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The emergence of lesbian kinship patterns in the late twentieth century US: A case study in Brooklyn, New York

Riley, Claire Veronica, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1992

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**The Emergence of Lesbian Kinship Patterns
in the Late Twentieth Century U.S.:
A Case Study in Brooklyn, N.Y.**

by

Claire Riley

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

1992

• 1992

CLAIRE RILEY

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

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Abstract

**The Emergence of Lesbian Kinship Patterns
in the Late Twentieth Century U.S.:
A Case Study in Brooklyn, N.Y.**

by

Claire Riley

Advisor: Professor June Nash

This dissertation documents the emergence of kinship patterns among lesbians in and around the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. These patterns include: lesbian spouse relationships; new female and male parental roles; the elimination of the social role of the biological father in those cases where children are conceived through anonymous donor insemination; kinship networks to support these patterns; and a new definition of family based upon the existence of an emotionally intimate relationship between individuals defined as family.

The dissertation suggests that lesbians are a part of a process of social change in American society in general, which includes: the growing economic independence of women; changes in parenting, especially those brought about by the new reproductive technologies; a growing urban lesbian and gay population; and the questioning of the meaning of "family" in America, particularly the shift away from an emphasis on duty, to an emphasis on meeting emotional needs within marriage and family relationships.

The dissertation also suggests that feminist theory in anthropology has been unable to analyze this new definition of family based upon emotional intimacy because feminist anthropologists have not incorporated the organization of emotional life into their theoretical frameworks on kinship and gender. It is suggested that such a perspective be included within feminist analyses of kinship and gender.

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CHAPTER ONE:
CONCEPTUALIZING THE PROBLEM

Introduction

I attended a party at which a group of women discussed the trials and tribulations of motherhood. Judith, the mother of a twenty-month-old, began with sleep problems: "We finally got her to sleep through the night, so now we're starting to get some sleep. But we still have no privacy. We never have sex anymore; we actually had to go to a hotel once!" Sharon, the mother of a nine month old, responded: "Sex, what's sex? If we hold hands now, that's enough. I'm always so tired. The baby's up by six in the morning, so I fall asleep by 9:30 at night." Jeanne turned to Agnes, who was six months pregnant, said, "I hope we're not scaring you. We complain a lot, but, despite all the problems, when they give you a smile, it's all worth it!" Sharon then asked Agnes, "Have you two decided on a name yet?" "Not yet," Agnes replied, "we have some possibilities, but nothing definite."

Sounds like fairly typical mother talk, but, as the conversation continued, a difference emerged. Judith said to Agnes, "Well, once you and Phyllis decide what you're gonna call the baby, you can then decide what the baby's gonna call each of you." Agnes replied, "We were thinking of Mommy Agnes and Mommy Phyllis, but we're not sure. We have time though; the baby's not even here yet, and it will be a while before it's talking."

The difference between these women and other women chatting about motherhood is that these women chose to have children after

living as lesbians. Sharon and Jeanne are in their forties, have been living together for over twenty years, and are raising their daughter together. Agnes and Phyllis are in their thirties, have been living together for four years, and are now expecting their first child. Judith and her spouse Delia are in their thirties, have been together for three years, have one daughter, and would like to have another child.

On October 10, 1987, outside of the Internal Revenue Service building in Washington D.C., thousands of lesbians and gay men from around the country participated in a ceremony called "The Wedding." A Unitarian woman minister symbolically married the lesbian and gay couples in attendance, emphasizing the spiritual union in true love. The ceremony was both a celebration of lesbian and gay couple relationships, and a protest against the legal system's lack of recognition of those couple relationships. Many people in attendance held signs and wore buttons that read "Love Is What Makes A Family, Nothing Less, Nothing Else."

While I was sitting in a group of lesbians just before Christmas, one woman said: "I know now that I don't have to spend the holidays with my biological family, I have a choice. I can spend all or part of it with my real family." Who is her "real" family if not her biological family? Don't all Americans believe that biology is the basis of kinship? For this woman her circle of close friends and her lesbian spouse are the people who constitute her "real" family.

The above vignettes all exemplify that women who live as

lesbians are changing the kinship system by creating new kinds of relationships. By kinship I mean the kinds of relationships people create to organize their daily lives outside of productive activities, and the meanings they attach to those relationships. I use the phrase "living as a lesbian" to highlight my interest in how people live their daily lives, rather than their sexual desires, because the two do not always match. Some women may have sexual relationships with other women, identify themselves as lesbians, yet live in heterosexual marriages. Those women are not the focus of this study. My interest is to understand the relationships and their meanings of those women who choose to organize their daily lives around their erotic interests.

This dissertation is a study of kinship change among lesbians in and around the Park Slope neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York. Specifically, I will demonstrate that some lesbians are creating a new kinship pattern, which includes: lesbian spouse relationships; new female and male parental roles; the elimination of the social role of the biological father in those cases where children are conceived through anonymous donor insemination; kinship networks to support these patterns; and a new definition of family based upon the existence of an emotional intimate relationship.

While these patterns differ from the patterns of white middle class heterosexuals in regard to sex and gender, they are consistent with the emphasis on the couple relationship, romantic love, the importance of children, and familial love in the society in general. Moreover, lesbians have defined family in the context of

the redefinition of family in American society. Specifically, the lesbians I have worked with are a part of a process of kinship change in American society that includes a shift away from an emphasis on duty in marriage and family relationships to an emphasis on meeting emotional needs within marriage and family relationships. For these women, as well as other Americans, this process has involved defining family as those individuals with whom they have emotionally intimate relationships in addition to (or in some cases rather than) biological and affinal kin.

Finally, I will demonstrate that feminist theory in anthropology is not able to analyze this new definition of family based upon emotional intimacy because feminist scholars have not incorporated the organization of emotional life into the theoretical frameworks they use to analyze kinship and gender. I will suggest that we do so.

Before I discuss the data, I will outline the theoretical ideas with which I collected and analyzed my data, and upon which I build my arguments. Then I will discuss the theoretical contributions I believe this research will make.

Conceptualizing the Problem

As I began data analysis and writing, I discovered that the data I had collected did not fit into existing theories of kinship and family.¹ I decided, then, that the problem is not with my data

1. Since the definition of the word "family" is a central component of the dissertation, I do not use "family" as an analytic concept to guide my research, but only to make reference to my informants' meanings. However, in discussing

but with the theoretical models of kinship: they are heterosexually biased.

All social theory is bound by the folk models of the theorists, and, as Ardener (1972) pointed out in his work on women in conceptual models, researchers who use dominant folk models as analytic frameworks are generally unable to account for the experience of non-dominant groups. It is not surprising, then, that criticism of a theory often comes from the study of a group or groups for which that folk model has little or no analytic value. For example, scholars who have done research on women and research on African Americans have suggested that our theoretical models are biased by gender (Slocum 1975; Reiter 1975) and race (Stack 1974; Valentine 1978).

Morin (1977) suggests that psychological research on lesbians and gay men has suffered from heterosexual bias, that is, the assumption that heterosexuality is superior to and/or more natural than homosexuality. He then demonstrates how this bias formulates research questions on lesbians and gay men (such as causality and cure), as well as how research without heterosexual bias can pose different questions that yield different answers.

A number of anthropologists have suggested that the ethnographic record is heterosexually biased in that we have little data on homosexuals (Blackwood 1986; Creed 1984; Newton 1988a; Read 1980). In addition, with only recent exceptions (e.g. Weston

literature, I will use whatever terms the authors employ to discuss the phenomenon under study.

1988a, 1988b, 1990; Lewin 1988, 1990a, 1990b; Lewin and Lyons 1982; Herdt 1981; Riley 1988a, 1988b, 1989, 1990), homosexuals have not been discussed in terms of kinship and family, and more importantly, kinship theorists have not incorporated data on homosexuals into their theoretical models. The result is that heterosexual bias distorts anthropological models of kinship.

Heterosexual bias in kinship theory is demonstrated not only by the absence of data on homosexual relationships in theoretical models, but also because theorists have built into those theoretical frameworks the assumption that heterosexuality is at the base of any kinship system. While not specifically discussing heterosexual bias in kinship theory, anthropologists have critically reviewed theories of kinship and family within the past twenty-five years. In particular, David Schneider has suggested that kinship theorists confuse their folk models with their theoretical models in that they assume that kinship is based upon biological relationships.

My difficulty with the study of kinship can be summed up simply: the assumptions and presuppositions which the anthropologist brings to the process of understanding are imposed on the situation blindly and with unflagging loyalty to those assumptions and little flexible appreciation of how the other culture is constituted, and with a rigid refusal to attempt to understand what may be going on between them. The anthropologist has, as part of his culture, his conceptual scheme, a way of ordering his experience of another culture, a way of constructing the reality he believes he is encountering, and he is not easily shaken loose from that secure, reassuring, comfortable, well-worn common language to which he is committed and

shares with his community of anthropologists, and which helps to define his place in that community. The anthropologist lives by his culture just as everyone else does, and it is very unnerving to distance oneself from one's culture and community, for this leaves one without a firm anchor in some secure way of occupying a known world and ways of viewing that world (196-197).

Specifically, Schneider suggests that theorists' fundamental assumption in the study of kinship has been "Blood Is Thicker Than Water" (165), i.e. that

kinship consists in bonds on which kinsmen can depend and which are compelling and stronger than, and take priority over, other kinds of bonds. These bonds are in principle unquestioned and unquestionable. They are *states of being* not of *doing* or *performance* - that is, the grounds for the bonds "exist" or they do not, the bond of kinship "is" or "is not," it is not contingent or conditional, and performance is presumed to follow automatically if the bond "exists." All bonds are of essentially the same kind. *All of this is because kinship is a strong solidary bond* that is largely innate, a quality of human nature, biologically determined, however much social or cultural overlay may also be present (165-166; emphasis in original).

Yanagisako also argues for a symbolic analysis of kinship (1975; 1978; 1985), and with Collier comes close to suggesting heterosexual bias in kinship. They suggest that kinship theorists

assume that of all the activities in which people participate, the ones that create human offspring are heterosexual intercourse, pregnancy, and parturition. Together these constitute the biological process upon which we presume culture builds such social relationships as marriage, filiation, and coparenthood (30).

What they do not say is that rooting kinship in sexual reproduction

excludes from kinship structures people who do not participate in heterosexual relationships, i.e., people who engage exclusively (or predominantly) in homosexual relationships. If kinship is based on blood and affinity, then heterosexual intercourse produces children and therefore biological relationships, and heterosexual marriage produces in-laws, and therefore affinity.

Sex and Gender, Kinship and Family

Researchers using both feminist approaches and/or symbolic approaches to kinship have critiqued the biological/reproductive² approach. This research project has been built upon that critique. In particular, through research, analysis and writing, I have assumed three ideas: that kinship is a system of symbols and meanings (Schneider 1968); that sex and gender are not biologically determined but socially constructed (Rubin 1975; Yanagisako and Collier 1987); and that the nuclear family is not a universal social form (Collier, Yanagisako and Rosaldo 1982; Rapp 1987a). I will discuss these three ideas as they relate to this research.

Kinship as a System of Symbols and Meanings - David Schneider (1968, 1984, etc.) has consistently argued for a symbolic analysis of kinship. He argues (1968) that the core of a kinship system is the cultural level, i.e., its symbolic meaning. He defines cultures as a "system of symbols and meanings, which, while they enter

2. I use the term biological/reproductive to describe this model rather than procreative or biological or sexual reproduction because it highlights the previous emphasis on both biological relationships and sexual reproduction in the study of kinship.

into and form an integral part of action processes, are nonetheless analytically separable from action and can be studied in isolation from it" (with Smith 1973:4). For Schneider, a cultural analysis of kinship is an investigation of the definitive units and rules of a kinship system.

Schneider's framework frees us of the biological and reproduction constraints and hence the heterosexual bias of previous kinship theory that excludes an investigation of lesbian relationships within kinship studies. The idea that kinship is a system of symbols and meanings allows us to ask: What kinds of relationships do lesbians create and what do they mean? What symbols do they use to portray these meanings? However, despite the freedom from the biological/reproductive model, I suggest that his work suffers from heterosexual bias.

From his research on American kinship he suggests that the husband-wife and parent-child relationships are the definitive units in American kinship, because these are the biological and affinal relationships that define relatives. He also suggests that coitus is the central symbol of American kinship. Moreover, he suggests that women are defined as unequal to men (with Smith, 1973), and that coitus between husband and wife is the only legitimate form of sexuality (1968:108). He allows for variation on the behavioral level, but maintains that on the symbolic level, these features are central and unchanging through time and different groups of Americans.

I have yet to find a lesbian for whom heterosexual inter-

course is particularly meaningful in her life, let alone for whom I would say it is a central symbol in her kinship ideology. Neither have I found lesbians who believe that women are unequal to men (in some cases quite the contrary), nor that coitus between husband and wife is the only legitimate form of sexuality. If all Americans believe the ideas Schneider suggests, then how do we account for lesbians who do not believe these ideas?

My training as a feminist scholar leads me to the conclusion that there is a problem, not with my informants and their life experiences, but with the models used to analyze American kinship. I am suggesting that Schneider's work suffers from heterosexual bias, i.e., upon close examination, it is clear that he, too, fails to separate his conceptual model from the dominant folk model of American society.

In ending their essay on conceptual problems in models of gender and kinship, Yanagisako and Collier (1987) state:

We know that we, too, can never be free
from the folk models of our own culture,
and that in questioning some folk concepts
we privilege others. (50)

Schneider's work had consistently questioned the biological basis of kinship, but, by not questioning the assumption of heterosexuality, we can only assume that he agrees with it. At the time he conducted his research (the early 1960s) many people viewed lesbians as outside of the American kinship system. Like all kinship theorists of his time, Schneider does not even discuss whether he agrees or disagrees with this assumption.

While he does not explicitly reveal the assumptions that

guide his research, through his choice of informants, he implicitly reveals his ideas of which Americans constitute the American kinship system, and implicitly, which do not. Schneider's main informants were 102 white middle class heterosexually married people living in and around Chicago, 47 husbands and 55 wives. This suggests that his work suffers from class, ethnic, and heterosexual biases. Schneider acknowledges the first two biases (1980, and with Smith 1973), yet nowhere does he or anyone suggest that his work suffers from heterosexual bias. By not including lesbians in his research, I can only conclude that Schneider agrees with the assumption that lesbians are outside of the kinship system.

In the legal sense Schneider is right, i.e., the legal definition of kinship and family in the United States does not define lesbian relationships as being part of the kinship system, and, in a state society, the dominant folk model is institutionalized within the legal system. Here the distinction between social structure and social organization is useful. Firth (1951) notes that social structure refers to the way a social system is supposed to operate, while social organization refers to the way in which it actually operates.

Lesbian relationships are not part of the social structure, i.e., they are not institutionalized within the American legal system. But this does not mean that they do not exist. Quite the contrary, lesbian relationships do exist in the actual operation of the social system; they are part of the American social organization. To eliminate from analyses relationships which are not in-

stitutionalized within a society is to adopt the dominant folk model of the society, and leave uninvestigated all of those relationships that exist outside of the social structure.

If the goal of a cultural analysis is to demonstrate that kinship is more than the sum of biological and affinal relations (i.e., the results of sexual reproduction), then looking at the symbolic level of kinship ties that are not based on biology or affinity, and where women conceive children outside of heterosexual relationships, would provide a compelling case study, and bring us to a greater understanding of the meaning of kinship in contemporary America.

What do lesbians think about kinship? How do they define a relative? What do they think of gender and sexuality? What, if anything, symbolizes lesbian kinship?

The implicit assumptions and the results of Schneider's research reflect commonly held beliefs about sexuality, gender and family at the time of his fieldwork, 1961-1963. Yet, many Americans have different behaviors and attitudes regarding gender roles, sexuality and family life in America reflecting the social change which has occurred since the time of his research. Schneider's framework is additionally problematic because it provides no method of understanding these changes in behavior and ideology that have been occurring in American society since the time of his work.

Yanagisako questions the utility of a scheme which analytically separates the cultural domain from its social context (1978).

The one-way flow from the symbolic down to the behavioral level, she suggests, obscures the dialectical relationship between meaning and action, and inhibits an understanding of how meanings change. "People do not adopt symbolic systems wholesale, but instead construct systems out of their own experience" (Yanagisako 1978:27).

Yanagisako (1975) also notes that many previous studies of kinship change have focused on the sociological level and just assumed ideational change to have been an accompanying phenomenon. She suggests that change in the symbolic level of kinship should be investigated along with change on the sociological level. This is difficult if one is doing an historical or retrospective study, particularly if the research population is not literate, as was the case for many of the older studies of kinship change (e.g., Eggan 1971). Many of the people who lived through the changes may no longer be living, which prevents researchers from asking them about their beliefs, and, if they have not left a written record, determining their beliefs can be extremely difficult or impossible.

I have been observing a kinship system in the process of change and have investigated both its structural and ideological levels. I have asked people how their ideas have changed, how and why they developed beliefs that run in contradiction to those of the larger society with which they were raised, as well as what life experiences helped them to shape their beliefs.

Sexuality and Gender are Socially Constructed - In one of the most widely referenced articles in feminist scholarship, Gayle

Rubin (1975) suggests that sex and gender are socially constructed and organized by a sex/gender system. This idea is useful for this research because it contradicts the American folk belief that heterosexuality and gender relations are rooted in nature, and therefore, enables researchers to separate reproduction from sex, gender, and kinship.

The most useful data that dispels American folk concepts of the "naturalness" of heterosexuality and gender roles, and thus the most useful for framing this research, come from studies of societies with institutionalized homosexuality and/or with gender roles that conflict with biological sex. These studies most clearly demonstrate that the lines of biological sex can be crossed and that people in some societies view homosexual relationships as part of their kinship systems.

In a review of anthropological research on homosexuality, Blackwood (1986) points out that earlier research on homosexuality was conducted by people who, like the psychologists of their time, defined heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as deviant. These beliefs, Blackwood suggests, are rooted in the idea that sexuality is an individual experience. In contrast, she suggests that homosexuality is socially constructed, based on "systems of gender, kinship and economy" (9). Researchers studying male homosexuality more recently assume, like Blackwood, that homosexual relations are shaped by the kinship system. For example, Adam (1986) suggests that "same-sex bonds typically conform to the same kinship codes that arrange other aspects of life" (Adam 1986:20).

In addition, Kelly (1976) demonstrates that among the Etoro, having homosexual relations with an older man is essential to the growth of a boy, and the choice of sex partners is dictated by kinship rules.

While noting that studies of homosexuality cross-culturally have focused on male homosexuality, from the data available, Blackwood suggests two major classifications in lesbian relationships: lesbians in non-class societies and lesbians in class societies. In non-class societies, several formal and informal sexual patterns occur. These include relationships in sex-segregated childhood and adolescent groups, and among adult women. For example, Azande women could, in the past, establish formal lesbian relationships (often with co-wives), that could be formalized through a ritual.

This bond secured the emotional and economic support of the partner, and may have served to widen the trade network of the woman and possibly enhance her position in the community (Blackwood 1986:11).

Despite the fact that individual women's husbands might feel threatened by these relationships, the people in these societies viewed these relationships as acceptable, and the husbands could not interfere in their wives relationships.

In class societies, however, people treat lesbian relationships differently.

In those with rigid hierarchical gender systems women's sexual activities are strictly confined. Formal lesbian patterns do not exist unless they maintain a status marginal to the dominant culture. (Blackwood 1986:12).

Clearly, American society falls into the latter category, and lesbian relationships "maintain a status marginal to the dominant culture," or, as I phrase it, exist outside of the social structure.

Earlier anthropologists (such as Schneider exemplified above) have interpreted "outside of the social structure" or "marginalized" to mean "does not exist" or "is not important," because the ethnographic record has little about the realities of lesbian lives. However, contemporary ethnographers have begun to document the communities these women have created (see for example, Kennedy and Davis 1986 and 1988; Newton 1988a and 1988b, Wolf 1980, Krieger 1982 and 1983; Lockhard 1986), and the relationships within them (see for example, Weston 1988; Lewin 1982 and 1988; Riley 1988a, 1988b and 1989), and this research builds upon and contributes to such documentation.

Studies of societies where people live in the social role of the opposite biological sex contradict the American folk belief that gender roles are rooted in biological sex. Blackwood (1984) demonstrates that among several Native American peoples, cross-gender females assume the clothing, activities and social roles of men, enter marriages with women with whom they have had sexual relationships and raise children -- all accepted practices within these societies (Blackwood 1984).

Similarly, within some African societies, such as the Nandi (Oboler 1980), and Southern Bantu (O'Brien 1977), an older woman can begin her own lineage by creating a structural marriage with a

younger woman. The older woman steps into the structural roles of "husband" and the members of her societies recognize her as such. The wife has sexual relations with a male lover to conceive, but the people in the society define the female husband as the "father" of the children. Thus, for these people, biological sex and social gender roles can be separated.

These studies demonstrate that biology does not create gender or sexuality. On the contrary, they support the notion of the social construction of sexuality and gender. In addition they demonstrate that the nuclear family is not universal, that heterosexuality is not universally the only accepted form of sexuality, and that some societies can and do separate the social role of father from the biological role of genitor.

Yanagisako and Collier (1987) suggest feminist theorists have not, in fact, demonstrated the social construction of gender because underlying their concept of gender is the assumption that gender roles are socially constructed out of the same biological difference, i.e., the different reproductive roles of women and men. They suggest that:

the next puzzle we must generate and then solve is the difference between men and women. Rather than taking for granted that "male" and "female" are two natural categories of human beings whose relations are everywhere structured by their difference, we ask whether this is indeed the case in each society that we study and, if so, what specific social and cultural processes cause men and women to appear different from each other. Although we do not deny that biological differences exist between men and women (just as they do among men and among women), our analytic strategy is

to question whether these differences are the universal basis for the cultural categories "male" and "female." In other words, we argue against the notion that cross-cultural variations in gender categories and inequalities are merely diverse elaborations and extensions of the same natural fact (1987:15; emphasis in original).

If the assumption of a feminist analysis is that gender is not rooted in different reproductive relationships, and a goal of a feminist kinship analysis is to understand how gender is constructed within human relations, then looking at single gender relations can provide a fruitful case study. What does kinship look like within single gender relationships? How are the relationships between women the same as between heterosexuals? How are they different? What causes the similarities and differences? What kinds of parental roles do they form? Are the women's roles similar or different? What causes the similarities and differences?

The Nuclear Family Is Not Universal - Malinowski (1913)

posited that the nuclear family is a universal family form with the primary function of nurturing children. Murdock (1949) later elaborated on this idea by saying that the nuclear family has four functions: economic, reproductive, sexual, and educational. This definition provided a model for many anthropologists doing research in the twentieth century. They went to the field assuming the existence of the nuclear family, rather than investigating whether or not it was a socially significant unit in that society. They asked questions about the nuclear family and therefore collected

information about that social form. They did not necessarily ask questions about other social forms, and, consequently, collected less information on social forms other than the nuclear family. Again, because western anthropologists see biological and social relationships as identical, they assigned social relationships to biological relationships whether or not they actually existed.

Murdock (1960) illustrates the commitment of anthropologists to the idea of the universality of the nuclear family. In reviewing family structure cross-culturally, Murdock (1960) states that "the nuclear family is a universal human social grouping" (1960:38). He deals with variation in family form by stating that the nuclear family exists in various forms:

Either as the sole prevailing form of the family or as the basic unit from which more complex familial forms are compounded, it exists as a distinct and strongly functional group in every known society (1960:38).

Spiro (1955) uses his research on the Israeli kibbutz to support Murdock's idea that the nuclear family is universal. He notes that the father, mother, and young children do not share a domicile, and the parents do not have primary responsibility for their children on the kibbutz. However, he suggests that the nuclear family is a psychologically and socially distinct group because it has a living area where its members can socialize separately, and the parents are involved in the care of all the children of the kibbutz. Therefore, the nuclear family does exist on the kibbutz, Spiro argues, albeit in a different form than the U.S.

Similarly, when discussing the American family system,

Parsons (1960) focuses on what remains the same among American families, rather than what has changed, and argues that the nuclear family is still a strong institution within American society. Rather than focusing on the lost functions of the family, Parson prefers to view the American family as more specialized, and therefore, more important than earlier when it had more functions. Thus ethnographers of the 1940s and 1950s seem to do whatever necessary to find the nuclear family, even where it did not have social or cultural significance.

There are always the biological relationships of a nuclear family, i.e., everyone has to have a mother who gave birth to her/him, and a father who contributed genetic material for conception, but these relationships are not universally socially recognized (as cross gender females and woman marriage demonstrate), and the nuclear family is not always a significant social unit. For example, the Zinacantecos of Mexico do not have a word for the nuclear family (Rosaldo, Yanagisako and Collier 1982), which suggests that the nuclear family is not a significant social form for these people.

Feminist researchers have questioned the universality of the nuclear family, suggesting that it is our western bias that has gotten in the way of our research (Rapp 1987) and that our models are biased by race, class and gender (Stack 1974; Rapp 1982; Yanagisako, Rosaldo, Collier 1982). In addition, as I discussed above, the focus on biological relationships and sexual reproduction assumes heterosexuality to be at the base of family structures.

It is not surprising, then, that kinship theorists see the nuclear family as the basic unit of kinship (e.g., Murdock).

Moreover, while they assumed that the nurturance of children is the primary function of the traditional family, kin theorists do not view people who raise children outside of nuclear families as families. For example, among my research participants are women who live together, and in addition to a sexual relationship, share domestic labor, support of their household and raising of their children -- all activities traditionally defined as functions that are fulfilled by the family. Yet traditional approaches to family studies would not define these women as constituting families because they are not heterosexual nuclear families.

For example, anthropologists who argue for a shift from family to household in the study of the domestic sphere, define household types by the *relationship of the residents*. Sanjek 1982, for instance, refers to households composed of people without biological or affinal ties (which could include lesbians) as "no family households." This typology reflects the biological and hence heterosexual assumption in domestic relations. While trying to overcome problems in the study of the domestic sphere, defining household types by biological relations of the residents still cannot further the investigation of lesbian relationships and their meanings.

Such an investigation necessitates reconceptualizing the domestic domain, which feminist scholars have begun. Rapp (1982) notes that when American researchers use the term "family," they

often mean "household," because in American society the two are ideally the same. She turns the tables. Rather than starting from the premise that families should live together and then looking for the nuclear family, she suggests that we shift our focus to the household and its functions. Under capitalism, Rapp notes, households are the places in which people pool their resources and turn these into the necessities of life, and the nuclear family is the ideal way in which people form households. This shift of focus to the household allows us to ask: What other ways are people recruited into households? What kinds of people live together and how do they define their relationships? Such questions allow us to study lesbian relationships under family/household research.

Yanagisako (1979) suggests that family is about more than biological reproduction. If this is the case, then studying adult relationships that have nothing to do with sex and reproduction (e.g. friendships that are defined as kinship ties), studying relations based on sex for pleasure not reproduction (lesbian couples), and studying reproductive relationships that are not based on sexual or biological relationships (lesbian parenting relationships), provide more compelling case studies on family in contemporary America.

Social Science Research on Lesbians

The research on lesbians in other social science disciplines has also shaped this dissertation. As with anthropology, how researchers perceive lesbians and gay men shapes how they formulate their research projects, i.e., what questions they ask, how they

ask them, and who they ask. Prior to the mid 1950s, psychologists saw homosexuals as pathological and/or criminal, and their research goals were to discover the cause or causes of homosexuality and ultimately its "cure." They assumed that the causes were the same for male and females, and primarily studied male homosexuals. As research subjects, they used patient and criminal populations (i.e., people either in their private practice or mental institutions), and people in prisons. They did not discuss the methodological implications of using primarily incarcerated persons as research subjects. This leaves the reader with the impression that the authors assumed the only difference between incarcerated and unincarcerated persons is that the people on the outside simply had not been captured yet!

In 1956 Evelyn Hooker published preliminary results of her study (and in 1957 a more complete picture), which questioned the position on homosexuality as a disease. By using unincarcerated homosexual males who lived normal, productive lives, she demonstrated that their performance on standard psychological tests was no different than unincarcerated heterosexual men. From this she suggested that homosexuality was not a disease but a different way of life.

Not surprisingly, Hooker's research was quite controversial. While some people greeted her findings enthusiastically, others strongly disagreed. For example, in *Homosexuality: Disease or Way of Life* Bergler (1956) argues that homosexuality is a disease:

Homosexuality is not the "way of life"
these sick people gratuitously assume it to

be, but a neurotic distortion of the total personality. It is granted that heterosexuality *per se* does not guarantee emotional health; there are innumerable neurotics among heterosexuals too. But there also exist healthy heterosexuals, and there are no healthy homosexuals (Bergler 1956: 151; quoted by Green, 1976:1).

Questioning the use of criminal and mentally ill people as research participants was a valid methodological criticism that most psychologists could not dismiss. Hooker's work encouraged comparisons of nonpatient homosexuals with nonpatient heterosexuals, and shifted the research questions away from finding a cure for homosexuality, to proving whether or not homosexuals were healthy (Kenyon 1968; Oberstone and Sukoneck 1976; Freedman 1975; Greene 1976). In 1975 the majority in the field of psychology agreed that homosexuals can be healthy, when the American Psychological Association removed homosexuality from its list of psychological disorders.

Deviance theory was the primary framework for analyzing homosexuality within sociology in the 1950s and 1960s. Those working with the framework had as their primary goal understanding the organization and groupings of deviants. The primary problem with the framework is that the researchers failed to realize that the term "deviant" is put upon the individuals from the outside dominant culture, and the individuals within those groups do not necessarily perceive themselves as deviant. There are at least three perspectives for those living in subcultures: the dominant group's perspective that the sub-group is deviant; the awareness of the members of the sub-group that they are perceived by the domin-

ant group as deviant; and the self perceptions of members within the sub-group, that they are normal.

For example, Harry and DeVall's research (1978) exemplifies the problems with using a deviance framework in studying lesbians and gay men. "Virtually all groups of persons engaged in disapproved activities elaborate justificatory rhetoric about their behavior. . . . Similarly, gays have elaborated many justifications of their behavior" (31). Clearly, they do not understand that gay men do not necessarily see themselves as deviant. They are viewing their research subjects from a position of members of the outside dominant group and assume the research participants share that perspective. Therefore, they understand the self perceptions of gay people as "justificatory rhetoric," and not an opposing identity.

A more useful and interesting question would be: How do people maintain healthy/positive self-images in light of the larger societies' definition of them as deviant? This question, and others like it, came later, as the researchers employing a deviance theoretical framework eventually came to understand the limitations of the approach. For example, Ponce (1978), a heterosexual researcher, found while doing participant observation in a gay organization, that people were trying to place her within what she came to call a "gay trajectory," i.e., *their own* perception of themselves.

The focus on lesbians and gay men in their own communities eventually lead to studies in identity and community. The

researchers conducting these studies began with the premise that the larger society viewed lesbians as deviant, but discovered how lesbians defined themselves within their own communities. These studies not only documented the self-identity of lesbians but also laid a foundation for a growing ethnography of lesbians in the U.S. This data base demonstrates that lesbians are creating communities around the U.S., removing themselves from the heterosexual marriage and family systems and creating new relationships around their sexual orientation (Ponse 1978; Moses 1978; Barnhardt 1975; Krieger 1982; Krieger 1983; Kennedy and Davis 1986, 1988; Newton 1988). This dissertation will build upon and contribute to that growing ethnography.

More recent research in psychology, as well as popular literature, assumes lesbians, like heterosexuals, can be emotionally adjusted individuals who are living an alternate lifestyle, and focuses on the particular problems that come from living as a lesbian (Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective 1987; Pies 1986; Clunis and Green 1988). These discussions provide data for my research. For example, Crawford's (1987) chapter discusses problems lesbians bring to a clinical setting when parenting. I see these problems (such as isolation, lack of boundaries, and lack of terminology) as symptoms of living a new kinship pattern that lacks social and legal recognition.

The most relevant research for this dissertation is Kathleen Weston's (1988; 1991) discussion of the meaning of kinship among lesbians and gay men in San Francisco. She demonstrates that her

research participants, like mine, choose who is in their families, i.e., they are creating a new definition of kinship based upon the behavior of individuals, rather than exclusively defining kinship as based upon a biological or affinal tie. We conducted fieldwork at approximately the same time and much of her data is very similar to my own. I believe the similarity demonstrates that we have been observing the same process of kinship change.

In this work I elaborate on her ideas about the meaning of kinship by discussing the basis of choice in kin relations (i.e., relations that involve meeting emotional intimacy needs) in its historical context. Moreover, I also discuss the kinship roles and patterns lesbians are creating, as well as the responses of the heterosexual population to those social constructs.

Sex, Gender, Family and Kinship in Historical Perspective

This research project builds upon and furthers the above outlined research. It assumes that lesbians are people who are living outside of the heterosexual family systems, and describes more fully the nature of their relationships. The dissertation has two other goals, one ethnographic and one theoretical. In addition to documenting lesbian relationships, I will demonstrate the importance of emotional intimacy in lesbian kin relationships throughout the chapters. I will suggest that not only are emotional needs becoming increasingly important in American family relations (as other scholars have demonstrated), but that my research participants are using emotional intimacy as a basis of creating a new definition of family.

On the theoretical level, I will demonstrate that feminist scholars have not incorporated the organization of emotional life into their theoretical frameworks of kinship and gender, and I will suggest that we do so.

To fully understand the ethnographic goals of documenting the existence of lesbian families and understanding their emerging definition of "family," it is necessary to place the present social context in historical perspective. In particular I will highlight the following social processes: the rift in the gender system that eliminated the interdependence of men and women, and specifically allowed for the economic independence of women; the growth of a concept of personal life separate from work life; the increasing importance of emotional intimacy in marriage and family relationships; the development of lesbian and gay male identities and communities in twentieth century America; and the technological and ideological separation of sexuality and reproduction.

Separating work from family life was a very slow process that eventually provided options for some women outside of marriage in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Ferguson notes:

However brutal its economic exploitation, nineteenth-century industrial capitalism did have one positive aspect for women in that it eventually weakened the patriarchal power of fathers and sons and, thus, the life choices of women increased (1981:167).

This independence was not an instantly effective because women's wages were lower than men's; however, eventually some women's work received enough of a wage to allow for economic independence. In

addition, capitalism spurred the growth of urban areas which gave women a place to which they could escape "the confines of rigidly traditional, patriarchal farm communities for an independent, if often impoverished, life in the cities" (Ferguson 1981: 167).

