model: *new equity*. I define new equity as a model for the division of work that allows for temporary equity while its ultimate goal is equality. One of its main features is flexibility in work responsibilities. Another one is independence of motherhood status combined with a commitment to shared motherhood or parenthood.

I argue that new equity more appropriately accommodates the needs of all family members than “traditional equity” or strict equality. On the micro level, children’s developmental changes are best served by flexible work arrangements and two parents attending to the child. On the macro level, increasing economic insecurity, rapid technological changes in the workplace combined with low birthrates and high life expectancies have turned extended full-time homemaking into a liability to the primary family worker and the family economy (Blau & Ferber, 1992; Coontz, 1997; Spain & Bianchi, 1996).

Neoclassical economic theorists such as Howard Becker (1981) view “traditional equity” based on a pronounced sexual division of labor both as biologically determined and economically advantageous. (Peterson & Gerson 1992). Feminists such as Heidi Hartmann (1987) have criticized the neoclassical argument because it is based on the assumption that a family is "a single-minded, indivisible, utility-maximizing unit" (Blau & Ferber, 1992, 35) and that it ignores conflicts of interest among family members. High

divorce rates underline the importance of acknowledging conflicting interests within couples.

Furthermore, despite the fact that lower fertility rates and increased life expectancy have decreased the economic significance of childbearing and childrearing in women's lives, the model presumes that the levels of housework and childcare are constant over time. It also assumes that all men and all women have gender specific-skills that will match up independent of the individual's aptitudes. On the other hand, the model excludes joint production, meaning the pleasure component of producing goods and services, and does not take into account the complexities and mutability of individual tastes (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; Blau and Ferber, 1992).

Strict equality, in contrast, is based on the assumption that long-term stable equality in all areas of work is the most desirable work arrangement in families. It allows all parents to be equally involved in raising the children, thus offering children much needed parental attention and guidance. In addition, it protects partners' paid labor investments that can be profoundly harmed by extended absence from employment especially in sectors that experience exponential technological growth and change.

As "traditional equity", strict equality does not account for increasing economic insecurities, the possibility of long-term unemployment, and the reality of many low-income families who would not gain from dual incomes because of high childcare costs. It also neglects preferences, desire, and pleasure that can motivate unequal involvement in different areas of work (Ahlander & Bahr, 1995).

Therefore, I want to propose *new equity* as an alternative to both "traditional

equity” and strict equality. New equity recognizes certain advantages of specialization and exchange without assuming a sexual division of labor or a permanent pattern of specialization and exchange. It is also based on the fundamental understanding that the division of work in each separate sphere is equitable over time and that equality remains the overall goal.

Thus, new equity is defined (a) as a continuous movement between equity (each person primarily responsible for a specific type of work) and equality (both partners jointly responsible for all types of work); while (b) partners may alternate responsibilities for paid work, childcare, and housework. Such flexibility and overall fairness in the division of work allows families to adjust quickly to changing work requirements on the job and at home. New equity can be conceptualized as a form of “task-orientation” with respect to the socioeconomic and emotional needs of the family: whoever is available and best suited for the work at any given time will take responsibility for it. Table 9.1. illustrates how “traditional equity” based on a sexual division of labor differs from new equity.

New equity, thus, combines advantages of both “traditional equity” and equality. It incorporates efficiency and economic utility concerns by protecting both partners’ labor investments but also allowing for temporary or extended equity arrangements when they are desired or necessitated by unemployment or disability. On the other hand, new equity’s ultimate goal is equality which protects both partners from the negative consequences of extended absence from the labor force and does not burden any one parent with sole responsibility for being the breadwinner or homemaker for extended

periods of time. Efficiency gains are especially high with respect to transition costs because both partners are prepared to take equal or primary responsibility for any given work sphere.

Table 9.1.: A Comparison Of "Traditional Equity," Strict Equality, And New Equity

	"Traditional equity"	Strict Equality	New Equity
Principles of the Division of Labor	gender-role-orientation	task-orientation, 60/40 split of responsibilities	task-orientation, solidarity, pleasure
Responsibilities	separate spheres	shared spheres	shared spheres
Arrangements over Time	fixed	fixed overall but flexible within work spheres	flexible overall and within work spheres
Ultimate Value	equity	equality	equality
Investments	gender-specific	gender non-specific	gender non-specific
Skills	gender-specific	overlapping	overlapping, individualized
Emotional Benefits	sense of pride in being main provider/homemaker	friendship, pleasure, sense of shared accomplishment	friendship, pleasure, sense of shared accomplishment
Emotional Costs	resentment for sole responsibility, alienation of fathers from their families	conflicts over equality in times of inequality	conflicts when experiencing prolonged inequality
Efficiency Gains	low communication costs because of exclusive responsibility	low transition costs within work spheres	low transition costs in times of change, protection of labor market investments
Efficiency Losses	high transition costs in times of change	high communication costs	high communication costs

To exemplify the claims made above, I will discuss efficiency issues and other pertinent dimensions of the division of labor, based on the results of this study. I will start with housework, continue on to childcare, and, last, discuss paid work.

9.1.1. HOUSEWORK

9.1.1.1. EFFICIENCY AND TIME USE

The concept of efficiency implies a rational and optimal means-ends relationship where benefits should outweigh costs in the production of a product or service. Clearly, the concept is modeled on industrial production processes. Thus, its usefulness is limited when analyzing and assessing affective and emotive types of work which are integral to family life. Childcare, in particular, has inherent affective and emotive aspects that cannot be measured quantitatively. However, some measures can be used to gauge the efficiency of households.

One of those measures is time use. Blair and Johnson (1992) report that in a subsample of the 1988 National Survey of Family and Households (NSFH) that included 778 white, married women, employed wives reported spending a mean of 31.06 hours per week on household labor not including childcare (their husbands: 15.28 h/w) while nonemployed wives spent 42.04 hours per week (their husbands: 12.23h/w). All mothers in my sample – whether employed or not – only spent a mean of 11.29 hours per week on housework. Not only did they spend less time than the wives but even less than the husbands in this NSFH subsample.

This rather large discrepancy might be due to the high levels of income in my sample which allowed twelve of the 25 couples to pay for regular cleaning services. However, as pointed out earlier, there was no correlation between hired cleaning services and the number of hours spent on housework. Those who employed housekeepers spent an average of 11.4 hours per week on housework while those who

did not spend 11.2 hours a week on chores. In addition, these families did not differ in lifestyle from their heterosexual counterparts. The very low number of hours spent on housework, thus, indicated high levels of efficiency in these households.

Other comparative data come from the *American Couples* study conducted by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983). In this case, the authors grouped the hours spent on housework into three categories: ten hours or less, 11-20 hours, and 21 or more hours spent on housework. Comparing my sample to the results of full-time employed married women, and full-time employed gay men and lesbians indicates that the full-time workers in my sample spent even less time on housework than their lesbian counterparts in the *American Couples* sample (see Table 9.2.). The total number of housework hours per couple paint a similar picture. Fifty percent spent 20 or less hours on household chores while another 37.5% spent between 21 and 30 hours. In dual full-time employed households, families spent an average of 20 hours on housework compared to 25 hours of those with one or more non-full-time employed mothers. This comparison supports the conclusion above that with respect to time use, the women in my couple were more efficient in their performance of housework than their comparison groups.

Table 9.2: Comparison Of Hours Per Week Of Housework Not Including Childcare Of Full-time Employed Persons In My Sample (RR) To *American Couples* Sample (AC)

	10 or less	11 - 20	21 or more
AC: f-t employed wives	41%	41%	18%
AC: f-t employed gay men	63%	30%	7%
AC: f-t employed lesbians	69%	27%	4%
RR: f-t employed mothers	75%	25%	0%

As many students of the division of labor have observed, time allocation to certain tasks often depends on their importance compared to other tasks. Unlike the two samples I used as comparison, all women in my study spent extensive time on childcare, as I will discuss below. Feminists, in particular, preferred childcare to most household tasks. Janet, the birthmother of a four-year-old, gave the following example.

With the increase in my hours [of paid work], we both feel that our priority is with him. So, some things we might let slip because we feel that it is important to spend with him as much time as possible.

In this case, time with the children superseded housework or caused adjustments in the division of work. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) also observed that lesbians were more willing to reduce housework in favor of more affective work or time for each other.

As Fenstermaker Berk (1985) and many other researchers have pointed out, housework and childcare are important arenas of "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Lesbians as well as gay men do not have to assert their gender identity by "doing gender" in their relationships by performing gender-typed tasks in family work.¹ Furthermore, both partners in same-sex couples are likely to be held equally responsible by outsiders for the appearance of their home. Social pressure will not single out one partner and introduce unequal dynamics of social accountability.

The "doing gender" hypothesis was further supported by the fact that feminists were even less likely to spend time on housework than their non-feminist counterparts. Thus, to lesbians housework has a different symbolic importance, with the key issues being equality and new equity.

9.1.1.2. EFFICIENCY, SKILL OVERLAP AND FLEXIBILITY IN TASK ACCOMPLISHMENT AT HOME

Becker (1981) argues that gender-specific skills enhance the efficiency of heterosexual couples while skill overlap in same-sex couples makes them less efficient. This statement assumes that all men and all women respectively have similar if not the same skills.

Below, I will argue that the skills of the women in my study do not always overlap.

Secondly, when overlap occurs, it can increase efficiency because two people are available to perform a certain task with more expediency.

First, one has to keep in mind that most household chores are not very complex and challenging. With the exception of cooking most of the skills that were unique to one member of the couple were related to temperament. Generally, this was seen as an advantage because different skills improved efficiency when both partners complemented each other (see Chapter 6).

Sometimes, however, divergent skills associated with different temperaments were a source of conflict. Danielle was unhappy with how her partner Amanda was performing tasks:

What's hard is that we just have a different way of doing it. I'm more picky about how stuff is done. And she is more one to get it done fast. But she is more efficient than I am. So sometimes she'll do stuff and I do it over again because it's not done right.

In response, Amanda stopped doing many chores because she became increasingly frustrated with Danielle's fussiness.²

Secondly, skill overlap with respect to housework can actually increase efficiency

because a couple can be more flexible in their performance of tasks. Loretta, the full-time employed birthmother of a four-year-old, explained how task-orientation made it easier to run their household even though her partner was only working weekends.

I don't know as far as one person [taking full responsibility and] doing all for one type of chore and the other doing all for another... And it just winds up being easier for the other person to do something - then she might do it or I might do it. But we are both flexible enough to change. So, I think that helps a lot.

As discussed earlier, flexibility was one of the main principles in the division of work of most couples.³ As Cybill, the comother of a four-year-old, explained, flexibility can take different forms. At one point, it meant sharing the same task. At another time, one partner took on that chore entirely for a while.

Cybill: She does the laundry sometimes. I do the laundry sometimes. She starts the laundry. I finish the laundry. We complement each other that way without specifically saying, "You do this and I do that." It doesn't happen that way. She might do the laundry three weeks in a row. But then I might do it five times in a row.

This type of cooperation allowed many couples to use their time most efficiently. Instead of one person being burdened with a specific task they shared responsibilities. Whoever was available performed the chore at hand.

In other instances, cooperation decreased efficiency, as in the case of Loretta and Jennie. The first two years after their son was born, they often were home together because Jennie worked nights.