By the early part of the twentieth century the split between working class people's work (public) life and their home (private) life was such that their productive activities seemed marginal to their social lives. Rather than gaining their identity from their work, most working people gained their identity from their personal life (Zaretsky 1976). Moreover, studies in human sexuality by scientists such as Freud, Ellis, and Krafft-Ebbing, suggested that women had sexual drives as well as men, and the legalization of birth control, as well as its use by a growing number of middle class women, suggests that sexual satisfaction was becoming more significant in marriage (Mintz and Kellog 1988).

The development of the concept of a personal life and emphasis on sexuality, transformed the idea of marital love from duty to one's family to emotional and sexual intimacy between husband and wife in the early twentieth century. Social scientists of the time referred to this idea of marital love as the "Companionship Model" of marriage. Women were still responsible for marital love because they had the skills for developing and maintaining emotional intimacy, and were also primarily responsible for developing healthy personalities in their children. Men were responsible for financially supporting and providing social status for their families (Cancian 1987; Zaretsky 1976).

While acknowledging women's sexual drive, scientists studying human sexuality also began to define intense relationships among adult women as deviant, and used the terms "lesbian," "homosexual" and "sexual invert" to describe them (Weeks 1981; Klaitch 1974). Actual instances of women living outside of heterosexual marriages alone or with other women were rare due to women's economic dependence on men, but the use of these terms and the deviant status associated with them were common, and had the effect of diffusing the intensity of women's homosocial relations in the early part of the twentieth century (Sahli 1979).

Ferguson (1981) suggests that defining certain sexual relationships and activities as deviant and others as normal was useful in preserving male control in the family:

self-styled progressive thinkers and humanists of the 1920s and 1930s who developed the ideal of the sexually equal "companionate marriage" did so in order to protect their newly mystified form of the patriarchal family (in which the male is instrumental breadwinner and the female is the expressive, nurturant, but sexy mom-housewife) by protecting young people from the lesbian/homosexual threat (Ferguson 1981:169).

However, Ferguson (1981) also notes that identifying some relationships as either deviant or normal provided options for those dissatisfied with conventional forms of sexuality and family life.

While a small number of middle class women were able to support themselves economically in the early twentieth century, this was not the case for most working class women. With the passing of protective legislation, compulsory education and child labor laws,

it became increasingly difficult for working class women and their children to earn a wage outside of the home. A movement began for a "family wage," enabling one individual, the father, to support the entire family among the working and middle classes. The moral justification for the "family wage" used by social reformers and labor unions of the time was that the family should consist of a wage earning father, a home-making mother, and children (May 1982). Thus, the ideals of social thinkers in the professional class as well as the economic realities of the working class, helped to cement the nuclear family as the normative household type in the early twentieth century (Bridenthal 1982; Zaretsky 1982).

World War II brought tremendous change to the sex/gender system in American society, and consequently, Americans began to change the way they defined sex, marriage, and family. These changes laid the groundwork for the emergence of lesbian families. During the war there was a massive mobilization of people, as women and men left their homes for jobs in urban areas and for the military. Women in particular, both married and single, and in all classes, left male dominated households in never before realized numbers. Women's employment rose 57% during the war, as did their opportunities for nontraditional employment (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). The government needed women to fill male jobs in all parts of the economy, particularly in the war economy, and encouraged women to leave home and go to work. Many discovered for the first time that they could financially support themselves and live separately from men, i.e., they could have a life outside of marriage

(D'Emilio 1983; Kennedy and Davis 1989).

For some women, particularly those from small towns and rural areas, this time away from their families provided the opportunity to discover that they had sexual feelings for other women. For women who already knew that they were sexually attracted to women, the move away from families provided the first opportunity to meet others like themselves. In urban areas they found growing gay subcultures and social networks, and in the military they found a population of lesbians tolerated by the government in wartime, because they needed all the man and woman power they could get (D'Emilio 1983; Kennedy and Davis 1989). Berube suggests that World War II was crucial to developing a lesbian and gay movement:

World War II was as crucial to these women and men as the 1969 Stonewall Rebellion would be to a later generation; but its impact was lost in the tragedy of a world war with no gay movement or gay press to record its history (Berube 1983:89).

In addition, I suggest that the experience of economic independence combined with living outside of the traditional family was central in laying the ground work for lesbians to create a kinship pattern around their erotic lives. There could be no such thing as a lesbian kinship pattern without economic independence from men. Women could, and did, have sexual relationships with other women at other times in history (Smith-Rosenberg 1975; Faderman 1981); however, without economic independence they could not set up households, create spouse relationships nor raise children without men.

As the war ended, the government lead a campaign to pull the

sex/gender system back to its pre-war status. Newsreels, newspaper and magazine articles, and posters that once encouraged women to leave the home and get a job to support the war effort, now told women that leaving their jobs, getting married (or returning to their husbands) and raising a family were the patriotic things to do.³ The number of working women fell by four million between 1944 and 1946 (D'Emilio 1989). Those who wanted to remain were often fired and when they tried to find other jobs, were unable to get as good positions as they had during the war.⁴ Many women left their jobs to marry, whether by choice or not, as an unprecedented number of people lived the "American Dream" of a nuclear family with wage-earning father, home-making mother and children in the 1950s.

Post World War II Americans had an extreme commitment to the traditional family and split gender roles. There was a resurgence of anti-feminism and a revival of the nineteenth century theme of separate spheres.⁵ However, Cancian (1987) notes a difference between nineteenth and twentieth century concepts of separate spheres. In the Victorian separate spheres, women had a world of

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3. See Milkman 1984 and the documentary film "Rosie the Riveter" for examples.
 4. Some of Kennedy's research participants in Buffalo told her that they knew the wartime boom for women would end with the end of the war, so did not share this fate. Instead of getting a new job within the wartime economy, they held onto the same jobs they had before the war, earned seniority, and were not fired at the war's end (Elizabeth Kennedy, personal communication).
 5. Parsons and Bales (1955) transformed this folk model into a social science theoretical model for examining family relationships within American society.

other women and children; however, in the 1950s her husband was her sphere, and her life was focused on emotionally caring for him and maintaining an intimate relationship with him. Her husband was her specialization, and his specialization was earning a living. Thus while men were emotionally dependent on women due to their lack of expertise in emotional life, women were emotionally dependent on men because they focused their lives around their husbands, and because the husband-wife relationship was supposed to be the primary source of emotional intimacy and support. Despite the ideological commitment to the male dominated nuclear family with the wage-earning father and home-making mother, the number of women entering the labor force during the 1950s increased and continued to do so through the 1980s.

Due to the commitment to traditional family and gender roles within the population in general, some women who were living as lesbians during the war went back to their husbands or boyfriends when the war ended (Kennedy and Davis 1989). However, for those who chose to remain living as lesbians, the 1950s were a difficult yet germinal time. The government's tolerance of lesbians in the military that was useful during the war ended, as witch hunts took place in the military and government during the McCarthy era. In addition, popular literature added to Americans' fear of a homosexual menace, and a half dozen states passed "sexual psychopath" laws in the early 1950s (D'Emilio 1989).

D'Emilio (1989) suggests that due to the common experience of intense oppression, lesbians and gay men at this time created a

collective consciousness of oppression which laid the groundwork for a gay rights movement. As a result of this oppression, gay people began the first homophile groups, the Mattachine Society and the Daughters of Bilitis. Starting as local groups, these two spawned chapters throughout the nation in the decade to follow. In addition, the subcultures of gay people in urban areas grew tremendously after the war, and the gay bars that had always existed in urban areas flourished in the 1950s and 60s, despite the fact that they were illegal, operated by organized crime, and vulnerable to frequent police raids. These urban lesbian and gay populations, and the bars and social groups within them, created social spaces for lesbians and gay men (D'Emilio 1983; Kennedy and Davis 1988).

In June of 1969, during a routine raid in the Stonewall bar in New York City, the patrons fought back and started a riot that lasted three days (D'Emilio 1983). This event is accepted as the birth of what is now known as the modern Gay Rights Movement. Gay liberation groups quickly sprung up around the country and began putting forward the idea that homosexuality is another form of sexuality which people should be given the freedom to express. The gay liberation movement, which stressed freedom from the constraints of sexual mores and traditional gender roles, gave birth to the gay civil rights movement, whose members argue that lesbians and gay men are a social minority, discriminated against in a number of ways. They work to expose bias, pass legislation that would eliminate it and pursue precedent setting litigation that would challenge existing laws. Particularly important to this

research, they have fought for a what are called family issues, including parity in domestic partnerships and parental rights.

In addition to the economic changes among some Americans, the developments in reproductive technology since the 1950s (including the availability of birth control, abortion, prenatal screening, donor insemination, surrogate motherhood, and in vitro fertilization), have changed the way Americans experience reproduction. In particular, the widespread use of donor insemination has allowed lesbians to conceive without heterosexual relations. The availability of sperm banks provides lesbians with the choice of either eliminating the kinship role of "father" within their families through the use of an anonymous sperm donor, or redefining the kinship role of "father" by involving a man known to them.

During the 1970s and 80s the socio-economic changes that started during World War II continued, further shifting the sex/gender system and making the normative nuclear family a statistical minority. These changes included: a steady increase in the number of married women with children working outside of the home; a rising divorce rate; an increase in female headed households; an increase in single parents, especially mothers; an increase in the number of people living alone; and an increase in the number of people living in what the census calls "non-family" households, i.e., people not related by blood or marriage (Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Harding 1981; Thorne 1982).

Given their increasing economic independence, in the 1970s and 1980s women no longer needed to marry for the same economic and

social reasons that their mothers and grandmothers may have married. Women in the 1970s and 80s were financially better off when married, partly because men made more money than women, and partly because in the economy of the 1980s a household needed two incomes for its members to live comfortably. This was particularly true for working and lower class women, as most households at or below poverty level were female-headed (Bergmann 1986). However, unlike a century ago, it became possible for women to work and economically exist without a man in the 1970s and 80s, albeit at a lower standard of living.

Once women began to alter the gender interdependence by entering the paid labor force and taking on some of the responsibilities of the male role of wage-earner, many women expected that men should share some of the responsibilities of their role as home-maker and primary parent. This idea was supported by feminists who argued for the breakdown of traditional gender roles in the family and for equality in the marital relationship, including sharing housework and child care (Mainardi 1970; Syfers 1973, Benston 1969). In their study *American Couples* conducted in the late 1970s, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that sharing housework is indeed important to women, but not that important to men. Consequently, many American women work inside and outside of the home, which causes tensions, conflicts, and a "double day" for working women.

Moreover, the gender shift impacted on personal life and concepts of love. With less need for financial support, the signi-

ficance of marriage and family life continued to shift toward the formation of personal identity and achieving emotional and sexual intimacy (Zaretsky 1976; Rowbotham 1973). While people continued to define love as emotional and sexual intimacy and continued to have an idea of the self as an individual composed of a complex psychology and emotional life, many women did not want the primary responsibility of maintaining an intimate relationship, but wanted an exchange in emotional intimacy.

Cancian (1987) notes that in the 1970s the Companionship Model of marital relationships began to decline. Many people had replaced that model with a new definition of love and couple relationships based upon the new concept of self, including "intimate communication of needs and feelings, and on openly confronting problems," where "family and gender roles are flexible and are continually renegotiated," and men and women are equally responsible for maintaining the relationship (Cancian 1987:39).

This new ideal has not been without its problems. Cancian (1987) notes that men and women have different definitions of "love" and different styles of expressing it. Women define "love" as emotional intimacy, have been socialized to express "love" verbally and want to discuss their emotions. Men, on the other hand, define love in more practical, concrete terms, and have been socialized to show their love through performing practical tasks, sharing activities, spending time together, and through sexual relationships. Thus, Cancian notes, the shift toward emotional intimacy has actually been a shift toward the female definition of

love as "the" definition of love, and correspondingly, defining men as having difficulty with love because of their inadequacy with this type of emotional intimacy. The result has been conflicting expectations within marital relationships, as many men have difficulty with verbally expressing feelings, and women are unhappy due to the resulting lack of emotional intimacy.

Ross (1980) found this conflict in her analysis of couples' advice books of the 1970s. She notes that the emphasis on emotional and sexual intimacy in marriage brought new ideological burdens to the marital relationship in the 1970s. Because women were socialized to be more emotionally expressive than men, Ross continues, men did not expect to give or receive the same kind of emotional intimacy. These differing expectations created what Ross called a "crisis" in heterosexual couple relationships, in which women wanted and expected emotional intimacy and men did not.

Rubin's (1976) research with working class families, conducted in the early 1970s, also provides an example of the conflicting expectations in marriage. She notes that many of the women she interviewed were dissatisfied with their marital relationships, complaining of a lack of emotional intimacy and companionship. On the other hand, their husbands were disillusioned; because they were good providers, they perceived themselves as good husbands and did not know why their wives were complaining.

In the following chapters (Chapter Four in particular) I will demonstrate that the combination of women's growing economic independence, the increasing emphasis on emotional and sexual

intimacy in marriage, the emphasis on the breaking down of traditional gender roles, and the value on equality in relationships, have all encouraged women who have sexual feelings for other women, to choose other women as spouses. These women no longer need to marry a man for financial support and security. Moreover, many lesbians report that in addition to the sexual attraction, the stronger emotional ties they have with women, and the desire to be free from traditional gender roles, are also reasons they live as lesbians. Many say that they could not create the kind of emotionally supportive relationship with flexible gender roles (that Cancian describes as a new ideal of the 1970s) with a man. However, they have created such relationships with women. The above factors in combination with the experience of living in a different kinship pattern, I suggest, lead these women to redefine family based upon "love," i.e., an emotionally intimate relationship, rather than biology.

This is by no means to say that all Americans agree with the changes in definitions of love, family, and gender. On the contrary, in response to these changes, conservatives began a counter movement which they called the "profamily" movement, and they see feminists, lesbians, and gay men as their primary antagonists. They argue that the heterosexual nuclear family based upon duty is a natural social unit ordained by God, and that changes in gender roles and sexuality, and legalizing abortions and lesbian and gay relationships, go against God and nature (for example see Falwell 1980). They work to block any legislation that feminists and gay

rights activists propose to change sexuality and gender relations in America (Adams 1987). Moreover, they attribute many of the political, economic, and social problems in contemporary America to the "breakdown" of the family, and, consequently, to remedy these problems, Americans must "save the family" (Falwell 1980; Cohen and Katzenstein 1988).

We have, then, a social situation where change is occurring on both the individual and social levels; a growing number of individuals are rejecting the ideal of the heterosexual nuclear family within their lifetimes and creating new social patterns. In addition, they have formed social and political groups that work for the social and legal recognition and acceptance of their new social patterns. This dissertation attempts to document the social patterns, beliefs and life experiences of some lesbians in Brooklyn, New York who are rejecting the heterosexual nuclear family and creating new social forms.

Love and Commitment in Family Relations

While social scientists agree that there has been a shift from an emphasis on "duty" to an emphasis on "love" (i.e., emotional intimacy), in familial relationships among some Americans, there is disagreement as to the impact of this shift on family life in America. Some social scientists (most notably Lasch 1977 and 1978, and Bellah et al. 1985), view the growing emphasis on meeting the emotional needs of individuals in marriage and family life as incompatible with strong family ties.

For example, in his book *The Culture of Narcissism*, Lasch

(1978) describes Americans who are concerned with self development as motivated primarily or purely by self-interest, with little regard for the welfare of others. He attributes this attitude to the ethic of psychotherapy:

Even when therapists speak of the need for "meaning" and "love," they define love and meaning simply as the fulfillment of the patient's emotional requirements. It hardly occurs to them . . . to encourage the subject to subordinate his needs and interests to those of others, to someone or some cause or tradition outside of himself. "Love" as self-sacrifice or self-abasement, "meaning" as submission to a higher loyalty - these sublimations strike the therapeutic sensibility as intolerably oppressive, offensive to common sense and injurious to personal health and well-being. To liberate humanity from such outmoded ideas of love and duty has become the mission of the post-Freudian therapies and particularly of their converts and popularizers, for whom mental health means the overthrow of inhibitions and the immediate gratification of every impulse (Lasch 1978:13).

Similarly, Bellah et al. (1985) argue that the goal of self development among people who are involved in therapy, places individual needs above the needs of others, which is not conducive for maintaining relationships. If the needs of both parties are no longer met, they argue, the relationships in question will dissolve.

No binding obligations and no wider social understanding justify a relationship. It exists only as the expression of the choices of the free selves who make it up. And should it no longer meet their needs, it must end (Bellah et al. 1985:107).

Cancian (1987) disagrees with the perspective put forth by Lasch and Bellah et al. In her book *Love in America: Gender and*

Self-Development she argues that individual self development and the new definition of love based upon emotional intimacy do not necessarily work against social bonding. She notes that critics take a pessimistic view of therapy, self-development, and their impact on familial relationships, because they look only at an extreme version of the new type of relationship and ignore research on the compatibility of self-development and intimate relationships.

Other feminist scholars have a similar observation. They (Collier, Rosaldo, Lamphere 1982; Thorne 1982; Lindsey 1981) note that critics of family change tend to polarize "traditional" and "new" family by describing the traditional family in ideal terms (i.e., discussing the love and care that is *supposed* to occur within the family), as opposed to the reality of life in many American families (e.g., the existence of emotional, physical and sexual abuse). On the other hand they describe innovative family forms in their most extreme and problematic forms (i.e, as composed of individuals who are only motivated by self-interest).

For example, Lasch (1977) characterizes the traditional heterosexual nuclear family as a "haven in a heartless world," "a refuge from the cruel world of politics and work, an emotional sanctuary" (Lasch 1977 xviii). On the contrary, feminists (Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako; Thorne 1982; Hartmann 1987) suggest that the family has not necessarily been a haven for women and children, given the different experiences of women and men, the fact that women do the bulk of the emotional nurturing, and the

existence of domestic violence within the family. Lindsey suggests that:

The family may well have been - and may well still be - a "haven from the heartless world" for many men. But for women and children, it has always been the very center of the heartless world, from which no haven existed (Lindsey 1981:8; emphasis in the original).

On the other hand, Bellah et al. (1985) describe people who are "therapeutically inclined" as focused primarily on self-actualization, with little or no interest in the needs of others. They assume that self-development and commitment are mutually exclusive. "For such expressive selves, love means the full exchange of feelings between authentic selves, not enduring commitment resting on binding obligation" (Bellah et al 1985:102). They pay lip service to the fact that they are describing ideal relationships when they say that "most Americans are, in fact, caught between ideals of obligation and freedom" (102). However, the overwhelming tone of the book can be summarized by statements such as

therapeutic language with its stress on openness, self-development, and change, undermines a larger language of commitment (Bellah et al 1985:106).

Such polarizations of traditional and new family forms are not useful because they create stereotypes that obscure the reality of life in contemporary American families, rather than investigate and illuminate that reality.

Moreover, the perspective on psychotherapy and its relationship to family relationships shared by Lasch and Bellah et al (1985), distorts an understanding of family relationships in con-

temporary America. Bellah et al. state that one of the purposes of their book is to "understand the rise of the therapeutic as a major mode of thinking about the self and society" (Bellah et al 1985:112). They explain that they are interested in analyzing therapy as "a cultural phenomenon rather than as a clinical technique - as a way of thinking rather than as a way of curing psychic disorder" (Bellah et al 1985:112).

To begin with, Bellah et al. assume that therapy is by nature conformative, i.e., it helps people adjust to social relations, but does not challenge the organization of social relations. I disagree. I say therapy can be used to facilitate change, both individual change and kinship change. In fact, I have observed lesbians change their beliefs through psychotherapy with a clinician who has a lesbian feminist perspective. In the therapeutic process, the clinician tries to help her client bring to the forefront her unconscious beliefs about herself and the world, which dictate how she will behave and interpret the behavior of others. Once identified, the client and therapist can examine those beliefs and change those which she finds damaging and/or not useful in living as a lesbian.

In my opinion, the beliefs that people have about themselves are shaped by their social positions, i.e., race, class, gender, and sexual orientation. I am interested in gender roles because they are, in fact, gender differentiated kinship roles, and many beliefs women hold about themselves are rules about proper behavior for their gender based kinship roles. Therefore, as they begin to

live new kin roles, (e.g., lesbian spouse, second female parent), they need to redefine their rules about proper behavior. Lesbian feminist therapy is a part of the process of kinship change, i.e., a process in which women change their beliefs and values to go along with behaviors in their new kinship roles.⁶

There is a very high incidence of women involved in some form of therapy within the lesbian community in Park Slope, and a high number of lesbian, feminist and gay therapists in the community. There are a number of informal groups and formal organizations within the New York City area that provide training, support, and discussion for such therapists. I see this process as a major component of kinship change for lesbians.

Moreover, the criticism by Lasch and Bellah et al. that the focus on the individual's emotional needs creates self-interested narcissistic people does not look at the long term process of therapy and self-development. From my observation of my own therapy process and the processes of close friends, when a person begins therapy, keeping the focus on themselves and directly asking for what they want may be a new experience. This is particularly true for women who have been raised to think primarily of others, and to put the needs of others before their own. Initially they

6. For example, Crawford discusses the issues that a lesbian couple brings to a clinical setting when choosing to have children. I see these clinical issues which she addresses on the individual level (e.g. defining parent roles, lack of social recognition as a family, alienation, etc.) as the result of social change, i.e. kinship change. For a discussion of feminist therapy see Greenspan 1983. For discussions of lesbian feminist therapy see The Boston Lesbian Psychologies Collective ed. 1987.

may take it to an extreme and be demanding and self-centered. However, this is often one stage in the process of emotional change. For most of the people I know, the goal of therapy is to learn to get along well with people, not to be asocial. This includes learning to give and receive. Thus, these critics are just observing people in the early stages of a process of change.⁷

In her research, Cancian (1987) identifies two new "blueprints" of love based upon mutual nurturing, which she calls the Independence and the Interdependence models:

The new blueprints emphasize three sets of qualities that I label "self-fulfillment," "flexible roles," and "intimacy and open communication." First, in the new images of love, both partners are expected to develop a fulfilled and independent self, instead of sacrificing themselves for the other person. Second, family and gender roles are flexible and are continually renegotiated. Third, the relationship centers on intimate communication of needs and feelings, and on openly confronting problems. Self-development and love are integrated in these blueprints, and love is the responsibility of the man as well as the woman. The Independence and the Interdependence blueprints both emphasize these qualities; they differ on the issue of self-sufficiency and independence vs. mutual support and commitment. (Cancian 1987:39)

She demonstrates throughout her book that the Interdependence model of relationships is, indeed, conducive to strong enduring familial ties among married couples as well as friends and extended kin.

7. Of course certain individuals have self-centered personalities, regardless of whether they define family as based on "duty" or "love". My goal here is to demonstrate that commitment and obligation are not absent from those who define family as based upon "love".

I agree with Cancian that the focus on individual self development and meeting the emotional needs of individuals within family relationships are compatible with strong family bonds. In the chapters to follow I will demonstrate that my research participants have a definition of family based upon "love," i.e., emotional intimacy, and that they combine both individual self-interest with obligation toward others. Moreover, I will demonstrate that they take Cancian's perspective one step further. Not only do they define love as emotional intimacy, but they define as family those individuals with whom they have an emotionally intimate relationships, whether or not there is a biological or affinal tie between these individuals.

I will further demonstrate that lesbians are not the only people in American society who define family as such, and I will suggest that lesbians are among those at the forefront of the redefinition of family because this redefinition is based upon changes in gender relations. As discussed above, Cancian (1987) notes that the new definition of love as based upon emotional intimacy is really an adoption of the feminine definition of love. It has been difficult for men to adjust to this new type of love relationships; thus heterosexual relations have been strained. On the other hand it has been easier for women to adopt this type of relationship, and, as I will demonstrate, easiest for lesbian couples (which consist of two women), to create the type of relationship Cancian describes.

Feminist Kinship Theory and The Organization of Emotional Life

As I will demonstrate through the dissertation, in the course of my research I collected a good deal of information about my research participants' emotional relationships and exchange of nurturance, i.e., the relationships these women create to meet their own emotional needs and the needs of others. To summarize, it is very important to the women I worked with to have an emotionally close relationship with at least one person, although usually more than one. These persons may include a spouse, intimate friends, siblings, and children. The relationships consist of an exchange of emotional nurturance on a regular basis that provides support for life's problems, as well as a sense of emotional security from the bonds created.⁸ The women place a high premium on nurturing behavior and these nurturing relationships. The existence of a mutually nurturing relationship is the primary criterion for defining a person as a family member according to their new definition of family, and they prioritize relationships in their lives based upon the strength of the emotional attachment they have with each individual.

In analyzing these data I asked myself: where do my data on my research participants' emotional lives (that is their desire to nurture and be nurtured) fit into feminist theory in anthropology?

8. Relationships with children are not perceived as an exchange of nurturance, but, rather, as the parent nurturing the child. However, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Five, the women cite the uniqueness and importance of the emotional bond with their children as one reason they choose to have children.

I could not immediately answer that question. This was upsetting to me because, like most people writing a dissertation, I wanted to make an earth-shattering theoretical statement. Instead, I set the data aside for a while. Then I remembered that a major tenet of feminist theory as I understand it is that if a theoretical framework is unable to account for the experience of women, there is something wrong with the theoretical framework, and not the women. I decided, then, to rethink the feminist rethinking of family and kinship.

The critique of the feminist analysis of kinship within anthropology that I will present in the pages to follow, is grounded in the feminist assumption that "the personal is political," which emerged in the early years of the feminist movement. According to androcentric definitions of politics (both within theoretical frameworks of social science and among political groups of American society), politics consists of those activities and relationships that occur within the public sphere. Personal activities and relationships (such as family relationships and sexual relationships), were, according to the androcentric tradition, outside of the political arena. For example, Rowbotham (1973) notes that:

Men often speak with amusement about our preoccupation with the orgasm. They brandish it as a sign of our inability to understand the serious world of their politics (Rowbotham 1973:36).

In contrast, feminist social scientists and political activists have suggested that our personal lives are shaped by the

social, political, and economic organization of the society in which we live (Rowbotham 1973; essays in Koedt et al. eds. 1973), and have sought to reshape social science paradigms by including personal lives in their social, economic, and political analyses. This undertaking has been directed toward analyses of household labor (Benston 1969; Dalla Costa and James 1972; Fox 1980; Hartmann 1987; Malos 1980), sexuality (Rapp and Ross 1983; Snitow et al. eds. 1983; Vance ed. 1984)⁹, and the social construction of gender differences in personalities (Chodorow 1978; Gilligan 1982). In addition, feminist scholars have provided social, political, and theoretical analyses of their own emotional lives (Dimen 1986; Oakley 1984).

Despite the above-mentioned works, I will demonstrate below that anthropologists have not included an analysis of the organization of emotional life, i.e., have not incorporated the idea that the "personal is political," within their theoretical frameworks of kinship and gender. This is not to say that anthropologists studying kinship and gender have not mentioned emotional relationships in the context of women and kinship. On the contrary, many have. However, when they move to the level of theoretical analyses of gender and kinship, they do not include the organization of emotional life and its relation to gender organization in particular societies.

9. Of course feminists are not the only scholars who have provided social, political and economic analyses of sexuality within the last decade. See for example Foucault 1980; Weeks 1981; and the essays in Peiss and Simmons eds. 1989.

The feminist rethinking of family and kinship has been a critique of traditional androcentric anthropological theories, which assume, among other things, that one of the family's primary functions is to nurture children; that women's nurturing of children is an extension of their biological role in reproduction; and that women's role in the family, even in society, is unchanging and therefore does not require investigation (see for example Malinowski 1913; Murdock 1949; Evans-Pritchard 1965; Fox 1967). Androcentric kinship theorists further assume that societies are divided into two domains, the domestic and the public, and that the public is the male realm associated with power and production, while the domestic is the female realm associated with interpersonal relations (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Evans-Pritchard 1940). Consequently, an analysis of the political organization of a society would not include the analysis of the domestic sphere, and, correspondingly, an analysis of domestic relations would not include a discussion of political organization.

In the Introduction to their collection *Women, Culture and Society*, Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) argue against biological determinism for women's roles in society. Yet the three theoretical essays in the collection examine the social (Rosaldo), psychological (Chodorow), and symbolic (Ortner) consequences of women's role as mothers. Rosaldo (1974) accepts the idea of a universal division of social life into domestic and public spheres and suggests that women are universally subordinate to men because they participate only in the domestic sphere. Women, Rosaldo suggests,

are tied to the domestic sphere due to their social roles as primary child socializers. Thus, women's roles as mothers determine their subordination.

Chodorow (1974) also accepts the domestic public dichotomy and examines its psychological aspects. She argues that due to women's universal role as primary caretakers, young girls identify with their mothers and not with their fathers. Girls observe the gender inequality in their families and internalize the inequality as low self esteem. Ortner (1974) looks at the symbolic aspects of women's role as mothers. She suggests that all societies maintain a universal symbolic distinction between culture and nature, with culture the more valued aspect of the symbolic order. Because of women's biological, social, and psychological roles in reproduction, women are symbolically defined as closer to nature, and, hence devalued.

Since the publication of *Woman, Culture and Society*, a number of feminist scholars have argued against the universal subordination of women. They have suggested that, where it exists, the subordination of women is the result of pristine state formation (Leacock 1972 and 1978; Nash 1978; Silverblatt 1978; Gailey 1987) or the impact of western contact through colonization and/or economic dependency (Etienne and Leacock eds. 1981; Nash 1980). They further suggest that women's lives are about more than their biological, social, and psychological roles in reproduction, and that theorists' conceptualizations of women and the family have masked women's other activities (Slocum 1975; Reiter 1975a). Scholars

have demonstrated that motherhood and productive activities are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, women do participate in production as well as reproduction.

For example, Slocum (1975) points to the bias in questions used by archaeologists and physical anthropologists in discussing women's role in evolution and suggests that women were central in evolution because of their productive role in gathering as well as their role in socializing children (especially in teaching language to children). Moreover, Draper (1975) demonstrates that among contemporary gathering/hunting peoples, women's gathering activities provide 60-80% of subsistence. Further, in the traditional horticultural societies of the New Guinea Highlands, women do the bulk of the productive activities of gardening and pig-raising (Strathern 1972).

As with political status, some feminist anthropologists argue that women's productive activities have been altered by contact with western societies through colonization (Etienne 1980) and/or economic development and dependency. Nash (1980) notes that in Latin America, most of women's productive activities occur outside of the market. Because they focus on market activities, economists studying production do not readily see women's productive activities. Moreover, some of women's productive activities have been eliminated through competition with factory made goods.

Thus feminist scholars studying women in political and economic organization have demonstrated that women's roles in biological and social reproduction are not in conflict with political

and economic activity. Indeed, women in many traditional societies operate in both the domestic and public spheres.

While some scholars focused on women in the public sphere, others focused on reconceptualizing the domestic sphere. Two related ideas emerged out of this research that provide the foundation for the ideas I wish to present: 1) the domestic and public spheres are not separate but related; and 2) within capitalism, the reproductive activities that occur within the domestic sphere support the public sphere.

Reiter (1975b) suggests that the division of social reality into public and private spheres developed during state formation, with the most radical division coming with the development of industrial capitalism. In 1979 she further suggested that the domestic/public dichotomy is not a social reality but an ideological construct of capitalism (to which Rosaldo 1980 ultimately agreed). Once scholars rejected the ideas that the two spheres are separate and gender segregated, they then asked: What is the relationship between the domestic and public spheres? Feminist scholars then began to re-examine the domestic domain in terms of its relationship to the political and economic spheres.

It is my impression that feminist anthropologists studying kinship have not examined emotional life within the context of gender and kinship studies as a reaction against the androcentric perspective which viewed women only as nurturing mothers and not as social actors, i.e., in attempting to correct male bias they have thrown out the baby with the bath water.

The work of Sylvia Yanagisako illustrates this point. In her 1979 review essay she points to the limitations of Malinowski's functionalism in viewing families as functioning to meet emotional and biological needs, and suggests that we expand our analyses of the domestic domain by viewing families and households in their larger social and political contexts. Yet in the attempt to move away from Malinowski's focus on functionalism and toward households in their larger contexts, Yanagisako has ignored the issue of the organization of emotional life altogether. In her essay on women's kin networks (1977), she provides descriptions of women's inter-household relationships, much of which is very similar to the data I have compiled on my research participants, e.g. the women frequently call each other on the phone and visit for no ostensible reason other than to maintain their connection. However, when she moves her discussion to the theoretical analysis, the women and their emotional relationships disappear. She concludes that women's inter-household networks operate to symbolically ease the tensions between the ideology of household autonomy and the reality of inter-household dependence.

After reading that essay, I ask: Do the women Yanagisako worked with get something from one another that has nothing to do with easing the symbolic tensions between the ideology of household autonomy and the reality of inter-household dependence? Do they get something from their relationships with each other that they do not get from their husbands? If so what is it? What significance (if any) does it have to feminist kinship theory?

Other scholars similarly analyze the economic or political aspects of women's networks, yet do not analyze the emotional aspects (although they may mention the emotional components). For example, Safa (1980) demonstrates that the women in the Puerto Rican shantytown where she worked have strong ties with kinwomen and neighbor women that have important economic aspects. They have developed mutual aid networks, in which they borrow goods and services from one another and share child care. She suggests that they have strong emotional attachments (particularly in discussing how women will often return to their mothers' homes to have their children); however, the primary focus of her essay is to demonstrate the possibility of class consciousness-raising among these women based on this solidarity. I ask: What are they getting emotionally from these relationships?

Similarly, Stack (1974) documents women's inter-household networks. Her research was conducted to challenge the public and social science stereotype of poor urban African-American families as disorganized. In contrast, she demonstrates that, as a response to the poverty in which they live, her research participants have a different organization than the male dominant nuclear family of the white middle class, i.e., they form domestic networks of mutually supporting kin. She documents that women's greater access to resources puts them at the center of these networks. She discusses adults nurturing children, mentions the strong emotional bonds between the women who support one another and suggests that women want emotional bonding with men but that such bonding is in contra-

diction to their obligations toward their kin networks. However, she does not focus on the emotional aspect of the relationships in her descriptions, nor does she discuss emotional relationships in her theoretical conclusions.

In addition to research that looks at women's inter-household networks, feminist scholarship that reconceptualizes domestic labor similarly does not include the organization of emotional life in its analyses. Peattie and Rein (1983) note that feminist rethinking of domestic labor has been written in opposition to conventional sociological analyses which looked at housework "as an aspect of social roles, rather than as a part of the occupational system" (Peattie and Rein 1983:43). Women's reward for their labor is not money, Peattie and Rein (1983) suggest, but personal and emotional gratification.