Loretta: Well, I think that when I was home the first two years we both really got into the routine of both doing just about everything and doing everything together. It's much easier. We both go shopping together. We both bring him to the doctor's together. We're both everywhere together.

However, the decrease in efficiency prompted by dual performance of a task was compensated for by decreased stress and increased pleasure.

9.1.1.3. PLEASURE

Whereas time is an easy variable to measure, pleasure is rather elusive – especially when assessed from an economic perspective. Yet, taking pleasure in certain tasks can greatly increase efficiency. Most couples divided a number of specific tasks on the pleasure principle (see Chapter 6). In one instance, one mother took over certain jobs because her partner truly disliked doing them.

Colleen: Also, she hates to shop. So, I go grocery shopping. I go buy the formula and the diapers. And I don't mind that at all. It's really kind of playing.

Being able to divide up the work this way reduced potential conflict between spouses.

Whenever couples did not have such a "natural" way of sharing household responsibilities, conflict became much more likely. Julia, the comother of a one-year-old, described her irritation when she felt she was doing more than her fair share of cooking and cleaning.

I cook more than Jean. I clean more than Jean, too. One time the [cleaning] lady couldn't come, I did all the cleaning, you know. That sometimes gets us in trouble. Because after a while that gets on my nerves. I'm not a maid.

Another way of reducing conflict around housework as well as increasing the pleasure component was working side by side. Many couples performed different tasks at the same time. Victoria and Kathleen tended to have "big tidy-ups" together when one

would clean the kitchen and bathrooms and the other would do the rest of the house. Louise and Anne, mothers of a six-year-old, had little cleaning parties. Helen and Colleen often spent evenings taking care of different housework items at the same time creating a sense of joint responsibility and cooperation.

In conclusion, taking pleasure in doing certain household tasks greatly reduced the emotional cost of doing housework. Cooperation, flexibility in task accomplishment, and pleasure all enhanced efficiency at home. I propose that the extremely low time commitments to household labor found in this study were partly due to the high levels of sharing domestic work.

9.1.2. CHILDCARE

9.1.2.1. EFFICIENCY AND TIME USE

So far, I have only addressed efficiency issues around housework. Childcare, on the other hand, was much more time and energy consuming than household labor. The mothers spent anywhere between ten and 70 hours of childcare per week.⁴ They averaged 36 hours with a median of 33 hours.

The high time commitments to childcare were due to the young age of the children in the sample. In addition, the mothers in my study reported that some children needed more attention and care than others. Steven, Loretta and Jennie's son, was especially demanding.

Steven was colic. So we definitely divided staying up around the clock. He never slept. We were both very dedicated to him. So, childcare was both of us. And we both had our fill for the first two years.

In other cases, the children did not sleep very much and required constant attention.

Unfortunately, there is little comparison data available. Pleck (1983) used the results of the 1975/76 Study of Time Use in his discussion. In this study, employed wives with children five and under only spent an average of 8.4 hours per week on childcare while unemployed mothers spent about 15 hours. However, the definition of childcare was very narrow.

If a respondent was interacting with a child while involved in some other action, and described this other activity as the primary one, he or she would not be coded as engaged in childcare. (Pleck, 1983: 255)

The couples in my sample estimated the total number of hours spent on childcare per week without any specifications. The mothers tended to count any time spent with the child as childcare whether they were primarily involved or responsible for him or her or not. With this in mind, the elevated numbers of childcare hours seem reasonable for infant and toddler care. Furthermore, because of its highly affective requirements, childcare calls for more qualitative assessments.

9.1.2.2. EFFICIENCY, PLEASURE AND CHILDCARE

Even the most routine childcare tasks such as changing diapers, giving baths or preparing children for bed have profound affective components that cannot be evaluated by traditional efficiency measures such as time, financial investment, or the training required. The emotional involvement of mothers with their children emerged as one of the primary aspects of childcare.

Despite the intense demands these young children often placed on their mothers,

pleasure and joy were at the center of their experience. Jennie took care of her four-year-old full-time and did not expect to enjoy it as much as she did. "When I first started to stay home, I thought it was gonna be really boring, just not any fun at all. But it has turned out to be really great." Often even the routine caretaking activities were experienced as pleasurable. Christine, the comother of two boys, explained:

Sometimes when I take Joshua upstairs and she is giving Aaron a bath downstairs, "Oh, I missed giving him the bath." I enjoy doing that stuff and I think Mindy does too.

At other times, the needs of children became overwhelming. Having two parents who were strongly committed to the daily care of their children helped them weather those moments of oppressive neediness. Especially early on when both mothers were inexperienced mutual support was of utmost importance. Spending a whole day with a child – even an older child – can be more than one person can handle. Cindy, the full-time mother of an eight and a three-year-old, explained:

... when I have a hard day, I tend to say, "Okay, Emily the kids are yours I'm going to my room and I need some space." And I'll close the door

Flexibility, mutual responsibility, solidarity, and pleasure allowed couples to minimize the negative effects of intense childcare. Sharing childcare not only maximized the pleasure of being with the children for both partners but it also minimized the negative effects of the extreme nature of infant and young children's care. These consequences point to efficiency gains because both partners were able to take care of the child/ren (skill overlap), thus reducing stress and conflict between them.

9.1.3. JUGGLING HOUSEWORK AND CHILDCARE SIMULTANEOUSLY

When both mothers were home, housework and childcare were often done at the same time. One mother would take care of the child while the other was able to finish a chore without being interrupted constantly. Once a couple had more than one child, cooperation and flexibility became even more important to the smooth running of the household. Christine, the comother of a five-year-old and an infant, described the following routine:

I don't know how we juggle this. But one of us tries to clean up before Aaron is too frantic and Joshua has to go upstairs. And then one of us takes Joshua and one of us takes Aaron. And we just sort of switch it depending on who is doing what.

This ability and willingness to respond to the needs and demands of the moment enabled many couples to reduce friction in the accomplishment of household chores and childcare. This finding, however, does not imply that there was never conflict around childcare and housework. Cybill, the comother of a four-year-old, recounted the following fight she and her partner had recently had.

We got in the car on the way to church. Sunday morning, it was last weekend. We did a lot of stuff on Saturday running around. And I had a lot of work to do. And Janet said, "You can have Sunday morning." So, Sunday morning I was doing my stuff. And we were running out to church at ten to eleven and we were getting into the car and she said, "I got no help from you this morning." And I just turned around and said, "You gave me Sunday morning." And I walked out with Jack and I was mad... And we were going down and she said, "You are absolutely right I gave you Sunday morning. I apologize."

Not every conflict had a happy ending. High levels of shared work created high expectations about each other's responsibilities. These high expectations led to conflict at

times resulting in efficiency losses.

Yet, as Schwartz (1995) pointed out in her study of heterosexual couples, a “traditional” division of labor also took high tolls on the relationships between husbands and wives. Alienation of fathers from their families and resentment at having to carry the entire burden of homemaking or financial provision can create higher costs to the members of a family than high levels of sharing those responsibilities.

9.1.4. PAID LABOR

From a neoclassical economic point of view, one might argue that even if there were some efficiency gains when families share housework and childcare responsibilities, the gains are eradicated by tremendous losses in comparative advantage in the labor market. That is, equality at home is paid for by great losses in the labor market because neither partner can commit herself entirely to paid work.⁵ It is possible, though, to argue the opposite: equality based on flexibility and solidarity in the division of work at home is, in fact, beneficial to increasing opportunities in the labor market.

As pointed out above, lower fertility rates and increased life expectancy have resulted in a decreased significance of children in the lives of mothers. Furthermore, women have tremendously increased their investments in schooling and occupational advancement over the last decades. In addition, the fast pace of change in many occupational sectors make prolonged absences from the labor market more costly than ever before. Thus, with the decreased economic effect of children on mothers and women's increased investments in the labor market, families are best served when

mothers can minimize paid labor disruptions. Moreover, given the high divorce rates in the U.S. and other western countries, the protection of mothers' earning capabilities has become even more important for the welfare of mothers and their children.

Most of the participants in this study were highly educated with an average of 18 years of education; they earned a mean income of \$53,000 a year (median: \$47,500). In fact, at an average age of 37, they were in the prime of their work lives. Thirty-four mothers were employed full-time while another nine women worked part-time. Eight mothers were on maternity or parental leave and six were unemployed at the time of the interview. Many had enjoyed long and uninterrupted years of schooling and work experience they did not want to compromise (see Chapter 5). Helen, the birthmother of a one-year-old, put it this way.

Given the fact that I know that I have to work for a certain number of years before I can retire, it feels like it makes more sense to try to work relatively continuously and then maybe retire early. Your income drops so much when you are out of the work force for a while. And it's hard to recoup that loss.

By sharing breadwinning as well as homemaking responsibilities, most couples were able to protect each partner's investment in paid work.

9.1.5. LOSS AND GAIN OF OCCUPATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

No matter how committed a couple is to their respective work, a child always requires some economic and occupational sacrifices. The women in my study were not immune to those pressures. Many women sacrificed occupational opportunities in order to be available to their children. Helen, the full-time employed birthmother of a one-year-old,

felt that her work life would be very different if she didn't have a child.

I would be inclined to work longer, to work different kinds of things. I might have gone for a different kind of job. I consciously stayed away from jobs where I would have had to travel or have long hours. So, I probably wouldn't have taken [my current] job if it wasn't for Jodie.

Families that chose a more “traditional” division of labor experienced the greatest loss of occupational opportunities. Cindy and Emily, the mothers of two daughters age eight and three, chose a “traditional” homemaker/breadwinner model. However, both had grown unhappy with their setup. Emily, the comother and primary breadwinner, was tired of carrying the entire financial burden and spending so much time and energy on paid labor. Furthermore, she felt that she would be the better homemaker. Changing roles and responsibilities, however, was impossible because Cindy, the birthmother, would have been unable to support a family of four.⁶

Having children forced all families into some kind of occupational sacrifice. Some mothers, however, were able to combine the care of their children with career changes or educational advancement. By doing so, they minimized the cost of both having a child and changing types of work. Loretta and Jennie were able to arrange their paid labor and schooling in a way that offered both more career opportunities while making sure that one of them was always available for their four-year-old son. Jennie, the comother, described their work arrangements during the first two years of their son's life as follows:

Back then, I worked at night because I work at a hotel. And, so, she'd go to school during the day and I would take care of him. It was sort of like we were both full-time with him. We kind of split it evenly.

After two years, they switched roles and Loretta, the birthmother, went to work full-time while Jennie took care of Steven and went to college. Within the next year, Steven would start to go to school at least part-time. At that point, Jennie planned to start a new line of work. This couple exemplified the importance of new equity in the protection and expansion of paid labor investments.

In another case, Cordelia, the comother of a one-year-old, decided to concentrate more on her writing career after her son was born. She cut back her paid job to part-time, took care of her son part-time and tried to spend as much time as possible on her writing. In a similar vein, Cybill, the comother of a four-year-old, had switched careers a few years back. After her son was born, she decided to become self employed and work out of her own home. This enabled her to spend more time with her son as well as build her career. However, these changes created financial stress. In turn, her partner Janet found a higher paying job that required more hours.