Marxist feminists, on the other hand, have looked at housework as unpaid labor, and have suggested that in a society that measures value through money and uses cash as a medium of exchange, women's unpaid household labor has been devalued and, consequently, women remain economically dependent on men (Benston 1969; Dalla Costa and James 1972; Fox 1980; Leacock 1981; Malos 1980). Despite the fact that it does not receive a wage, women's household and child care labor is economically and socially essential to the economy, feminists argue, because it reproduces the labor force both on a daily basis and generationally.

The Marxist perspective has been useful in demystifying housework and family relationships. It allows one to examine the

conflicts and power differentials within households (Hartmann 1987) as well as the economic aspects of what is purportedly a labor of love. However, Marxist analyses have been incomplete because they do not examine the organization of emotional life and thereby dismiss two important areas of investigation: Women's motivation for performing the work, and the gender imbalances in the organization of emotional life.

Rapp's 1982 article on the family in contemporary America illustrates these two problems. She suggests that scholars separate the ideology of family from the functions of households in the political economy. She treats women's desire for "love" as an ideology to recruit women into households for domestic labor, and simultaneously as a mask for their economic relationships to their husbands, i.e., the exchange of their domestic labor for access to their husbands' incomes. She ends that paper by stating that:

To liberate the notion of voluntary relations which the normative family is supposed to represent, we have to stop paying workers off in a coin called love (Rapp 1982:184).

Rapp's perspective is problematic. Assuming that women are duped into "love" so that men can exploit their household labor dismisses women's motivation for housework (the goal of giving and receiving "love"), as insignificant or unimportant.

Peattie and Rein (1983:51) suggest that the Marxist literature explains housework in terms of social functionalism, yet "has no way of describing or accounting for the motives of housewives except as a kind of epiphenomenal false consciousness." They sug-

gest that the "commitment to housework by women is established as the affirmation of commitment to other family members" (Peattie and Rein 1983:50). I agree. When women say they are working because they love their husbands and children and are looking for love in return, they are expressing a socially constructed emotional need. Dismissing women's motivation conflicts with a basic premise of feminist scholarship, that is to understand and document women's reality (Reiter 1975; Kelly-Godol 1975).

As feminist scholars we need to document women's motivations for their behaviors. We must investigate what they are looking for, examine it within its social context, and analyze the exchanges they participate in to get these needs met. What is it that they want? What are the social constructs that create these emotional needs? Do they get what they want? If so, from whom and at what price?

Moreover, dismissing "love" as an inappropriate payment for women's household labor (as Rapp suggests) cannot account for lesbians who, as I will demonstrate, also want love, yet are not in economic relationships in which one partner exploits the other's labor in exchange for "love." On the contrary, I will demonstrate in the chapters to follow, both members of the lesbian couple work outside the home and both financially contribute to the support of the household, and both perform household labor.

Furthermore, by dismissing women's nurturing activities, Marxists are leaving unexamined another arena in which women's labor is exploited. There is a great deal of work involved in

maintaining emotional intimacy and health, as well as time, energy and skill. This work includes not only child care but adult care as well, i.e., discussing problems, building self esteem, providing emotional support, sharing joy, etc.

Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) make reference to the labor involved in emotional nurturance in their comparisons of lesbian, gay male and heterosexual couples. They found that in order for a relationship between two people to last, one member of the couple must have the desire, as well as the skill, time and energy to maintain emotional intimacy in the relationship. They note that in heterosexual couples this person is generally the woman. They do not analyze the gender differences involved in the skill, time, and energy required to maintain relationships. I suggest we do so.

Moreover, this labor, like housework, is socially necessary but is invisible because it does not receive a wage. We need to develop a framework that would allow scholars to examine the gender differences in the labor process and relationships involved in the organization of emotional life.

Di Leonardo (1984 and 1987) moves closer to the type of analysis I am suggesting. She advances feminist kinship theory by identifying a third arena of labor and social relations that occurs outside of production in American society. In addition to wage labor and household labor, di Leonardo identifies what she calls "kin work" which she uses to refer to:

the conception, maintenance, and ritual celebration of cross-household kin ties, including visits, letters, telephone calls, presents, and cards to kin; the organiza-

tion of holiday gatherings; the creation and maintenance of quasi-kin; decisions to neglect or to intensify particular ties; the mental work of reflection about all these activities; and the creation and communication of altering images of family and kin vis-a-vis the images of others, both folk and mass media. Kin work is a key element that has been missing in the syntheses of the "household labor" and "domestic network" perspectives. In our emphasis on individual women's responsibilities within households and on the job, we reflect the common picture of households as nuclear units, tied perhaps to the larger social and economic system, but not to each other. We miss the point of telephone and soft drink advertising, of women's magazines' holiday issues, of commentators' confused nostalgia for the mythical American extended family: it is kinship contact across households, as much as women's work within them, that fulfills our cultural expectations of satisfying family life (di Leonardo 1987:442-443; emphasis in original).

She points to an arena of women's experience that has not been studied and provides us with a framework for studying it. She discusses both how it benefits women (they get power and enjoyment out of this work), and how it is exploitative (it is unpaid labor that men do not return in kind). She looks at what women do from their point of view and asks how it benefits women, as opposed to focusing only or primarily on how it impact on men and male domains.

Di Leonardo describes the emotional connections women have between households, and those relationships look much like the relationships between women that Yanagisako describes in her work (and that I will describe in the following chapters), i.e., the frequent phone calls and visits to keep people connected. However,

she does not explicitly examine the organization of emotional life, nor provide an analysis of the gender inequality within that organization. She suggests that emotional relationships occur within households, and, because she is examining inter-household activities, emotional relationships are not her focus.

Feminists and nonfeminists alike have long recognized that women in industrialized societies have done and continue to do the bulk of work involved in what Marxists call the reproduction of the labor force: the housework, child care, cooking, planning, and emotional support of adult men and children necessary to keep men healthy and emotionally stable enough to work, and to socialize children to grow up to be workers and the support staff of workers (di Leonardo 1984; 195; emphasis mine).

I am suggesting that we treat emotional relations much like we have treated housework and child care, i.e., as work, and explicitly include emotional lives in the analysis of kinship work. Such analyses will provide richer ethnographies and a greater understanding of gender relations in particular societies.

Outline of Chapters

In the next chapter I will discuss the methodological issues I faced while collecting and analyzing the data, and then describe the population and field site. Chapters Three through Six are the descriptive data chapters. In Chapter Three I describe the new definition of family based upon emotional intimacy, and discuss its development in its social and historical contexts. In Chapter Four I discuss actual relationships based on the two definitions of family my research participants hold. I demonstrate that they do,

indeed, have commitment and obligations within both type of relationships, as well as self-interest. I will also suggest that lesbian kinship networks function as a social environment in which women learn to live the new lesbian kinship patterns. In Chapter Five I suggest that the lesbian spouse is a new kinship role that emerged among some women with sexual attractions to other women, in the context of the increasing economic independence of women, the emphasis in marriage on emotional intimacy and the feminist emphasis on equality in marital relationships. In Chapter Six I discuss the parenting relationships lesbians create, and suggest that they have created these roles from combining already existing ideas about parenting in a new way. Finally, in Chapter Seven I discuss the ethnographic and theoretical conclusions this case study raises.

Before continuing, let me define certain words, phrases and terms I use in the following chapters. To begin with, because lesbians are creating new kinship roles, most of their relationships lack agreement on terms of reference and/or address, as well as analytic terms agreed upon by scholars. Thus, I have had to create my own analytic terms. I use the word spouse as an analytic term to discuss the relationships of co-residential lesbian couples because it is not gender defined (thereby facilitating comparisons with heterosexuals and gay men), and because my research participants do not use it for reference or address (thereby keeping my analytic concept and my research participants' folk concept distinct).

In discussing parental roles, I refer to the birth mother, or legally recognized adoptive parent as the "primary female parent." I use the term "second female parent" to describe the role of the parent who does not give birth, or, in the case of adoption, is not the legally recognized parent. I am not suggesting either as a term of reference or address. In fact, these terms are useful as analytical terms because no one uses them for either. I use the term "co-parent" to describe the relationship between the adults, both female and male, who are raising a child together.

I use the term "donor insemination" to refer to the process whereby a woman conceives a child without sexual relations with a man. The more common term is artificial insemination. However, artificial refers to the method of insemination, whereas donor refers to the relationships of the parties, i.e., that someone is donating sperm for conception, but not necessarily taking a social role in the child's life. Given that this is a kinship analysis, I prefer making reference to relationships.

Kinship theorists using the biological/reproductive model of kinship (e.g. Murdock 1949) divide family into two types, the family of origin (i.e., the family you are born into, consisting of parents and siblings), and the family of procreation (i.e., the family you create as an adult in which you procreate, consisting of your spouse and your children). As discussed in above, these two family types rest upon the assumption that kinship is based upon procreation and consists of people related by blood and marriage.

These two types do not provide a useful framework for

analyzing lesbian relationships. The distinction between the family one lived in as a child and the family one lives in as an adult is useful for this research, because it allows us to compare and contrast the family a woman creates in her adult life to the one in which her parents raised her. For discussing this social unit I retain the term "family of origin." However I use the term "family of creation" to refer to the relationships a woman creates in her adult life, rather than family of procreation. This broader term allows us to look at relationships that may involve procreation as well as those that may have nothing to do with it.

I use the word "dyke" at different points in the dissertation which requires some explanation. When the word is used by heterosexuals it generally is a pejorative term. However, in the late 1960s and early 1970s lesbians began to use it in a positive manner, symbolizing their rejection of the heterosexual view that their sexuality is deviant, as well as their creation of positive self images. It frequently has a humorous or ironic edge, as when I, and many lesbians, refer to Park Slope as Dyke Slope.

The term used to describe a woman's recognition and acceptance of her sexuality is called "coming out." On the other hand, lesbians use the phrase "in the closet" to refer to the time before a woman either recognizes her sexual preference or reveals it to others.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY AND FIELD SITE

Methodological Issues: A Lesbian Studying Lesbians

Lesbians are a minority group in the U.S. that in the past has been invisible to the larger heterosexual population (although that is in the process of changing), and whose social parameters have not been well understood by social science researchers. In addition, I am a member of that group. These facts cast a particular light on the methodological issues I encountered as an anthropologist doing participant observation fieldwork. In this chapter I will discuss these issues, which include point of view, role in the field, deciding what data to present to the public, defining the population, and selection of research participants. I will then describe the field site, followed by the kinds of data I collected and methods of collection.

Point of View - The influence of post-modernism in contemporary anthropology has raised discussion regarding the craft of writing ethnographies (Marcus and Fisher 1986 and Clifford and Marcus eds. 1986). Post modernism has not shaped my approach to ethnography, but rather the earlier critiques of anthropological method and theory which shaped post-modernism have shaped my research and writing, i.e., feminist criticism and native criticism.¹

1. While I see feminism as influencing post-modernism and the new ethnography, Clifford (1986) does not. For a feminist critique of post-modernism in anthropology see Mascia-Lees, Sharpe and Cohen 1989.

Beginning with Evans-Pritchard's (1940) *The Nuer*, the anthropological endeavor consisted of an unbiased western ethnographer who entered another society, lived among and observed its people, studied their culture, and returned to his own society to write a description and analysis of those people. The ethnographer used an authoritative tone in writing the ethnography, as though his perspective was an accurate description of reality.

I intentionally use the male pronoun because, as feminists have demonstrated, traditional methodology was androcentric. Ethnographers were not unbiased observers and reporters of another culture's reality, but western middle class men who took their cultural biases to other cultures. They assumed, among other things, that men were more important than women and that the male perspective was only one perspective in a given culture. For example, Evans-Pritchard lived among the Nuer, but only spoke to Nuer men about their concerns and relationships. However, he did not title his ethnography *Nuer Men*, but *The Nuer*.²

In addition to feminist critiques, native anthropologists have suggested that Western ethnographers are not objective observers, but arrive in their field sites with biases from their own cultures (Hayano 1979; Jones 1972). People who live in minority groups in American society have echoed this critique. Americans who study minority groups of which they are not members are not

2. I use Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* as an example because anthropologists used it as a model ethnography for generations. For general discussions of male bias in anthropology see Slocum 1975 and Reiter 1975. For a discussion of male bias in Evans Pritchard's Nuer ethnographies see Gough 1971.

unbiased, often have preconceived notions about the people they study. In order to conduct valuable research among minority groups, outsiders must recognize their biases and work to get past them (Walker 1982).³ The fact that outsiders have not been that successful in shedding their biases has encouraged insiders to do research in their own communities.⁴

As I discussed in Chapter One, I think the native criticism holds true for researchers working with lesbian and gay populations. This is not to say that a heterosexual could not conceptualize this research project, but a heterosexual *did* not, which I attribute to the lack of knowledge of the realities of living as a lesbian among most heterosexuals.⁵ I have been living as a lesbian

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3. For an example of a poor ethnography by an outsider see Wolf's (1980) ethnography of the lesbian community in San Francisco, which Krieger (1985: 229, fnnt. 13) describes as a "tourist's guide" to the lesbian-feminist community in San Francisco. Of course outsiders can and have done valuable research. See for example Stack's (1974) ethnography of urban poor African Americans.
 4. For discussions of Native Anthropology see Jones 1982; Walker 1982.
 5. It is my opinion that most heterosexuals have a very limited idea of what it means to live as a lesbian (or gay man). In fact, in 1991 it is still socially acceptable among many heterosexual people to make jokes about (and otherwise speak disparagingly of), lesbians and gay men, where it would not be socially acceptable to do so about other minority groups. These jokes reinforce existing stereotypes and lend support to prejudice and discrimination. A part of my awareness of jokes and derogatory statements about lesbians and gay men is because people do not always recognize me as a lesbian. I am then privy to the ease and frequency with which many heterosexuals will say hostile, cruel and derogatory things about lesbians and gay men. However, much of what I am discussing is what I see and hear on television and radio. For examples of the kinds of things said on television and radio about lesbians and gay men, listen to the audio tape *Defamation*

for the past twelve years, and my conceptualization of this research comes from my experience of living this kinship pattern. As a lesbian I have felt that sense of invisibility that comes from living outside of the traditional kinship system (e.g., people referring to us as single whether or not we are coupled; no ritualized celebrations of our important life events; some people implicitly or explicitly defining us as having no family, etc.). From our perspective we are rich in family, but many of us see our families as composed of people who differ from what the traditional kinship system would accept. I decided, then, to do research on lesbian kinship that would document lesbian kinship patterns, to help both lesbians and heterosexuals understand our family relationships.

In writing this dissertation, I have tried to allow the reader to hear my research participants' voices. However, I am not saying that my dissertation is their perspective of their lives. I am writing about how I view lesbian relationships in the late twentieth century. Not all my research participants view themselves as living in the process of kinship change as I do. In my opinion this is because they are living in that process and can not see the forest for the trees. However, no one has disagreed with me. In fact when research participants have read papers I have written or have heard me speak about my perspective, they have told me that my perspective validates their experience. In this way I

see that I am both documenting their lives and am a part of the process of change by reflecting back to them my view of their lives.

Role in the Field - Every fieldworker must decide what role she will take in her research process, and sometimes the people with whom you work choose that role for you. As a native this was initially problematic. I see myself as a real native, i.e., I am not just doing U.S. research, I am working in my own community, among my own friends, which created a personal stress. Initially, there was no separation between work and my personal life, no time when I was not "working." I felt overwhelmed in the early stages of research, as if my work was taking over my life, and found myself creating artificial boundaries, such as only interviewing people who were referred to me. After a while I was able to relax and feel comfortable with the lack of boundaries as my "real life" and "work life" blended more easily, and I was able to do participant observation that yielded richer data.

On the other hand, when my colleagues went off to South America and Africa, they totally separated themselves from their social networks and created new ones. This was not simple and had its own problems. People at home (including myself) often felt angry and abandoned, and my friends had to deal with everyone's emotions on their return home. However, their obligations within their social networks of family and friends were, for the most part, suspended during the time of their research.

This is not the case for people doing research at home.

Friends and family expected me to attend functions and give them as much time as usual. I was able to speak with close friends before I began the fieldwork and told them I would be less available. They were angry but we worked on it. However, others were not so understanding. Many people in my family of origin do not understand what doing research involves, and did not know why I could not attend all family functions. Even other anthropologists did not understand that I was doing field work and did not have that much time. In addition I had to work full-time which left me very little time for anything but the thesis and working to pay my bills.

On the other end, when my cohorts were ready to return home, they had the unhappy task of breaking the relationships they had created, and coming home to their original social networks. While they may or may not have maintained their relationships through letter writing, phone calls, and visits, they were removed from them in their day to day lives. Their separation allowed them to focus all of their attention on analysis and writing.

For me, the new friendships I created remained, and so did the social obligations. Since I began writing, I have removed myself from some social networks that I created during fieldwork, particularly the lesbian mothers networks, and I feel that loss and so do the women I had become friends with. Again, this is nothing unique to native anthropologists, but when foreign researchers leave their field sites the people they worked with do not expect them to maintain their social connections in the same way, whereas

my research participants have such expectations.

Moreover, knowing when to end data collection is not at all clear for native researchers. When doing foreign research, people generally end data collection when their visas and/or money run out, whereas native researchers are still in the field while analyzing and writing. In my case, events continued to occur that related to my thesis and I wanted to observe them. However, due to time limitations (both amount of time to work and the thesis and academic institutional time constraints) I needed to focus on writing. I had to learn to choose carefully how I would use my time, and learn to say no to things I would have liked to attend.

Presenting Data - In writing up research results, any anthropologist must decide what to put into published accounts and what to omit. This decision is particularly difficult for lesbians and gay men (or any member of a group that is the target of prejudice and discrimination), if there are any sensitive issues that might be perceived by outsiders as problematic. On the one hand, we recognize the need to discuss problems among ourselves so that we may find solutions. On the other hand, we do not want to add fuel to the fire by providing more ammunition for the other side when we "air our dirty laundry."⁶

I do not feel I can protect the lesbian community as a whole.

6. Newton found in her research on Cherry Grove, a lesbian and gay resort in New York, that many of the older members of the community believe that the community is only safe because people don't know it exists. These people were opposed to her letting people even know of Cherry Grove's existence (Newton 1990).

In fact, trying to conceal information may be detrimental to lesbians. I believe the lesbian population needs open discussions about our lives as we create new relationships. Keeping hidden controversial issues or mistakes we have made, will only hold us back. We need to be able to openly discuss these issues if we are to learn from them and move on. In addition, those outside the community will find out what we are doing with or without our help, whether we like it or not. I feel it is more powerful to define what we are doing in our own terms rather than leave it to them to interpret. Moreover, as an ethnographer, I want to present as accurate a picture of the social environment as possible.

On the other hand, I do feel the obligation to protect the identities of individuals. To that end, I have tried not to give much detail on the people I have worked with. This approach can raise a problem in that it tends to lose the thick description of ethnographic research. To achieve such description, I present case studies of four women that provide such "thick description." These portraits are substantially accurate except that identifying characteristics have been changed to protect their identities. They are found in Appendix A.

Defining the Population and Selection of Research

Participants - Just as traditional theoretical frameworks are not useful for studying lesbians as I discussed in Chapter One, traditional field techniques employed by anthropologists are problematic when applied to lesbians. Working with an invisible population that is discriminated against makes common methods of defining the

population under study, and methods of selecting research participants, useless for lesbian research.

People studying lesbians often use the word "community" when describing the unit of study (Wolf 1980; Lockard 1986; Krieger 1982). I find "community" problematic because as used historically in anthropology, "community" assumes an observable, geographically discrete population. Lesbians are not a readily observable population. Living as a lesbian is something many women choose to hide to avoid discrimination. In addition, the lesbian population is not a geographically discrete community, but, rather, a population living a particular kinship pattern spread throughout the United States (especially in urban areas).⁷

Some of the confusion stems from the folk use of the term. Lesbians refer to themselves as a community; "the lesbian community of Park Slope" is a common description. However, as I discussed in Chapter One, it is essential that researchers separate their analytic concepts from the folk concepts of the people under study. To that end, I use the term "population" as an analytic term, and "community" to refer to the folk meaning of the word as used by my research participants.

I am interested in observing the process of kinship change and am focusing on the lesbian population of Park Slope as a stage to view people living in a process of kinship change. Park Slope provides such a stage because women are in face to face contact,

7. Resort areas that are predominantly lesbian and gay are exceptions to this. For research on one such community see Newton 1988.

have overlapping social networks, and interact on a regular basis, allowing for participant observation. I am not interested in Park Slope as an object of study, i.e., in understanding the structure and function of the community.

Of course, the women in the neighborhood do not relate exclusively to other neighborhood residents, but have social networks that include women from outside Park Slope. I followed their networks whenever appropriate or useful to the research topic on kinship. For example, in joining a group for lesbians considering having children, some women lived in Park Slope and some lived in Manhattan.

When selecting research participants for observation and interviews within a more traditional community study, the researcher usually tries to obtain a sample representative of the community. Here, again, standard methods do not work when studying lesbians. Because lesbians constitute a population that is not well understood, we do not know the parameters of the population to be able to say that any group of people are representative of anything. There are no statistics on how many exist in the country; one cannot call the Census Bureau and ask: How many lesbians answered the 1980 census? How many were living with partners? How many single? How many with children?, etc. In 1980 my roommate and I attempted to note that we were lesbians somewhere on the census form, but the questions asked and possible answers

provided reflected traditional definitions of marriage and family.⁸

In addition to the impossibility of sampling among lesbians and gay men, my research interest, and the social context, make sampling even more problematic. Much of what I am discussing is rapidly changing, and the society's response is in flux. For example, I will argue that lesbians define their lovers as life partners, and have a movement to have their relationships socially and legally recognized as such. While I was working on this chapter in July of 1989, two major events occurred to facilitate those goals. Mayor Koch announced an executive order to extend bereavement leave to people in lesbian or gay relationships, and the New York State Supreme Court voted that a gay man could not be evicted from his rent controlled apartment in New York City after his spouse died (even though his name was not on the lease), because they constitute a family. Doing research under conditions of rapid social change makes any sampling unfeasible.

My goals are different than the goals of researchers studying known populations. Instead of sampling a known population, my goal is to describe relationships within a population that is not well known, to identify the parameters of the lesbian population in Park Slope, as well as the processes of kinship change that I have been

8. The 1990 census represents the beginning of change. While there is no question that asks about sexual orientation *per se*, there is a category of relationships called "unmarried partners", and allows two women to identify as spouses. Given that many women will not describe themselves as unmarried partners out of fear, and that there is no method for those who do not live with a spouse to record their sexual preference, it will be a serious under count of lesbians in the U.S. However, it is a step in the right direction.

observing. I have focused on how people are constructing their lives, the type of relationships they create, the meaning of these relationships in their lives, and wherever possible, heterosexual people's responses to them. Therefore, connecting to social networks of people living these new patterns and observing and interviewing them, proved to be more useful than sampling.

Choosing research participants for the interviews was initially a problem for me as a native. I thought that I could not interview friends because that would not be objective, not "real anthropology." So I began expanding my network by asking friends to recommend women for the interviews, and the first seven interviewees were all referred. I found that while I was able to collect data from them, my relationships with these interviewees were somewhat artificial. At the same time I tried to expand my network by attending events of groups that I had little or no familiarity with, particularly those that had bearing on family issues (such as lesbian mothers' networks), and soon made friends among them. I then questioned whether or not I could interview these women since they were becoming friends.

I decided that this was absurd. When an anthropologist does foreign research she goes to the field and makes friends among the people living there, who become her research participants. One must create social bonds to be accepted and become a part of the community. I decided, then, to interview women I had met during the course of participant observation. I have a relationship with them, and a context in which I can place the data from the inter-

views. Those with whom I have had a good deal of contact are key informants. I also tried to have some contact with the seven women I interviewed. I was very successful with two, but, for the most part, with the remaining five, I was limited to phone conversations and bumping into them in public.

As I began to evaluate and organize my data, I realized that I had a tremendous amount of information on friends, all of which I decided to use. I did not have to interview people I have known for ten or fifteen years, because I already knew the answers to the questions from discussion over the years and living this kinship pattern with them. In fact, I have very rich data on people I have known for many years, having observed them in their process of kinship change.

I have four different categories of research participants: (i) women whom I have only interviewed (five); (ii) women whom I have interviewed and with whom I have on-going social interaction (six); (iii) women with whom I have on-going social interaction (approximately fifty); and (iv) women with whom I have sporadic social interaction (just over fifty women). That brings the total to approximately one hundred women.

Most of these one hundred women are white working to middle class women, college educated or more, between the ages of 25 and 45, who identify themselves as feminists. This adequately describes the subjects of most of the social science research on lesbians. Using the snowball technique, i.e., connecting to one or two social networks, participating in them, and working out from

them, one discovers the outlines of the social landscape of the population under study. I have found that, like the rest of the society, the lesbian population is bounded by race, class, education and age. When I expanded my networks as a white, educated, professional class woman from a working class family, I got more white, educated, working to professional class women. This is, I believe, why the social science literature on lesbians is primarily about white, middle class women in their 20s to 40s.

I did not realize this immediately, particularly in the area of race. Initially I did not see past my folk belief of the white liberal lesbian community (which is that lesbians are not racist like the larger heterosexual population), to see what was actually the social landscape. The belief that we are not racist is in some ways true and in some ways false. I find very little overt racial prejudice among white lesbians (as opposed to my family of origin where there is a great deal of overt racism). In fact, white lesbians talk more liberally than other white people I know, generally taking the African American perspective on race conflicts. However, this liberal view about race is not matched with racially integrated social groups and networks.

White lesbians and African American lesbians constitute two separate and intersecting communities, with some who participate in both communities. Most of my participant observation was in the white community. The African American women I know and interviewed, were those who participate in the white women's community. While I went to some events in the African American community, I

never got connected to a social network, but remained marginal to the community as a whole. I had more difficulty finding African American women to interview; I did not get a single woman through a referral (as opposed to seven white women through referrals). I now believe that this is because of my marginal status in the African American lesbian community.

I would like to note that once I found someone to interview, I was surprised to see how open the women were while talking to me. To a certain extent this is due to my personality; I am warm, open, and get along very well with people in most areas of my life. However, there is more operating here. "Family" has been a topic most lesbians in the 1980s and 1990s want to talk about. Most women have opinions on the lesbian baby boom, domestic partnership legislation, and the Conservative Right's characterization of lesbians as anti-family. Therefore, most were eager to discuss family issues with me, in fact, many actually enjoyed being interviewed, and afterwards felt they had learned something from the experience.

The Field Site

Background - When I go home from my chiropractor on Saturday afternoons, I usually walk down Seventh Avenue (the main commercial strip of Park Slope), so that I can do some shopping. The avenue is bustling with people shopping for anything and everything, including baby clothes, vacuum cleaners, housewares, hardware, food, art supplies, greeting cards, etc. If people are not shopping, they may be looking for breakfast, lunch, or brunch, and have

a wide variety of coffee shops and specialty food stores to choose from. On hot summer days, there is usually a large crowd in the Häagen Dazs ice cream store.

Along the 20 blocks I walk, I see signs that tell the tale of life in New York City in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Outside of the D'Agostino's Supermarket, there are well dressed white men pulling up in their Volvo cars to pick up their wives and children who have shopping carts filled with food. They seem to be of the "comfortable" middle class, professional New Yorkers, who make up a large portion of the population of the neighborhood. As they load their groceries into their cars, they pass men and women, mostly African Americans, dressed in old, torn and dirty clothing, who are sorting plastic bottles and aluminum cans to be refunded inside the store. These are the homeless people who live in the park or the homeless shelter for women, both a few blocks away. These people reflect the socio-economic variation in both the neighborhood in particular and the city in general.

I also encounter signs of the liberal social and political trends within the City.⁹ There are generally people handing out flyers, posting flyers, and soliciting signatures for petitions for a variety of issues. For example, feminist groups generally hand out information about approaching demonstrations and marches for

9. The neighborhood has historically been an area of organizing for liberal politics. However, this is not to say that all of the residents are liberal, but that people and organizations that are conservative are possibly not as numerous as, but at least not as visible or vocal as, their liberal counterparts.

abortion rights. Lesbian and gay groups have had meetings and demonstrations in the neighborhood about anti-gay violence, and they hand-out and post flyers up and down the avenue. In response to the many violent racial attacks in New York City in general, and Brooklyn in particular, area residents have advertised and sponsored peace and harmony demonstrations and events.

National level politics are addressed as well. During the Gulf War in early 1991, political groups set up tables along the avenue to distribute information about anti-war demonstrations and candlelight vigils for peace. In addition, some one stamped the sidewalks and streets of Seventh Avenue with signs reading "Fight Racism Not Iraq." Toward the latter part of 1991, a group began a movement to oust the local Congressman who was a strong supporter of President Bush and the Gulf War.

The neighborhood also shows signs of people who have a sense of duty to their civic community. Individuals representing local churches or community groups sometimes stand on the street requesting donations of food, clothing and money to be distributed to the homeless. The neighborhood is generally plastered with posters when police need help in solving a crime. For example, there are often posters with names, identifying characteristics, and pictures of lost children and adults to help the police and family find these individuals. There are similar posters to solicit information about homicides, such as a mugging homicide and a hit and run homicide of a teenage girl. Posters also advertise more positive signs of civic community, such as the Civic Associa-

tion's annual blood drive and annual tour of Park Slope homes.

Being a native of Brooklyn I have been familiar with the neighborhood all of my life. My father was born there and often talks about what it was like in the past. I moved to an adjacent neighborhood, Boerum Hill, in 1981, and began participating in community events and collecting background information on the neighborhood. In April 1986 I moved to Park Slope and began systematically collecting data on kinship ideology in interviews in September of that year.

The Site and its People - Park Slope is a neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York (one of the five boroughs of New York City), developed in the second half of the nineteenth century. According to the 1980 census, the population of Park Slope was 65,202, 38,163 of which were non-Hispanic whites, 19,282 Hispanics, and 7,757 blacks (Bird 1985). Built around a beautiful park, the neighborhood combines the best of urban living with a taste of country life, providing easy access to the center of New York City commerce, as well as open fields and beautiful trees. The neighborhood has some of the most gracious and lovely homes in Brooklyn, built with brownstone, limestone, and beautifully detailed woodwork and ironwork. The homes for wealthier families were built closer to the park, particularly the north end, and originally had three to five floors for a single family. Similarly, apartments in those sections are gracious, detailed, and spacious, with two to four bedrooms. The homes and apartments in the south end of Park Slope, and more than three blocks from the park in the north end, were

built for working class families. Consequently, they are smaller, simpler and less expensive.

The neighborhood reflects the historical shifts in real estate prices and population in New York City over the past century. As Bird (1985) notes:

By the turn of the century, Park Slope had become a social ladder for upwardly mobile groups; Italian immigrants were settled in houses at the bottom, earlier Irish immigrants had moved a rung up to the middle, and old Dutch and English families lived at the top of the ladder, the Gold Coast along the park. By the 1930s and 1940s, the Irish had moved up to the top and the Italians up to the middle Slope, while blacks and Hispanics had moved into the houses vacated at the bottom (Bird 1985:127).

The 1950s and 60s saw an influx of Puerto Ricans and African Americans, and many of the white ethnics moved out. For example, in the early 1960s, my sister-in-law's parents, Irish immigrants, moved to the neighborhood in the 1950s, and had the opportunity to buy a house for \$9,300. They decided against it because the neighborhood "was changing" (meaning more people of color were moving in), and moved to Bay Ridge, a predominantly white conservative neighborhood further out in Brooklyn. Similarly, when I visited friends in Park Slope in the mid 70s, my father and other white ethnic people of his generation told me it used to be a nice neighborhood (meaning predominantly white ethnic), but it was not nice anymore.

My father and his cohorts did not realize that at that time real estate prices were beginning to rise, as the neighborhood

experienced a process known as gentrification. This process involved an influx of primarily white middle class people into the neighborhood, who renovated homes and displaced the poor who could no longer afford to live in the area. The home that my sister-in-law's parents could have bought for \$9,300 would probably be worth at least \$300,000 now, as most homes in Park Slope are now worth somewhere between \$300,000 and \$500,000. By the mid 1980s most of the neighborhood once again became a relatively exclusive area, catering to a professional, upper middle class, commonly called "yuppies."

The rental market had swings similar to those of the real estate market. In the early 1970s when I was attending Brooklyn College, many students lived in Park Slope. One could rent a nice two bedroom apartment for \$250-300 a month, and there were larger apartments with 3-4 bedrooms for about \$400 to \$500. Then landlords started breaking down the big apartments to smaller one bedroom or studios apartments, reflecting smaller family size and more single people living alone or in couples. In 1991 one could not rent a one bedroom for under \$650, or a two bedroom for under \$1000.

The gentrification process has created class tensions in Park Slope, as it did throughout Brooklyn and the other four boroughs of New York City (see Susser 1982 and 1991; Mollenkopf and Castells, eds. 1991). The rise in the cost of rental apartments and the conversion of rental apartments to cooperative apartments displaced residents who could not afford the escalating cost of housing. On

the other hand, renovating apartments and brownstones to meet middle class housing standards created more housing for middle class people, who could afford the higher cost of housing. Many neighborhood residents who were displaced, both lesbian and heterosexual, express anger and resentment toward those who can afford the housing market, particularly those who came from outside the neighborhood (especially Manhattan).

Changes in the rental market have affected businesses as well. Slowly the neighborhood stores, such as Irish bars, small "mom and pop" Jewish dry goods stores, and Italian specialty shops, began to close because they could no longer afford the high rents. They have been replaced by specialty stores such as gourmet food stores, expensive gift and clothing shops, and various restaurants, demonstrating the food trends among the middle class (e.g. Japanese, Tex Mex, nouvelle cuisine, Mexican, vegetarian, Middle Eastern, etc.).

Despite the gentrification process, some stable working class families and businesses, from a wide range of ethnic groups (e.g., African Americans, Irish, Italians, Puerto Ricans, West Indians), have remained in the area, primarily in the outer boundaries. There are Italian pizza parlors, Irish bars, Italian butchers, West Indian restaurants, and German delicatessens in the area. There are two major ethnic parades in the area, the Irish American parade that takes place along Prospect Park on the Sunday after St. Patrick's Day, and the Caribbean parade and festival along Eastern Parkway on Labor Day.