The willingness of these mothers to negotiate their occupational lives to advance their partners' work interests was notable. Such willingness to compromise and adjust seemed rooted in the understanding that both women's paid work was seen as equally important. Even more impressive was the parents' strong sense of their children's needs. They were prepared to suffer substantial economic and occupational losses if it meant the happiness of their children. Loretta, the birthmother of a four-year old, was the primary breadwinner in her family. To her and her partner, the well-being of their child was central.

At the moment [my income] seems to be maintaining us and providing all

that we need right now and enabling Steven to have somebody full-time... Because we really wanted to have him and enjoy him that one of us would stay home to watch him and sacrifice the additional income that we would have with two people working full-time.

In conclusion, all families sacrificed some economic and occupational opportunities for their children. Yet, those who followed the principles of flexibility, pleasure, and new equity in the division of work were able to minimize the negative effects of parenthood more than most of the couples who chose a “traditional” homemaker/breadwinner model.

Lesbian nuclear families with young children are unusual families. Yet, they face the same kinds of pressures and pleasures heterosexual families with young children encounter. In a rapidly changing world of work and high rates of unemployment, most couples and families benefit greatly from having two potential breadwinners. Yet, only women in egalitarian heterosexual couples are compensated for their increased labor force participation. Women in more “traditional” marriages are still seen as the primary homemakers. In the absence of well established social structures that support childrearing, families themselves have to provide individual solutions to social problems.

Most mothers in my sample had the unique advantage of having two people with substantial earning potential as well as high commitments to the fair and equal division of housework and childcare. Their ability to rapidly adjust to changes in any area of work created tremendous efficiency gains. If one mother quit or lost her job, she would immediately take on more of the housework and childcare. If another had to increase her hours in the labor market, she was able to instantly reduce her time commitments to

domestic work.

New equity works best, of course, when both partners have similar earning potential. Not surprisingly, the couples who used “reversed traditional” arrangements were those similar in income potential, education, and age. For most, the reversed model also was a temporary arrangement. Their socioeconomic similarity reduced the likelihood of falling into a long-term homemaker/breadwinner model.

New equity also requires substantial trust that one partner’s greater responsibility for certain tasks or spheres of labor will only be temporary and the other will compensate by resuming equal or complete responsibility at a later point. Research on heterosexual couples has found that women assume that their increased involvement in housework with the arrival of a child will only be short-term. Mahony (1995) eloquently describes various scenarios in which egalitarian couples slowly fall into more gendered patterns upon the arrival of a child.

Why were these lesbian couples so trusting? What kept one partner from entirely shirking the responsibility for either family work or paid labor? For many couples, trust developed over many years before they had children. More than 90% did not have children until three or more years into their relationship. Fifty-two percent of the couples had been together for more than five years before they had their first child. Many stressed that their partnerships had evolved over the years to accommodate each others’ likes and dislikes and that they had weathered crises that had strengthened their trust in each other.

In addition to relationship longevity, I propose that two characteristics of lesbian

couples enabled them to rely on each others' commitment to equality in the long run. First, shared or joint motherhood ensured high levels of dedication of both partners to childcare and childrearing. Comothers, in particular, relied on childcare to strengthen their sense of relational motherhood and to establish the basis for public motherhood in case their parental status should be threatened. Second, the double gender effect in lesbian couples reduces the likelihood that either mother is willing to take on sole responsibility for family work or paid labor nor is it likely that either one will categorically refuse to contribute to any area of work.

9.2. SHARED VERSUS JOINT MOTHERHOOD

In Chapters 3 and 4, I elaborated on the emotional, social, and legal difficulties lesbian mothers encountered because of powerful assumptions about motherhood as a heterosexual institution and about biological primacy. I also discussed how couples negotiated motherhood in three domains: public, relational, and personal motherhood. Relational motherhood, in particular, was of great importance to comothers because it offered an arena to build strong relationships with their children and support the couples' appreciation and acknowledgment of each others' mothering abilities and motherhood status.

Many researchers have identified the importance of sharing mothering of an infant in order to avoid falling into "traditional" patterns in heterosexual relationships (Coltrane, 1996; Ehrensaft, 1990; Mahony, 1995; Schwartz, 1995). In general, lesbian parents are more likely to share mothering because they are both socialized into a

mothering attitude. On the other hand, having two potential mothers decreases the pressure of being a mother. Thus, lesbian couples have a choice in deciding whether one parent should be more responsible for mothering and if so, who it should be. To elaborate on these two choices I will discuss shared motherhood versus joint motherhood.

Shared motherhood refers to more than one parent mothering a child over time. However, one mother can be the primary caregiver. Mothers also may be responsible for very distinct aspects of the child's life and development. In this model, birthmothers can preserve their claim to being primary mothers while accepting their partners as co-parents. *Joint motherhood*, on the other hand, refers to an entirely co-equal mothering approach. None of the mothers is viewed as primary caregiver and most responsibilities are shared equally. The notion of joint motherhood requires the birthmother to at least symbolically relinquish the power social customs and the law bestow on her.

9.2.1. SHARED MOTHERHOOD

In this model, one mother is more involved with the child. Work requirements, various interests in childcare, or an intense biological claim to the child can determine who the primary mother is at a given time. Work requirements were frequently cited when shared motherhood occurred. For Corinne, a comother, this arrangement was not by choice.

She does more of the childcare because she is available more. That wasn't the way it was supposed to be. I am a part-timer [like her] but it isn't working out real well. Which is another reason why I am looking for another job. Because I really would like to spend more time with the baby.

Shared motherhood regularly occurred whenever one mother was on leave or a long-term full-time caregiver. The more intimate knowledge of the child's rhythms often resulted in the other mother's deference to the primary caregiver when it came to childcare decisions and provisions. Veronica, the full-time caregiver, had a clear arrangement with her partner.

She knows that I have Kay on a certain schedule. So, she doesn't initiate anything without checking with me first what needs to be done.

Sometimes this type of arrangement can result in conflict. Alexandra, a comother and primary caregiver, described how tensions can surface around issues of control and biological motherhood.

It also becomes a control thing. If you're the one who has been taking care of him all day, you feel like you know him better and you know what you've done with him. So it's hard to be patient when the other parent comes home. I want to be saying all the time this is what he needs now. She used to do that to me and I would get really mad at that. Because it reminded me that I didn't know that. And also because she is the biological parent - that was harder for me.

While most mothers were equally interested in taking care of the child, Lucy, the comother of a one-year-old, preferred being primarily responsible for household chores.

I made it very clear to her that I'm not gonna be the person to be home with the kid full-time. I would want to be working. I don't have the kind of patience, the energy level, or the stamina to always play with him.

Her partner, Sheila, explicitly stated the basics of shared motherhood in the following passage.

I've always have been the primary [caregiver]. But I always wanted Lucy to be an equal mother. That's what I say and that's what I feel. But at the same time I think that there is also a kind of deeper emotional level where since I gave birth to him and the long time I was breastfeeding, I felt like

I was his mother. Lucy is his mother too in a different way.

The notion of a deeper bond with the child because of the biological process, surfaced at different times in the interviews but was usually dismissed as a temporary phenomenon linked to breastfeeding.

Generally, the awareness of the intensity of early biological motherhood did not result in a claim to primary motherhood. In one rare case, however, the birthmother clearly saw herself as the mother to the extent that she refused to let her partner adopt their son.

Jennifer: Basically, what I discovered is that Marilyn thinks of him as her child. She definitely thinks of me as Christopher's parent. Mostly she didn't want any third party telling her what she should do.

Accordingly, Marilyn, the birthmother, took the lead in childcare concerns when both women were present. Yet, Jennifer took primary care of their son on weekends while Marilyn was working part-time.

In sum, all couples shared mothering to some degree and all participants took part in daily childcare whenever they were present. As discussed before, time and availability – especially employment status – were the best predictors for the level of involvement. While all parents shared mothering and motherhood to some degree, many opted for joint motherhood.

9.2.2. JOINT MOTHERHOOD

Many couples championed joint motherhood. Although these couples showed great flexibility in their work arrangements, paid work arrangements often interfered with

completely co-equal parenting efforts. Many mothers, however, were able to achieve joint motherhood at least temporarily.

One important aspect of joint motherhood is the shared understanding that biological motherhood does not automatically result in an unequal parenthood experience. Teresa stated their philosophy around joint motherhood as follows:

There is much myth around mother's intuitively understanding babies. Basically, people who are willing to really try to understand the baby and work with the baby and not just pass it back to the mom when things get hard can learn to understand this particular kid and what they want and what they need. A lot of times, Nina would figure things out before I did or in a different way. It was really nice because we did share the burden of figuring out why is she crying and how can we stop it.

Many mothers reported similar experiences. Their joint attempts to figure out the babies needs and temperament created an atmosphere of joint motherhood from the start and reinforced a strong sense of relational and personal motherhood in comothers.

Another area of importance was sharing the daily care very equally. This arrangement worked best, when partners had similar paid work commitments. One common technique of sharing household and childcare tasks was switching responsibility for the child or children. Similar arrangements were made with taking care of children when at parties and social gatherings. Cybill and Janet had developed a system allowing each of them to enjoy social events and take care of their son Jack at the same time.

Cybill: When he was very young, we were both always watching him [at parties]. It finally dawned on us that neither of us is having a good time this way because we are both so concerned. So, what we started to do is we started to take shifts. We tried to do it for an hour each. You're completely responsible and I can socialize with others and vice versa. And then we cut it down to half an hour because half an hour isn't draining.

These arrangements are very successful as long as both mothers agree on how to take care of the child. When disagreements occurred, as in Angela and Wendy's case, they were more difficult to solve than under the premisses of shared motherhood. Wendy explained:

When I decided to put the baby in the green outfit she would like to put her in the blue outfit. We never seem to make the same decisions on the baby. Or she'll be taking care of the baby and I want to take care of the baby differently. She'll get all bent out of shape about that.

Shared motherhood was not without conflict, of course. However, the less involved parent was more likely to give in on certain issues after a period of conflict. In addition, most conflict was not around certain childrearing issues but more around primary mothers wanting their partners to do more or acknowledge their work more. Sheila, the primary caregiver and birthmother of a eight-month-old, described her misgivings:

I felt like I wanted to get up and take care of him [at night] but I also wanted Lucy to appreciate that. She was just assuming that if I said I wanted to do it I wanted to do it. And she didn't really have to say thank you. It was so much so that I wanted her to do more.

Lucy, her partner, also had an easier time letting their son cry himself to sleep. Their different styles introduced additional tensions.

In sum, both, shared motherhood and joint motherhood, assume that both partners are fully involved parents. Joint motherhood was based on an entirely co-equal status, joint responsibility, and equally shared caregiving while shared motherhood allowed for one person to be the more involved parent.

Sharing mothering as one aspect of shared/joint motherhood, has important consequences for the division of work. If both partners view childcare responsibilities as

integral to their parenthood experience, they can trust in each others' abilities (not withstanding occasional differences over childrearing issues), expect the other to be available when at home (unless involved in other family or work responsibilities), and be comfortable with themselves or their partners taking sole responsibility whenever necessary.

9.3. THE DOUBLE GENDER EFFECT

In the earlier chapters I have pointed out many ways in which the double gender effect – that is same-sex gender dynamics – pulls lesbian mothers into more “feminized” behaviors and expectations and relieves them from those same behaviors and expectations at the same time.