The area was designed to be, and still is, predominantly a residential neighborhood. There was one factory in the area in the early part of this century. However, like many factories in the city, it was abandoned and turned into an apartment complex in the mid 1980. Most of the people who live in the neighborhood work in other parts of the city, in all occupations, from office workers, factory workers, and dock workers, to attorneys, bankers, and real estate developers.

Those who do make their living in the neighborhood are employed in either one of the local businesses, or provide a needed skill or professional service to area residents. For example, the area supermarkets, restaurants, and shops provide employment for unskilled workers, especially high school and college students. The renovation of homes provides work for skilled workers, such as electricians, carpenters, plumbers, etc. The need for professional services provides employment for doctors, chiropractors, dentists, psychotherapists, veterinarians, attorneys, etc. There is also a good market for those who make their living from the "service industry," i.e., beauty salons (providing hairstyling, nail care, facials, etc.), animal grooming, house cleaning, gardening, catering, etc.

The schools in the area are a study in contrast. The public schools suffer from a lack of funds, resulting in inadequate services and staffing, as do many of the schools in New York City. A few of the grammar schools are satisfactory, but the Junior and Senior high schools have problems. Most of the people who can

afford to do so, prefer to send their children to private schools, at least after elementary school, as these schools provide excellent education for their students. The result has been that the public schools are composed of primarily working class, poor, African American, African Caribbean and Hispanic students, while the private schools have primarily white middle class students.

This presents a dilemma to some white middle class parents who, because of their social and political beliefs, want their children to go to integrated schools. They find they must choose between their desire for their children to get the best education possible and their desire for their children to grow up in a racially integrated environment. It seems that they choose the former for post elementary school, and the latter for elementary school. In addition, many white middle class parents get involved in the operation of the elementary schools, in the attempt to improve the education of their children.

The Lesbian Population - AKA "Dyke Slope"

I asked Joan why she decided to move to Park Slope in the mid 1970s from the midwest without knowing anyone or ever visiting the neighborhood. She said that she had seen several ads in a national gay newspaper for lesbian roommates in Park Slope and thought to herself "There must be a lot of dykes in Park Slope."

She was right. In the late 1960s the neighborhood became a magnet for members of the counterculture movement, drawing people with non-traditional beliefs, politics and lifestyles, including lesbians, gay men, and feminists. By the time Joan moved to Park

Slope, there was an identifiable population of lesbians living there, so that some people nicknamed the neighborhood "Dyke Slope."¹⁰ By the late 1980s there developed a strong lesbian and gay presence, with several lesbian and gay neighborhood organizations, stores, and restaurants owned and operated by gay people, and lesbian performers in the Prospect Park concert series. There is a lesbian visibility in the neighborhood that is only surpassed in Greenwich Village.¹¹ For the reasons discussed above, it is very difficult to estimate how many lesbians and gay men live in Park Slope. However, I have counted over 100 lesbians, and given that I know only a fraction of the women from face to face contact, I would say that there are at least 1,000 lesbians in and around Park Slope.

Heterosexual people in the neighborhood are also aware of the large population of lesbians living there. When I told a heterosexual woman resident that I was doing research on lesbian families in the neighborhood, she said that Park Slope was a great place to study lesbians because there are so many living there. And there seems to be a growing acceptance of lesbians and gay men, as exemplified by a sign outside of the Park Slope United Methodist Church:

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10. While the lesbian population in the neighborhood is identifiable by other lesbians and by heterosexuals in the area, I still consider lesbians an invisible population from a methodological standpoint because their social patterns are not well understood by researchers.
 11. Rose, new to the neighborhood, told me that seeing lesbians just walking down the street, or in the supermarket, or riding bicycles in the park makes her feel very comfortable.

Our Creed

We the people of the Park Slope Methodist Church, old and young, black and white, rich and poor, straight and gay - unite as a loving community in covenant with God. Summoned by our faith in Jesus Christ we commit ourselves to work for the humanization of urban life and towards physical and spiritual fulfillment. Amen.

However, not all heterosexuals appreciate having lesbians in the area, and the greater visibility of lesbians has meant a greater vulnerability to anti-lesbian violence. Within the first half of 1990, two anti-lesbian incidents occurred in Park Slope, which prompted an anti-violence march in the neighborhood in July 1990.

People outside of the neighborhood, both heterosexual and gay, are also aware of the lesbian presence in Park Slope. Initially I thought I would only identify the field site as a neighborhood in Brooklyn, but everyone I spoke with, straight and gay, guessed that I was working in Park Slope. In the 1989 Gay Pride Section of the Village Voice, there was a picture of a turkey baster and the caption read: "Baster Baby Boom: Soon, half of Park Slope may be conceived this way" (Village Voice June 27, 1989).¹²

What follows are descriptions of organizations and events that I and many of my research participants were involved in. I will focus on their contributions to the creation of a sense of community for the lesbians in the neighborhood, and their relation-

12. Some lesbians have used turkey basters to inseminate. The children so conceived are sometimes called "baster babies" or "turkey baster babies."

ship to kinship change, if any. These include: Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts; Chrystal Quilt; Brooklyn Lesbians Together; the activities in Prospect Park; The Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center; and Lesbian Mothers Groups.

Brooklyn Women's Martial Arts - BWMA is a karate school that was founded in 1973 by two lesbians, and is one of, if not the oldest feminist institution in Park Slope. I studied self-defense and karate there for a total of about 6 months in 1979 and 1980, and have attended events at the school since then. The classes are open to all women, and are particularly well attended by lesbians. The school's primary goal is to help women empower themselves, physically and emotionally. As my introductory teacher told us, many women were raised to think of themselves as powerless, but at BWMA women learn to think of themselves as powerful. Students are taught to take space in the world and not be intimidated by people, especially men, on the street or elsewhere. For any woman this is a powerful message that can help build self esteem.¹³

In addition to empowerment through physical strength, the school serves two other important functions within the lesbian community: socializing and political organizing. Many lesbians, particularly those new to the neighborhood, train at BWMA as a way to meet other lesbians as much as to learn karate. BWMA provides a structured, on-going, social activity that facilitates that goal.

13. In today's era of work-out culture, emphasizing being thin, and implicitly or explicitly providing women with negative messages about their bodies, BWMA is a welcomed breath of fresh air.

In addition to classes, BWMA hosts fund raising benefits, such as an annual services auction, an annual bowlathon, and concerts by women performers. BWMA also allows other groups, such as lesbian mothers groups, to use their space for social events, which provide lesbians with local weekend activities.

Students and teachers use the school as a center of political organizing. They post notices and make announcements in classes about lesbian and feminist events and issues. Community members call the school for information regarding activities, and school members call community members to notify them of current events. For example, in early July 1989, after the Supreme Court ruling on *Webster v. Reproductive Rights*, women from the school were calling people to inform them of an abortion rights demonstration the next day. In addition, members participate as school representatives in various political activities such as the lesbian and gay pride march at the end of June, where they generally give a karate demonstration.¹⁴

Chrystal Quilt - A feminist education and counseling service for lesbians and heterosexual women founded in 1981, the Chrystal Quilt offers workshops, support groups, and classes for women on topics that range from mother-daughter relationships to organizing your papers, to women's poetry, to financial planning. Among the events offered, many address lesbian family issues, such as a lesbian mothers support groups, writing your will, deciding whether or

14. Two of my favorite memories of lesbian pride marches are BWMA karate demonstrations, one outside of St. Patrick's Cathedral and one outside of the Main Public library on Fifth Avenue.

not to have children, having a child after 35, and how a child impacts on lesbian couple relationships. These events provide a place for lesbians to gain information, discuss their experiences, and meet other women who are creating new family forms.

Brooklyn Lesbians Together - In the spring of 1988, a group of women from the local gay political group, organized an evening of lesbian sexuality, with readings by lesbian writers, and videotapes of lesbian erotica. During the evening, they suggested that they begin a social network for lesbians in Brooklyn, that would provide an alternative to social events and bars in Manhattan. The idea took hold very quickly, and they developed Brooklyn Lesbians Together, better known as BLT. While it serves the women in all of Brooklyn, most women live, and events take place in, Park Slope. Since its beginning, the social network has sponsored monthly potluck dinners, walks in the park, dances, and other social events, as well as a monthly newsletter. As with the other organizations in the neighborhood, BLT provides places and events for socializing, and has provided a sense of community for the lesbians living in Park Slope.

Prospect Park - The park provides lesbians, as well as everyone in the area, a beautiful place in which to walk, jog, play softball, picnic, bike ride, ice skate, boat or simply sit under a tree to escape the heat and humidity of mid summer in New York City. In addition to individual use of the park, there are activities that take place either specifically for lesbians or that would definitely interests lesbians. Groups such as lesbian

mothers' groups, 12 step programs specifically for lesbians and gay men, and BLT organize picnics and activities in the park. There is a women's softball league in the park in which many lesbians play. This league is a source of activity and socializing, even for those who do not play. For many lesbians, the women's softball games are much more exciting than New York Mets games or New York Yankee games.

The park offers concerts (indoor in winter and spring and outdoor in the summer), that reflect the cultural mix of Brooklyn: Jazz, Latin, Caribbean, traditional Irish, etc. They also feature "women's music" (which is a euphemism for lesbian music), and these concerts are particularly well attended by lesbians. There is a strong lesbian presence at other concerts as well. When the Park presented Jazz singer Betty Carter, the audience had a very visible lesbian presence. There were groups of lesbians picnicking in the grass and couples sitting in the audience. A lesbian was walking around asking people in the audience to sign a petition to put a local lesbian attorney on the primary ballot to be elected as a Civil Court Judge.

Lesbian and Gay Community Services Center - While it is located in Greenwich Village, not Park Slope, "The Center" is an important organization for many lesbians with whom I have worked. It houses organizations such as SAGE (Senior Actors in a Gay Environment), The Lesbian and Gay Anti-Violence Project, and Center Kids (see below). In addition, it provides meeting places for a number of groups (including political groups, social groups, educa-

tional groups and 12 step programs for lesbians and gay men), as well as hosting many lecturers, performing artists and political forums.

Lesbian Mothers' Support Groups and "Center Kids" - As I will discuss more fully in Chapter Five, when lesbians decide to have children, they face a number of issues to consider, decisions to make, and problems to solve, which stem from living a new kinship pattern that lacks social and legal recognition. The process they face has strong emotional and social consequences. To facilitate this process, many women form support groups in which they explore issues, exchange information and share feelings, opinions, and experiences. These groups meet in members' homes, both in and outside of Park Slope. I joined one such group that met for two years, and it turned out to be an excellent source of data.

In addition to small discussion groups, in the summer of 1988, a group of about twenty-five lesbian and gay male parents formed a larger organization to provide a social network for themselves and their children. The group offers outings, picnics, forums on legal and medical issues, holiday parties, etc. Beginning with about 20 households on its mailing lists, the group now has over 300 households to whom it mails its monthly newsletter and announcements. In the spring of 1989 they became an organization of the Community Center, and adopted the name "Center Kids."

Types of Data and Methods of Collection

The dissertation consists of data on: spouse relationships; parenting relationships; friendships; relationships with family of

origin; lesbian kin networks; the meaning of family and relatives; the heterosexual population's response to lesbian relationships; the legal systems perspective on lesbian relationships as well as gay rights activists actions to change that perspective.

The in-depth interviews - The data collected in interviews consists of responses to a series of questions asked during two or three interviews, covering biographical information, kinship terminology, kinship roles (spouse, friends and parental), personal networks, definitions of family and relatives, household organization, and income allocation. This interview schedule is found in Appendix B. The schedule was a guide for me to insure that I collected all the data I needed from each participant. However, I did not administer it as a questionnaire; the interviews were open-ended, more like discussions, which made the interviews enjoyable for myself and my research participants.

One intent of the project has been to replicate Schneider's research on the definition of American kinship using lesbians. The field procedures for the American Kinship Project instructed the interviewer to ask each informant to "list for me all the people you consider to be related to you" (Wolf n.d., quoted by Yanagisako 1978). My research assumption was that Schneider's use of the words "related to you" was biased by time and type of person. I believe that "relatives" was a significant word to heterosexual married couples in the 1960s but might not get at kinship ideology of lesbians in the 1980s. I believe that the word "family" has more meaning today, so I asked each research participant to list

her family members and then we discussed why she included each person. Later on I asked her to list her relatives and to discuss why she included each person. These questions elicited each research participant's criteria for defining family and relatives.

In addition, I presented each woman with a page on which I had drawn three concentric circles with her name in the center. I asked her to place the people in her life on the circles in relation to her (i.e., that she place the individuals who were more important to her closer to the center of the circle). Then we discussed each person and her relationship with her/him, and why she placed her/him in that position on the circle. This "circle game" revealed important social networks consisting of people the women did not necessarily consider family or relatives.¹⁵

Other interviews - Often in participant observation the conversation turned to a family issue. I took advantage of the situation by conducting an informal interview. I would ask the same questions about that family issue that I would ask individuals during formal interviews. For example, in a discussion someone would complain about the lack of satisfactory kinship terms for a lesbian family, and I would question the person on what terms they used and why, thereby collecting data on kinship terminology. However, I did not have complete sets of data on the individuals interviewed in this manner.

I also held informal interviews with attorneys and psychotherapists. I asked attorneys about the legal status of lesbian

15. I would like to thank Ellen Lewin for suggesting this tool.

relationships and the possible legal steps lesbians can take to gain spouse and parental rights, and the social and political activity among gay rights activists to change the legal definitions of lesbian relationships. It is my belief that many of the "problems" lesbians encounter and bring to a clinical setting are the result of living in the process of kinship change. Therefore, I spoke with psychotherapists on the kinds of issues they see lesbians bringing to a clinical setting, and how the psychotherapy process can facilitate change in kinship behavior and belief.

Participant-observation - I attended forums, meetings, social events, and workshops having to do with family issues, as well as private social events, such as baby showers, birthday parties, holiday celebrations, and just spending time in the homes of the women I worked with. As mentioned above, I participated in a support group for lesbians planning on having children. The purpose of the group was to provide an arena for lesbians to explore issues, exchange information and share feelings and experiences in their processes of planning and having a child, and was an incredible source of data.

Secondary Sources - I read scholarly publications to collect information on the American kinship system and on lesbians. In particular, in discussing the traditional ideas about family, I am using David Schneider's book *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. While I see theoretical and methodological problems in his book which I discussed in Chapter One, I believe it is a good description of the dominant ideas about family in the 1950s and 1960s,

when my research participants were growing up and learning about kinship ideology.

I also collected information on lesbian relationships, how the dominant culture views them, how the legal system defines them, and what gay rights activists are doing to change that definition, by reading lesbian and gay magazines and newspapers, mainstream publications, watching documentary films, news programs, and talk shows with lesbian topics.

I particularly like talk shows because they are, from my point of view, like staged town meetings. The general format is that individuals tell their experience on an issue, an "expert" gives her or his opinions, and then the audience members voice their views. This format provides a view of life's varying experiences and differing opinions on an issue. For ethnographers of lesbians (and gay men) these programs allow one to observe how lesbians present themselves to the general public and the issues that are important to them. The shows also provide rare opportunities to observe the opinions and attitudes of the general public on lesbians and the issues they discuss.

Moreover, the existence of shows with lesbian topics are data in and of themselves. These programs demonstrate that lesbians are willing to come out on network television and discuss issues that are important to them, and that the producers of these shows believe that the general public wants to hear lesbians discuss these issues. This was not true thirty years ago, and exemplifies the process of kinship change Americans are involved in.

CHAPTER THREE:
LOVE IS WHAT MAKES A FAMILY

Introduction

When my grandmother passed away, I was very upset and wanted my closest friend Patricia to accompany me to her wake and funeral. She later told me that when requesting time off from her job at the New York Telephone Company, she had not thought through what she was going to say to her supervisor, and simply said that her sister's grandmother had died and she would need the following day off. Her supervisor asked her: "you mean your grandmother, right?" Patricia then realized that while she feels as though I am her sister, her supervisor, like most Americans, would not recognize me as a sister, but as a friend. She, like many lesbians, has two definitions of "family," and I am her sister in her new definition of "family," not the traditional definition. She quickly corrected herself and said that I was her half sister and my grandmother who passed away was not the grandmother that we shared.

On October 11, 1987 over 200,000 people from around the country marched on Washington D.C. for lesbian and gay rights. Many women wore buttons and carried posters with the slogan: "Love Is What Makes A Family." One man carried a poster that read "Anti-Nuclear Family." These slogans illustrate that the word "family" is symbolically and politically loaded for not only the women I have worked with, but for lesbians and gay men around the country. Symbolically they have different meanings for the word "family," and politically they are advocating that their meanings of "family"

be recognized and accepted by the larger society.

In this chapter I will suggest that the lesbians I have worked with are changing their beliefs about family and kinship as well as their behaviors. I begin with a discussion of the "traditional" definition of family with which they were raised. I will demonstrate that they have maintained from the "traditional" definition the idea that "family" is a loving group of people who take care of each other, and have combined it with the new idea that people can create a familial tie over time by behaving as "family," i.e., by developing a strong emotional bond with an individual that involves mutual care-taking. Therefore, rather than biology creating a kinship tie that dictates behavior, they have created kin ties by behaving like kin (i.e., acting loving and supportive toward one another) over a period of time.

I will also suggest that lesbians are part of a process of kinship change within American society. As I discussed in Chapter One, over the past four decades, many Americans have increasingly given more importance to emotional intimacy in family relations, over a sense of duty. I will demonstrate that lesbians have taken this perspective a step further by defining as "family" those individuals with whom they have an emotionally intimate relationship. I suggest that they are among those at the forefront of kin change because the changes in question are really gender changes that come more easily to lesbians, and because their common kinship pattern fosters a redefinition among them.

The Traditional American Folk Model of Kinship

In discussing the ideas of the traditional definition of "family" in America within this chapter (as well as the remaining chapters), I wish to make it clear that I am not discussing actual behavior. Statistics demonstrate that many people in the U.S. do not live in accordance with these ideals. Despite statistical reality, however, traditional ideas warrant discussion for three reasons. First, most of the women I spoke with were raised in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time the ideas I will discuss were the dominant ideas regarding family, and for that reason have been powerful reference points for my research participants in shaping their beliefs about family.

Second, these ideas still hold a tremendous amount of moral weight in American society, even though behavior has changed. In particular, conservatives who organize to maintain the status quo use the beliefs of the traditional definition of family as justification for passing legislation that would benefit people living in heterosexual male dominant nuclear families, and impeding legislation that would recognize any other household or family forms. Further, when these people judge lesbian families, for whatever reason, they compare them to the normative nuclear family, not to people's actual behavior in the U.S. Finally, regardless of how lesbians perceive themselves, and how others perceive them, the traditional American folk definition of "family" is institutionalized in our legal system. As I will discuss in Chapters Five and Six, when a lesbian must interface with the legal system or other

institutions that incorporate the legal definition of "family," lesbian relationships are not recognized. They live their daily lives within this legal climate.

In discussing the traditional ideas about family, I am using comments from the general population (especially people who still hold these beliefs), my informants, and the literature on American kinship and family. In particular, I use David Schneider's book *American Kinship: A Cultural Account*. While I criticized this book theoretically and methodologically, I believe it is a good description of the ideal of "family" among white middle class people in the 1950s and 60s, the time at which most of my research informants were growing up and learning about the meaning of "family." This is not to say that most people lived the pattern at that time, nor even that most people had the same beliefs that I will discuss. However, Schneider's book provides a good description of the ideal of the traditional male dominant heterosexual nuclear family with which my white middle class research participants were raised, that is held today by conservatives who criticize lesbian families (and others who do not live within the conservative ideal family pattern), and which is embedded in our legal system.

The major ideas within the traditional American folk model are: the co-resident heterosexual nuclear family is a natural unit; gender roles within the family are natural; heterosexuality is natural, and hence homosexuality unnatural; relatives in the extended network are those related by blood and affinity; kin

relations are characterized by love; friendship is also characterized by love, however, the difference between friends and relatives is that you can not break ties of blood. I discuss these ideas in greater depth.¹

When white middle-class Americans use the term "family" they have two possible meanings. The first refers to the more intimate residential group, and the second refers to the extra-domestic network of kin (Rapp 1982). When my informants use the terms "my family," "the family" or "my immediate family," they are generally referring to the intimate residential group. An important idea most of my informants were taught in childhood is that this residential group is ideally the heterosexual nuclear family. As Schneider (1968) notes:

Informants describe the family as consisting of husband, wife and their children who live together as a natural unit. The family is formed according to the laws of nature and it lives by rules which are regarded by Americans as self-evidently natural (Schneider 1968:34).

The next idea of the traditional folk model is that the gender segregated roles in the heterosexual nuclear family are a result of biological difference between men and women. Schneider (1968) reports that in the early 1960s his informants believed that women, due to their biological role in reproduction, are naturally inclined to care for children and provide emotional nurturance. On

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1. The reader will note the similarity between these ideas, and the assumptions in kinship theory I discussed in Chapter One. This is not a coincidence, but, rather, a result of the lack of separation of folk models from theoretical models in American social theory.

the other hand, Schneider (1968) notes that men:

do not bear children, nor can they nurse them from their own bodies. The cultural premise is that they are not naturally endowed with ways of sensing infants' needs. But there are many things which a man can do if he cares to learn. What a woman can do naturally, it is sometimes said in America, a man can learn - albeit slowly and not always with the smooth skill which a woman would exhibit (Schneider 1968:37).

Men, then, take on the role of providing for the family financially.

Most of the women I worked with were taught that heterosexuality and gender roles within the family are "natural," and that women and men are interdependent. As Kathy's conservative Catholic mother told her, women and men are interdependent and complement one another and need one another to be complete. In particular, women need men. Similarly, Robin's mother, whom she describes as a "good liberal Jewish parent," says she is supportive of Robin's life, but she tells Robin's brother that she is really concerned about her, because she does not think a woman can live without a man. This is not uncommon as many women of her generation believe a woman cannot live independently from men, and, as my historical discussion in Chapter One illustrated, this was true when they were young women.

As with gender roles, Americans who hold traditional ideas about family and kinship consider heterosexuality (due to its biological role in reproduction), as natural, and hence homosexuality (because it does not result in reproduction), as unnatural. From

his research Schneider (1968) notes that most of his informants believed that "sexual intercourse is legitimate and proper only between husband and wife" (Schneider 1968:38), and that sex "between persons of the same sex is homosexuality and wrong" (Schneider 1968:38, fnnt. 4). When growing up, most of my informants were taught by the adults in their lives that homosexuality is an unnatural form of sex. For example, growing up in an Irish Catholic family, Joyce was taught:

There was no other thought than heterosexuality, first of all, that was the only way to go. But not only that, there was marriage and living in the nuclear family situation and that was it. Or else there was the religious life, that was an option in my family, a life of celibacy that was glorified by everyone.

Heterosexual audience members on talk shows demonstrate that some people currently hold this belief when they refer to homosexual relationships as "unnatural." For example, on the Oprah Winfrey show on August 8, 1990, a gay male couple and their adopted son discussed gay parenting. A man in the audience asked "How are you going to explain that this is unnatural?" The two men replied that they did not think their relationship was unnatural. The heterosexual audience member meant that their sexual relations do not result in reproduction. Again, as I discussed in Chapter Five, this man did not separate sexuality and reproduction. Within the traditional set of beliefs, the two are inseparable, and this causes people to have difficulty in understanding lesbians and gay

men who parent.²

The belief in the "unnaturalness" of homosexuality is institutionalized in the American legal system. Twenty-seven states have sodomy laws that prohibit sexual relationships between persons of the same sex. In 1986 the Supreme Court upheld the constitutionality of the Georgia state sodomy laws in the *Bowers v. Hardwick* decision. In that case, the respondents argued that the right to consensual adult sexual acts is protected under the constitutional right to privacy, as are decisions regarding other aspects of kinship. The majority of the Supreme Court disagreed, stating, among other things, that the Constitution does not guarantee the "right of homosexuals to engage in acts of sodomy" (*Bowers v. Hardwick*).

Further, the Court solidified within the law the folk idea that homosexual relationships are outside of family and kinship by stating:

No connection between family, marriage, or procreation on the one hand and homosexual activity on the other hand has been demonstrated either by the Court of Appeals or by respondent.³

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2. Religious conservatives often use the fact that homosexual relationships do not result in reproduction to condemn lesbians and gay men, because they believe that all sexuality should lead to reproduction. The irony is that this idea is in no way a reality for the majority of heterosexuals. If it were, abortion and birth control would not be in demand.
 3. *Bowers v. Hardwick* Opinion of the Supreme Court, June 30, 1986. It should be noted that the vote was 5-4, and that Justices Blackmun, Brennan, Marshall, and Stevens wrote a dissenting opinion arguing that individuals, homosexual and heterosexual, should have the constitutional right to decide on their sexual activities in the privacy of their own homes.

In addition to the immediate family, Americans use "family" to refer to the extra-domestic network of kin, which consists of those related by blood and marriage. As with the nuclear family, gender roles, sexuality, and kin relationships are believed to be founded in nature and cannot be terminated:

The relationship which is "real" or "true" or "blood" or "by birth" can never be severed, whatever its legal position. Legal rights may be lost, but the blood relationship cannot be lost. It is culturally defined as being an objective fact of nature, of fundamental significance and capable of having profound effects, and its nature cannot be terminated or changed (Schneider 1968:24).

Familial relationships, particularly within the immediate family, are characterized by love and loyalty, what Schneider refers to as "enduring diffuse solidarity":

Love can be translated freely as *enduring diffuse solidarity*. The end to which family relations are conducted is the well-being of the family as a whole and of each of its members (Schneider 1968:50; emphasis in the original).

Friendship is also characterized by love. However, as Schneider notes, the difference between friends and relatives is the fact that a biological tie is permanent, while a friendship tie can be broken:

What distinguishes friends from relatives, as informants tell us so clearly, is that you are born with your relatives but you can pick your friends. If you pick them, by the same token they can be dropped at will and without obligation (Schneider 1968:53).

Friends are relatives who can be ditched if

necessary, and relatives are friends who are with you through thick and thin whether you like it or not and whether they do their job properly or not. You can really count on your relatives (Schneider 1968:54).

The importance of kin ties over friendships is summed up in the American adage "blood is thicker than water."

New Ideas About Family

Over the years I have heard lesbians make statements such as "my real family," "my other family," "the family I created," "my lesbian family," "my biological family," "my old family," and "my new family." I interpreted these terms as meaning that the women speaking had more than one type of "family," and in the course of the interviews two definitions of "family" emerged. For example, in response to the question "Who are the members of your family?" several women asked me to clarify which "family" I meant. Jane asked: "My biological family? Because I consider some of my friends family." Deborah asked:

D: You mean this family or where I grew up?

C: How do you define it . . . you have a differentiation between this family and where you grew up? [pause] . . . Like if someone said 'Who is in your family'? How would you answer that?

D: Oh, who is in my family. . . My current family would be my family that I would talk about.

And her "current family" includes her spouse and their son.

Anne said:

A: Yea, uh, my real family? Because sometimes friends are family.

C: So you differentiate between--

A: I differentiate between the family I was born with and the family I construct.

And Agnes refers to her new family as her "soul family."

While they were taught the ideas about family I discussed above, most women found in adulthood not all of these ideas were useful guidelines for living. These women have learned that biological and affinal kin do not necessarily act in a loving and supportive way and are not always there when you need them. They have developed a different concept of "family" based on their life experiences (some experiences having to do with living as a lesbian and some not), supported by ideas from the feminist movement, lesbian and gay rights movement, the personal growth movement, and the conservative pro-family movement. They have maintained the idea that "family" is a loving group of people who take care of each other, and have combined it with the new idea that people can create a familial tie over time by behaving as "family." Therefore, rather than biology creating a kinship tie that dictates behavior, they have created kin ties by behaving like kin (i.e., acting loving and supportive toward one another) over a period of time.

The main criteria my research participants use to define an individual as a family member within the new definition is that they have a strong emotional bond with each individual that involves mutually nurturing and a long-term commitment to the rel-

ationship.⁴ For example, when I asked Joyce why she named her spouse Deborah as a family member she said:

We've lived together seven or eight years, and we've been very committed to one another and committed to having a child together. I just feel that she's a very special relationship in my life. She's a very different person than I ever related to before, and I think that she'll always be my family, no matter what happens, no matter how our relationship changes. . .

Rhonda, a single mother describes why she considers her close friends as "family":

Because we have like a life commitment to each other. I consider a few other people like that. Not a lot, maybe three or four people. We care about each other, we will be something to each other in the future, when we get to be old ladies we'll take care of each other. There's a question about long-term commitment. . . It's like people who I would call in a crisis, people who I would feel like--I have to make a will and who I would want my child to be going to. So, there may be two people I would consider. Not that he would necessarily live with those people but I would trust them to figure out what would be best for the kid. There's that kind of expectation, that the person would take a lot of responsibility for me and/or my child. Of course, people get disappointed when the crunch comes, what really happens? But those people I have that kind of confidence in.

For Anne, the family she was born into is based, as Schneider suggests, on blood and marriage, and she named her mother, father,

4. In her study of the meaning of family for lesbians and gay men in San Francisco, Weston (1988) reports similar findings. Both men and women had two kinds of family, which she refers to as biological and chosen family, and both men and women report that "chosen" family is based upon love, mutual support and a shared history.

aunts, uncles and cousins as the family she was born into. Constructed family, however, consists of people she chooses to have in her life, and these are people with whom she has a close emotional tie, over a long period of time, and feels she will always have in her life. It includes for her people with and without a biological or affinal connection. She views her mother and father as constructed family because she chooses to relate to them now.

Denise gives her reasons for naming her friend Dorothy as a family member:

She's a friend. She was really supportive when my aunt died. She was supportive in--what Dorothy would say is--her way. I was very physically alone those first two weeks. Outside of being at my uncle's house to help him deal with people and get some stuff done.

Denise also discusses her friend Louise:

C: What is it that makes you define her as family?

D: She's been there and we've been there for each other. . . She's been tremendous to me and I'd like to think I've been supportive of her. We've been friends through both of my major relationships and my smaller liaisons. We've been close, we've been running mates. We knew each other for three years before I thought that we really had a relationship. We had a party relationship, if there was a party going on one of us would call the other and see if the other was going. . . We've been able to share and be real with each other and share our hurt and pain. We had some hard times in our relationship as well, which involved a third person, her lover, and there was a lot of shit going on, and we got through that.

Of course lesbians are not the only group of people in America who are letting go of a strict biological definition of

family based upon duty, and transforming "friends" into "family." For example, Lindsey (1981) found that among the people she interviewed, many see friends as family, and for reasons similar to the lesbians I have worked with. "Family," for most of the people she spoke to, means people with whom you have an emotional bond, with whom you get and give emotional support. This includes neighbors, church members, people with whom you work, and those you live with.

Similarly, some heterosexuals with whom I have discussed my work, say that they too feel that friends are family. Some say they are closer to friends than family; friends are more significant within their daily lives than family. These comments suggest to me that you do not have to be a lesbian to have dear friendships that mean the world to you and with whom you give and get emotional support. In addition, you do not have to be a lesbian to have been rejected or abused by your family of origin and have turned to friends for loving relationships.

Similarly, Johnson (1989) found that relations with biological kin have changed. The middle-class people in California she studied emphasize the emotional aspects of kin relations over duty. She notes that they use personal preferences in choosing whether or not they relate to certain people who are biological relatives. They believed that individuals have the

right to choose only those family ties that contribute to their happiness, self-fulfillment and personal growth. . .
[I]ndividuals tended to organize their kinship relationships according to mutual attraction and shared interest when deciding on the degree of closeness and distance to relatives. Thus interactions

among kin were often formed on the basis of friendships rather than on recognized norms of obligation and mutual responsibility (Johnson 1989: 91).

These examples of changes in kin behavior and beliefs of some heterosexuals, suggest that the lesbians I have worked with are part of a process of kinship change within American society that involves a shift away from blood kin to an increasing importance of friendships in everyday life. This process is a continuation of the shift from "duty" to "love" in family relations, discussed in the historical outline of Chapter One. More specifically, relationships that consist of emotional intimacy are given greater priority than those that do not, regardless of the presence or absence of an biological relationship.

While this shift to emotional intimacy in marriage and family relations is a general trend in American society, I believe that lesbians are among those at the forefront of this kinship change for two reasons. To begin with, the kinship change under question is really gender change. Since the onset of World War II women have been breaking down the barriers of rigid gender roles by taking on some of the responsibilities of the male wage-earner role. From their experiences and with the awareness of gender inequality brought about from the feminist movement, some women have expected men to share in the responsibility of maintaining emotionally intimate relationships.

However, not all men are willing and/or able to participate in the sharing of responsibility for an emotional relationship. In general, adult American men of the 1980s were not socialized to be

emotionally nurturing and to express love verbally. Rather, Cancian (1987) notes that this is a female pattern of love, and men have a different pattern of love, i.e., they have been socialized to express love by providing practical help, sharing physical activities, spending time together and through sexual relations (Cancian 1987:75). Therefore, men are slower to learn and engage in emotional intimacy. Thus, defining love as emotional intimacy is really an expectation that all people will adopt the female definition of love, which Cancian (1987) call the "feminization of love."

Lesbian couples, on the other hand, are composed of two women, both of whom have been socialized to want and be capable of emotional intimacy in relationships. Thus, creating a mutually nurturing relationship based upon emotional intimacy, open communication, sharing of feelings, flexible roles, and equality, is easier for two women than for a man and a woman, as noted by Rubin (1983) in her book *Intimate Strangers*. It is for this reason that I believe that lesbians are on the cutting edge of the process of redefining "family" based upon "love."

In addition to the gender changes involved in the new definition of love, the second reason why I think that lesbians are among those at the forefront of kinship change is due to their experience of living a different kinship pattern. The daily experience of living in a family form different from the heterosexual nuclear family and belonging to a network of others who live the same kinship pattern, fosters a common redefinition among them. From their

common experiences the women I have spoken with have defined an emotionally intimate relationship with reciprocal nurturing as a definitive criterion for family membership, within the new definition of family, and in some cases, have it take precedence over a blood or marriage tie. As Joyce says:

I think that that is the epitome of the dilemma that you feel. On the one hand, your relatives are those "people" (your uncles, your aunts) that really have nothing to do with you, and what we're trying to do is establish that this is an okay feeling for us to be feeling, that people who are not necessarily given that sanctification in society are also your family. And we are making it, we are saying this, and other women are saying it to me they say "how's your family?" and they meet Tommy and Deborah and that's a family and I think that they see us as a family in that traditional sense but we're not traditional, we're not in that at all. And I think that this is something that we have to struggle with because we do have this "definition" and societally established framework of family and relatives and then there's what we feel.

And what she feels is that her family of creation consists of her lesbian spouse, son, and a few intimate friends with whom she has mutual nurturing relationships.

The experience of a common definition of kinship based upon a shared kin pattern is, of course, not limited to lesbians. For example, in her study *All Our Kin*, Carol Stack describes the kinship patterns and beliefs of urban poor African-Americans living in Illinois in the early 1970s. The nuclear family is not the basic unit of their domestic organization, but, rather the domestic network is the center of social organization for these people. Due to

the constraints of their poverty, nuclear family households cannot survive for long periods of time. Instead, people create, break down, and then recreate new households within a stable group of individuals which Stack labels the domestic network.

Domestic networks consist of "those you count on" the people of The Flats told Stack, i.e., those people who share with you whatever resources they have (e.g., food, clothing, furniture, child care, housing) when you are in need, and with whom you share when they are in need. These people are cooperating kin consisting of people with whom one has a biological connection and those with whom there is no biological connection. However, even in those cases where there is a biological connection, it is not the biological tie alone that creates the kin tie, but, rather, the behavior of the individual, i.e., that she or he will cooperate in the system of generalized exchange. Stack (1974) labels these individuals "essential kin" which she defines as those

who activate and validate their jural rights by helping one another, thereby creating reciprocal obligations toward one another (Stack 1974:157).

It is the behavior of sharing that creates the kinship tie between the people. Consequently, only those biological kin who behave this way are considered kin.

On the other hand, the people of the Flats consider friends, who behave in the expected kin pattern of sharing, to be kin. As Stack notes:

When friends more than adequately share the exchange of goods and services, they are called kinsmen. When friends live up to

one another's expectation, their social relations are conducted as kin. For example, if two women of the same age are helping one another, they call their friend "just a sister," or say that "they are going for sisters" (Stack 1974:58).

They live a kin pattern different from the heterosexual white middle class male dominant nuclear family, and, like lesbians, define family based on their everyday experience.

In addition to challenging the definition of family based on blood and duty, from living as lesbians women develop different beliefs about sexuality and gender. These women disagree with the folk idea that heterosexuality is natural. On the contrary, many lesbians experience their sexuality as very natural. It is not uncommon to hear women say that sex with a woman feels more natural than sex with a man, or that once she had sex with a woman, she found her true sexuality, or true self. Here, the women are using "natural" in an individual sense, i.e., that having a sexual relationship with a woman is in keeping with their own natures. They do not see lesbian sexuality as outside of nature, but as a part of it.⁵

For example, on the February 25, 1988 episode of the talk show *Geraldo*, which featured lesbian mothers, a heterosexual woman in the audience said that lesbian couples were raising their children in an "unnatural situation." One lesbian mother responded:

We are bringing our children into a normal situation. . . The reality is there is at

5. In her research on lesbians in San Francisco, Weston (1988) found that her research participants have similar notions of the naturalness of lesbian sexuality.

least 10% of the population that is gay. That's the normal reality of life. And our child is going to be the child of two lesbian parents, 10% of the population. And if you look at it that way it just is.

In addition, lesbians disagree with the ideas that gender roles within the family are natural and that women need men. In contrast the women I have worked with have found that living in a spouse relationship with another woman is not only possible, but feels natural and gives them great happiness and satisfaction. Moreover, living in the 1970s, 1980s, and entering the 1990s, they have found that they can live independently from men. While they may have less of an income than their heterosexually married sisters, they are able to financially support themselves and create a life with or without a partner.

Again, lesbians are not alone in holding beliefs about sexuality and gender different from those Schneider reported in his 1968 ethnography. Rather, the women I worked with have lived through an age in which there have been significant changes in beliefs and behaviors regarding sexuality and gender in American society. The 1960s saw a "sexual revolution," which stressed the importance of sexual gratification in achieving personal happiness for both men and women, regardless of whether or not they were married. Moreover, as Mintz and Kellogg (1988) note:

The trend toward postponement of marriage, combined with increased rates of college attendance and divorce, meant that growing numbers of adults spent protracted periods of their sexually mature lives outside of marriage (Mintz and Kellogg 1988:209).

The availability of birth control, cures for venereal disease, and

liberalized abortion laws combined to allow for sexually active lives outside of marriage.

In addition, the feminist movement of that time questioned traditional gender roles within the family, suggesting that they were socially constructed forms of economic exploitation as opposed to "natural" familial roles. Feminists encouraged women to give priority to their own interests rather than altruistically putting the interests of their husbands and children first, to gain economic independence through work outside of the home, and to demand that their husbands share housework and child care responsibilities.

These two movements had an impact on individuals who might not necessarily consider themselves feminists or "sexually liberated." For example, Stacey (1990) describes the lives of working class families in California's Silicon Valley. Influenced by the feminist movement of the 1960s and 70s, in the 1980s the middle aged working women in these families rejected rigid gender roles within their families as described by Schneider (1968), and negotiated family roles with their husband. On reaching adulthood, several of their daughters explicitly rejected feminism; however, they took for granted issues for which the feminists of their mothers' generation fought (e.g., a women's right to sexual satisfaction in or outside of marriage, available contraception, abortion rights, the ability to combine a career and a family, and sharing housework and child care within the family).

While there has been a redefinition of the meaning of sex and

gender among many Americans since the 1960s, there are segments of the population who still believe in traditional definitions of sex and gender. This has created a climate in which sex and gender are not fixed, but to be negotiated within people's lives (see Ginsburg and Tsing 1990). This is the social climate in which my research participants reached maturity and adulthood, and in which they formed their ideas about sex and gender.

Although lesbians have changed the criterion that determines who shall be in one's family (i.e., not exclusively biological and affinal kin), and ideas about sexuality and gender, many characteristics of "family" are very similar to those of the old definition of family. Loyalty, reliability and responsibility are still important characteristics of family members, as seen in Anne's hesitation to consider her friend Tina as family:

C: What would make you feel like she isn't?
What's the hesitation?

A: The things that make me feel like she isn't is that we had a really rocky history and I feel like she's let me down or betrayed me in a couple of ways and that's mutual. We've both kind of let each other down and betrayed each other. For the most part that was a long time ago but they're those kind of things that--for me it's like, "Okay, you get one chance." I have a feeling that she's that kind of person too. So, I think these things have been very slowly healed and we've worked on them a little bit but a part of me just wants to say that they can't heal. It's not a conscious choice but it's just that you can work and work on things, but when the chips are down someone's just going to fall apart on you then it damages--I guess it damages the friendship. I don't think that those feelings are deserved necessarily but that's what happens when you have a really

bad--when you really screw-up in your relationship with somebody it has ramifications. I feel like we both expect a tremendous amount of each other and neither of us quite lives up to that. There's a hesitation because part of the relationship feels really unstable because there's part of me that wouldn't be at all surprised for it to fall apart again. It's fallen apart once so that we didn't speak at all. I guess that once that happens I feel like that's kind of a possible permanent damage and I'm not sure that that's a family kind of thing.

C: Something about family members don't let each other down or betray each other?

A: Yea, and don't--yea. Well, I mean you might let each other down in the sense that you couldn't always come up with what the other person needs but you're supposed to die trying or something.

In addition the idea that a familial tie is unbreakable (which Schneider refers to as strong and enduring solidarity) is an aspect of this new definition of family. This is demonstrated in Anne's discussion of the difference between family of origin, friends and constructed family:

C: So, what's the difference between friends and family?

A: Friends and constructed family?

C: Right.

A: Because in general I would say--if it was friends and biological family I would just say that biological family are people that you can't avoid having a bond with. You were born with them and--for me, I was born with them and I can't get away from being bonded to them whether it's healthy or unhealthy. Friends you choose for better or worse, it's not always good but you do choose them and you can lose them if you want to.

However, in discussing "constructed family," Anne notes that

A: I wouldn't expect to lose [them]. They're people I would expect to always be friends and that the form might change a whole lot but they would be people who if I picture myself doing whatever I'm going to be doing in twenty years, somewhere in my life they'll be there. Whether I'm communicating with them or not they're going to be in my emotional picture for good. Also, that I would--this is a changing thing, I don't know if this is always going to be true but at this point in my life there are people that I would want to be there for if they really needed me, if they seriously needed me. Or, not needed me but needed someone. There are also people with whom I'd like to share important things--my important things and their important things. Other friends are--actually a much healthier relationship, a lot of times, which is that they may be there forever but they may not depending on how much we all change. I would hope that they could be there when I need them and hope that I could be there when they needed me but wouldn't really rely on it or want them to rely on it too much. They're people that I share what I can with but don't necessarily think that because something's important to me it will be important to them. With constructed family I figure that if something's tremendously important to me, even if it's not a specific interest of theirs, it will be important to them. . . None of these boundaries are absolute. It's not like: "If she does this then she's this." But that's the general thing.

In addition, I have observed women discuss their problematic estranged relationships with friends in the same manner as they discuss problematic estranged relationships with members of their families of origin. In these discussions, they demonstrate that they are no longer close to the person; however, the person is still "family" in that they have not completely severed their ties

with them. For example, Miriam no longer gets along with her friend Sybil. There were a number of things Sybil did that hurt Miriam and made her distrust her, but she still loves her and cares for her "like old family." If Sybil were ever in trouble Miriam would do what she could to help; however, she did not want an ongoing relationship with Sybil. Similarly, for the past few years Beryl has been disappointed in her relationship with Audrey, who has been quite depressed and self-centered. She does not expect to get much attention from her when they speak on the phone or get together; however, Beryl has maintained a relationship with her because she cares about Audrey and wants to check up on her periodically to make sure she is alright.

While many of the characteristics of a family member are the same, the difference is that lesbians do not attribute those characteristics to people due to the existence of a biological tie. Rather, they create a familial tie by behaving as a family member should, over a period of time. The familial tie is created through experiences which demonstrate that the person has familial characteristics (e.g., loyalty, responsibility, etc.), and which most Americans associate with family life (e.g., co-residence, child-rearing, and sexuality).⁶

Living together is an experience that can help create a familial tie among lesbians. As Joyce notes:

6. In her book *Friends and Family*, Lindsey (1981) found that co-residence, child rearing and a present or past sexual relationship created kinship ties among the heterosexual and gay people she interviewed.

What is a family? Well a family in one sense are people that are grouped together to help each other survive. And that's basically what we're doing.

And Deborah:

D: Yea, and I guess that you live with someone and you have a daily contact with them and you're daily involved with them. I'm not daily involved with my biological family in any way. I keep in touch but you know. . .

C: So family feels the more intimate group of people that you're with.

D: Yes, yes, I would say that.

The feeling of family may not come at the point of beginning co-residence, but after living together for a while. For example, at the time of our interview, Anne had been living with two roommates for close to a year. She said that when she began living with them she did not think of them as family, but after living together and sharing their daily lives together, and after helping each other with their joint and individual problems (such as finding a new apartment together and helping one person with a serious illness), she was beginning to think of them in familial terms.

Raising a child together is another experience that can create a familial tie between lesbians. Deborah echoed what Schneider's informants believed, that children are what make a family:

C: So when do you think you started to think of your relationship with Joyce as family?

D: I guess, we were a couple certainly, but I don't think we labeled ourselves a family until Tommy was born. That was definitely

a thing that made use feel like more of a family, more united as a family unit.

C: So what did Tommy's birth bring that meant family for you?

D: Just to have a child in your life. I felt that was, I don't know, that's how you define a normal family if you have. . .

C: To have a child living with you and raising the child?

D: Yea, I thing so, yea. Me and Joyce, when we were together, we had some friends, but most of the time, sometimes I would feel very lonely. Around the holidays and stuff especially. Joyce did have her family who would call or, I don't know, she didn't go there that much on the holidays, but I was I guess more depressed than her, that I didn't have a family to share Christmas with, or celebrate Christmas with, or enjoy Christmas with. Many of the holidays were very lonely for us. . . I don't know, there was something missing. When you have a child you can see Christmas through his eyes, it's more of a thrill for you. He talks about Christmas and Santa Claus and Rudolph and he saw the reindeer, and when is he coming. And we put up a tree and decorate the tree and hang the stockings. And that kind of stuff. It makes it more of how it is supposed to be or something. I get that feeling of sharing the holidays. That was a big thing. I'm less depressed around the holidays, I look forward to it. I'm just as happy as anybody else, or even more so maybe.

Her lover, Joyce, shares her belief:

C: So you perceive yourself as family, is that how you put yourself out to the world?

M: Yea, yea. . . I think that that's what happens with a child too, the child defines that, there's this constellation there that exists that makes a family. . .

However, women without children and single women are very

quick to point out that family does not mean having children for them, that they have "families" without children or spouses. When I have told people, lesbian and heterosexual, that I am doing research on lesbian families, many assume I mean only women with children. Some lesbians, however, ask me what I mean by family, because they want me to know that they have no children and they still think of themselves as having family. At a workshop on "Creating Lesbian Families," most of the participants wanted to discuss having children. A few women, including Alice, were disappointed. Alice feels that for her, creating lesbian families does not exclusively mean having children. The network of intimate friends she has created over the years is her lesbian family.

Sexuality brings tremendous intimacy, and, not surprisingly, lesbians feel a familial tie to people with whom they have or have had a sexual relationship. Edith cannot imagine breaking up and having no contact with her spouse Cynthia for the rest of their lives. "I tell her, 'Even if we break up, I'm going with you'." In fact, I have observed a number of lesbian couples who had long term relationships, and, after breaking up, remained "family," i.e., important in each other's lives. Beth was devastated when Jennifer broke up with her and began a new relationship. However, shortly after that she told me "I know things will never be the same, but I know we'll still have a relationship. We're family to each other." Similarly, Julie and Lois had a sexual relationship that lasted three years. They have been friends since they broke up sixteen years ago. Their relationship has survived relation-

ships on both sides, and Lois's move out of state. They are still extremely important to one another. Julie told me: "Lois is not just an ex-lover, she's family."

It is not just the sexual relationship that creates the familial bond, but the commitment that sometimes comes with sexual intimacy. Rhonda demonstrates the importance of commitment in determining whether or not she has a familial relationship with lovers and ex-lovers:

C: When you've been sexually involved with a woman you've considered her to be a family member? And when you broke up--

R: Oh, no, I would say not this past relationship [was familial]. The one I was with for nine years we had that kind of commitment to each other. With Maria there was always a lot of stress about commitment.

Similarly, Anne discusses her relationship with her ex-lover and why she thinks of her as family:

A: What does make her family is that I often feel really, really close to her and I feel like she understands me better than a lot of people do. Which isn't saying much because I always walk around feeling misunderstood but I do feel like she often understands me better and I feel like I understand her well. I have a lot of respect for a lot of things about her and I sometimes can feel very familiar and comfortable with her in a way that's very unusual--like, very familiar, as if I've known her all my life. And, um. . . yea, those kind of things make her feel like she is family.

In summary, according to the definition of family lesbians are creating, kinship is achieved rather than ascribed, i.e., one creates a familial tie through behaving like a family member,

rather than expecting a social relationship from another person due to the existence of a biological or affinal relationship. However, much of the expectations of familial behavior are the same. One should behave in a supportive, loving, care-taking manner, and one should be loyal and reliable. While there is a new definition based on behavior, most women still have the old concept based on ascription by blood and affinity and see people as kin accordingly. However, the nature of the actual relationships with these people vary from person to person as I will discuss in the next chapter.

Exceptions to the Rules - This is preliminary research that is designed to outline the parameters of kinship change. For that reason I have focused on the commonalities among my research participants to enable me to draw a picture of the new kinship patterns. However, there were some exceptions to the general pattern of kinship change. To begin with, not every woman kept the two definitions of family separate. For example, Jessica had a very difficult time deciding whether or not to include as family her grandmother who had raised her, her mother, and her father. She said that they were her family when she was young, but, because they could not accept her lesbian family, she became separated from them.

For Jessica, their lack of acceptance of her family pattern meant that they were not her family, despite their blood ties to her. However, in the recent past each had begun to demonstrate that they were changing and perhaps opening up. Ultimately she decided to include her grandmother, mother and father because she

believed that people take time in changing, and that they were probably on their way to accepting her. She decided to include cousins she rarely sees because at a recent wedding she had seen them and they were all accepting of her. She said that she would not have included them before seeing them, because years ago they had been judgmental of her.

Unlike most of the other women I interviewed, Jessica does not seem to keep the two types of family separate. Rather, the new definition seems to take precedence over the first. Biology or affinity are not enough to create a kinship tie for Jessica; the individuals must also *behave* as family to her or they are not family to her.

Two other women have also given the new definition precedence over the old. Arlene was raised by foster parents, and only saw her birth parents on weekends. She does not consider either her birth or foster parents as family. They are all dead now, and she did not have much of a relationship with them in her adulthood (she was in her late 40s at the time of this research). She visits her brother once in a great while and considers him family, but the tie is not that significant to her. For Arlene, family consists of close friends "who have stood the test of time."

In a more extreme case, Barbara does not consider any people with whom she has a biological or affinal tie, as her family, because she has no relationships with any of them. She includes her friends, lover and ex-lovers as her family, as well as her ex-lover's mother because she loves her very much and they have main-

tained a relationship after she and her ex-lover broke up.

On the other hand, while most women's family of origin consisted of biological and affinal kin, Denise, an African-American woman, named other individuals in her family of origin, particularly people who had been involved in caring for her as a child. These included her mother's best friend and her children, with whom she still has contact. Her definition of family of origin is much more flexible than the traditional model discussed above (which most of my informants were raised with), allowing for achievement through behavior as well as ascription by blood and affinity.

Denise's definition of family fits with some studies of urban African-American communities (e.g. Stack 1974; Valentine 1978), which demonstrate that people living in these communities have a more flexible definition of family, including people who behave as family. In particular, single parent families are an accepted social pattern, and single mothers often create close friendships that include sharing child rearing. These women will incorporate each other, and each other's children, into their families.

In addition to her including non-biological kin in the family of origin, Denise seemed to ascribe greater importance to biological kin than the other women I worked with. She was the only woman I interviewed who included deceased people when I asked her to answer the question "Who is in your family." She told me quite a few stories about her grandmother and great grandmother (who died long before Denise was born), and this family history was quite important to her self identity. Despite differences in family of

origin, she had a similar new concept of family, people with whom she shares her life today.

The exceptions discussed above are notable because they suggest variations in how lesbians define family, and raise questions for further research. Why would some women reject the biological definition of family altogether, while some women maintain both the old and the new definitions? Does having a more flexible original definition of family, such as that of Denise, facilitate the creation of a new definition of family? Does it similarly make one's family of origin more easily accept your new definition of family? What other variations in traditional definitions of family exist for lesbians, and do they impact on the new definitions? These questions suggest the need for further research.

Emergence of the New Definition of Family

I am interested in how this new definition of family developed. None of the women I know were taught this definition of family when they were children. Like most Americans growing up in the 1950s and 1960s, they were taught that "family" refers to both the heterosexual nuclear family, and the extra-domestic network of people related by blood or marriage. So how did they come to define female lovers and friends as "family" in adulthood?

Yanagisako (1978) suggests that: "People do not adopt symbolic systems wholesale, but instead construct systems out of their own experience" (Yanagisako 1978:27). Following that, I looked to their life experiences and the social contexts in which they lived for explanations of the emergence of this definition of family. I

found that their life experiences contrasted with ideas that they were taught regarding family relations, sexuality and gender roles. Their life experiences, combined with ideas they learned from the feminist movement, the lesbian and gay rights movement, the personal growth movement, and the conservative pro-family movement, lead to the development of their new definition of family.

The women who have shared their lives with me grew up in the 1950s and/or 60s, which shaped their definitions of family. To begin with, many people today, particularly conservatives, hold the heterosexual nuclear family of the 1950s as the ideal family form people should strive to create. Moreover, these people assume that this family form is "natural," i.e., has always existed.⁷ However, Mintz & Kellogg (1988) note that

the pattern of family life characteristic of the fifties differed dramatically from any that has been observed earlier in our history or since. Young adults of the 1950s married in unprecedented numbers. They married earlier than other twentieth century Americans and they had more children and bore them faster. At the same time, the rate of increase in divorce rates were slower than it had been for earlier or later American families (Mintz and Kellogg 1988:178).

The high rate of marriage, earlier age of, and higher number of children in the 1950s, were the result of a combination of economic and social conditions. The postwar economic boom provided

7. For examples of people who hold such beliefs see Falwell 1980; Neuhaus 1986. Audience members of talk shows often express the idea that the heterosexual nuclear family is "natural" and that other forms of families, be they lesbian families, single mother families, etc., are either inferior families or do not even constitute "families".

both working and middle class men with jobs that would allow them to earn enough money to support their families, and at an earlier age. The dramatic increase in housing, particularly the development of suburban areas, as well as the availability of government mortgages for veterans, allowed couples to find and afford homes of their own.

As many married couples moved into the newly developed urban areas and, thus, geographically removed themselves from their kin networks, there was greater emphasis on the nuclear family. Most people at that time believed that individuals, male or female, could not be happy and lead a fulfilling life outside of marriage and children. Thus, there was pressure to conform to this living pattern (Miller and Nowak 1977).

The nuclear family of the time had rigid gender roles. The father was supposed to be the sole wage-earner and the mother the home-maker and primary parent, responsible for the physical and emotional welfare of her children. Moreover, the family became a child-centered environment. Those raising children in the 1950s had lived through the depression of the 1930s and World War II, times of deprivation and anxiety. Parenting in an economic boom, many were determined to provide their children with everything they did not have as children (Hisler 1986; Mintz and Kellogg 1988).⁸

In the 1950s vaccines for several childhood diseases were developed, and the mortality rate of children went down. The

8. See also Part One of the Documentary series *The Sixties* for descriptions of being a parent and a child in the 1950s.

reduced concern about children's physical well being, combined with the popularization of Freudian psychology, increased the focus on children's emotional health. Since the mother was responsible for child care, the mother was held responsible for the child's emotional development if anything went wrong. This provided both an ideological pressure for women to remain at home as full-time mothers, and an anxiety about damaging their children should they do anything wrong (Eisler 1986; Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

One of the most significant technological developments to impact on how people defined and experienced their families, was the growth of the television industry. In 1940 there had been 3,785 television sets in the United States. By 1960, 90% of all American homes had them (Mintz and Kellogg 1988). For the first time a generation of Americans of all backgrounds grew up with the same image of "family" across the country when they turned on their televisions sets and watched shows like *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, *Ossie and Harriet*, *The Donna Reed Show*, etc. Most families were white, financially comfortable, and had a working father and a home-making mother. In each episode the families encountered a few problems, but nothing that could not be solved by father's wisdom and mother's love, and all in 30 minutes.⁹

Of course, not everyone lived this wonderful life of post World War II America, nor thought it was a life worth striving for. Certain people responded rebelliously to the strong sense of con-

9. For a discussion of the images of family life on American television see Cattleman and Podrazik 1982.

formity in gender roles and family living at the time. It was in the 1950s that the counter-culture movement of the 1960s got its start with beatniks of the 1950s; it was in 1953 that *Playboy* was first published; it was in the 1950s that the first homophile groups supporting homosexuality began; and many married women of that time were privately unhappy with their roles as housewives and mothers (Ehrenreich 1983; D'Emilio 1983; Friedan 1963).

Despite the beginning of conflict and criticisms, many of my research participants who grew up in that time report that when they compared their families to the television families, their families fell quite short. Rather than simply seeing their families as different, many felt that there was something wrong with them and their family. Rhonda refers to this as the "mystification of the family":

Hardly anybody has the family that they're supposed to have, nobody has that family, that family is a myth, but the myth about the family makes you think that something is wrong with you, and that your family is fucked up. If you don't have what the family is supposed to look like, it's the wrong color, it's the wrong shape, it's the wrong ethnicity, it's the wrong whatever, the parents are not both your parents or you only have one parent, whichever situation you have--which I think is at least close to the majority of the so-called "families" in the U.S.A.--if you don't have that family you think something's wrong with you.

C: How do you cope with that mystification of the family?

R: Well, you hear me trying me to cope. It's a constant struggle. . . I've always had one or two close friends who I could count on. . . I've always had, in a sense, somebody who was to me

like family, like what family is supposed to be. Somebody who's supportive, somebody who takes care of you, somebody who you turn to in a crisis, somebody who will look after you if you can't take care of yourself.

Rhonda's experience of what she calls "the myth of the family" and her response to it are not unusual. Many women found that the idea that the family of origin is a source of unconditional love and support is a myth for them as well. In contrast, a number of women found that their families of origin were unsupportive or rejecting of them for a variety of reasons, some having to do with their sexual orientation and others having nothing to do with it. For example, when Donna was in her early 20s her father died leaving her to care for her mentally ill sister. Her aunts and uncles, who she had been told would always be there for her, "disappeared." None of them offered to help her, and when she asked her wealthy uncle to temporarily loan her money, he refused. She was hurt and felt abandoned and quickly decided that in her family of origin, blood was indeed not thicker than water.

Deborah had a very difficult childhood in which she felt unloved and unsupported. Of her family of origin she says:

There wasn't very much love or understanding or sympathy, there was a lot of back stabbing, and [they were] just very critical and not any kind of a support system that you could hang onto or grow from or learn from. . . It was just very closed.

Clearly, she believes that a family should be a group of people who provide love, and a place "to grow," which she did not find in her family of origin. Rather than concluding that there is something

wrong with her, as Rhonda discussed above, she looked for that type of a relationship elsewhere and found it with her spouse, Joyce.

C: So what is it that you get being with Joyce that makes her feel like family?

D: Well, I feel like she was the first one to ever care about me, you know, really sincerely. . . instead of like my family cared about me in a selfish way, like my grandmother had me because it made her feel good. Whatever those needs were that I met. It wasn't like "I want you to do this because it's gonna be good for you." It was a very selfish sort of love that I feel that my grandparents had. Where Joyce was, you know, let's do something to make you feel good. . . That kind of stuff, you know, in a caring way.

While her family of origin was not a place to grow, in adulthood her relationships with her spouse and friends have been. She said at one point "my family is not my family," which seems like a contradiction, yet it is not. It means that she was taught that those related by blood and marriage are her family, and that society recognizes them as such, but they do not behave as family, therefore from her perspective they are not. Here the care-taking behavior becomes the criterion for defining someone as a family member, rather than an expected behavior from a person with a biological or affinal tie. The behavior, and not the blood tie, is most important to her in defining people as family. She recognizes her family as those who behave as such, i.e., in a supportive and caring manner.

From being rejected or not cared for by her family of origin, she has attempted to bring people other than biological and affinal kin into her life to create supportive, loving relationships, i.e.

familial relationships. Her reaction is common. For example, when I asked Joyce "How did you develop your idea of family, people who are taking care of you rather than people who are biologically related to you," she replied:

The more I became an individual and the more I was rejected, the more I had to look for other resources. There were many lonely times for me. I think you have a fantasy world, your family is this and this. The reality is something quite short. But because you are involved in a world that emphasizes family so much, that's what you're bombarded with all the time, you have certain expectations or desires for what family is or who they are. And the more that I became an individual and they wholeheartedly rejected me, I had to look for something else. You can't be alone, not have anything, you have to have something. That's what makes the gay community a community; we try to make up for or compensate for a lot of people who are gay and have been rejected by their family. It's not unusual.

It is not unusual, and, I suggest, it is the result of living a common kinship pattern. From supporting each other over the years, sharing their lives with one another, going through the ups and downs of life, they become increasingly important to each other, and eventually consider each other family. Over the years I have seen lesbians develop deep friendships with women in support groups they joined to discuss having children. Over time these friendships turn into networks of mutual support for parenting, including exchanging baby sitting, child care tips, children's clothing, etc. Very often close friendships develop between certain women that go beyond parenting and which they eventually define as family.

Moreover, they lived these experiences at a time in which there had been a questioning of the meaning of family, sexuality, and gender in American society. These individuals lived through the fifties in their childhood or teens, and then experienced the late 1960s and 1970s in their teens or early adulthood. In contrast to the rigidity and emphasis on conformity of the 1950s, they found support for breaking out of the limited roles of the heterosexual nuclear family and for re-thinking the meaning of family in the 1960s and 70s. In particular, they got ideological support from four social movements, the feminist movement, the lesbian and gay rights movement, the personal growth movement and the conservative pro-family movement.

To begin with, feminist ideas have greatly influenced the lesbian definition of family described above. Feminists have argued that the nuclear family's gender differentiated roles are not natural but socially constructed. In their analyses they have pointed to the problems within the male dominant heterosexual nuclear family, e.g., domestic violence, child abuse, economic dependence of women, and their consequent difficulties in supporting themselves in cases of divorce. Feminist solutions to these problems include economic equality for women; sexual and reproductive freedom; sharing of housework and child care within the family; and changes in employment to allow for the sharing of housework and child care (e.g., flex-time and viable part-time employment).¹⁰ These beliefs gave ideological support to lesbians who wanted to

10. For examples and discussions see Yalom and Thorne eds. 1982.

live separately from men and create spouse and parenting relationships with other women.

Ideas from the lesbian and gay movement have, of course, shaped the lesbian definition of family. Lesbians and gay men have suggested that homosexuality is not a psychological pathology. They have questioned the "naturalness" of heterosexuality and have suggested instead that compulsory heterosexuality is institutionalized into our kinship system. They have suggested, among other things, that individuals should be given the freedom to express their sexual desires, and that any relationships or family forms created from their sexual relationships should be legitimized. They have also suggested that homosexuality and parenting are not mutually exclusive, and have fought for the rights of lesbian and gay parents.¹¹ These ideas have provided lesbians with support for new behaviors and beliefs regarding family.

The personal growth movement has also provided support for creating this new definition of family. By personal growth movement I mean people and groups who advocate the idea that all individuals deserve emotional support, intimacy, and unconditional love in their lives. These include the "New Age Movement," humanistic psychotherapies, 12 step programs, etc. Most lesbians I know are or have been involved in the personal growth movement, and the ideas of this movement have been influential in shaping their kin-

11. For examples and discussion see Rich 1980; Katz 1990; Clunis and Green 1988; Vida ed. 1978; Stoddard 1990, Ettlebrick 1990; Adam 1987; Martin and Lyons 1972; Boston Lesbian Psychology Collective eds. 1987.

ship behaviors and beliefs because they encourage women to strengthen relationships with people who "support their growth" and distance themselves from people who are unsupportive. This perspective prioritizes people according to their behavior rather than the presence or absence of a biological connection. Lesbians have taken this one step further by defining people with whom they have an emotionally intimate relationship as family based on their supportive behavior, regardless of whether or not there is a biological connection.

The conservative pro-family movement emerged in the 1970s largely as a response to the ideas put forward by people in the feminist movement, lesbian and gay rights movement and the personal growth movement. They see the gender and sexual arrangements of the nuclear family as natural and ordained by God; they define duty to family as the basis of familial relationships, rather than meeting individual emotional needs; and they view problems in society from crime to poverty as a result of the breakdown of the traditional male dominant nuclear family. They do not see lesbian relationships (or any other type of non-traditional relationship) as an alternative to the traditional nuclear family, but, rather, they believe that the absence of the nuclear family means social anomie (i.e., social isolation, unhappiness, pain, abandoned wives, fatherless children, etc.).¹²

The rise of the pro-family movement has resulted in a con-

12. For examples and discussion see Falwell 1980; Schlafly 1978 and 1981; Neuhaus 1986; Ginsburg 1989; Cohen and Katzenstein 1988; Adam 1987; Mintz and Kellogg 1988; Bellah et al. 1985.

troversey in America. The word "family" is a key symbol in this conflict as the participants contest its definition. Lesbians use it to discuss their social patterns, to describe how they experience their relationships, and to claim legitimacy for those relationships; conservatives use it to maintain the hegemony of the male dominated nuclear family (Rapp 1987).

It is my opinion that the pro-family movement and the controversy over "the family" this movement has generated, have contributed to lesbians redefining family, although an unintended contribution, I am sure. By naming themselves the "pro-family" movement and using "save the family" as one of their slogans, conservatives have implicitly and explicitly suggested that lesbians (along with feminists and gay men) are anti-family. Family is a symbolically loaded word in this society. As Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako (1982) note, in the American symbolic system, we contrast relationships within the family and the market. Since the market is the social arena based upon competition and self-interest, the family is based upon nurturance, i.e., unconditional love and acceptance.¹³

Thus, being outside of family life is an isolating and upsetting idea for most Americans. In addition, a common myth that lesbians and gay men fight is that they are isolated, asocial

13. Of course, this is an ideal view of American families, as there is unconditional love and acceptance, as well as conditional love, rejection, and violence in many American families. Here I wish to point to what the word "family" represents to many Americans to understand how the controversy over "the family" has influenced the lesbian redefinitions of "family."

people. In reaction to that characterization, lesbians began to think of their relationships in terms of family rather than community. The slogans "Love is what makes a family," and "Anti-Nuclear Family," demonstrate that lesbians reject the pro-family/anti-family dichotomy and, instead, define loving relationships as the basis of family (Weston 1988a).

These four movements have provided ideas that have shaped the new lesbian definition of family. Specifically, they have provided ideas that form the core of the belief, i.e., that women can live separately from men, that heterosexuality is not natural and homosexuality is normal, that people should be drawn to those who help them in life, regardless of a biological connection, and, finally, by stressing the importance of family (read intimate relationships and love), in this time of alienation in post-industrial society.

"Love is What Makes a Family"

Schneider states that love is a powerful symbol in American culture, and sexual love is the symbol of American kinship:

Sexual intercourse (the act of procreation) is the symbol which provides the distinctive features in terms of which both the members of the family as relatives and the family as a cultural unit are defined and differentiated (Schneider 1968:31).

I found love to be central in the definitions of family of the women I worked with (as the title of this chapter suggests). However, it is not the type of love Schneider discusses, i.e., sexual or procreative love, but a nurturing love, a love that enables growth, not just the growth of children, but of adults as well.

This concept of love is based upon the idea of mutual nurturing discussed in Chapter One, which Cancian (1987) refers to as the new blueprints of love, based upon self-fulfillment, flexible roles, intimacy, and open communication. The women I have worked with share this new image of self and love. The meaning of love, then, is that both members give and take emotional nurturing and development. What is significant here is that the women expand that meaning of love beyond sexual relationships to include intimate friends, and the ability to participate in the new blueprint of love (as Cancian would say), is the primary criterion for defining someone as family according to the new definition. This then becomes a new kinship value, a new expectation of behavior, for the new kinship definition. Mutual nurturing is what makes lesbian love, and love is what makes a family.