With respect to *childcare*, shared/joint motherhood is clearly a result of the double gender effect. Except for one comother, all participants were strongly drawn to motherhood and were mothering once the child was born. The increased stress on gendered behavior in all three domains of motherhood called forth emotional and material caring behavior associated with women. Yet, two women strongly drawn to caring for one child have to share the responsibility and the power thus decreasing the potential for one mother becoming the gatekeeper to the child – an often discussed issue in heterosexual parenting (Ehrensaft, 1990; Schwartz, 1995; Slater, 1995)

Although biological motherhood did have an impact on power relations between partners and on early bonding with the child, the long-term effects of biological motherhood seemed negligible. Often, of course, power difference only becomes

apparent in times of acute crisis. Especially, when couples consider separation, biological motherhood has the legal, social, and emotional clout that comotherhood is unable to counter. Research on the dissolution of lesbian parents' relationships is desperately needed to gauge the effects of shared/joint motherhood on long-term coparent-child relationships.

The division of *housework* also reflected the influence of the double gender effect. On the personal or identity level, housework as a site for gender production and reproduction seems less important to lesbians than heterosexual men or women (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kurdek, 1993). The women in this study reported spending less time on housework than any other comparison sample (see discussion above) and family housework hours averaged 22.5 per week. Yet, many women also reported that they enjoyed certain tasks and had no general objections to housework. In addition, feminists generally spent less time on housework than non-feminists. Thus, housework did not seem an arena that was important enough to spend much time on.

More central, however, was the fact that on the relational level, performing or not performing certain tasks did not define a mother as more or less of a woman. Furthermore, the hierarchy of desirable tasks was not based on gendered standards but rather personal preferences. For example, cleaning bathrooms and toilets often defined as a "feminine" task is also seen as one of the least desirable chores (Coltrane, 1996). Cleaning bathrooms did not occupy that position in lesbian couples. Although some clearly had higher hygiene standards than their partners and were more likely to clean, there was no clear trend or a mention of aversion to this chore.

Lastly, whenever others came into the home, both were held responsible and felt accountable for the state of their homes. Once again, partners sometimes had different standards of cleanliness and order but, generally, both partners prepared for guests together and shared the responsibilities for hosting. Although the person with higher standards was more likely to be left with more work because she was more invested in the appearance of the home (Mahony, 1995), often one partner had higher standards of cleanliness while the other was more interested in order. This form of complementation balanced commitments to housework.

As discussed earlier, paid labor also reflected the impact of the double gender effect in lesbian couples. While none of the partners expected to be taken care of, none was prepared to carry the sole financial burden as a matter of course. Although seven couples decided on a long-term homemaker/breadwinner model, some primary providers in the “traditional” category voiced their frustration with the overwhelming financial responsibility while some primary family workers in the “reversed traditional” category stressed the importance of their own work commitment. Expectations of financial independence pulled lesbian mothers into the labor market while simultaneously avoiding sole financial responsibility for the family.

Above I discussed the advantages of new equity over “traditional equity” and also over a rigid formulation of equality. Shared/joint motherhood and the double gender effect ensured the flexibility and trust required for a successful use of this model. Yet, I propose that even in opposite-sex contexts new equity can also prove to be a viable

alternative to strict equality and “traditional equity.” By expanding shared/joint motherhood to shared/joint parenthood, both partners commitment to mothering and family work can counter the pull of “traditional” gender expectations and behaviors. Secondly, the double gender effect was strongly influenced by ideological commitments. Thus, heterosexual couples in which both partners share strong feminist beliefs can approximate the double gender effect.

9.4. ENDNOTES

1. This does not mean that their standards for cleanliness or order are lower than those of heterosexual couples. Most women I interviewed felt very strongly about living in a pleasing and clean environment.
2. Many men in heterosexual couples share Amanda's experience. Because they feel they cannot do certain household chores right they simply leave them to their partners. In turn, many women become increasingly upset about their partners' withdrawal from housework.
3. Schwartz (1995) also observed that equality in peer marriages was largely based on flexibility in the division of work.
4. These are the adjusted hours spent on childcare. The unadjusted hours ranged from five to 95 hours per week. On average, birthmothers spent four hours more on childcare than their partners (median: 6). I adjusted the participants estimates based on their interviews and their time commitments to other kinds of work.
5. It is important to keep in mind that not all jobs require such intense time and energy investment that any other obligations are detrimental to occupational advancement. In addition, the current sex segregated labor market is to the disadvantage of women in general. However, such labor market favors men. Thus, gay male couples profit the most – in the absence of anti-gay discrimination.
6. Emily was also concerned about her family's welfare in case something should happen to her.

God forbid that I die. All these years I spent working. All these years Cindy spent not working. The way it is in a marriage, social security-wise, or pension-wise, or you name it - in a straight situation the wife would get it. But sadly, if I'm 50 years old and retire or I die, Cindy doesn't get diddly-squat. And that's very sad.

Since at this time same-sex marriage is illegal in the United States, full-time homemakers in lesbian families face even greater disadvantages than their married counterparts. Yet, even in married couples full-time homemakers carry a higher economic risk than full-time breadwinners in case of the dissolution of the relationship.

10. CONCLUSION

10.1. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The transition to parenthood and the division of labor in families are two central and closely related topics in the sociology of the family. Most studies have found that during the transition to parenthood powerful personal and social forces draw many heterosexual couples into a more gendered division of labor (Belsky & Kelly, 1994). Some argue that biological motherhood and efficiency considerations are the reasons for choosing a basic homemaker/breadwinner model (Becker, 1981), while others point to the inequalities of the sex-gender system and resulting power imbalances in heterosexual couples as the main sources of a more pronounced sexual division of labor (Baber & Allen, 1992; Blau & Ferber, 1992; Hartmann, 1987). To disentangle the effects of biological motherhood and the concrete demands of early childcare from gender inequality, I examined lesbian couples' transition to biological parenthood and their division of labor during their children's early years.

This study is rare because – despite its relatively large sample (n=50) – its sole focus is on lesbian couples who had their children biologically. Most other studies include adopted children and/or children from prior heterosexual or homosexual relationships. Furthermore, this project is unique in lesbian family studies because I interviewed both partners individually and as a couple. Additional questionnaire data provided quantitative information that allowed for complex comparisons of partners' accounts. Last but not least, it includes a longitudinal component that reassessed couples' division of labor about two years after the initial interview.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 2, the participants in this study were not representative of lesbians in general or lesbian mothers in particular. Yet, other studies of lesbians who had children after coming out match the overall profile of my sample. They are primarily middle-class, well-educated and of European American descent. Thus, I generally compared my findings with those of research focusing on heterosexual, dual-earner, middle-class, white couples.

Heterosexual and lesbian middle-class couples shared many characteristics. For example, middle-class couples often postpone childbearing until later in life and generally approach parenthood in a very purposeful manner. The participants in this study seemed to even surpass the level of conscious planning commonly associated with middle-class, heterosexual couples. In particular, these women devised plans detailing many aspects of their division of work after the child's arrival. In addition to concerns that all parents encounter, these lesbian couples faced unique questions such as who would carry the child, how to choose a donor, and how to legally, socially, and privately support both mothers' claim to equal parenthood (Chapters 3 & 4).

Unless one or both partners confronted severe fertility problems, the desire to carry a child was the most important factor in deciding who would be the birthmother. In cases in which both partners intended to bear children, age determined who would inseminate first. After much deliberation, most couples opted for anonymous sperm donations fearing potential custody and visitation claims from known donors. Their precarious legal situation prompted many partners to draft extensive legal documents to support comothers' claims to their children in case of the birthmothers' death or

incompetence. All mothers were aware, however, that comothers remained vulnerable legally unless they were able to adopt their children.

The fragility of their legal status, however, did not impede comothers from fully participating in their children's lives. They publicly claimed their status as a parent (*public motherhood*). Both parents acknowledged each other as mothers and so did their children (*relational motherhood*). Finally, both parents displayed strong identities as mothers (*personal motherhood*) (Chapter 4).

While both partners tended to minimize the importance of biological motherhood, it proved to be influential during the first months after a child's birth. Breastfeeding, in particular, resulted in infants' intense focus on birthmothers. Many comothers, however, found that intimate childcare tasks such as bathing and bottle feeding allowed them to also closely bond with the baby (Chapter 4). Once the child was weaned, biological motherhood had much less impact on the relationship to the child and the division of labor.

The second part of the dissertation analyzes various aspects of the division of labor in lesbian families. It addresses a central question: Given the high labor demands young children create and the increased need for financial security, is wide-spread equal parenting and a fair division of work possible? The answer was yes. More than half of the couples in this study shared productive and reproductive labor equally – that is each partner performed between 40 and 60% of housework, childcare, and paidwork. This finding is especially important because 68% of the families had at least one child under two years old.

The remaining couples chose long-term or short-term specialization into various degrees of homemaking and breadwinning. About one quarter of the participants opted for a “traditional” model where birthmothers primarily stayed at home with the children and comothers focused on providing for the family. Four couples chose this arrangement long-term while two returned to an egalitarian division of work after a year. This arrangement mirrors the “traditional” heterosexual division of labor and is in accordance with strong social and cultural norms supporting birthmothers’ concentration on early childrearing.

Comothers in this group tended to not identify as feminists. Although some voiced dissatisfaction with bearing primary responsibility for their family’s financial security, none of them seriously considered changing their overall division of labor. The negative effects of long-term specialization in these families included most birthmothers’ inability to sufficiently provide for their families because of their extended absence from the labor market.

The remaining five couples employed what I call a “reversed traditional” model. Here, comothers were the primary homemakers and birthmothers the principle providers. These couples did not follow the biological motherhood imperative. Interestingly, most of these mothers strongly identified as feminists and shared similar access to socioeconomic resources.

For three of the five couples in this group this arrangement exceeded one year in length. Compared to the “traditional” group, however, all comothers continued to invest in their occupational development by going to college or furthering their careers at

home. All three comothers would have been able to support their families if they were to reenter the labor force full-time.

This last group exemplifies most clearly a phenomenon I defined in Chapter 9 as *new equity*. Here the ability and willingness to take on and rotate primary responsibility for either family work or paid labor created a safety net for families who tried to provide extended parental care for their children. It also allowed individual mothers to follow their personal work aspirations, which had special importance when entering a new occupation or starting their own business.

New equity took on many forms. Its central feature, however, was flexibility in work arrangements on the job as well as task accomplishment at home. Those most successful at new equity took consecutive parental leaves (see Chapter 5). In addition to providing extended parental care for their children, mothers in this group shared the experience of primary childcare and were both able to develop strong early bonds with the child.

At home, flexibility allowed couples to adjust quickly to daily variations in work requirements on the job and the constantly changing needs of infants and toddlers. Six principles of the division of work at home emerged from the narratives: fairness, shared responsibility, cooperation, communication, solidarity, and pleasure. The effective use of these principles decreased the stress produced by the daily balancing act of work and family life (Chapter 6).

In the study of heterosexual couples' transition to parenthood and the division of labor, three theoretical approaches have dominated the field: The New Home

Economics, gender, and power (see Chapter 8). Applied to lesbian couples, most of these frameworks were of limited use. Contrary to the assumptions of the New Home Economics which stresses the importance of biological motherhood and the utility of a pronounced gendered division of labor, birthmothers did not differ from comothers in their commitments to paid work and domestic labor. Furthermore, their division of labor was quite efficient despite a predominantly egalitarian division of work (Chapter 9).