CHAPTER FOUR:
"WE ARE FAMILY"
LESBIAN KIN NETWORKS

Introduction

I attended the wake of an Irish woman whose life was cut short by cancer. It struck me as very similar to the Irish wakes in my own family; there was a somber feeling in the room, yet no one was visibly crying or expressing much emotion. People were quietly talking in small groups as individuals went to the casket to pay their respects. However, there was one difference that I have not usually found in other Irish wakes. At one end of the room there was a group of women who were clearly not of this family, whom I identified as lesbians. These women were the lesbian kin network of Delia, the sister of the deceased. They came to pay their respects and give Delia support in her grief.

The previous chapter focused on the definition of "family" my research participants have developed. In this chapter I will look at the behavior and functions of different kin relationships, both those created from "traditional" definition of family and the "new" definition of family. I will demonstrate that for the lesbians I worked with, their egocentric networks consist of two different social networks that correspond to the two different definitions of family. I will describe each network, discuss the relationships between the two, and suggest that the friendship network is the social context in which a woman learns to live the in new emerging kinship patterns discussed in the previous chapters.

Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapter One, I will demonstrate that, contrary to what Lasch (1977) and Bellah et al. (1985) suggest, the kinship ties my research participants create from their definition of family, based upon meeting individual emotional needs, combine commitment and obligation with self-interest.

Family of Origin

As discussed in Chapter Three, most of the women I have worked with were raised with the idea that one's family is composed of people related by blood and marriage. Almost all of these women still define people encompassed by that definition as family. However, whether or not those people are important in their daily lives varies from woman to woman.

Parents - From observations and interviews, it is clear that even in cases where women came from problematic homes, such as ones in which there was alcohol, drug, physical or sexual abuse, the parent-child bond is strong and enduring. All women seemed to be deeply emotionally attached to their parents, especially their mothers. However, this does not necessarily mean that the attachment is positive, or that they get along well. There is variation in the tenor of the relationships from amiable and supportive, to very hostile and abusive, to non-existent.

As a rule, parents are not thrilled to discover that their daughters are lesbians. Most Americans consider lesbianism to be a sexual deviation, and they wish their daughter would be "normal," i.e., heterosexual. They handle learning about their daughter's sexuality, and how they relate to her after the initial revelation,

depends on how they deal with problems and conflicts within their family. If members of a family become antagonistic, angry, and refuse to speak to one another for some period of time when they experience conflict, they will then handle discovering that their daughter is a lesbian in the same manner. If they emotionally cut off children who disappoint them, they will then estrange themselves from their daughter when she tells them she is a lesbian. If they become upset initially but come around fairly quickly after a conflict, again, their behavior will reflect and shape how they handle the subsequent disclosure.

For example, in the early 1970s, at age 17, Dawn informed her parents she was a lesbian. The parents thought that being a lesbian was a mental illness, and sent Dawn to a psychiatrist who had her committed to a mental hospital. Dawn realized that the hospital staff would keep her there until she was "cured." She had a male friend come to visit and pose as her fiancé. The hospital staff released her the next day. While this may seem, to some, like a cruel thing to do, Dawn's parents actually thought they were making the correct decision.

Phyllis is from a conservative Irish Catholic family, and her parents have difficulty with any deviation from the traditional model of family and sexuality. For four years she lived with Agnes, which her parents knew, but she never actually told them that she was a lesbian. When Agnes became pregnant, Phyllis decided that she wanted to tell her parents.

I never really didn't intend on coming out to them and then what happened was some-

thing with the baby just brings it all out. My thought was that I was just going to say Agnes is having a child and I'm going to raise the child with her. You know, just sort of say it like that. Then when it really came down to Agnes being pregnant, I started thinking about it and getting more in touch with what I really wanted. I just really felt that I didn't want to continue not being honest with them. That I really wanted it out in the open. You know, it's uncomfortable because everyone else [her sisters] is "Oh, I'm so happy I'm an auntie" but they can't talk in front of my mother. I just thought it wasn't fair to the child and it didn't feel good to me. It just seemed so ludicrous.

She wrote them a letter explaining her family life. They cut her off, and at this writing four years later, have not had any contact with her. This has been extremely painful for Phyllis.

Rejecting their children who disappoint them is consistent with Phyllis' parents' way of dealing with family problems:

My parents have a very rigid background and they're pretty moralistic and they have actually excommunicated¹ a number of their kids. Tom because he was living with someone he wasn't married to. He was twenty, I guess. John because he was student council president in high school and there was a sit-in and he was responsible--he was held responsible for it and he wouldn't apologize. And Alice because they never liked her. There was no real reason. She maybe tried to defend one of my brothers or something, nothing really. It was very, very hard and their names couldn't be spoken in the house for five years. My younger sisters didn't know her and it was really very hard and painful.

1. Excommunication is a term used in the Catholic Church to mean that a person has been permanently expelled from the Church. However, Phyllis uses it here to mean that her parents expelled her siblings from their family, not the Catholic Church.

Like many people of their generation and background, Phyllis' parents cannot deal with sexual variation. Phyllis' sister told her what their mother said about Agnes' pregnancy:

It's immoral to have a baby--I'm not sure, she wasn't really explaining what exactly made it immoral or anything she was sort of just--she was very angry and talking really irrationally but she was saying that something about having the baby is immoral and she wished that I had asked her before the pregnancy. Julie said, "What difference would that have made?" I said it probably wouldn't have made any.

On some level they knew about Phyllis' sexual orientation, but did not want to know, i.e., openly discuss it.

In fact, as long as it was not spoken, they were accepting. Phyllis' mother told her and her lesbian sister that she knew they were lesbians, but did not want to talk about it:

My mother had said before there's some things that parents don't want to know. She took me and Mary, my gay sister, aside and said that and then left the room. It was a very clear message--and there always has been that you don't talk about things in the family. You don't talk about things. If you do talk about them, don't talk about them outside of the family.

This acceptance was reflected in their behavior toward Phyllis and Agnes:

I've been sharing a lot more of my life with them. Also I've been--like, Agnes was invited to my sister's wedding and she went for Christmas and my mother made a special effort to get Hanukkah presents and candles and all this stuff. Agnes does not really even practicing but . . . my mother knit her a vest. I haven't said anything but they know that we bought this place together. They know that we've lived

together for four years. In more recent years they would come to town and say let's go for dinner, and I'd ask if Agnes could come. I never presented her [as a lover], but I started talking more about her, and then they picked up on it and started inviting her on their own without me saying it.

While Phyllis' parents have still not spoken to her, it could very well be that she and her parents are trapped in a stage of the process women go through when they tell their parents that they are lesbians. Initially, there is some distress, often followed by a period of estrangement, and then reconciliation.² This process takes time and can be very painful. However, most times the estrangement is not permanent.³

For example, Joyce, also from a conservative Irish Catholic family, has had a similar experience with her parents. She, too, described her parents' reaction to learning that she was a lesbian as excommunication. The excommunication lasted for several years. After the birth of Joyce's son, her sisters encouraged her to visit her parents. However, they would not accept Deborah as her spouse. Joyce decided she no longer wanted to visit them. A few years later her parents contacted Joyce to resume their relationship.

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2. A gay comedian noted three stages parents go through when they learn their child is gay: they don't want to talk about it, they want to talk about it, they want to talk about it on the Oprah Winfrey Show.
 3. This pattern is an exaggerated form of the process of reaching adulthood, in which an individual learns to live her life separately from her parents, and the parents learn that the individual is not living the life they might want her to live. This process can be difficult and painful for anyone; however, for families who have great difficulty with sexual variation it can be particularly painful on all sides.

Her father's younger brother had recently died, and Joyce believed that they had faced their own mortality and wanted to make peace with her. Joyce now sees them once in a while and visits them on holidays with her son and Deborah.

I think that we've come to a certain understanding that we have to live differently, and we just have to make the best of it. That's how I think they've come to see things. But we certainly have a lot of disagreements.

Her spouse Deborah has had a similar relationship with her parents, and finds herself now in a similar situation. She describes her experience with her parents: view:

My parents were in town and we're trying to work things out and become friends or at least be civil to one another. . . In terms of any kind of emotional support or financial support or anything, none of my family members have ever come through for me.

For some families, there is never a break in their relationship, even if they have difficulty accepting their daughter as a lesbian. For example, Miriam's parents have always argued with her when they disagreed with something she was doing, yet they have never broken off contact with her. They have always had a "hang in there and fight it out" approach to conflict with their daughter, and learning that Miriam was living as a lesbian was no exception. Initially they argued with her, tried to reason with her, but never at any point did they reject or threaten to reject her. Eventually they came to accept her as a lesbian.

Yet other parents are able to immediately accept their lesbian daughters, as is the case with Judith's mother.

My mother is unusually open to a lot of things so if you bring anything up with my mother she'll deal with it directly and non-defensively, which is wonderful.

Judith feels her mother is not only accepting, but supportive of her life. Judith speaks to her regularly, shares her life with her, and visits her in Florida at least once a year.

Judith's mother's acceptance is reflected in her art work. Her mother is an amateur artist who paints pictures from photographs. When I visited Judith and Delia's new home, I saw her mother's painting of Delia's late sister, whose wake I described at the beginning of this chapter. It spoke not only of her acceptance of Delia as her daughter's spouse, but her desire to give Delia a very special gift as a remembrance of her sister.

Some parents who accept their lesbian daughters (and/or gay sons) belong to an organization called Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). The organization's goals include supporting group members by working out individual and family problems, and working for social and political change for their lesbian and gay children. At the annual lesbian and gay pride march in June, the PFLAG contingent usually carries posters reading slogans such as "My son is gay and he makes me proud every day," and its members get a booming round of applause when they walk down New York City's Fifth Avenue.

Siblings - Siblings, particularly sisters, are very important to the women I worked with. The relationships are important to them due to their biological connection and their shared childhood. As with parents, relationships with siblings' vary. However, most

women seemed to have less difficulty gaining their siblings acceptance of them as lesbians than gaining their parents acceptance. Therefore, their relationships are closer.

Dee, for example, is from a large Italian family, socializes with all of her five siblings on weekends at their homes, their parents' home, or grandparents' home, and is particularly close to one of her sisters. Two of her sisters both gave birth within a one month period. Dee went through labor and delivery with both sisters, lending physical and emotional support, and recording the deliveries in still photographs and on videotape. She is godmother to one of the babies, to whom she feels a particularly strong bond. She is especially fond of her nieces and nephews and tries to see them as often as possible. She takes them on special trips to the circus or amusement parks or has them sleep over night at her home. They in turn are delighted by her special attention and look forward to spending time with her.

Phyllis does not have the same opportunity for daily contact with her siblings because they live in different cities. As a result, she does not have very much in common with them today. However, she loves them very much due to their shared history, and they return the love, along with support of her family.

They all know about the baby and they've all known--they were actually some of the first people that I called to tell them about the baby because they're all really wonderful and I really like them.

Life experiences can sometimes bring siblings closer together, and bridge any possible gaps created by differences in

sexuality. Mindy was fairly close to her sister, but when they both had babies within a few months, they became much closer from sharing similar experiences and from spending time together with their daughters. She also became closer to her younger brother in a new way. Being older, she had been in the position of advising him in his life. However, because he had had children before she did, he was giving her advice after her daughter was born.

Delia's sister Eileen, whose wake I described at the beginning of this chapter, was diagnosed with cancer 2 1/2 years before she died. In those 2 1/2 years, Delia took an active role in her sister's life and health care. Delia visited her whenever she was in the hospital or hospice, discussed her health care with her doctors and nurses, and handled practical matters such as her finances and health insurance. She also took care of Eileen's three children on alternate weekends, and she and her spouse have been raising them since Eileen's death.

Of course, there are differences in relationships with siblings that have little to do with sexual orientation, but more to do with gender and personality differences. Of those with brothers, most of the women I worked with seemed to spend more time with and feel more emotionally connected to their sisters than to their brothers. Rhonda, for example, feels a much closer bond with her sister than with her brother because of their common experience of growing up female in their particular family of origin, and, because Rhonda likes the person her sister has become.

Well, she's also a terrific person. She's hot, you don't meet people like her too often. She's

very sharp, very aware of her feelings, very open about what she's feeling. She's warm, she's funny, she's good. I don't know how to explain it but she happens to be a special person, not just in my life special but special generally.

On the other hand, she and her brother primarily have their shared history in common, and she does not really like the adult he has become. In her opinion, he is not emotionally expressive, and, he is not a very good father to her niece.

My relationship with one of my brothers is fairly problematic and has been for twenty years but I still consider that we are close, in a sense, because we grew up together, we were close.

Lesbians also have personality differences with siblings, that are not related to gender. For example, Beryl has two older brothers and has very different relationships with each of them. Joel, she sees at all traditional holidays and keeps in touch with over the phone. She does not have a lot in common with him, but loves him very much and sees him as much as she can. Jonathan, on the other hand, she rarely has contact with. She sees him as a depressed man who has isolated himself from the family, initiating very little contact with her or the other members of the family.

Other relatives - As with parents and siblings, relationships with aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents vary among my research participants. Their feelings for them also vary. They participants have a lot of love for some of their relatives due to past history. They dislike others due to painful experiences in the past. Apparently, women have fewer on-going relationships with these people than with parents and siblings, primarily due to a

lack of common interests.

For example, Judith was close to her cousins in childhood but has little in common with them today:

They're not people I want to spend a lot of time with. You know, like, Passover's always important to me and I always go to my cousins, but this year I didn't know what I was going to do because it's also that I don't think Delia would enjoy it. They're not enjoyable people for the most part. I think I feel the split of being a lesbian to my family. You can't talk about yourself and you can't talk about your family.

C: Why have you chosen not to tell them?

J: Because I think they'd be so intolerant I don't want to deal with them. I don't see them that often. I see them once or twice a year and I don't want to deal with their prejudice. It's not that important to me. The person who's important is my mother and that's worked out fine. I'm really sick of their racism. I'm out to one cousin, who seems to be relatively fine about it, but the other cousins--it's like if you tell one you tell the other. I get worried about it coming out, but--I don't want to deal with it. I think they'll see me differently.

conversely, Anne feels a closeness to her cousins and aunts and uncles.

I didn't have any brothers and sisters and those cousins and second cousins were all very much family to me, and some of my second cousins grew up with me and were very close to me. The daughter of my cousin is like the closest thing I feel like I have to a sibling because we grew up right next door to each other and she was several years younger than me, but I spent a lot of time with her, and in some ways we were very close.

However, she is not very close to them now, because she lives in another state and does not have much in common with them.

Denise had a positive and ongoing relationship with her aunt, her mother's sister, until her death a few months before the interview. She has a poor relationships with her mother, and her aunt was especially important to her. Her mother's surviving sister is also important to her, and she sees her regularly. But, because she is a Born Again Christian and tries to lecture Denise about her lesbianism, she has a difficult relationship with her, much the same as her relationship with her mother.

For the majority of the women I interviewed, when I inquired about aunts, uncles and cousins, they waved their hands or shrugged their shoulders saying that they were not really important. For example, Joyce stated:

I know I have aunts and uncles and cousins out there, but they're not important to me. I never see them and I have nothing in common with them right now.

After I received that response on a few occasions, I thought perhaps I was not asking the right questions, and pushed my interviewees a little further. Still, I did not obtain much more information. I then realized that with a shrug of the shoulder and a wave of the hand they were indicating that those individuals are not presently relevant in their every day lives. There is a biological or affinal connection, and they were taught as children that these people are relatives or family, and they felt a love and affection for many of these individuals, but those relationships currently have little significance in their daily lives. They keep in contact with their relatives through their parents, and see them at family events (such as weddings, holidays and funerals), but

most lesbians in this study do not seem to have significant day-to-day relationships with aunts, uncles and cousins.

Friends

In this section I will demonstrate that friendships are important in the everyday lives of many of the lesbians I have worked with, as Agnes' comment demonstrates: "My friends are my life." However, as mentioned in Chapter One, there has been a shift toward the increasing importance of friends, as opposed to biological kin, in the society in general. In the last section, I will discuss what is particular to lesbians in the shift to friends as kin. I will suggest that lesbian kin networks are important because they provide a social environment in which women learn to live as lesbians.

I have observed three types of friendships among my research participants. The present limitations of our language do not allow for proper expression of this variation, which suggests that we are creating new relationships, as Denise notes, speaking of her friend Tanya:

She's a person who really cares about me and I really care about her. There is no family label or role for her, she's not a sister, she's not a mother, she's something more and different than that and unlimited by those roles.

I refer to the three types of friends as the "intimate friend," the "social friend," and the "community friend." In the remainder of this chapter I will more fully describe these three types of friendships, and suggest that these friendships constitute new kin

networks which support the new kinship patterns of lesbian spouses, lesbian parents, and the new definition of family.

Intimate Friend - An intimate friend is one with whom a woman has a strong emotional bond that is generally the result of a long history, "people who have stood the test of time," according to Angela. The relationships withstand changes in interests, education, career, and even moving long distances. These are the people with whom a woman has regular contact, shares the intimate details of her life, including major life events (both good and bad) and the minutia of daily life. She gives to them and gets from them emotional support and a sense of belonging. These are the friends a lesbian views as family.

When I asked Agnes "What does a friend mean to you?," she replied:

Everything. My friends are, to me, more important than my job, although my friends don't pay the bills. My friends are what's keeping me in New York more than my parents.

Agnes has four intimate friends. The significant factors she employs in describing them as intimate friends are that there is a history to each relationship, she shares all of her life with each person, and each is supportive of her.

I can call up and--or see--any of them. I just say anything to them. I don't think there's anything I can't say. I don't talk to my parents the same way, I don't talk to my sister like that.

Agnes speaks regularly with them on the phone, discussing what is going on in her life and in their lives. These four friends organ-

ized a baby shower for her and her spouse Phyllis before the birth of their daughter.

Most of the women I know are typical New Yorkers, overwhelmed by hectic schedules and living out of date books. Generally, with intimate friends there is a commitment to see one another, or at least have phone contact, on a regular basis. For example, when Jeanne's life was complicated more than usual by the adoption of her daughter, she still made it a point to see her friend Jane once a week as they had for the past 15 years. When regular contact is not possible due to a new job or returning to school, women feel the loss and try to find balance in their relationships.

Intimate friends usually take active roles in major life events, both joyous and painful. Joan is Judith's intimate friend. They speak on the phone regularly, and visit on the weekends. Judith is an "aunt" to Joan's daughter. Judith is Delia's spouse, and it was Delia's sister's wake that I described at the beginning of this chapter. A month before Eileen's death, Judith turned 40. She wanted a party but they had little time or energy to organize it because they were caring for Eileen and her children. Joan offered to have it at her home and to help with the organization. When Eileen died, Joan helped with phone calls to friends and family, informing them of Eileen's death and the plans for her wake and funeral. Joan made herself available to help with anything, and attended the wake to be supportive of both Judith and Delia.

Little did I know that in a few months I would lose my sister Diane to cancer, and when she passed away, my network was activated

in a very similar way. I was in Colorado with my sister when she died, and my friend Patricia called everyone in New York to let them know about the service in Brooklyn. My intimate friends, Delores and Rebecca, had recently moved to New Mexico, and they invited me to stay with them for a few days right after Diane's death. They also helped with phone calls to people, and came up to Aspen to be with me at her memorial service a few weeks later.

Intimate friends often celebrate holidays together, either joining celebrations with each other's families of origin, or having a separate celebration that is in addition to, or instead of, the family of origin celebrations. For example, women's seders are very important to many of the Jewish lesbians I know. Donna was a part of a Jewish lesbian support group that was very important to her because the women were "like family." They had regular Friday night services together, and had a special seder at Passover. These events were important to her because she does not attend such events with her family of origin. Her parents died years ago, and she does not like her aunts and uncles.

Christmas Eve parties at my home have become a tradition among my intimate friends. For the past ten years we have had a dinner and tree decorating party. In 1988, I did not want to have a party because my sister had recently died, and instead, two other friends held it at their home. The next year, when I had the party at my home again, two friends told me that, while they understood why I did not have the party the previous year, they were really happy I was having it again because they had really missed the

tradition of Christmas Eve in my home.

In addition to traditional holidays, many women celebrate other events together. The last Sunday in June is the annual Lesbian and Gay Pride march, commemorating the 1969 Stonewall riots in Greenwich Village, which gave birth to what is now regarded as the modern gay rights movement. The preceding week has a number of special events, such as the Salsa Soul Sisters' celebration and the Lesbian Feminist Liberation dance on Saturday night. The march is an annual symbolic event that celebrates the community of lesbians and gay men. I see this as a lesbian and gay holiday, and some people refer to it as such. During this time, intimate friends usually want to get together and reaffirm their friendship based on a common kinship pattern. They will attend public events together, especially the march, and often have private celebrations, such as a brunch before, or dinner after the march.

Birthdays are an important time for lesbians and their friends. Women expect to get together with their friends and have a special celebration, regardless of whether or not they have a large party. A woman may go out with her intimate friends for dinner on her birthday, or the intimate friends may organize, or help with a party for her. For example, Katie usually has dinner with her intimate friend Debbie on the night of her birthday. One year Debbie organized a barbecue party for Katie's birthday at Debbie's home the weekend after Katie's birthday, in addition to dinner on her birthday.

The importance and meaning of intimate friendships can be

seen at the time of someone's death. Katie and Marilyn each lost intimate friends to AIDS. Each had been very close to these men since childhood, and had continued and strengthened their friendships in adulthood. At their deaths, they were each in profound grief, and over the year that followed had continual pain and difficulty in adjusting to life without them. Their grief demonstrated that their relationships were deep and significant. In fact, their friends passed away within a year of my losing my sister, and I was struck by how similar our grief processes were.

Social Friends - The next type of friend I have observed is the social friend.⁴ Unlike with intimate friends, a woman does not share the intimate details of her life with social friend. But, these are the people with whom a woman has a relationship that is focused around an activity, job, group, or organization. If the activity ceases, or she leaves the social arena, the friendship will lapse. These are people, lesbian or straight, who a woman will call her friends from work, school, softball, ACOA meeting, couples group, mothers group, the community center, etc. Most women do not define this type of friend as family, but place it within a larger concept of network, that corresponds to the extra domestic kin network. Agnes refers to these people as her "extended family" or "second line friends."

Anne contrasts social friends with intimate friends, whom she calls constructed family:

4. Of course, social friendships can and do develop into intimate friendships, but not all of them do.

Other friends are--actually a much healthier relationship, a lot of times, which is that they may be there forever but they may not depending on how much we all change. I would hope that they could be there when I need them and hope that I could be there when they needed me, but wouldn't really rely on it or want them to rely on it too much. They're people that I share what I can with, but don't necessarily think that because something's important to me it will be important to them. With constructed family I figure that if something's tremendously important to me, even if it's not a specific interest of theirs, it will be important to them.

Joyce discusses her social friends.

I have friends who were very much involved with me in raising Tommy as an infant, and planning him, but because . . . our lives have changed a great deal we are not that close. But we are certainly there for each other and supportive, we'd do anything for each others' kids, you know, that kind of bonding that existed all along. We came about because of the kids but we were also there for each other, to be supportive to each other. But many things change when you have kids too, people break up, and people go through changes, or you know, the boys and girls are now divided off, so, it's part of their thing. They have their own classes and their own thing, how much time do you have in life to be there? But we always know how each others' kids are doing, and we're always very interested in them, and always happy to see them when we do see them.

They do not speak or see each other on a regular basis the way intimate friends do, but she still cares for them and they for her.

Katie has belonged to a gay chorus for several years, and has developed friendships that are very important to her. Most of them are social friends, that is, she sees them regularly at rehearsals, tells them what is happening in her life, finds out what is hap-

pening in their lives, socializes with them at group parties, invites them to her parties, goes on weekend retreats with the group, etc. However, she does not have an intimate relationship with all of these people in which she discusses things in detail nor does she discuss very personal matters.

Social friends may celebrate holidays and special events, along with intimate friends. For example, Sarah has had a seder every year at Passover for the past several years which is attended by not only her intimate friends and social friends, but friends of friends as well. It is an open event that keeps growing every year. In addition, when women want to have a bigger party or celebration, i.e., for a thirtieth, fortieth, or fiftieth birthday, or for a graduation, they will invite more than just intimate friends, they will invite social friends and the next type of friend I will discuss, community friends.

Community Friends - The third type of friendship, community friends, are those individuals whom a woman knows causally through participating in the lesbian community. They meet occasionally at events, run into each other on 7th Avenue while shopping, meet in the park at softball games, hear about each other from mutual friends, etc. They hope to run into each other during lesbian and gay pride week because they may not have seen each other since the last lesbian and gay pride week. These are accidental meetings; they do not go out of their way to see one another, nor make special plans to spend time with each other as they would with intimate or social friends. They may have seen each other many

times over the years but never develop a social or emotional bond. For example, one woman might say to another: "I haven't seen or heard about Mary in a long time. Is she ok?" Then there will be a conversation stating what they each know about Mary.

While there is not a strong bond between the women, community friends are important to lesbians because they contribute to their sense of a lesbian "community," i.e., a sense that they belong to a larger unit outside of their personal networks. Another lesbian's welfare is important to each woman in the sense that they all are lesbians and they wish one another well and support one another when they can. For example, Marcia had a very serious illness, and her intimate friends organized a benefit for her, consisting of performances by musicians and singers. It was attended by hundreds of people, most of whom did not even know her. I am sure some came simply because they wanted to hear certain performers; however, a number of women came because they wanted to lend financial and emotional support to a lesbian who was sick and needed help. One performer pointed out that this demonstrated that lesbians are "taking care of one another."

This sense of caring for other lesbians even extends to those community members who are not particularly well liked. For example, Rachel has a good heart and a good sense of humor, which draw people to her, but many women find her abrasive and manipulative when they try to begin a friendship with her. When she was expecting a baby, Regina helped to organize a baby shower for her, and spoke to about 10 women over the phone regarding gift ideas.

Regina was struck by how most women complained about her furiously, yet each one had called and each one planned to either attend or send a gift. They provided explanations such as: "She drives me crazy, but she's a lesbian having a baby and I want to support her," or "I can't stand her anymore, but I've known her for ten years and I want to support her now that she's having a baby." They felt a sense of responsibility toward her because she was a member of their "community."

Commitment and Responsibility

The example of how these women responded to Rachel's shower demonstrates that commitment and obligation to others do exist in the relations of the lesbians I worked with. As discussed in Chapter One, this behavior contradicts the assertions by Bellah et al. (1985), who draw an extreme picture of people who create relationships based on meeting emotional needs, suggesting that they do not combine self-interest with an obligation to others.

In its pure form the therapeutic attitude denies all forms of obligation and commitment in relationships, replacing them only with the ideal of full, open, honest communication among self-actualized individuals . . . For therapeutically liberated individuals, obligations of any kind become problematic in relationships (Bellah et al. 1985:101).

My research participants contradict Bellah et al., and demonstrate that self-interest and obligation are not mutually exclusive in their relations with both family of origin and family of creation. They behave in ways that are not necessarily in their own

self-interest, but that help the members of their families.⁵ To begin with, most of the women I worked with help those in both of their kin networks in practical ways. For example, most people that I know do not really enjoy painting someone's new apartment (although some people may of course enjoy it). However, helping a friend paint is a common occurrence I observed over the years.

In addition, few people really enjoy leaving their homes early in the morning so that they can stop in at a friend's house to feed cats on their way to work in the morning, but this is a common occurrence in the community. Similarly, women often help their family of origin and family of creation with spring cleaning. While, there are people who actually enjoy cleaning (something which I will never understand in my lifetime), most people could think of better things to do than clean a friend's apartment. When someone in her kin network is ill (e.g., has a cold or flu), she will usually ask if the person needs some help, and offer to come by to shop, cook, clean, or do whatever the individual may need. Thus, the women demonstrate a willingness to do unpleasant tasks to help friends.

I don't see these practical activities as purely altruistic.

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5. Of course, I am not trying to suggest that all lesbians have a sense of responsibility and obligation to others within their families of origin and families of creation. As with people in the larger heterosexual population, there is variation among lesbians, and some lesbians have self-centered personalities. However, I'm trying to demonstrate that creating relationships based upon meeting emotional needs does not necessarily exclude having commitments and obligations toward others, as Bellah et al. (1985) suggest.

Rather, I have observed both the sense of obligation on the part of the helper in assisting the member of her family, and her own self-interest. She is participating in a system of generalized exchange of time and labor, and she knows that when she needs help, she will be able to call on those she has helped in the past. The areas in which I have observed altruistic behavior are those in which individuals feel an obligation to take on the responsibility of caring for someone who cannot fully care for themselves. This generally occurs in people with serious illness and the elderly.

Because of my interest in parenting, my research has focused on women in their 30-40s. This means that most of their parents are reaching retirement or retired, and may be facing serious illness for the first time. I found among my research participants, women who have cared for their parents at these times. As mentioned above, Delores and her spouse Rebecca were very involved in caring for Delores' father when he faced a serious illness. Similarly, while she had a strained relationships with him beforehand, Amanda cared for her father in his last year while he was ill with cancer. Moreover, Jeanne and Sharon lived with Jeanne's mother for years. When she became ill they cared for her, and when they were no longer able to care for her. They put her in a nursing home and visited her regularly.

Despite their relatively young age range, some of my research participants have had siblings and friends who have faced serious illness and death. Again, in these instances they cared for their family members. For example, as discussed above, Delia cared for

her sister during her two year battle with cancer, and has been raising her three children since her death. This has not been easy for her or her spouse Judith. On the contrary, it has been very difficult. Moreover, she was not very close to her sister before her illness. She cared for her sister and her sister's children out of both obligation and love. As also mentioned above, Donna's parents died when she was in her early twenties, and she alone has cared for her mentally ill sister over the past seven years. This involved visiting her when she was hospitalized and helping her to adjust to life when she came out of the hospital.

In addition to siblings, several women I know have friends who are ill with or have died of AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome). These women participate in caring for these friends, visiting them at home and in the hospital, and running errands for them which they can not do for themselves. Voluntary organizations for people with AIDS demonstrate that commitment and obligation to others is found within the lesbian and gay community in general. These organizations help people with everything from negotiating with the medical establishment, to shopping and cooking, to caring for pets during illness. The volunteers who carry out these tasks are performing them out of a sense of commitment to care for others within the lesbian and gay community.

Thus, performing activities that are not directly in one's self-interest is not outside of the experience of people who organize relationships based upon meeting individual emotional needs. From my experience and observation, the reason why Bellah et al. do

not recognize the compatibility of obligation and self-interest, is that they do not completely understand the philosophy self-development. Many of the people whom I know (both heterosexual and homosexual) see the ability to love others as a goal in self-development. Full maturity means being able to care for others, not just yourself. Moreover, the experience of loving unconditionally will actually bring one to self-development.

So, for example, when I went to Colorado to care for my terminally ill sister, most people viewed it as something that I was doing for her. However, a number of people also saw it as an opportunity to "grow" because I would experience unconditional love which would improve my life. The emphasis on the importance of being able to love unconditionally in the philosophy of self-development is something that its critics all too often miss.

The Relationship of Two Networks

To summarize so far, lesbians have two kinds of social networks, the family of origin network composed of biological and affinal kin, and the friendship network composed of intimate, social and community friends. In general the two networks are activated at different times and for different reasons. Birthday parties, holiday celebrations and specifically lesbian social events reflect one's lesbian network. In general, parents, siblings and other members of one's family of origin do not attend lesbian social events. However, there are a few exceptions. Yolanda is very close to her heterosexual sister Maria. They are both single mothers and help each other in raising their children.

Yolanda brought Maria to a lesbian picnic, and she seemed quite comfortable socializing in a group of lesbians, which left me with the impression that this was not her first time doing so.

There is more overlap involving members of one's lesbian network participating in family of origin activities. Holiday celebrations, weddings, bar mitzvah parties, communion parties, etc., generally reflect family of origin. Lesbians usually bring their spouses to such family events, and these women may be incorporated into the family of origin network. Intimate friends often want to know the important people in each others lives, including their family of origin, and will invite each other to family of origin events. For example, when my sister Beth was visiting from Denver, one of my intimate friends invited herself to my brother's home. After hearing about Beth for the past fifteen years she wanted to finally meet her. Sometimes they have events for that purpose, such as when Patricia and Beryl had a "mothers' night," i.e., they went to a Broadway show with their mothers. However, intimate friends usually do not become incorporated into the family of origin network in the way that spouse can.

While they are generally separate networks with separate events, certain events do equally involve both networks. These include baby showers, commitment ceremonies,⁶ funerals, and graduations, i.e., events which a woman would like all of the people in her life to attend.

6. Commitment ceremonies are ritual events that celebrate lesbian couple relationships. I will further discuss them in the next chapter.

There was one interesting and fortunately unusual occasion when the two networks overlapped. San Francisco and Oakland have large lesbian populations, and many women in New York have friends living in the San Francisco Bay area. When the earthquake hit on October 17, 1989, like everyone else in the country, lesbians in the New York City area wanted to find out about their loved ones on the West Coast. I was immediately concerned about my friend Miriam and tried to call her but could not get through. Because we were very close when she lived here, I knew her parents and had their phone number, and, knowing she would contact them as soon as possible, I called to find inquire about Miriam. When I spoke to her father he told me that she was fine, and that other friends had called him to ask about her as well.

Friends as Kin

Wolf (1980) notes that friends are as important, or even more important, than family of origin to the lesbians she studied in San Francisco, and suggests that this is true because:

for most lesbians close friends are a substitute kin, their strongest support group. Lovers may come and go; consanguineal relatives are usually no longer a significant part of their emotional life; but friendships are the core of their personal support group, and as such serve a crucial psychological and emotional function (Wolf 1980:97-98).

While agreeing with the importance of friends for lesbians, Weston (1988) notes that friends are not a substitute kin, but a different kin, and that they are important even if relationships with family of origin are good. "That's the way one builds a good life: a set

of friends," a 64 year old male research participant told Weston.

Weston states that

His statement reflects a conviction very widely shared by lesbians and gay men of all ages. Most see themselves as having better friendships than heterosexuals, or if not, will at least make a case for the greater significance and respect that homosexuals accord to friendship. Undoubtedly such comments reflect a mixture of observation and self-congratulation, but they also draw attention to the identification lesbians and gays make between friendship and homosexuality, in contrast to straights for whom family and friends are often supposed to represent exclusive categories (Weston 1988a:156).