As found in other studies (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983), power differences conceptualized as differences in socioeconomic status did not result in any specific type of work arrangement. Although many couples were quite heterogeneous, the distribution of responsibilities and the actual performance of tasks were more strongly affected by personal preferences and time/availability than differences in income, education, or age. The more powerful partner, however, was more likely to complain about the division of work.

Gender, on the other hand, was more influential. While hardly any couples exhibited a “traditional” gendered division of work or accomplishment of tasks, same-sex gender dynamics created a *double gender effect* (Chapter 9). Generally, women are socialized into expecting more responsibility for domestic labor and less for financial obligations than men. Thus, most women view housework and childcare as “normal” if not desirable tasks. Therefore, the double gender effect at the same time pulled lesbian mothers into more “feminized” behaviors and expectations and relieved them from those same behaviors and expectations. Regarding paid work, both partners were less willing to take on the sole provider role while also stressing individual financial independence.

As a result, the double gender effect created a strong foundation for equality in the division of work.

The double gender effect, however, could not explain why 28% of the couples chose long-term specialization rather than an equality model. Comothers who preferred a “traditional” model rarely identified as feminists. In addition, their partners greatly enjoyed being primary caregivers. In contrast, those who chose a “reversed traditional” model tended to strongly identify as feminists and had access to similar socioeconomic resources. Thus, feminist attitudes counteracted the social and cultural pull into a “traditional” division of labor favoring birthmothers as the primary caregivers.

Finally, whether couples favored an egalitarian model or various forms of specialization, all mothers were highly committed to shared parenting and motherhood. Because time and availability determined many aspects of childcare and housework, whoever was free at the time would perform a task – whether she was employed or not. For example, full-time mothers often expected their partners to take full responsibility for childcare after they returned home. Thus, commitment to shared motherhood decreased the likelihood of the full-time employed partner withdrawing from childcare when at home.

In many ways, the findings above confirm results of earlier research that stress equality in lesbian relationships (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Patterson 1995a&b). Yet, this study also found great diversity in work arrangements and temporary as well as long-term forms of specialization that do not fit a simple equality model. Complex negotiations concerning children’s needs, shared motherhood and parenting, financial

independence and interdependence, and commitment to paid labor resulted in various work adaptations.

Thus, rather than stressing *strict equality* as the ruling principle in the division of work, I suggest that *new equity*, that is, the ability to utilize various models in the division of labor depending on current work demands, is the hallmark of lesbian couples' division of work. Although new equity cannot substitute for urgently needed social programs providing affordable quality childcare and a safety net for families, it can reduce the negative consequences of long-term specialization into family worker and provider. As long as making a home and caring for children remains socially and economically devalued and politically neglected, both parents' long-term involvement in domestic work and paid labor will be essential to protect both partners' interests and those of their children.

10.2. A COMPARISON WITH HETEROSEXUAL COUPLES

The worlds of family and work have changed dramatically over the last thirty years. The family wage has disappeared and families all across the country are dependent on two steady incomes. As a result, increasing numbers of heterosexual mothers have joined the labor force (Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Most Americans will change jobs and even careers several times over the span of their working lives. Times of occupational transition often require financial sacrifices and a family's economic security often depends on both parents' ability to become the temporary single provider.

In addition, many new fathers wish to be involved in their children's lives starting

from birth. Financial responsibilities and non-responsive work environments often make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to be actively engaged in early basic childcare. Even companies that officially have family friendly policies often indirectly or directly discourage fathers from taking advantage of them. Taking paternity leave or changing to a part-time schedule is still viewed as a career stopper (Hochschild, 1997). There are a growing number of men and women, however, who divide paid labor and family work more equally (Coltrane, 1996), creating “postgender marriages” (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998).

As pointed out throughout this dissertation, the couples in this study resembled egalitarian heterosexual couples in many ways. A strong commitment to shared parenting (Ehrensaft, 1990), flexibility in both employment and domestic work arrangements (Schwartz, 1995), a willingness to publically assert relationship and parenting equality (Blaisure & Allen, 1995), and very conscious decisions about parenting and work characterized both groups (Coltrane, 1996). Thus, the findings of this study support previous findings that these practices and attitudes are essential to the success of egalitarian parental relationships.

One marked difference between studies of egalitarian heterosexual marriages and the participants in this study is that egalitarianism was not a sample requirement. The only condition for sample inclusion was a nuclear family structure consisting of the birthmother, the comother, and at least one child under six years old. The powerful commitments to shared parenting and the relatively high levels of egalitarian divisions of work observed in this study are the result not of selective sampling but of the double

gender effect, that is same-sex gender dynamics, feminist attitudes, and an intense desire to have children.

This is not to say that this group of lesbian mothers is in any way representative of all lesbian parents. The fact that the majority of participants was highly-educated, middle-class, and European American calls for comparisons with heterosexual couples who also enjoy race and class privileges. While many similarly located heterosexual partners are dual-income couples and have the same access to outside childcare and housekeeper services, an unequal division of labor often remains.

As Hertz (1986) and Wrigley (1995) reported in their studies, most middle-class career women remain primarily responsible for domestic labor. Instead of performing most the necessary family chores themselves, they are in charge of hiring and supervising other women to perform the work. Thus, gender remains the primary organizing principle in reproductive labor even in most privileged heterosexual couples.

10.3. LOOKING BEYOND: SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although lacking the kind of social and public support most other families in their socio-economic bracket take for granted, both birthmothers and comothers tried to create a beneficial environment for their children. However, without legal recognition and support from social institutions, children in lesbian families will continue to encounter social discrimination and legal insecurities despite their parents' efforts (Reimann, 1996). The long-term effects of discrimination on children and parents' relationships require further investigation.

Longitudinal data on the impact of various strategies of caregiving during infancy on long-term work arrangements in lesbian families are also needed. If the strategies the families in this study employed to further equality have positive effects on long-term equity, they could prove useful to other prospective parents who seek equality in their relationships. If these strategies are unrelated to work arrangements at later points, gender and/or biological motherhood might prove to be more powerful than evidenced in this study.

The role of socioeconomic power differences within couples also warrants further investigation. In lesbian relationships commonly used measures of power such as income, education, and age differences, do not seem to influence a couple's division of labor (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1987; Reilly & Lynch, 1990). While my study confirmed those earlier findings, I also found that significant resource differences resulted in the more powerful partner's tendency to complain more about work arrangements. Further research exploring the connections between power and critical attitudes toward the relationship could provide new understandings of how women use resource differences in intimate settings.

Feminist ideology, so prominent among the participants, is another area that requires further investigation. The analysis showed that comothers who were less committed to feminism were more likely to take on a provider role while comothers with stronger feminist ideals were less likely to do so. The male provider role has been frequently identified as the source of marital inequality (Schwartz, 1995; Ferree, 1990). If feminist attitudes among lesbians reduce their likelihood of becoming long-term

primary providers in their families, feminist attitudes among men might have similar consequences.

Biology played a limited, yet crucial, part in the transition to parenthood. More research on how early biological requirements limit and define future parenting roles is needed to more clearly understand how ideological commitments to equality and material necessities for the reproduction of a family interact.

The exploratory nature of this research and other studies raise many questions about lesbian couples' transition to parenthood and their division of work. Class differences have not been sufficiently addressed. The effects of race, ethnic and cultural diversity are unknown. It is also unclear how geographical location impacts on the lives of lesbian families. Last, the extent to which the involvement in familial, social, and political networks influences these issues demands further exploration.

Same-sex relationships offer a glimpse at intimacy and family life beyond gender difference. Giddens (1992) suggests that lesbians and gay men are the “prime everyday experimenters” (p.135) when it comes to “pure relationships”¹ – a type of relationship that is becoming more common among heterosexual couples as well. Individual abilities and desires rather than gendered prescriptions of behaviors and emotions govern intimate interactions and work arrangements. As shown in this study, parenting and the division of labor relied on each partner’s expressed desires and interests and the assumption of basic equality.

Parents who wish to respect each other’s preferences and share parenting will

find much in common with the families studied here. Yet, same-sex and opposite-sex gender dynamics do create some important differences in power relations. As shown in studies of egalitarian heterosexual couples, however, those dynamics can be consciously opposed and redefined (Ehrensaft, 1990; Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998; Schwartz, 1995).

Thus, studying the “prime everyday experimenters” of relationships based on mutual choice and equality offers insights into different ways of organizing couple and family life. The fast changing social and economic realities of today’s world require that families quickly adjust to ever new time and work demands. As shown above, partners’ willingness and ability to take responsibility for both productive and reproductive labor can decrease the pressure on each individual because no one person carries the entire burden for either family work or financial security. In addition, shared parenting becomes the rule rather than the notable exception.

10.4. ENDNOTES

1. The term pure relationship “refers to a situation where a social relation is entered into for its own sake, for what can be derived by each person from a sustained association with another; and which is continued only in so far as it is thought by both parties to deliver enough satisfactions for each individual to stay within it.” (Giddens, 1992:58)

APPENDIX I: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

DOING THEIR FAIR SHARE: THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Interview Guide Individual Interview

CHILDREN

Please tell me about your child/ren.

- How many children do you have? What age?
- When did you first discuss children?
- How did you decide who would be the biological mother?
- Were there any difficult questions you had to address?
- How do/es your child/ren address you? As mom, mother, by your first name, changing names around?
- What is her/his last name?
- How did your family feel about your decision to become a parent?
- How did you locate the donor(s) (father/s)?
- Did you take any kind of legal steps to protect your interests as parents over against the donor or other interested parties?
- Is the donor (or father) involved in any aspect of the parenting?
- Do you feel that your child(ren) is demanding more care and attention than you anticipated?
- Have you thought about specific schools you want your child/ren to go to?

RELATIONSHIP HISTORY

First, please tell me about your coming out experiences.

Please tell me about your relationship with your partner:

- When did you first get together?
- What did you find most attractive about your partner?
- When did you move in with each other (who moved)?

HOUSEWORK AND CHILDCARE

Please tell me about a normal workday in your family. Describe it from the moment you get up in the morning to the moment you go to bed at night.

- How do you divide up the work with your partner?
- Which are the tasks you do jointly?
- Which are the tasks only one of you does on a regular basis?
- Who is responsible for which aspect of child/care?
- Who does more childcare, you or your partner?
- Did you breastfeed your child? If yes, did that cause any problems in your relationship?
- When the child is sick or wakes up in the middle of the night, who tends to take care of

her/him.

- Who is responsible for which aspect of the housework? Laundry, meals, grocery shopping, cleaning the house, etc.
- Who is responsible for paying the bills?
- Who does more housework, you or your partner?
- Why do you divide the work this way?
- Do you regularly discuss how to divide up the work?
- Do you change work arrangements or do you prefer a more stable division of labor?
- Do you agree on what are more or less important housework tasks?
- Do you feel that the division of work is fair?
- How much time a day do you spend with the child/ren alone?
- How much time a day do you spend with your partner alone?
- How much time a day does the whole family spend together?
- How much time a day do you have for leisure activities or just time to yourself?

EMPLOYMENT

Please tell me about your work.

- Are you currently employed? If yes, please tell me about your job.
- Has your sexual orientation influenced your choice of profession and your current job?
- Did you change your hours, your job or your profession when you became a parent?
- Did or does your insurance cover your or your partner's medical expenses for your child?
- How many hours do you currently work.
- How does your job influence your home life?
- Do home and work responsibilities get too much some times? Explain.
- If you could afford to not work for a few years, would you consider that option?
- Do you have any plans for your future? Would you like to change jobs, start a new line of work or go back to school?
- Do you think your work life would be drastically different if you did not have children?

MONEY

- How much money do you make roughly? Remember all this information is strictly confidential.
- How much money does your partner make?
- Do you pool all or some of your income?
- Do you have joint savings and/or checking accounts?
- Who pays for the everyday expenses, such as rent, food, utilities etc.
- Who pays for the expenses for your child/ren?
- Do you claim your child as a dependent on your tax returns?
- Have you yourself invested in stocks, bonds, etc.?
- Do you have joint investments in stocks, bonds, etc.?
- Do you have access to your partners accounts and investments?
- Does your partner have access to your accounts and investments?

- How important is it to you that you are financially independent?
- Has having children changed the way you value money?

**SOCIAL SUPPORT NETWORKS:
FAMILIES OF ORIGIN AND FAMILIES OF FRIENDS**

FAMILIES OF ORIGIN:

- How do you get along with your family?
- Do you have regular contact with your family?
- Do you visit with them? Is your partner present?
- Are you out to some or all members of your family? Are there tensions around your sexual orientation?
- How does your family like your partner? Do they see you as a couple?
- How did your family react to you becoming a mother/co-parent?
- Are they supportive in any way?
 - * Emotional support: calling and visiting you, a source of valuable advice, a shoulder to cry on?
 - * Practical support: childcare, financial support, taking the child/ren for weekends and holidays?
- Is the practical and/or emotional support of your family crucial in your ability to keep your job?
- Is your partner also responsible for keeping in touch with your family?

YOUR PARTNER'S FAMILY:

- How do you get along with your partner's family?
- Do you have regular contact with your partner's family?
- Do you visit with them with or without your partner?
- Are they supportive in any way?
 - * Emotional support: calling and visiting you, a source of valuable advice, a shoulder to cry on?
 - * Practical support: childcare, financial support, taking the child/ren for weekends and holidays?
- Is the practical and/or emotional support of your partner's family crucial in your ability to keep your job?
- Are you in any way responsible for keeping in touch with your partner's family?

FRIENDSHIP NETWORKS:

- How many friends do you consider to be close friends?
- Are they mainly women, lesbians, or mothers?
- Do you have many individual friends or rather groups of friends who all know each other?
- Do you and you partner have the same friends?
- Are your friends supportive of your child/ren: do they offer to baby sit when necessary, do they invite you and your child/ren to their homes, etc.?

- Did you make new friends through your child/ren?
- Do you find it important that your friends understand what it means to be a parent?
- Are both of you equally involved in maintaining relationships with your joint friends?
- Do you sometimes feel jealous of your partner's friends? Or do you feel your partner spends too much time with her own friends?

MEMBERSHIP IN GROUPS

- Do you belong to more formal parents groups: such as lesbian and gay parents groups, other parents organizations etc.
- Do you belong to any political or social groups that have become important in your life as a lesbian and/or a mother?
- Do you consider yourself a feminist in some ways? How does it affect your everyday life – family, work, etc.?

DECISION MAKING

- Who usually makes decisions about housework, childcare and work?
- Who usually decides how to spend your money?
- Who usually decides where to go out for dinner, which movie to watch, which friends to invite, where to go for the weekend or where to spend your vacation etc.?
- Who usually decides what to have for dinner?
- Who usually executes these decisions?

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Even in the best of relationships there is conflict once in awhile.

- What do you disagree about most often? Housework, money, work, how do raise the child/ren, leisure activities, friends, etc.?
- Do you feel that you give in more often than your partner?
- Do you feel you resolve problems once you have discussed them?
- When there are tensions in your relationship, who usually addresses these tensions first, you or your partner?
- Do you sometimes feel powerless when you have serious discussions or fights? If so, why?
- Do you feel that there are disagreements between you that you will not be able to resolve in the future?
- Do you discuss your relationship problems with your friends or your family or origin?
- Do you feel that the support of your friends or your own family make it easier for you to stand up to your partner when you have disagreements?
- Do you have disagreements over political issues?
- If you are involved in political groups, does your partner support you in your efforts?

SEX

Many couples say that having a child has changed their sex lives.

- Do you have a similar experience?
- Are you basically satisfied with the romantic and sexual aspects (such as quality and frequency) of your relationship?
- What aspect of it would you like to change?

THE FUTURE

Looking into the future five years from now, what will your life look like ideally?
Family, work, friends, living environment?

- If it were possible, what would you like to change about your life?
- If it were possible, what would you like to change about your relationship with your partner?
- If it were possible, what would you like to change about your relationship with your child/ren?

Thank you very much for your help. There is one more thing. Please fill in this short statistical data sheet and return it to me. Also, if it is alright with you, I would like to keep in touch with you and see how you are doing in a couple of months.

APPENDIX II: COUPLE INTERVIEW GUIDE

DOING THEIR FAIR SHARE: POWER AND THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN NUCLEAR FAMILIES

Interview Guide Couple Interview

- Has having a child or children changed your relationship? For example, has it added some problems or reduced others?
- Would you like to change your division of work? If yes, please give an example?
- Do you think fairness in the division of work is important to be happy in relationships?
- Some couples experience that the way they divide up the work makes one mother the "work mom" (who takes care of all the basic childcare) and the other the "play mom" (who comes home from work and just is the fun one). Do you have a similar experience?
- Do you relate differently to the child in some ways – taking care of physical or emotional needs, kinds of play. etc.? If yes, please explain.
- Have some developmental phases of your child/ren been easier for one or the other of you – e.g. breast feeding, solid foods, walking, speaking? If yes, please explain.
- If you compare your family life and the way you handle your division of work with **straight families** you know, what do you think are the differences or similarities between you?
- If you compare your family life and the way you handle your division of work with **lesbian families** you know, what do you think are the differences or similarities between you?
- Could you imagine other kinds of family arrangements that would work for you? E.g. group families, families with more than two mothers and/or fathers?
- Do you consider yourselves "married" in some ways?
- Do you sometimes feel that you have to be exceptionally good parents because you are lesbian mothers?
- Do you feel that biological motherhood introduces differences or even inequality into the relationship with your child/ren and each other? If yes, how does it effect the way you deal with each other and the child/ren?
- Some couples experience that breastfeeding can be a source of discomfort or even conflict. Do you have a similar experience?
- What kind of values are you trying to transmit to your child/ren? Do you agree on these values? If not, how do you handle these differences?
- How does the way your parents raised you influence your own parenting?
- Do you feel that you communicate well with each other – in everyday situations, when there are tensions, in moments of crisis etc.?
- Has having children changed your sex life? Are you satisfied with the sexual aspects of your relationship?

- Do you think that lesbians (and gay men) with children are changing the perception of lesbians (and gay men) in the larger society?
- What kind of legal changes do you think would improve your situation as lesbian mothers? Would you favor one of the following: gay and lesbian marriage, extending domestic partnership legislation or revising adoption regulations?

APPENDIX III: ORIGINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Date _____

CODE # _____

THE GRADUATE CENTER OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK**DOING THEIR FAIR SHARE:****THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN NUCLEAR FAMILY****DATA SHEET**

PLEASE RETURN TO: RENATE REIMANN
PH.D. PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY, BOX 375
THE GRADUATE CENTER OF CUNY
33 WEST 42 STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10036-8099

STATISTICAL QUESTIONS

Year of birth _____

Years of education _____

Highest degree received _____ Year _____

Are you currently in school? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please specify _____

Employment/occupation _____

Full-time _____ Part-time _____

On maternity leave _____ Unemployed _____

If unemployed, are you looking for work? Yes ___ No ___

Income (in thousands) (circle one)

0-5 5-10 10-15 15-20 20-25 25-30

30-35 35-40 40-50 50-60 60-70 70-80

80-90 90-100 100-200 200-300 more than 300

Years with your current partner _____

Child/ren

1) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

2) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

3) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

4) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

If you are the birthmother of one or more of your children did you breast feed them?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, for how long? _____

Did you take maternity/parental leave at any time?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, for how long? ___ years ___ months ___ weeks

How old was/were your child/ren? _____

Your own religious identification _____

Your own racial identification _____

Number and age of your siblings _____

Your height _____ Your weight _____

QUESTIONS ON THE DIVISION OF WORK

How many hours a week do you spend on the following?

Childcare _____

household chore _____

paid work _____

schooling _____

Who does each of these tasks more often, you or your partner? (always me, mostly me, the same, mostly her, always her, does not apply)

Cooking meals _____

Doing the dishes _____

Doing the laundry _____

Doing repairs around the house _____

Cleaning the house _____

Doing the grocery shopping _____

Taking care of company _____

Caring for pets _____

Being responsible for the car _____

Taking care of the garden _____

Making complaints to the landlord/lady _____

Paying the bills _____

Feeding the child/ren _____

Getting the child/ren ready for bed _____

Playing with the children _____

Disciplining the child/ren _____

Taking the child/ren to their activities and
appointments _____

Do you have household employees? (indicate type and weekly hours)

What kinds of paid childcare do you use? (indicate type and weekly hours)

Anything else you would like to comment on?

APPENDIX IV: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONNAIRE

Date _____

CODE # _____

THE GRADUATE CENTER OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

**DOING THEIR FAIR SHARE:
THE DIVISION OF LABOR IN LESBIAN NUCLEAR FAMILY**

DATA SHEET

PLEASE RETURN TO: RENATE REIMANN
THE CENTER FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH
THE GRADUATE CENTER OF CUNY
33 WEST 42 STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10036-8099

STATISTICAL QUESTIONS

Year of birth _____

Years of education _____

Highest degree received _____ Year _____

Are you currently in school? Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please specify _____

Employment/occupation _____

Full-time _____ Part-time _____

On maternity leave _____ Unemployed _____

If unemployed, are you looking for work? Yes ___ No ___

Have you changed jobs during the last two years?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please specify _____

Income in 1995: _____

Years with your current partner _____

Child/ren

1) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

2) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

3) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

4) Sex _____ Age _____ Are you the birthmother? Yes ___ No ___

If you are the birthmother of one or more of your children did you breast feed them?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, for how long? _____

Did you take maternity/parental leave at any time?

Yes ___ No ___

If yes, for how long? ___ years ___ months ___ weeks

How old was/were your child/ren? _____

Did you draw up any of the following legal documents?

Will	Yes _____	No _____
Power of Attorney	Yes _____	No _____
Donor Agreement	Yes _____	No _____
Partnership Agreement	Yes _____	No _____

Your own religious identification _____

Your own racial identification _____

Number and age of your siblings _____

Your height _____ Your weight _____

QUESTIONS ON THE DIVISION OF WORK

How many hours a week do you spend on the following?