While she notes the importance of friendships for lesbians and gay men, she does not attempt to discuss these relationships in the context of the larger kinship system.

Like Weston, I found that across the board, intimate friends and a network of social friends are very important to the women I studied, regardless of the nature of relations with family of origin. In the remainder of this chapter I will demonstrate that these friendship networks are very important to lesbians because they teach them what their mothers never did: how to live in the world as lesbians. Many people, heterosexual and lesbian alike, have more in common with peers than with their parents, aunts, uncles and grandparents due to generational differences. However, I will demonstrate that there is more than generational differences operating among the lesbians I have worked with. The development of lesbian kinship networks involves the creation and maintenance of relationships in which women learn about the new social environ-

ment in which they live.

When a woman begins living as a lesbian she is entering a new social group and must learn about a new kinship pattern. Since most heterosexual people do not have a realistic idea of what it means to live as a lesbian, heterosexual family of origin are generally unable to help a woman in this process, no matter how supportive they may be. Furthermore, in some cases heterosexual family of origin and friends may be distressed by the women's sexual orientation and may be antagonistic rather than supportive. Family of origin are often another issue lesbians have to deal with, i.e., how to reveal your sexuality to your family of origin and maintain relationships with them.

Unlike people in other minority groups in which a person is born, lesbians are not raised within this minority group, and their families of origin do not belong to this group, nor have they lived this new kinship pattern. In the opinion of some gay rights activists: "We are reared in families of an alien culture" (Goodman et al. 1983). Therefore, lesbians must learn about this kinship pattern in adulthood.

The experience is similar to that of upwardly mobile people and children of immigrants. Parents from working-class backgrounds are not able to help their adult children who move into the middle class in the same way that middle class parents can. They do not have the contacts that might help their children get into a good school, or get a good job after they graduate from school, or incorporate themselves into a new social group. Upwardly mobile

people usually find others, either from school or in their professions, who help them with the necessary social contacts and information needed to function in the new social environment.

Similarly, when coming to a new country, immigrants are not able to help their children adjust to their new social environment because they are not familiar with it themselves. Children go to school and learn from their peers and teachers. In fact, because children are socialized in school, and because they acquire language more easily, children sometimes teach their parents about their new country.

Like upwardly mobile people and the children of immigrants, lesbians look to people already living in the new social environment for direction. There are four points in the lesbian life cycle in which a woman encounters a new aspect of the kinship pattern, and generally seeks out advice from other lesbians. At these points we can clearly see the uses of the lesbian kin networks. These include: recognizing and accepting her sexuality; disclosing her sexual orientation to others; creating and maintaining a couple relationship; and having children.⁷

Usually the initial problem a lesbian faces in entering the new social environment is learning to recognize and accept her

7. I am presenting the issues in a logical sequence for convenience. However, peoples' lives are often not so logical. Some women become involved in couple relationships first then get incorporated into the community; some women are mothers before they live as lesbians. For these women, learning to accept their sexuality may come after the fact. However, these are the life cycle issues women may encounter at certain points in their lives.

sexuality. When they were growing up, most of the lesbians I know learned the same stereotypes about lesbians as everyone else in America. These include that lesbians are sexual deviants, that they hate men, that they want to be men (or both), etc. The process of acceptance generally involves redefining what it means to live as a lesbian from the perspective of their stereotype (whatever it may be), to the perspective that it is another way to live. The best way to accomplish this is to observe other lesbians.⁸ Women who are coming out often join social or political groups, attend discussion groups for women who are coming out, and/or participate in the existing networks of lesbian friends. In these contexts they can learn that lesbians are not stereotypical, but come in as many varieties as heterosexuals, and can begin to create their own identities as lesbians.

From these groups they also integrate themselves into the lesbian community, begin to create their own social networks, and meet other lesbians for dating. Because heterosexuals often discriminate against lesbians, many do not readily reveal themselves outside of the lesbian community. This presents a problem when trying to meet someone for friendship and dating. A woman has to know where to go to meet other lesbians in a comfortable atmos-

8. Therapy and counselling with clinicians who have the view that living as a lesbian is a legitimate way to live, can be a tool to help women restructure their relationships and their meanings. However, it is not a substitute for a network. In fact, Jessica, a psychotherapist, believes that creating a friendship network is an essential element for living as a happy, healthy lesbian, and advises her clients accordingly.

phere. Again, this is something she cannot get from family of origin. A lesbian will not say to her mother "hey mom, where can I go to meet a nice girl?" Her mother might not know she is a lesbian, and even if she did, and was accepting of her daughter, she probably has no idea where to go to meet other lesbians.

Some lesbians meet women at bars, dances, or social groups. However, many of the women I know met their spouses or the women they date through other friends. When a woman is single, she may let her friends know that she is available and wants to meet someone. Her friends then keep their eyes open, invite her to social events where they think there may be other single lesbians, and/or introduce her to someone they think she might like.

Judith did not have such a network after her first woman lover broke up with her.

C: Did you get involved with someone else after that?

J: Well, then I was sort of left with a dilemma. Am I a lesbian or not? Because I think you sort of feel like--most of the time you feel like you're a lesbian once you're part of a couple. And she really didn't have a lot of friends so there wasn't a network to fall back on. I was sort of trying to find out who I was and getting over this terrible upset.

C: What was the dilemma for you?

J: It was just like who am I? and how do I want to run my life and what are my options? I was in one relationship and a lot of it felt good but it also ended disastrously and what do I do now? And how are you a lesbian? I think a different set of identity questions were coming up. I think being a lesbian is a very different way of living and just being new at it--what do I do?--for about a year.

Even though she is supportive of Judith, her mother has no life experience that would enable her to help Judith deal with creating her own identity or finding a new partner. Judith explored these issues alone and in therapy, but now believes that a network would have helped her deal with her identity problems as well as to meet other women for dating and friendships. Since then she has worked to have more friends in her life:

One of the things I feel is that I really do want more people in my life to be more like family, more friends, and the [lesbian mothers] support group somewhat feels like that. We've spent some time with them and they don't feel like family, but they're important as a group and as individuals. I hope in time there'll be more closeness.

From observing her over the next three years following our interview, she did, indeed create more friendships in her life and has a network of women who share her kinship pattern.

Living in a lesbian couple is a social pattern that is not recognized or supported by the larger society, and women feel the need to discuss problems in a supportive atmosphere. If families of origin are unsupportive of the women's sexuality, then they will not be supportive of her relationship during problems. For example, when Patricia and her lover were having difficulties, her mother was not supportive or sympathetic. Instead she encouraged her to end her relationship, and when they did, suggested that she go out with men again. Of course, lesbian couples encounter many of the same problems that heterosexual couples encounter. Heterosexual family of origin may be supportive with those common problems. However, if the problem is particular to living as a les-

bian, women turn to their friends who can give them advice and support from their life experience.

For example, when a lesbian wants to discuss sexual problems she usually will not do so with heterosexuals because lesbian sexuality is usually outside of their experience. Instead she will seek out other lesbians, and a network of close friends with whom she can freely discuss sexual problems. This provides a major source of information and support for many lesbians. At a picnic, the conversation turned to sex, and everyone suddenly abandoned softball, badminton and sunbathing to join in. The women were eager to hear about the sexual experiences of others, and receive validation for their sexualities. It was clear that discussing the realities of sexuality with other lesbians is essential.

Finally, as I will discuss in Chapter Six, deciding to have children while living as a lesbian, raises a number of issues that most heterosexuals do not comprehend. For example, Jane cannot turn to her favorite Aunt Julia to discuss finding a sperm donor the way her heterosexually married sister Marilyn can to discuss issues in conceiving. Aunt Julia may be supportive, but she does not know the legal, medical, or social issues involved in sperm donor selection. Likewise, she will not anticipate the future problems that Jane will encounter (such as finding an obstetrician, hospital, pediatrician, schools, etc.), let alone the solutions. Aunt Julia may provide welcomed emotional support to Jane, discussing these issues with her and providing her opinion. However, Jane is embarking on living a kinship pattern which Aunt

Julia has never experienced and probably knows little about.

Jane will probably do what many lesbians do when they decide to have a child. She and her spouse (if she has one) will turn to others who have or want to have children for support. This was true for Delores and Rebecca, who set about talking to their friends and acquaintances who had children, when they began to contemplate parenting. When they felt the need to have an ongoing source of support and discussion, they started a support group.

Support groups for lesbian parenting have been popular since the early 1980s. Over the past few years I have spoken to several women interested in such a group, and they all express a sense of confusion and isolation regarding having a child, and feel that they have little or no support in their lives. Most do not tell their families of origin that they are planning on having a child until they have either adopted or are pregnant. This is not surprising, as often the individuals have difficulty understanding lesbian parenting and cannot be supportive, but generally are happy once there is a new baby in the family.

Agnes talks about why she joined a support group for lesbians having children:

[To discuss] issues of what it's like to be a lesbian parent. How do we relate as lesbians to our children? How do we involve a non-biological parent or partner? How does the kid relate to you, what do they call us? How do our families respond? How do we deal with being lesbian parents in the general society on a daily basis?

And Judith talks about her support group:

C: What do you get from them [support group mem-

bers)?

J: Validation of lifestyle, validation of our family, validation of being a lesbian. Real care and concern about the changes that we've [she and her spouse Delia] gone through. . . There's been some real caring and warmth, something that goes beyond meeting every other Monday night. It's a special group of women.

Agnes and Judith stress the need to discuss issues and to find validation in the similarity of experiences with others like them. This is what lesbian kinship networks provide that heterosexual kin networks cannot.

Once women develop friendships with other women based on learning some aspect of the new kinship pattern they are living, they often develop a relationship that includes other aspect of life, that could or are being fulfilled by family of origin. I have seen lesbians form discussion groups that, over the years, turn into networks of mutual support, including exchanging baby sitting, child care tips, children's clothing, etc. This is often the shift from being social friends to being intimate friends, who often define each other as family.

Thus, the friendship networks lesbians create serve as a social arena in which women learn to live a kinship pattern which involves living in a spouse relationship with another women, creating significant friendships which they define as family, and, possibly, parenting. The friendships are similar to friendships of heterosexuals in similar age groups and backgrounds in that both types of friendships may involve sharing daily life experiences, activities, emotional intimacy, social life, etc. They differ in

that lesbians learn within the networks how to live as a lesbian, which they generally cannot learn from their families of origin. Heterosexuals on the other hand, can learn to live their kinship pattern from their family of origin. In general, people observe those within their family of origin while growing up, and combine that information with what they learn about family life from observing friends in adulthood. Particular individuals may not be able to learn from family of origin (because of death the of a parent, geographical distance from family of origin, or no siblings) and some may choose not to because they do not get along well with their family of origin. However, they could learn from their family of origin because they are or will be living the same or a similar kinship pattern. This is not the case for lesbians who live a different kin pattern from their heterosexual family of origin, and, thus, must learn how to live this pattern from others who are living within it.

CHAPTER FIVE:
"WHERE AM I NOT MARRIED TO HER?"
LESBIAN SPOUSES

Introduction

Jeanne and Sharon were members of my support group for lesbians interested in having children. A month after they adopted their daughter, Melissa, we held our third meeting at their home. After playing with the baby for a while, Jeanne took me on a guided tour of their home. They live in a conservative middle class section of Brooklyn close to where I grew up, and their home looks much like the other homes I have visited in that neighborhood. However, this home told the story of their twenty-three years together: the pictures of them over the years; the history of an individual room (once a bedroom for Jeanne's mother, then a study, now a nursery for the baby); their joint study ("This is where we wrote our dissertations, hope you can get some inspiration from it!"); their offices for their psychotherapy practices ("This is my office, this is Sharon's office and this is a room we use for groups"). They changed professions, went through graduate school, took vacations, cared for Jeanne's elderly mother, and were now embarking on a new chapter in their lives, raising a child together. They consider themselves to be life partners.

In this chapter I will further demonstrate the new definition of family among my research participants by demonstrating that co-residential lesbians couples, such as Jeanne and Sharon, define each other as "family" in that they consider themselves spouses due

to their emotional bond, sexual relationship, and commitment to sharing their lives in a domestic partnership. This became clear in observations like the one above, and in discussions, either in groups or during interviews, where women talked about their relationships. I will then discuss the historical process in which the functions of marriage and family shifted away from economic and reproductive partnership toward meeting the emotional needs of individuals. I will then suggest that this process actually facilitated women choosing other women as spouses.

I will also demonstrate that despite their definitions of their relationships, American society does not socially or legally recognize lesbian couples as spouses. I will further discuss the issues lesbians face in living within a relationship that lacks social and legal recognition, as well as the efforts made by gay rights attorneys to gain such recognition. I will then suggest that some heterosexual people have difficulty accepting lesbian spouses because this social pattern sharply conflicts with the American idea of the interdependence and complementarity of men and women.

Lesbian Couples as Spouses

Co-residential couples consider each other spouses in the sense of domestic partners who are involved in an emotionally and sexually intimate relationship and who share their daily lives with one another. For example, Joyce refers to her spouse as a lover, and defines it as:

Someone who you're sharing your life with, you're

living with, you're involved in an intimate relationship with.

This consideration is reflected in discussions of kinship terminology, presentations of self, and the ending of relationships.

Terminology - Kinship terms are words that describe relationships between people. As I mentioned in the introduction, living within an emerging kinship pattern can result in a lack of social and legal recognition of new relationships. This is reflected in a lack of standardized terms to describe those relationships. As part of my interview, I asked women how they referred to their spouses and then how they defined that term. These questions elicited discussions about how they perceive their couple relationship, as well as their dissatisfaction and frustration with present terminology.

Until a few years ago, I observed that most lesbians used the term "lover" to refer to and define their significant others. However, there is a growing dissatisfaction with that term, because it only reveals that two women have a sexual relationship. It does not describe the extent of their commitment to one another, whether or not they live together, nor if they have children. Judith sums up the problem with the term lover:

When a woman refers to another woman as her lover, I don't know if they've been dating for two weeks and finally slept together last night, or they've been living together for 20 years.

These women experience their relationships as including more than sexuality, as demonstrated by the growing preference for other terms to refer to their spouse. For example, when I asked Agnes

how she refers to her spouse she said:

- A: My partner, my life-partner.
- C: What does your "life-partner" mean to you?
- A: It means the woman I'm married to.
- C: And what does being "married" mean?
- A: It means being committed for. . . for as long as you want to be committed. It means living together, sharing our lives together, sharing our experiences, having-doing everything together.
- C: Do you ever use the term "lover"?
- A: Sometimes, but I don't care for it. . . because it defines your relationship in a totally sexual way and there's more to it than sex. I think it's looked at. . . it's, um, it can be misinterpreted. . . I don't like any of the terms. I don't think there have been terms that fit us but I've settled for "partner."

In the social situations in which I have observed Agnes, she has consistently used the term "partner" to refer to her spouse and other women's spouses.

Laura discusses her relationships with her spouse Mindy:

It's a team in certain ways, we've always thought of ourselves as a team, getting apartments for no money . . . Cooperating, talking about whatever stuff is coming up, sharing a home, helping each other with our projects.

Rhonda, a single mother, prefers the term "mate" over "lover" to describe the woman with whom she had a nine year spouse relationship. Central to her distinction between a spouse and someone with whom she had a less serious relationship is a sense of commitment:

R: I would use the term "mate" which is dif-

ferent from "lover." To me "mate" is--I mean I would use that if I was writing it down I wouldn't use it for talk, conversationally I would say "my lover" -- but theoretically the term "mate" is different to me because it assumes a level of commitment that is different from a lover. You could have a sexual partner or somebody who you spend time with . . . or that you hang out with or see frequently. . . "Mate" means you have a commitment to the future, that you have a commitment to doing things together. Theresa was somebody that was for sure my "mate." Maria, the woman I was with up until about a year ago, was not a mate. . . There was not commitment on her side and I think there wasn't commitment on my side.

Many women say that they use different terms in different contexts and for different reasons. Most women use the term "lover" in the lesbian and gay community because lesbians know that it can mean more than a sexual relationship. However, it can be uncomfortable while talking to heterosexuals who might not understand that it means more than a sexual relationship. In these cases they use "partner" or "life partner." On the other hand, in some situations, such as starting a new job, a woman might not want to disclose her sexual orientation to the person with whom she is speaking. In a case like this, a woman might use a nebulous word like "girlfriend" or "the woman I live with" or "my partner" or "my roommate."

For example, Laura refers to Mindy as her "girlfriend" or "partner." She tends to use "girlfriend" when people listening are more open to women being in relationships, because, for her, it implies a sexual relationship. She uses "partner" when she is not yet sure who she is talking to, because "partner" is nebulous; it

could be a significant other, it could be a business partner. Both mean the same to her, but "girlfriend" is more open and friendly, while "partner" is more formal and business-like.

L: When I say "girlfriend" I'm exposing more content. I think in my mind the content is the same, but with "girlfriend" I'm exposing more. Obviously "partner" is a less sexual word, so I'm not always putting that sexuality obviously out there. People who are attuned to that word might realize, "ok, this is also a sexual relationship," it's just kind of less revealing but revealing. It's a very gay word [laughs].

C: Semi-closeted.

L: Layers of meaning. [both laugh]

C: And "lover" is too sexual for you, is that what. . .

L: I think I just never got into that, when I was first getting in touch with getting interested in women, it was not a word that was used, early 70s late 60s. It is a more sexual word, so it may be that a lot of my conservativeness about sex could be part of that.

Public Presentations as a Couple - In addition to discussions of kinship terms and marriage, public presentations of self are subtle ways of noting that two women consider themselves spouses. Often a woman will speak as though she and her lover are a unit, for example, saying "we are going on vacation next week" or "we are looking to buy a house" or "we didn't like the movie" or "we are going to my brother's home for Passover," etc. If the person she is speaking with knows that she is in a relationship, she will assume that the person understands that "we" means herself and her spouse. She does not have to name her spouse.

I attended a workshop on women and money, and several of the participants were lesbians. While most of the women did not come

with their spouses, those who had spouses presented themselves as part of a couple. At some point in the afternoon they discussed themselves in terms of their spouse relationships, e.g. "I'm a spender but my lover saves, so she handles the money and doesn't let me get into too much debt," or "I'm the saver and my lover is always complaining that I don't enjoy my money," etc. From their presentations of self, it was clear that they had significant financial relationships with their spouses, and that it was important to them to present their relationships while discussing their finances.

As I exemplified in the beginning of this chapter, getting a tour of a home is a wonderful way to get a sense of two women as a couple. They may or may not feel safe or comfortable presenting themselves as a couple in the outside world, but their home is the one place that lesbian couples feel safe to openly be a couple. They often describe their home in terms of their relationships, such as "we got this chair at Conran's after we were together for 6 years," "we've lived here for four years," "that's Jill's computer where she does her writing," "the kitchen is big enough for us to work together," etc. Their home provides a strong feeling of their domestic partnership.

One evening my support group met at Susan and Beth's home. We had all come from an event and decided to order a Chinese dinner. As Susan and Beth prepared the table for the meal and made a fruit salad for desert, I could see that they were a domestic unit. They worked in the kitchen together like a teammates, who had done

this many times before. (They had been living together for 17 years at that time.)

When I have entertained in my home, I have seen the partnership from another perspective. When I invite people to dinner I always ask if they have any special dietary needs and if they are allergic to cats (I have 5). When I am inviting a couple, I only have to ask one member of the couple; she will be able to answer for her spouse. "I'm allergic to tomatoes, but Janice has no allergies," or "Ellen is allergic to cats." The amount of information they know about each other regarding health, family, jobs, etc., clearly comes from intimate daily contact and sharing of one another's lives over the years.

Dissolution of Relationships - The end of a relationship often demonstrates its meaning. When two women who have been living together end their relationship they both experience an incredible emotional trauma. Each experiences the pain and the loss of a life partner after they separate. Many women seek therapy at that point to help piece their lives back together. In addition, they have to break up their household and divide their property and money, and decide on custody and visitation of their children if they have any. Their lives have been intertwined and now they are ruptured. Julie, a lesbian attorney, has helped several lesbians couples in the break up process work out an equitable settlement in property division and child visitation. She describes these separations as divorces, suggesting lesbian couples function as spouses.

And finally, the death of a spouse affects lesbians with the same pain, devastation, and disorientation that affects heterosexuals. Shortly after Janie and Irene started dating, Irene was diagnosed with cancer. Most of the five years they were together she was under some type of treatment, and in and out of leading a normal life. Whenever I ran into Janie, she always told me of Irene's condition, and the condition of Janie's life had much to do with Irene's health; her life went up and down with Irene's condition. When Irene died, she experienced the pain, loss, and sense of disorientation that comes from losing a life partner; the "where do I go from here" syndrome. The only difference is that some people did not acknowledge her feelings because they did not recognize their relationship as a spouse relationship.

By using words and phrases like "marriage," "commitment," "partnership," "sharing their lives," "loving each other," "making a family," etc., within their discussions of their relationships, the lesbians I have worked with demonstrate that they view their couple relationships in kinship terms, i.e., as spouse relationships. However, I do not wish to leave the reader with the impression that all lesbians perceive their relationships as identical to heterosexual marriage, or view that as a goal. On the contrary, some lesbians are quite uncomfortable with the idea that their relationships are similar to heterosexual married couples.

Laura discusses her views on the topic:

I have a real objection to the word "marriage" and I haven't quite figured out what the objection is. I see it as a lifetime relationship, I like to think of it as a

partnership.

C: Would you describe it as a domestic partnership?

L: Yea, yea, sexual partnership, domestic, life sharing, it is a marriage, but I don't want to say that. It seems like marriage is such a retro Catholic word, it's a very conservative way of looking at things, it's not at all feminist. To go back to those old roles and partnership seems to be less open to me.

C: So marriage seems more traditional and Catholic to you?

L: Yea, negating a lot of things the feminist movement has brought to women, and going back for the sake of showing partnership in gay relationships.

C: So what is it about marriage that would be negating feminist uh. . .

L: The self-determination of women, women having something of their own. And this is totally from the 50s midwestern Catholic kind of idea of family, women not having their own money, bank accounts, jobs that are good for them. It connotes a lot of oppressive stuff in women's roles.

Her comments demonstrate that she clearly sees her relationship with Mindy as a functional marriage, but does not like the institution of marriage, because it is oppressive to women.

On the other hand, Laura's spouse, Mindy, has no problem viewing their relationship as a marriage:

M: I'm into marriage, she's not. To be honest with you if we could legally get married I would get married and she wouldn't.

Gay rights attorney Paula Ettlebrick elaborates on Laura's concerns regarding marriage. She views marriage as a patriarchal institution based on a system of ownership of property and men's control of women. Legalizing lesbian marriages would allow certain

benefits, but would be re-drawing the lines on which relationships are defined as legal and which are not, and would open lesbian and gay relationships to state regulation. Rather than incorporating lesbians within an oppressive institution, she believes gay rights activists should work toward changing social relationships. For example, providing lesbians access to medical benefits through a legalized spouse relationship would be a limited gain, whereas a national medical insurance plan could provide everyone access to health care, whether or not they have a job with medical benefits or a spouse with such a job (Ettlebrick 1989: 8-17).

Changes in Marriage and the Emergence of Lesbian Spouses

At one point in the interview I asked each woman what her responsibilities were toward her spouse and her spouse's responsibilities toward her. The first thing each woman mentioned was the emotional aspect of the relationship; they are involved in mutual emotional nurturing, and provide a relationship where both can grow and receive unconditional love. This suggests that their emotional bond is the most important aspect of the spouse relationship, which is in keeping with the trend in marriage and family relationships discussed in Chapters One and Three. In this section, I will describe the emotional relationships women have created. I will then suggest that the shift toward meeting emotional needs in marriage, in combination with the economic independence of women and the feminist emphasis on equality in marriage, have facilitated the emergence of lesbian spouses.

The importance of emotional intimacy in lesbian relationships

can be seen in Laura's description of her spouse Mindy's responsibilities toward her:

L: Basically, it's being open and honest about what she is feeling, saying what is going on, not holding back. In terms of doing actual things, If I'm tired and pooped I would like her to see what I need. But I know this is like a fantasy kind of thing because she is also tired and pooped. It's not really an expectation, but like a need. . . More emotional stuff than things done.

C: Like what kind of emotional stuff?

L: Being supportive around my writing, understanding about the time needs that I have, that's probably the major one. If there would be a need it would be that.

Laura discusses her responsibilities to Mindy:

L: Emotional support.

C: And how are you emotionally supportive to her?

L: Uh, it's like checking in with her during the day, calling, leaving notes, remembering to do stuff, physical affection. Just sort of keeping in touch throughout the day.

C: What are you communicating to her during the day in the phone calls and the notes?

L: That I'm thinking of her. I think with Mindy, just sort of remembering that she is there, making her know that I'm thinking about her.

C: So it sounds like there is a lot of care taking on both sides. . . Is there any difference between your responsibility toward her and her responsibility toward you?

L: I don't think so.

C: It sounds like you're both offering emotional support.

L: Yea, we both have our different needs. I think,

yea, it's probably similar in structure.

C: Your needs are different, but you both expect and want to give to each other.

L: Yea.

Mindy discusses their responsibilities toward one another:

M: To listen to her, care about her, support her in whatever way I can, challenge her, stimulate her. She doesn't just want support about her writing, she wants to be challenged and pushed and stimulated and encouraged. I'm trying to be supportive and respectful.

C: And her responsibilities toward you?

M: Same thing, can't think of anything else. First, to be aware of each others needs and when possible, be available. Patience and respect are big things for me. Caring is a big thing.

C: So they're reciprocal things?

M: Yea, Equal.

Of course this type of mutual support and caretaking is an ideal not always achieved. When I asked about the source of conflicts in their relationships, the most common reasons given were a lack of emotional support, or lack of time together. For example, since the birth of their daughter, Mindy and Laura have little time alone together. Laura spends a lot of her free time on her writing and less time with Mindy and the baby. This is a source of pain for Mindy and conflict between them. Similarly, Dee's business takes her out of town a few times a year, which greatly distresses her spouse Beryl. She does not like being left alone for a week or more at a time, and having her home life drastically changed.

While the couples do not always live up to each others expect-

tations, the fact that they have expectations of a strong emotional bond that includes mutual nurturing suggests that their conflicts over emotional relationships are conflicts over kinship role expectations.

Other researchers have noted the importance lesbians give to the emotional aspect of their relationships. For example, in their book *American Couples*, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) compare and contrast heterosexual couples, lesbian couples, and gay male couples. They Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that for any relationship to survive and flourish, each couple must have one person with the skills to facilitate emotional intimacy and who devotes time and energy doing so. They refer to this person as "relationship centered." They found that in heterosexual couples usually the woman is "relationship centered," and attributed that to the greater emphasis on learning and using relationship skills in women's socialization. They found lesbians to be the most "relationship centered" couples, in that very often both members of the couple had the skills and desire for emotional intimacy.

Peplau (1981) conducted a somewhat similar study and had similar findings. The research asked lesbians, gay men, heterosexual women, and heterosexual men to rate different aspects of love relationships. Of the four groups, lesbians gave the highest rating to "being able to talk about my most intimate feelings," suggesting that emotional intimacy is very important to the lesbians which Peplau studied.

The type of relationship that I have described (which is

idealized among lesbians and achieved among many couples) is an example of the type of love relationship that Cancian (1985) discussed. Such relationships are based upon "intimate communication of needs and feelings, and on openly confronting problems," where "family and gender roles are flexible and are continually renegotiated," and men and women are equally responsible for maintaining the relationship (Cancian 1987:39). However, as discussed in Chapter Three, many men have different definitions of love, and different methods of expressing love, i.e., more concrete practical methods of expressing affection. Men have not learned the skills of open emotional communication, and are unwilling and/or unable to engage in such relationships. These gender differences sometimes create conflicting expectations in heterosexual relationships.

In her review of couples advice books of the 1970s, Ross (1980) found a crisis in heterosexual relationships in that women and men have different expectations of the marital relationship. Because women were socialized to be more emotionally expressive than men, men did not expect to give or receive the same kind of emotional intimacy. In her research on working-class families, Rubin (1976) found similar conflicting expectations for emotional intimacy among the husbands and wives she interviewed.¹

Stacey (1990) provides an interesting example of one woman's experience of the conflicting expectations of emotional intimacy in marriage. In her second marriage, Pam found that she did not have

1. See also Rubin 1983 for further discussions of the different expectations of men and women in marriage and other intimate relationships.

the emotional intimacy that she wanted from her husband, which was a source of distress and disappointment to her. At one point her new husband became an Evangelical Christian, and, although this religious doctrine conflicted with her feminist beliefs, she converted because the religion enabled her husband to be more open, and thus brought her greater emotional intimacy.

I suggest that with emotional intimacy as a value in spouse relationships among women, the greater possibility of achieving this goal with another woman leads those women who have sexual attractions to women, to choose women as spouses.²

For example, in a workshop on "coming out" held at a lesbian conference, a woman said that one positive result of her coming out is that "at last my best friend and lover is the same person." She explained that when she was in relationships with men, she never had the same emotional connection as she had with her female friends. The split between her sexually intimate relationships and her emotionally intimate relationships distressed her and made her feel emotionally disconnected.

Other lesbians have echoed similar feelings. Joyce was not happy in her relationships with men, but did not realize that she might be interested in women. Her friends were all involved in serious committed relationships with men. She wanted a committed relationship and did not understand why she did not have one.

It wasn't clicking for me with men, there
was something there that the struggle to

2. Assuming, of course, the economic independence of women as discussed in Chapter One.

deal with different things was enormous. I think that a lot of men don't express their feelings and I think a lot of times in a relationship you always want to know what's going on, because they're not expressing themselves so I was always putting energy into this man who was driving me crazy. I think that had a lot to do with it [her living as a lesbian].

Agnes discusses the last men she was with, demonstrating how she never quite connected to men emotionally:

It ended up like most other relationships that I had with men; they just sort of disappear or they get weirder than they already are or something, it's so hard to explain what happens. I get bored, I can't see myself being with them for longer than five or ten minutes. . . and it just ends.

Many women want a sexual relationship with a woman because (from their experiences) women expect to exchange emotional support, while men do not. This was true for Deborah:

I was married and there were times I wasn't there, just going through the motions of it, you know, not there you just want it to be over so you can get up. . .

The importance of emotional intimacy in a sexual relationship is also expressed in an interview with a lesbian by Anne Koedt, published in 1973. In response to the question "How is sex different with a woman?" the interviewee replied:

One of the really mind-blowing things about all this has been that it added a whole new dimension to my own sexuality. You can have good sex, technically, with a woman or a man. But at this point in time I think women have a much broader sense of sexuality. Since she and I both brought our experiences as women to sexuality, it was quite something.

Another aspect of sexuality is your feelings. Again this is of course an area that has been delegated to women; we are supposed to provide the love and affection. It is one of our duties in a male-female relationship. Though it has been very oppressive in the context that we've been allowed it, the ability to show affection and love for someone else is, I think, a fine thing-which men should develop more in themselves, as a matter of fact. Love and affection are a necessary aspect of full sexuality. And one of the things I really enjoy with Jennie is this uninhibited ability to show our feelings (Koedt 1973:88; emphasis in original).

Moreover, the value on equality and freedom from traditional gender roles that Cancian attributes to this new idea of love, is also clearly seen in lesbian discussion of love relationships. In response to the question "What would you say is the difference between this relationship and those you have had with men?," the interviewee cited above replied:

I think it all boils down to an absence of role-playing; I haven't felt with Jen that we've fallen into that. Both of us are equally strong persons, I mean, you can ask yourself the question, if there were going to be roles who'd play what? Well, I certainly won't play "the female," and I won't play "the male," and it's just as absurd to imagine her in either one of them. So in fact what we have is much more like what one gets in a friendship, which is more equalized. It's a more above-board feeling.

I don't find the traditional contradictions. If I do something strong and self-assertive, she doesn't find that a conflict with her having a relationship with me. I don't get reminded that I might be making myself "less womanly." And along with that there's less self-censorship, too. There's a mutual, unqualified, support for daring to try new things that I have never quite

known before (Koedt 1973:88-89; emphasis in original).

Similarly, Joyce talks about the difference between relationships with men and women regarding gender roles:

J: I was not into traditional roles at all.

C: What are "traditional roles?"

J: Getting up and making breakfast, coming home and making dinner, the expectation that that's gonna be taken care of and everything should be clean, you know, that kind of a thing.

C: So you'd be more of the homemaker?

J: Yea, and the man would be coming home, and that was not me.

Joyce wanted a sense of equality in a spouse relationship, including an equal sharing of household labor. She has created this with Deborah. Peplau (1981) notes that in her research on lesbians, gay men and heterosexuals, a sense of equality was the second most important aspect in a love relationship for lesbians. (As noted above, emotional intimacy was the most important.)

The goal of equality and freedom from gender roles is seen in how lesbians divide household labor and the financial support of the family. As with heterosexuals, lesbian couples who live together share the care of their households, and dividing household chores can be an issue. However, I found that it is a somewhat different issue than heterosexuals often face. Within traditional heterosexual marriages, the man assumes that, based on his gender, he does not have to do the bulk of the housework, and often views anything he does as "helping" his wife. Joyce notes that in her

relationships with men in the late 1960s and early 1970s, her partners assumed that housework was her responsibility:

I think that for a lot of men, *no matter how hippie they were*, that was something they didn't like. They may not have verbally expressed it but it was still a struggle in any relationship I had. It was very rare to find a man who was willing to compromise.

C: What do you mean by compromise?

J: To understand that there was double responsibility.

On the contrary, most lesbians assume that housework is a responsibility they share. They may have different ideas about what constitutes clean, or how the work should be divided, but after living together for a couple of years, most couples I am familiar with seem to have worked out some system that is mutually acceptable.

Tanner (1978) notes that the lesbian couples she interviewed divided the household chores by interest and skill, and Blumstein and Schwartz (1983), as well as Peplau (1981), found the same to be true of the same sex couples they interviewed. Weston found similar results on the division of household labor. The couples she interviewed evenly divide household labor by either rotating tasks or specializing tasks on skill or preference. Her research participants portray spouse relationships as a "union of equals rather than a relation of subjugation" (Weston 1988:202).

I found the same pattern among the couples I worked with. For instance, after living together for two years, Laura and Mindy each learned which tasks they did not mind doing, and which they despised. Laura hates doing laundry, but does not mind washing

dishes and cleaning the kitchen. Neither of them likes cleaning the bathroom, so they take turns doing that or do it together. Many of the women I spoke to managed some similar guidelines.