CHILDCARE

total number of hours _____

by yourself _____

with your partner _____

HOUSEHOLD CHORE

total number of hours _____

by yourself _____

with your partner _____

PAID WORK

total number of hours _____

transportation time _____

SCHOOLING

total number of hours _____

transportation time _____

Who does each of these tasks more often, you or your partner? (always me, mostly me, the same, mostly her, always her, does not apply)

Cooking meals _____
 Doing the dishes _____
 Doing the laundry _____
 Doing repairs around the house _____
 Cleaning the house _____
 Doing the grocery shopping _____
 Taking care of company _____
 Caring for pets _____
 Being responsible for the car _____
 Taking care of the garden _____
 Making complaints to the landlord/lady _____
 Paying the bills _____
 Feeding the child/ren _____
 Getting the child/ren ready for bed _____
 Playing with the children _____
 Disciplining the child/ren _____
 Taking the child/ren to their activities and
 appointments _____

Do you have household employees? (indicate type, hours, and expense)

What kinds of paid childcare do you use? (indicate type, weekly hours, and expense)

Do you have any of the following bank accounts or investments?

Individual checking account: Yes___ No___
 Joint checking account: Yes___ No___
 Individual savings account: Yes___ No___
 Joint savings account: Yes___ No___
 Individual investments: Yes___ No___
 Joint investments: Yes___ No___

CHANGES IN OTHER AREAS OF YOUR LIFE

Has your child or have your children experienced major changes in their lives?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain _____

Have you been involved in second parent adoption proceedings? Please check whichever is applicable.

_____ No adoption plans

_____ Planning adoption at a future time

_____ Started adoption process

_____ Adoption was granted (date: _____)

_____ Adoption was denied (date: _____)

_____ Other. Please explain _____

Has the relationship with your own family undergone major changes?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please specify: _____

Have you moved to a new place since our interview?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please indicate your reasons for moving to your new neighborhood:

Have your friendship networks changed over the last year?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please specify _____

Has the relationship with your partner undergone significant changes? For example, have there been problems you have been able to solve or others that have emerged over the last months? Have you experienced a crisis in your relationship? Have outside influences put pressure on your relationship?

Yes _____ No _____

If yes, please explain _____

Anything else you would like to comment on?

APPENDIX V: THREE VIGNETTES OF FAMILIES' DIVISION OF LABOR DURING THE FIRST YEAR OF THEIR CHILD'S LIFE

To illustrate divergent ways of managing the needs and demands of families with infants, I will present three vignettes of lesbian couples and their division of labor. In each family, one of the mothers was taking care of the child full-time when the interviews took place. In these cases, biological motherhood also played an important role at first. The birthmothers need to recuperate and the nursing infants required uninterrupted attention. Biological motherhood rapidly decreased in importance after a couple of months. The decision to stay with the child full-time became more a question of desire, financial feasibility and flexibility in work hours.

With regard to *domestic labor*, I found quite different solutions. While one birthmother performed substantially more childcare as well as housework, the second couple was more equal in their division of household labor. In a third case, the comother did more of the childcare and slightly more of the housework despite her full-time schooling. There was no clear connection between biological motherhood and the division of work at home. But I would suggest that whoever is the full-time mother while her partner works outside the house will be more involved in household management.

In all three cases, there was some dissatisfaction with the division of work – especially housework. Unlike most heterosexual women who stay home full-time, the full-time caregivers in my sample did not consider doing more housework part of the agreement. They interrupted their work lives in order to be with the children not to do

housework. In the first two cases, the full-time mothers – one birthmother and one comother – were displeased because they felt that they were shouldering more than their fair share of the housework. In the third case, the comother felt that she was doing too much of the childcare given that the birthmother was staying home for exactly that purpose.

A close analysis of the interviews with the full-time mothers in the first two families suggested that their dissatisfaction with the division of domestic work was partly based on their self-perception as potential "housewives." In their view, a housewife was unappreciated and devalued. Her work was taken for granted and she was expected to have the children ready and the house organized by the time her partner would come home from work. Both mothers strongly felt the contradictions between the desire and pleasure to be with the child and the equally powerful social disdain for domestic work.

The vignettes below recount in detail the different experiences of these three couples. Danielle, the birthmother in one couple, had been home with the baby for 12 months and was looking for part-time jobs at the time of the interview. Her partner Amanda was expected to finish her current full-time job within a few months. Alexandra, the comother in the second couple, was on her five-month parental leave while the birthmother, her partner Virginia, was employed full-time. In the third couple, the birthmother, Angela, had been on maternity leave for eight months and was unsure about when to return to work. The comother, Wendy, shared the responsibilities with Angela. Wendy was extremely flexible in her work schedule because she had quit her job and returned to school a few months before the baby had been born.

The *first couple*, Danielle and Amanda, were very similar to the majority of heterosexual couples with a very young child. Danielle, the birthmother, was staying home with the baby full-time. She planned to take a part-time position in order to continue spending as much time as possible with their daughter Chris. At home, the division of housework and childcare also closely mirrored that of most heterosexual couples. The birthmother spent 30 hours per week more on childcare and seven hours more on housework while the comother had a demanding 50 hour per week job. Overall, the comother worked a total of 13 hours per week more than the birthmother. Both clearly stated that the birthmother was doing most of the housework and childcare. The consensus established in the interviews was supported by their agreement on 80% of the responses to questions on the division of specific childcare and housework tasks.

Despite their low income at the time – yearly combined earnings of \$25,000 – they had decided to hire a housekeeper to come in once a week for deep cleaning

Danielle explained:

See, we have a housekeeper. I mean, we have to. We have a big house and we have dogs and the dog hair gets everywhere. We would be spending Saturday cleaning.

... It seems like so much work. Partly [it] is that Chris just makes a constant mess everywhere she goes. And you are always picking up after her and, really, your time is cut in half because one person always has to take care of the baby. Sometimes you can do something together but normally not. She likes your attention. And she doesn't sleep a lot

They also paid a friend of Danielle to take care of the child two days a week in order to free up the birthmother for important projects such as finishing a consulting job and cleaning the basement.

Despite the paid childcare and the housekeeper, the birthmother was dissatisfied with the division of work at home. She felt that all the responsibility for taking care of Chris was falling on her.

This has been a kind of point of contention with us. I would like not to have all the responsibility for figuring [the childcare] out - I stay home so I can take care of her and so in a way I feel it is my job. It's part of what I'm doing. But even when Amanda is home, if I wouldn't say "Oh, Chris needs to eat this for dinner," Chris just wouldn't eat (laughing). It would just be, "Oh, I thought you were taking care of that." It's hard because - and I know it's probably hard for Amanda too because she isn't here and she doesn't know what she is supposed to eat all day. And she doesn't know what she tried and she didn't try and what she likes and she doesn't like.

The birthmother felt even more resentful with respect to housework. According to her, the comother was not only less involved in performing actual chores but also took little responsibility for making certain that the house was in order. Danielle, the birthmother, put it as follows:

But there are a lot of little things that have to get done all the time that - I've never done this but I'm tempted to make a list. Things like cleaning, changing the air conditioner filters. I just can't even think of them now because it's just during the day. That's all the things she wouldn't think of. For one, it's not her house. [I have owned the house for many years.] So she's not used to doing it. And number two, her mind is on other stuff, I guess. That's more my concern. So that's when I do get kind of resentful.

Unlike most mothers in heterosexual relationships, the birthmother interpreted her parental leave as a chance to stay with their child and spend quality time with her. She did not consider performing the bulk of the housework as part of the arrangement.

Yes, when I'm here, I'm responsible for the foods and figuring out what to buy her. And figuring out what to make that she might like. But again, I don't mind because that is what I stayed home for. I mean, I think when we get into trouble is when it feels like I'm staying home to clean the

house all the time (laughing).

In the couple interview Danielle and Amanda talked more about the fact that the birthmother felt left alone with the drudge work. Part of the birthmother's frustration was due to her perception of the comother as the "fun one" doing "fun things" with Chris while she was responsible for the less exciting caretaking tasks.

Amanda: You should elaborate on it because you were the one who started it.

Danielle: Explain why I do all the work around here? (laughing)

Amanda: Danielle even likes to entertain groups of people with that theory.

Danielle: Well, part of it is that I'm breastfeeding. Especially in the beginning a lot of my time with her was at the breast. Then, also because I was staying home, I'm the one who makes her brush her teeth. I'm the one who makes her have her dinner. I'm the one that changes her diaper, changes her clothes. ... So anyway, I'll just say to Amanda, "Can you watch her while I get dinner. Or can you watch her while I get this." She would go and play. And I would notice that.

Mothers in heterosexual families often voice similar feelings. While the fathers do fun and interesting things with the children, the mothers feel stuck with the less pleasurable and less rewarding tasks (Coleman, 1991). The comother admitted that the birthmother sometimes felt that their division of work mirrored those of heterosexual couples.

Comother: I would think that Danielle would probably say that our relationship is more "heterosexual" in a lot of way because she sees me as, I guess, the "husband" and her as the "wife."

Interviewer: Do you see it that way too?

Comother: Sometimes I do but not to the extreme she does. I think the tendencies are there.

A "traditional" division of labor was always seen as undesirable. It implied power differences and exploitation of one partner by the other. The devalued social status of housework and childcare created a complex emotional dilemma for many couples. While

they acknowledged the importance of these tasks, they could not always escape their own internalized depreciation of the work. In this case, Danielle, the birthmother and full-time caretaker, relived the experience of her own mother.

What happens was that I started to feel like my mother who was very devalued in my family in a sense because she didn't have a job. And I started to feel like her in the sense that my dad would go to work all day and when he'd come home he didn't have to do anything. She worked all day too but then she worked all night. And I never really understood that until I had to do it. But the value of that was not really appreciated in my home. It was just expected. It just gets kind of under your skin a little bit – that idea.

However, the crucial difference between the birthmother and her own mother lay in their family arrangements. Danielle soon would resume part-time work prompting both partners to rearrange their work lives. Secondly, and even more importantly, once the comother would have the next child, she would be the one staying home full-time for at least a couple of months.

Yet, if the table were turned and the comother became a birthmother later on, it would support the notion of biological determinism in the division of work. The next couple I will discuss suggests that many of the problems and frustrations Danielle, the birthmother, faced were due to the fact that she was the full-time caregiver rather than the birthmother.

Virginia and Alexandra, the second couple, decided on a consecutive parental leave strategy so that their six-month-old son would have one full-time mother for as long as possible. As discussed above, the need for recuperation and the intensity of nursing prompted the birthmother to stay home for the first three months. Following the

birthmother's return to work, the comother took five months of parental leave to be with the baby. Both mothers were professionals and extremely committed to their work. At the same time, they felt strongly about being with their child full-time.

At the time of the interview, Alexandra, the comother, was the full-time caregiver and the birthmother was employed full-time. The comother spent 40 hours per week more on childcare than her partner. The birthmother in turn faced a 40 hour work week. According to their questionnaire answers, they spent equal amounts of time on housework. With respect to the division of specific tasks, the comother performed substantially more childcare and somewhat more of the housework.

Like Danielle, the birthmother in the first couple, Alexandra, the comother in this couple, indicated that she felt left with the bulk of housework.

But I feel like I really know what it means to be like a housewife now. I feel like I'm tidying up all the time. I resent the fact that just this morning after she had her coffee she put her mug down on the counter. And I was like, I said, "It's not helpful to me. The dishwasher is right there. Now I'm just gonna have to put it into the dishwasher." So, we have issues about that.

As in the case of the birthmother in the first couple, Alexandra did not see her role as that of the "housewife." In both instances, being home with the child all day and taking more responsibility for the house created a sense of dissatisfaction. Both mothers, one a birthmother the other a comother, struggled with the devalued status of domestic work. I would suggest they were so keenly aware of the socially unappreciated status of "housewife" because they had spent their adult lives as highly valued professionals. In addition, they themselves had internalized the cultural depreciation of housework.

Alexandra, the comother, also was frustrated with the level of responsibility for childcare. On a normal day, she spent all day with Langston, their six-months-old son. By the time the birthmother came home, the comother desperately needed a break from their son. However, she also acknowledged the birthmother's share in the work and her own desire to spend time with her partner and Langston.

We continue to share the responsibilities in the evening. But she has him a little bit more because she has more patience for him at that hour. But I don't bail out on childcare either – partly because she needs me and partly because I don't want to. As much as I don't want to have the full responsibility anymore, I still want to be involved with whatever is going on with him.

In this quotation, the comother voiced the sentiments of most of the participants in the study. While housework was predominantly seen as undesirable albeit necessary, childcare was largely viewed as pleasurable. The mothers enjoyed the close physical and emotional interaction with their babies. It strengthened and deepened their relationship with the child. Comothers, in particular, viewed early childcare as a means of establishing a close bond with the baby. Since comothers did not have the actual birthing experience and lacked the social and legal security birthmothers enjoyed, a strong connection with the child became even more important to them.

In this instance, Alexandra, the full-time mother, developed a close relationship with the baby staying home with the child all day. The intimate knowledge of every new step in the child's life and his daily routines often made it difficult for the comother to let her partner take over when she was home. The comother described her experience as follows:

It becomes a sort of control thing. If you're the one who has been taking care of him all day, you feel like you know him better and you know what you've done with him. So it's hard to be patient when the other parent comes home. I want to be saying all the time, "This is what he needs now." You know. He just needs to go to sleep and this is how you should get him to sleep.

When Virginia, the birthmother, was the full-time caregiver, the comother found it extremely challenging to take her partner's advice on childcare issues. As the comother, she felt less secure in her relationship with their son.

She used to do that to me. [Tell me how to deal with the baby.] And I would get really mad at that. Because it reminded me that I didn't know that. And also because she is the biological parent – that was harder for me. She is much more good-natured about it. And maybe there is a tie that is indisputable between her and him. So it's a little easier for her to just take my recommendations about what he needs.

However, the birthmother's experience paralleled that of the comother in many ways. The birthmother's role as "mother" was socially uncontested because of her biological connection to him. Yet, once she returned to full-time employment, she felt painfully excluded from the intimacy that had developed between Alexandra and Langston. The comother explained:

It's an issue, I think, somewhat for Virginia [the birthmother] to feel like [he is more oriented toward me]. She said before, half-jokingly, but not really jokingly, you know, that he responds to me more. That when he is upset that I can calm him easier than she can. And she says, "Do you think he knows that I'm not here?" In fact, the day she went back to work, "Did he miss me?" Oh yeah, I could tell that. I finally figured out that I just should say yes... she always says, "He doesn't smile at me as much as he smiles at you." There's definitely – she feels like I know him more or he knows me more.

Being the biological mother of a baby did not automatically create a close tie with the child. At an early age, routine interactions with the child were necessary for building a

relationship between mother and child.

Angela and Wendy, the *third couple*, had yet another arrangement. Angela, the birthmother, was on maternity leave while Wendy, the comother, was in graduate school. The comother's schedule allowed her to stay home most of the week and fully share the responsibility for taking care of their eight-month-old daughter. In addition to sharing the childcare equally, the comother reported spending five hours more on housework than her partner. With respect to specific chores, the comother performed significantly more childcare and about the same amount of housework as her partner. Like Virginia and Alexandra, the second couple, they did not have a housekeeper or use paid childcare on a regular basis.

Angela and Wendy only agreed on the division of 50% of specific tasks. The interviews supported the impression that they assessed their mutual childcare and housework contributions quite differently. The birthmother thought that the division of work was basically fair while the comother was less satisfied with the arrangement – especially with respect to childcare.

Comother: Well, in the baby chores, I try to do more when I'm home because now I'm gone. Monday and Tuesday I'm gone. I'm at school. So I try to do almost everything on Wednesday because I know what it feels like to have the baby by yourself for the entire day... Yeah, when I'm home I do more with the baby, I think... It's not exactly fair when you consider that I'm a full-time student and Angela is taking one course at the Associates level.

However, compared to the first six months with the baby, the division of labor had become more equal. For various reasons, the birthmother had been extremely depressed the first months after the birth. Because of her lack of energy and unhappiness, the

comother felt that she had to take care of everybody and everything. Since she was in graduate school and not otherwise employed, the comother was able to arrange her schedule around the needs of the birthmother and their baby.

But when Angela was like always depressed, I felt like I had to – that I had to do everything. I had to be responsible for everything. I had to try to keep Angela happy. And when I wanted to be working, I had to instead, you know, see if Angela wanted to watch TV with me or something. But I would rather that she just took care of the baby and I had time to look at my books. But, you know, once I realized that that was happening, I said, "Hey, you might as well go back to work. [laughing] And I'll find a way to take care of the baby and take less courses if I have to."

When the birthmother's condition improved, they settled into a more balanced routine. The comother did all the cooking. But they started to share the shopping. She continued to be responsible for all the paperwork and the finances. On the other hand, the birthmother was doing the bulk of the cleaning. However, the comother was still unhappy about Angela's decision to fire the housekeeper.

I didn't want her to do that. And then, you know, [Angela] didn't really take up the slack like she said she was going to. And I certainly don't want to clean. [laughing] I mean, I rather just pay a cleaning lady.

In addition, Angela and Wendy differed in opinion on many childrearing issues. They also disagreed about their own involvement in certain childcare tasks. For example, the comother was convinced that she performed most of the night time responsibilities.

I think either I wake up easier [than] Angela or, I don't know. [laughing] Yeah, I get up to [tend to the baby when she is crying at night] almost exclusively.

Angela portrayed their division of work as more equal.

Usually, since Wendy is closer to the baby, she'll get up. And she'll bring

the baby into bed. And then she'll feed her. And usually I put her back after that. So it balances out, "You brought her, so I bring her back."

Despite the divergent interpretations of their division of housework and childcare, the overall impression remained that they shared housework and childcare.

This couple's division of labor differed significantly from those of the first two couples. The full-time mothers in the first two cases, one a birthmother the other a comother, performed more of the housework and childcare than their partners. Contrary to the assumptions of neoclassical economic theory, the full-time mother and birthmother in this couple did less than her partner, a full-time student.

The three couples discussed above, exemplified how differently families can respond to the needs of a family with an infant. One family chose a "traditional" division of work, while the two other couples had elected non-traditional approaches. All three couples faced different structural and personal constraints within which they made decisions about staying with the children and continuing or discontinuing their work.

Not all couples experienced the same level of conflict over the division of family work as did these families. For some full-time caregivers, doing more of the housework was part of the trade-off. Generally, however, having a young child was associated with more conflict. Once the children were older parents' work requirements decreased and more stable patterns in the division of labor emerged.

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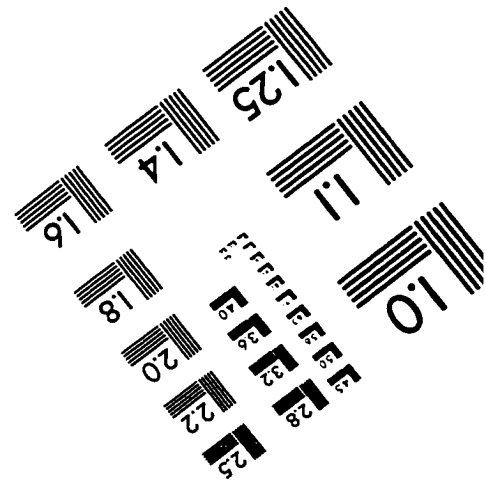
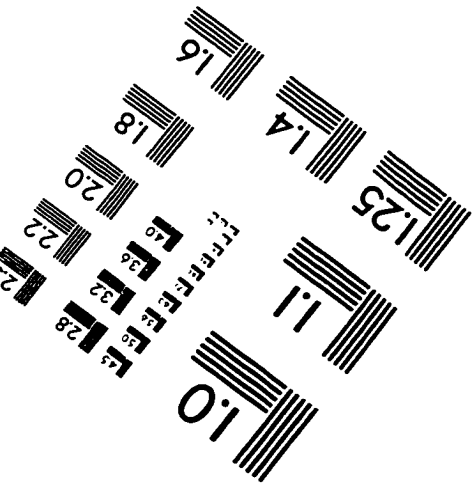
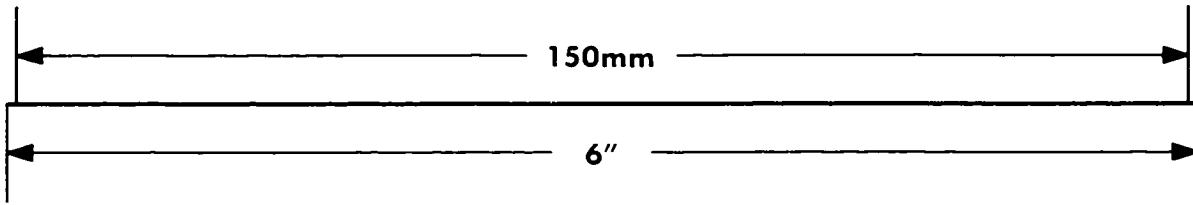
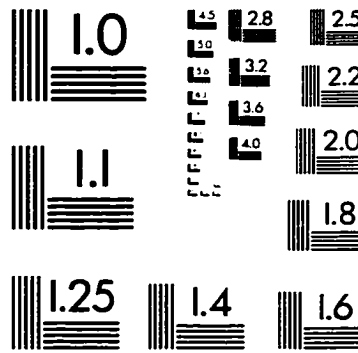
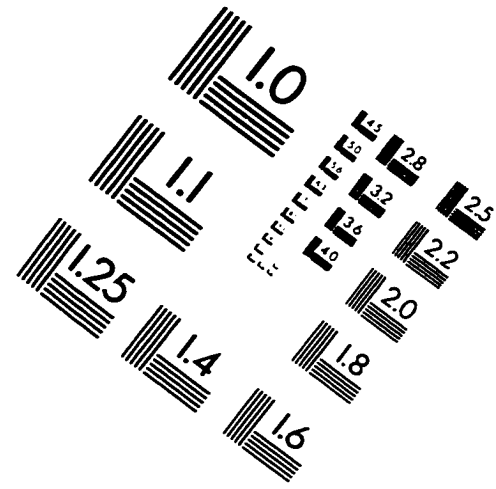
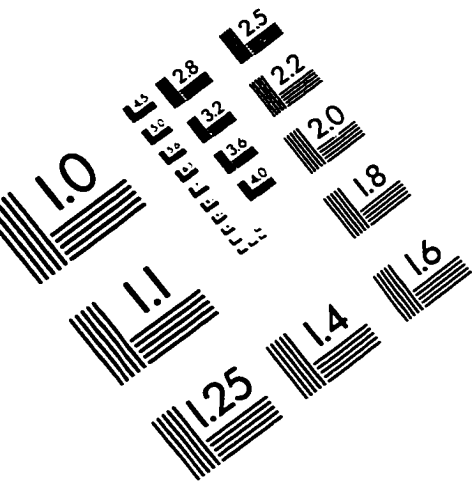
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