On the other hand, Deborah and Joyce have no guidelines as to how they divide up the chores. Joyce says: "Having a child, that goes out the window. It is whoever is available," and, at the time of the interview Deborah was unemployed so she did the major part of the housework because as Joyce notes, she was overwhelmed from working full-time and going to school:

She knows that I'm very worn out . . . just frazzled. And you know for her this is ok. I've been like in that situation in our relationship before, where she has not had that much of an input in the household and I have. So we've always been able to see that this is something that's going on right now but it's not permanent and when she gets disgusted enough you know, she lets me know that . . . she just can't do this, and I'm . . . willing to be there and to do. But she just at this point feels that she wants to do this for me right now because it's [her schedule of work and school] a lot. . . That's how we've had to deal with it because, like I say life is so crazy when you have kids and working a lot so it's got to be who's ever gonna be available.

C: So sometimes you do more than the other but over your life span it feels about even.

J: Yea.

Within American kinship, entering a marriage means entering into an economic partnership. This, too, is true for lesbian couples, and their manner of dividing financial responsibility reflects their goal of equality in their relationships. Although their financial partnership is not identical to that within a tra-

ditional heterosexual marriage,³ they live together and share the support of their household. I do not know of any lesbian couple in which one woman supports the other on a permanent basis or for an extended period of time. Their partnerships vary from completely pooling their money, to keeping their finances separate and equally contributing to household expenses. As I will mention in Chapter Six, one woman may totally or partially support the other after they have had a child, but this only lasts for a year or less. In addition, if one woman is temporarily out of work, or the other makes more money, her partner may support her or supplement her income. However, all couples over a period of time share financial support of the household. Weston (1988) found the same to be true of the lesbian couples she worked with in San Francisco.

What I am arguing, then, is that the emphasis on meeting emotional needs, in combination with the feminist value on equality, and, the economic independence of women, has allowed an increasing number of women who have sexual attractions to other women to create spouse relationship with other women. For, the goal of the ideology of "love" is to find a partner with whom you can have genuine sexual and emotional intimacy. Since they have stronger (or sole) sexual and emotional attractions to women, they

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3. In the traditional heterosexual pattern, the couple pools their money with joint checking and savings accounts. However, since more women have been working and keeping their own money, this pattern is not necessarily common among heterosexuals today.

in fact find the ideal type of relationship for themselves.⁴

While my research participants have changed the sexual and gender components of kinship, much of how they live their lives is similar to their parents' lives, and the lives of the heterosexual residents of Park Slope within the same age range, race and class backgrounds. They live their lives within households composed primarily of couples that operate within a network of extended kin. This similarity in pattern is due to the economic and ideological emphasis on couples in American society. For, while they have altered the sex and gender component of kinship, they have not altered the economic and occupational structure, which also shapes kin patterns, nor have they changed the ideal of romantic love.

The nuclear family household type emerged in conjunction with the development of the occupational structure in capitalist America. The nuclear family, in which one parent, the father, works for wages outside the home, and one parent, the mother, works inside the home caring for children, has been the most successful household type for middle class people living in capitalist America in the twentieth century. Since lesbians have not changed the economic structure in which they live, household organization and family ideals remain the same. Thus, the households and kin net-

4. I wish to make it clear that I am not insinuating, as Lasch (1978) does, that women live as lesbians because they can't have an emotionally intimate relationship with men. I am saying that this choice occurs to women for whom the sexual desire for another woman already exists, and provide economic, social, and ideological support to create a spouse relationship based upon those emotional and sexual relationships.

works my research participants construct seem to be based on a combination of their sexual orientation as well as their race and class backgrounds.

Further, in contemporary America there is a strong cultural pressure toward pair bonding with an importance placed on emotional and sexual intimacy and romance, especially for women. The importance of love and romance is also found among lesbians. These women have been socialized to want an intimate bond with one partner. While they have rejected men as spouses, they have not rejected the desire for a spouse. The strong ideals of romance and love, work toward pair bonding and against other household arrangements.

This is certainly not to say that all lesbians live in couples. On the contrary, some live alone or with people other than a spouse, which, to some extent, reflects different points in the life cycle. There are women who prefer living in collective households with people other than a spouse. Unfortunately I did not interview people living in such households, because the three collective households I knew broke up around the time I began interviewing. However, such households are far from the majority among the women I have worked with.

Exceptions noted, living with a spouse is not only a common type of lesbian household, it is an ideal to which many women strive. In fact, as a woman who has been single for most of her adult life, I feel pressure to be in a couple from within the lesbian community. For example, on more than one occasion, when I have run into community friends at social events, they often ask me

"Are you seeing anyone yet?" which implies that they think I should be seeing someone.⁵ Moreover, when I attend events at which "meeting someone" is not one of my goals (e.g., conferences, workshops, etc.), certain friends will ask me "did you meet someone?" when I tell them about the event, which, again, implies that they think I should meet someone.

Moreover, at certain lesbians events, such as a mothers' conference, couples are given a discount on the admission price. This is ironic, because the idea of a "family admission price" developed from the traditional nuclear family. The idea being that since a household is supported by one income, those households which had spouses and children should be given a discount. This is not the case in lesbian families. I do not know of any couple in which one woman supports the other for an extended period of time. Thus, a single mother household has access to less money than a two-mother household, and should be given the discount. The benefits provided to couples in these situations and the emphasis on couples suggest that the members of my community think that the lesbian couple is or should be the norm within the community.

Social Recognition of Couple Relationships

On December 1, 1988, Jim Jensen of CBS news reported on the swearing in of the first openly gay judge in New York. He said that the judge shared the moment with "his lover and the rest of

5. These women remind me of my aunts. When I was in my early twenties they would ask me: "Do you have a boyfriend yet?" whenever I saw them at family functions.

his family," suggesting that CBS news viewed his lover as a member of his family. This example is a sign of the beginning of societal acceptance of a lesbian or gay man's partner as a family member, a "spouse." However, this acceptance is not the rule. On the contrary, most people in America do not accept lesbian couple relationships as spouse relationships, and, even when they do accept them, are unsure about how to relate to a lesbian couple.

This lack of social recognition is, I believe, due to the fact that lesbians are creating a new kinship role, the lesbian spouse, and a new pattern, the lesbian spouse relationship. The role and the pattern are still in the process of emerging and lack social and legal recognition and acceptance at this time. This lack of social recognition for their spouse relationships means that lesbians often find themselves in the position of teaching heterosexual people how to treat them and their spouses, and it often takes a while for people to accept their partners as their spouses. Some of this stems from the persons's discomfort with the women's sexual orientation, and some of it is the simple fact that they have no guidelines for how to treat a lesbian spouse.

Family of origin often have difficulty accepting their family member as a lesbian, therefore, they have difficulty accepting her partner as a spouse. Beryl's mother exemplifies this:

My mother loves who Dee is in the world,
but has a hard time dealing with her as my
lover because she has a hard time accepting
that I'm a lesbian.

And even when family members try to accept the lesbian's spouse, they ask themselves: How do we treat her, as a "family member" or

"just a friend"? Do they buy her holiday and birthday gifts? Do they include her in family events? The lesbian usually asks that they treat her spouse as they would any spouse of a heterosexual family member: as a new member to be incorporated into the family.

When Miriam first introduced Kelly to her mother, her mother treated her as a friend. Miriam found that she had to teach her mother how to treat Kelly; she should be invited to family events, she should be given a Hanukkah gift and birthday gift, i.e., she should be treated the way her mother treats her brother's wife. She felt that her mother finally accepted Kelly, when she invited Miriam to dinner and arrived to find a place set for Kelly. Her mother did not explicitly invite Kelly, but she assumed Kelly was coming with Miriam, as she always assumed her daughter-in-law would when she invited her son.

Lesbians must also teach heterosexual friends how to relate to their spouses. Most lesbians have heterosexual friends. In fact, several of the women I worked with have a very close friend from college that they still have a relationship with and see as an intimate friend. These friendships are important to them, and they want their friend to know their spouse. In addition, many women make friends on the job and want these friends to be involved in their lives, and this means meeting their spouses. In these work relationships they have to teach their friends to invite them to social events with their spouses.

Of course this problem is eliminated if your co-workers are gay. Phyllis' boss is a gay man, which makes her life easier. She

does not have to explain who Agnes is; she did not have to explain why she took time off from work when Agnes had their baby, etc.

The difficulty friends and family of origin have relating to the lesbian spouse is clearly seen when inviting the woman to social events, particularly weddings. If one chooses to follow etiquette patterns found among the white working and middle class people in my social network in New York City, it is customary to invite a married woman with her husband, or an engaged woman with her fiancé; but if a woman is dating, the bride may use her discretion in deciding whether or not to invite the woman's guest.

Of course, not everyone chooses to follow this pattern and is free to invite whomever they like. My point is that for those who choose to follow traditional etiquette, there are no guidelines regarding inviting lesbian couples, other than the unwritten law of pretending the lesbian spouse does not exist. For example, in a book of commonly asked questions about wedding etiquette, Emily Post (Post 1987) does not answer questions about whether or not to invite the spouse of a lesbian.

The lack of guidelines for inviting lesbians to social events can be a problem for people who want to be supportive. In a group I was in, one heterosexual woman, Cindy, sent a lesbian, Robin, an invitation that said "and guest." Robin had been living with Ellen for four years, and was upset at not having Ellen's name on the invitation. She interpreted the invitation as demonstrating Cindy's lack of acknowledgement of her relationship.

Cindy was also upset. She was unsure about the nature of

their relationship and did not want to assume that Robin would want to bring Ellen to the wedding. My interpretation is that Cindy was well meaning and trying to be supportive, but that she did not know how to interpret the nature of their relationship. Robin was not very forthcoming about the relationship in the group and made only passing reference to Ellen. A lesbian would probably assume that if they were living together they had some type of commitment, but Cindy did not know how to interpret the situation.

On the other hand, after living together for nine years and attending family functions as a couple, Delores and Rebecca received an invitation to Rebecca's step sister's wedding with both their names on it. They assumed that Rebecca's mother instructed the bride on how to address the invitation, which demonstrated to them that Rebecca's mother had finally accepted them as a couple, and that her step-sister was accepting of them as well.

In addition to social invitations, family funerals are other events which can raise conflicts over the family's acceptance (or lack of acceptance) of a lesbian's spouse. The death of a loved one is an emotional trauma, a time when most people want and need emotional support. A lesbian generally wants her spouse with her through this process, and this may be uncomfortable and/or confusing to people. For example, Jennifer had not seen her family of origin in a while, and they had a very difficult time accepting her as a lesbian. When Jennifer's mother passed away, she went to the funeral with her spouse Alice, and her family was very upset and angry. Her sister asked her "how could you bring that woman?"

To her sister "that woman" was a shameful reminder of Jennifer's sexual orientation; to Jennifer "that woman" was her spouse whom she needed to help her through a life crisis.

During a funeral, many people hire a limousine for the family members of the deceased. While it may seem like a minor point to observers, who rides in the limousine can be a loaded issue for a lesbian. To the lesbian, her spouse is her closest family member, and just as much a family member as her heterosexual siblings' spouses. Yet, most people would not consider her spouse "family," and would not ask her to ride in the limousine. This places the lesbian in the position of asking her relatives to treat her spouse as a spouse at a time when she is under particular emotional stress. If tension about her sexual orientation already exists, refusing to allow her spouse to ride in the limousine could be a deliberate act to demonstrate their disapproval.

For those people who cannot accept their family member as a lesbian, there can remain tension in relation to their spouses. However, many people, over time, accept the woman and her spouse. For example, Beryl gets along well with most of Dee's family of origin. While the people in Dee's family rarely discuss her lesbianism openly, and some are uncomfortable with it, they have accepted Beryl as Dee's spouse and integrated her into the family as a daughter-in-law and sister-in-law. She attends all family functions with Dee, holidays, christenings, birthdays, anniversary parties, etc., and even visits Dee's family members and attends events without her when Dee has gone out of town on business.

While Dee was on one such trip, Beryl attended Dee's sister's baby shower with their joint gift. In addition, rather than exchanging gifts with all their siblings and spouses, Dee's siblings have a "secret Santa" at Christmas, in which Beryl participates. Dee's three year old niece demonstrates her family's acceptance by calling them Aunt Dee and Uncle Beryl.

Delores told me that her parents love Rebecca. Her sister and brother live out of state, and she and Rebecca see her parents the most. Rebecca has visited and helped out with problems from cleaning out the closets to caring for them when they were ill. When Delores' father was hospitalized both she and Rebecca visited almost daily, and dealt with the doctors, nurses and medical insurance company. Over the years she has consistently behaved like a daughter-in-law and they love her as a daughter-in-law.

Rituals - A lack of institutionalized rituals to announce and celebrate lesbian couple relationships, also demonstrates the lack of social recognition of lesbian couples. When a heterosexual couple plans to marry they go through a series of rituals that mark their transition from two separate individuals to two individuals who are sharing their lives with one another.⁶ First, they get engaged, announcing that they are planning to marry. Sometimes there is a celebration, sometimes simple, sometimes elaborate, usually dependent on the class and ethnic backgrounds of the two.

6. Again, not all people follow this pattern and go through the exact same series of rituals in the same manner. However, there is a pattern that people can follow or improvise upon if they so choose. My point is that there is no such pattern for lesbians to either follow or improvise upon.

But for all, there is at least a private ritual in which the man gives the woman a ring, a sign of their commitment.

In many American families, at some point before the wedding, the bride's female kin give her a bridal shower at which all the women of both sides give her gifts to help them set up their new home. The wedding itself is a ritual that marks the final transition, a rite of passage from living as two single individuals to a married couple. In the ceremony they bring together all of their loved ones to witness their public declaration of love and commitment, to present themselves publicly as a couple, and, usually to have a party to celebrate their relationship.

There are no institutionalized rituals to mark the stages of a lesbian relationship, i.e., no engagement parties, bridal showers, or weddings. Some women are beginning to have commitment ceremonies, but these are far from institutionalized; they are the exception rather than the rule. The few that I know of have occurred after the women had been living together for a while; they celebrate the relationship as opposed to mark the transition to forming a couple by living together. Thus lesbians lack rituals that both celebrate their relationships and announce to their communities that they are spouses.

Judith would like a ceremony. She and Delia were unable to have one because within a few months of meeting, they discovered that Delia's sister had cancer. This left no time or energy for a commitment ceremony. She discusses her feelings about a commitment ceremony in her description of a ceremony she attended:

These two women in our support group and their families and friends [had a commitment ceremony]. It was just phenomenal, really touching, moving. I think it makes sense for gay people to have ceremonies, to create their own rituals. I think that's another way that you feel like it's your family.

In addition to the symbolic aspects of ritual ceremonies, shower and wedding gifts are part of an economic system of generalized exchange. Traditionally, the women of the extended kin of the bride and groom gather to "shower" her with gifts that are intended to help her set up a household. For their wedding, the close relatives usually give large gifts, such as furniture, appliances, sums of cash, and the extended kin give smaller sums of money or gifts. The money and furnishings are intended to help the couple start their new life together.⁷ Ideally the system will eventually even out; people contribute to each person in their network and will get what they need in return when they get married.

While lesbians very often contribute to this generalized exchange system by giving gifts to their heterosexual friends and family members at their showers and weddings, they do not benefit from this exchange system because they do not have institutionalized ceremonies. Some get house warming gifts from friends and family of origin; however, these gifts are not customary but up to the discretion of individuals, and they are not on the same scale as wedding gifts in which couples may get most of what they need to

7. Today things have changed among some groups of Americans. Men, as well as women, may attend bridal showers, and shower gifts may include more expensive and elaborate items.

set up a new home. Therefore, lesbian couples must furnish their homes on their own, without the help of a network of extended kin, and whatever "nest egg" savings they have when they begin living together, is generally from their own personal savings. It takes a lesbian couple longer to set up a household in the fashion of their class background than it would their heterosexual counterparts. Thus, living outside of the social structure has economic consequences as well as social and ritual consequences.

Legal Status

In 1979 Sharon Kowalski and Karen Thompson met, fell in love, exchanged rings, and created a home together. Because Karen feared she might lose her job if her employer discovered that she was a lesbian, they decided to keep their relationship a secret. In November of 1983, Sharon was in a car accident that caused severe brain damage, and left her physically incapacitated, intellectually impaired, and unable to communicate as she had before. Briefly,⁸ Karen was at Sharon's bedside daily, and having a background in physical education, was actively involved in Karen's recovery, finding methods of communication, and working to physically rehabilitate her. Sharon's parents did not know Karen, did not understand why she was involved in Sharon's recovery, and felt that she was an intrusive outsider. Karen decided to tell them about their relationship, hoping that they would understand how much why Karen was so important in Sharon's recovery.

8. See Thompson and Andrzejewski (1988) for the entire story.

The plan backfired. Sharon's parents would not let her visit, and Karen eventually decided to file for guardianship of Sharon. After a long legal battle, her father won guardianship, and refused to allow Karen to visit. Sharon's parents disagreed with Karen on the proper care for Sharon. They felt Sharon was a vegetable and should not be overstimulated, and that it was pointless to try to communicate with her. They moved Sharon to a nursing home where she would receive no physical therapy. Not surprisingly she became depressed and regressed in her recovery.

Karen, who had been completely in the closet, then began to speak publicly to gain support for the case, and to educate people on the rights of gay people and the disabled. In December of 1988, by court order, Sharon was re-evaluated and the court found that she could make decisions for herself (*Lesbian Connection* March/April 1989). She communicated to the evaluator that she wanted to see Karen, and in February 1989 they saw each other for the first time in three and one half years (*Lesbian Connection* May/June 1989). In late 1991 Karen was awarded custody of Sharon.

The Kowalski-Thompson case illustrates that living outside of the social structure has legal consequences as well as social and economic consequences for lesbian couples. Because kinship relations in America are governed by the legal system, lesbian relationships lack any legal status. On a day-to-day basis this lack of legal recognition does not seem very significant, and many couples do not think about it. However, this is the legal context in which lesbian couples live their everyday lives. They do not

experience these problems if all goes well, if neither one ever gets sick or dies, or needs health insurance, or they never try to rent an apartment together. However, these are life cycle events that everyone encounters sooner or later, and most women find that they have to interface with the law at some point in their lives. The Kowalski-Thompson case has become a tool for gay rights activists in educating lesbians and gay men about the problems caused by the lack of legal status of lesbian and gay relationships because the case offers a real life example of how fragile lesbian and gay relationships can be in the face of the legal system.

The case has also become a symbol in the struggle for spouse rights for lesbians and gay men. Activists stress Karen's love and devotion toward Sharon, her desire to be actively involved in her recovery, and Karen's fight for Sharon's rights to the best care. They also stress Mr. Kowalski's homophobia, his lack of understanding or acceptance of his daughter as a lesbian, and his cruelty in refusing to allow Karen to see Sharon. Symbolically gay activists present the case as the father and the courts breaking up a family unit. The title of the book about this case is *Why Can't Sharon Kowalski Come Home?*, and a button supporting Karen's right to see Sharon reads "Bring Sharon Home." Home and love are powerful symbols of family in American society. By using them to describe Sharon and Karen's relationship, they counteract the conservative notion that lesbian relationships are anti-family, and demand recognition of their relationships.

The particular issue that the Kowalski-Thompson case demon-

strates is that lesbians do not have the right to make medical and other decisions for their spouses should either become incapacitated. This right is automatically extended to heterosexual couples at marriage.⁹ Other areas in which the lack of legal status is a problem for lesbian couples include: health insurance coverage; apartment rentals; and bereavement leave.

For married heterosexual couples, a person's spouse is automatically covered under a health insurance plan if the policy permits family coverage. This is not true for lesbians and gay men. Because their spouses are not recognized as family members by the insurance companies, their spouses are ineligible. If both have jobs that provide health insurance coverage this lack of recognition does not present a problem. However, for couples in which one does not have job related health insurance, one must pay for her own coverage, resulting in the couple paying double for health insurance. This is the case for Delores and Rebecca. Delores is a psychotherapist in private practice and Rebecca is an electrician with good health insurance coverage under her union plan. However, because they are not legally married, the union does not define Delores as a spouse and would not cover her under Rebecca's union plan. She has to pay for a private health insurance plan.

Gay rights activists argue that if all employees equally contribute to a plan, but gay employees do not get equal benefits,

9. Of course, many heterosexual couples choose not to marry and thus experience the same lack of social and legal recognition. However, they have the option to marry if they so choose at some point, e.g., if one of them needs medical insurance. Lesbian couples do not have that option.

this is discrimination based on sexual orientation and marital status. In 1986 New York City passed a gay rights bill barring discrimination based on sexual orientation, and since that bill, a group has brought a law suit against the Board of Education.

Ruth Berman and her spouse Connie Kurtz are two of the people involved in this suit. Ruth is a high school guidance counselor and has excellent health insurance benefits from the Teachers' Union, while Connie has her own business and pays a high premium for health insurance. Ruth applied to have Connie covered under her medical plan at school and was rejected because she is not a "family member." At the time she filed suit, they had been together for 13 years. In an interview in the New York Times, the reporter asked her why she thought she should be recognized as a spouse. Rather than detailing the reasons, Connie simply asked: "Where am I not married to her?"¹⁰ Her response demonstrates both her opinion that they are married, and her frustration with the society's lack of recognition for their relationship.

Another area in which lesbian couples' lack of legal status presents a problem is in renting apartments. If an apartment is leased in only one person's name, at his or her death it can be passed on to a spouse or other family member who has lived in the unit. Lesbian spouses have not been considered family members under any state laws, and, until recently, could be evicted at the death of a spouse, if her name were not on the lease. This is one area in which gay rights activists have been successful. In July

10. See *The New York Times* August 31, 1989, page C6.

of 1989 the New York State Supreme Court ruled in *Braschi v. Stahl Associates* that a gay man could not be evicted from his rent controlled apartment after the death of his spouse, because he was a family member. The court decided that the interpretation of family should not "rest on fictitious legal distinctions or genetic history, but instead should rest its foundation in the reality of family life."¹¹ While it only applies to rent controlled apartments (i.e., not rent stabilized apartments), it is a precedent setting case that gay rights attorneys hope to expand to other types of apartment rentals.

A third area in which lesbians experience legal problems is bereavement leave. Most employers decide whether or not to pay an employee for bereavement leave based on the employees relationship with the deceased. This changed for city employees of New York City in July of 1989 when Mayor Koch passed an executive order that would extend bereavement leave to unmarried couples, heterosexual and homosexual. However, it remains the case for most workers in private business in New York City, and throughout the country.

To illustrate, in 1986 I worked at a major New York law firm. Employees were entitled to three days bereavement leave at the death of a spouse, parent or sibling, and one day at the death of any other person related by blood or marriage. For the death of anyone outside of those categories the employee took time from her or his vacation or personal time. During my employment, a gay male

11. As quoted by Paula Ettlebrick of Lambda Legal Defense and Education fund, Inc., in an open letter date November 28, 1989, discussing lesbian and gay family relationships.

co-worker's spouse of nine years died of AIDS, and he was not given any death leave. He complained to the supervisor who, being very sympathetic and supportive, went to the head of personnel to try to convince her that this was his spouse and he deserved three days paid leave. After negotiating, she managed to get him one day off with pay. He was not paid for the rest of the time he took.

To summarize so far, while the lesbian couples I worked with perceive themselves as spouses, and function as spouses in our society, they lack social and legal recognition as spouses. Gay rights activists have worked toward such recognition by negotiating for spouse rights in health insurance benefits, apartment rentals, bereavement leave and the right to make medical decisions for one's spouse in situations of incapacitation. Progress has been uneven. There have been successes such as the *Braschi* case involving rental leases, and there have been defeats, such as the domestic partnership bill rejected in San Francisco in the 1989 election.

At this point it is impossible to predict what legal developments will (or will not) occur in the future; however, the activities of social groups coupled with individual perceptions, suggest that the American kinship system is in the process of a change regarding sexuality and gender. There are growing numbers of individuals who wish to create spouse relationships with same sex partners, and, there is a social and political movement that has as its goals the social and legal recognition of those relationships. It is to this process of change, and its significance to the American kinship system that I now turn.

Significance of the Lesbian Spouse Relationship

One afternoon the Oprah Winfrey talk show featured lesbians. In the question and answer period a man in the audience said "I don't get it," meaning that he did not understand why women would want to be with other women. Joanne Loulan, a lesbian sex therapist who was a guest on the show, angrily replied "what's not to get; lesbians are people who love each other, what's so hard to understand?" My interpretation is that this man, like many Americans, finds it extremely difficult to conceive of spouse love between two women because this shatters the idea of the complementarity and interdependence of two genders that is central to American concepts of sexual intimacy, love, marriage and family. This, I believe is why the social and legal recognition of lesbian couples is difficult to achieve.

As Schneider discussed in his study of American kinship, many heterosexual Americans see heterosexuality and gender relations as natural, i.e., having a biological base rooted in procreation, and, therefore, homosexuality as unnatural (1968:38). Similarly, the social relationships that correlate to the procreative relationships are "natural":

in one sense 'family' in American culture is simply the natural biological state of affairs centering on reproduction. Marriage, in its most limited sense, is sexual union. The reproducing pair living together with their offspring, is the family" (Schneider 1968:109, emphasis in the original).

Further, in defining "unnatural," Schneider makes clear the

American opinion about homosexuality in the early 1960:

"Unnatural" is thus used to mean both far from nature, contrived, without any basis in nature, and also that part of nature which is wrong, bad, evil or repulsive to human reason as in the "unnatural" sexual acts. (ftnt 1, page 109).¹²

The difficulty for many Americans to comprehend spousal love between two people of the same sex is also demonstrated when heterosexuals ask lesbians and gay men if one of them plays the male role and one of them plays the female role.¹³ They believe that spouse relationships require two genders, and in same gender couples, one partner must be playing the role of the opposite gender. This is supported by the common myth that lesbians really want to be men.

Lesbians, however, do not have this concept of gender. How lesbians conceive of gender is not the focus of this research; however, it is clear that lesbians differ from the traditional model of gender and that there are differences of conceptions concerning gender among lesbians.

The most common perspective on gender that I have found among the women I know is that both women perceive of themselves as women. Unlike common stereotypes of lesbians, neither one thinks of herself as a man, nor wants to be a man. They are women who are sexually attracted to, and want to create a home with, other women.

12. Schneider states that his informants define homosexuality as one of the "unnatural sex acts" (1968:38, ftnt 4).

13. This is a very common question heterosexuals ask lesbians and gay men on talk shows.

For example, in a discussion of lesbians couples, a woman mentioned that she knew of a couple who referred to one member as the wife and the other as the husband. The six women in the group were taken aback. To some extent this is a problem due to the lack of agreed upon kinship terminology discussed in the beginning of this chapter. However, the reaction of the six women was telling; they all thought it was very bizarre to think of your spouse or yourself as a husband. One woman mentioned that she knew of a couple who called each other "wife" and "wife," and all agreed that this was uncommon but understandable. Both women were using the female kinship term. But the idea that one member of a lesbian couple would be considered a man was a strange notion to these women.

The fact that there is a couple who does use male and female kinship terms suggests that perhaps there are lesbians who perceive of themselves or their spouses as men. I do not know the couple discussed above, so therefore, never had the opportunity to ask them about gender definitions. However, this remains a possibility that should be explored in further research.

Within the lesbian population there is a social pattern commonly referred to as butch/femme, in which one member of a couple, the butch, appears to take on a masculine role (i.e., has interests, behaviors, and dress style that are attributed to men in our culture), and one member of the couple, the femme, appears to take on a female role (i.e., has interests, behaviors, and dress style that are attributed to women in our culture). During the second wave of feminism which coincided with the birth of gay liberation

(the late 1960s and early 70s), some lesbians criticized this pattern suggesting that it mimics heterosexuals. The response from the women living within that social pattern has been that they are not mimicking heterosexuals but creating their own social pattern. (For further discussion see Hollibaugh and Moraga 1983; Newton 1985; Nestle 1987; and Weston 1988).

Most of the women I worked with did not see butch femme roles as a significant in living their lives. However, of the few I spoke to about it, none seemed to perceive themselves or their spouses as men. Beryl, who sees herself as femme, does not see her partner as a man, but rather as a different kind of woman than herself. She sees their relationship as complementary, i.e., they have different tasks and different emotional and sexual styles, but Dee is definitely a woman to Beryl. On the other hand, Juanita sees herself as a butch, and does not see herself as a woman. She is not a man, but a third type of gender for which she has no name.

Clearly, there is more data needed to understand the various ways of perceiving gender differences and how lesbians form their various perceptions of gender. However, what is significant for this research is that lesbians are contradicting the idea in the kinship system that there are two genders, which are very different and interdependent. They are saying that they do not believe that a dual gender relationship is necessary, and, thus, contradicting the belief in American kinship, that women need men and men need women, that the two are complementary and interdependent.

CHAPTER SIX:
THE LESBIAN BABY BOOM

Introduction

At the early part of my research, I ran into Colleen at a party and told her that a woman in my support group recently became pregnant through donor insemination. Her response was to ask me "Fresh or frozen?" I had no idea what she meant and assumed that I did not hear her correctly. I asked: "What?" She repeated: "Fresh or frozen?" I then realized that I *had* heard her correctly, but I still did not know what she meant. To me, fresh or frozen only meant vegetables. "Colleen, what the hell are you talking about, fresh or frozen?" I asked her. "Sperm, fresh or frozen sperm. Did your friend who got pregnant use fresh or frozen sperm?" she asked me. "Oh," I answered. "I don't know, I didn't ask her and she didn't mention it." I was surprised and confused; I did not know a woman had a choice of fresh or frozen sperm in donor insemination, and I did not know why it mattered.¹

At that time I did not realized that there is a tremendous amount of information to be absorbed and a number of issues to be resolved when considering having a child through donor insemination. The use of fresh v. frozen sperm is one such issue. For Colleen, who had been unsuccessfully inseminating with frozen sperm for a year, "fresh v. frozen" was a very important issue, because

1. If a woman gets sperm from a sperm bank, the specimen is frozen. If she has a known donor or uses an intermediary, she can get fresh sperm.

despite doctors' claims to the contrary, she believed that if she could use frozen sperm she would be able to conceive.

Colleen is not alone with her concern about conceiving through donor insemination and other concerns associated with lesbian motherhood. A growing number of lesbians are having children after they have been living as lesbians, i.e., outside of the heterosexual family system, primarily through donor insemination and adoption.² Many have formed support groups (such as the one I was a part of), to discuss mutual concerns and assist each other in creating what they perceive of as a new family form. The increasing numbers of lesbian mothers by choice, and the groups and organizations they have formed for information and support, have lifted lesbian mothering to the status of a social movement, so much so that on February 25, 1988, Geraldo Rivera opened his talk show on lesbian mothers with the question: "Is there a lesbian baby boom?"

In this Chapter I will describe: 1) the kinds of parental relationships my research participants have created (including how their definitions of parenthood relate to their definition of family); the emergence of these roles and their meanings; 3) the lack of social and legal recognition of these roles; and 4) the ethnographic significance of these roles.

2. An increasing number of heterosexual women are also having children outside of the heterosexual family system, and some of the issues discussed here impact on them as well.

Parental Roles

First Female Parent³ - This is the parent whose claim to parenthood is based on the existing definitions of parenthood in American kinship, i.e., biology or adoption. In addition, in keeping with the importance of emotional relationships in family relations as previously discussed, the women stress the uniqueness and importance of the emotional bond that exists between mother and child. For example, Joyce says that she is Tommy's mother because:

He is a child from me, from my blood, my genetics are there. He's very much part of me in a very close physical sense and emotional sense. There's a very special bond also between him and I that exists, that always will, I think, always. We have a mother-child relationship that is very special to me. My life revolves around him, really, in his day to day life, in his day to day needs, his future, his goals, whatever, that type of energy is always there. I guess that's it really, it's just those ties.

Most people refer to a first female parent as the "birth mother," the "biological mother" or the "legal mother." Her children generally call her "mommy," or "mommy" followed by her name.

The lesbians who live this role face a number of issues that result from living a new kinship pattern. These include deciding how to conceive, choosing a donor, finding cooperative doctors, etc. When Joyce was planning to have a child in the late 1970s, she had some fears when thinking about all that she was going to

3. I use the term "first female parent" to mean that this is the first female parental role in the American kinship system, and not to mean that it is more important than the second female parent which I will discuss below.

encounter when planning on parenting as a lesbian mother:

Just knowing that this was something that was revolutionary. . . We didn't know what the hell we were doing. We were gonna plan to artificially inseminate. . . and we didn't know what was gonna happen to us.

C: What do you mean?

J: In terms of legalities. . . We were very careful. . . we didn't talk about it on the phone. . . One of the most difficult things about being pregnant and a lesbian is having other women coming up to you and saying "of course you artificially inseminated" and want to talk to me about this in. . . public and its like "oh my God I don't believe this is happening" people just assume that and would just start talking about this. . . and had no idea that this was very scary for us. . .

C: What were you afraid of?

J: Well, we knew that there were no laws against artificial insemination. And we knew that in certain parts of the country they were deciding that lesbians could not get sperm from sperm banks. We knew that they were hip to the fact that lesbians were doing this and we were afraid. We wanted to protect the child. We had to make decisions; were we going to tell the child or not tell the child?. . . This was just something that was not discussed that much. The Baby M case just opened up a whole new bag. There were very few lesbians talking about it, making this decision, feeling good about it.

For women who have children from previous heterosexual relationships, they face issues which stem from ending one family and beginning another. In addition to the usual conflict and tensions that can accompany any divorce, the lesbian mother is beginning to live a new kinship pattern that many people, including family court judges, perceive as sexual deviancy. Women are often afraid, just-

ifiably so, they will lose custody of their children if their ex-husbands discover that they are lesbians.⁴

Those who choose not to tell their children or ex-husbands, usually do so to avoid placing their children in the position of deceiving their fathers. They then begin to lead a double life that may cause a great amount of internal conflict (Lewin 1988). Those who feel they can tell their children must negotiate with their ex-husbands in raising their children because they have conflicting kinship ideologies. They are changing their definition of family and parenting (as well as their sexuality), but the ex-husbands (or lovers), the fathers of their children, are not. Some fathers are cooperative, and possibly even understanding, and are able to put the needs of their children above their own hurt feelings, while other fathers cannot.

Second Female Parent - When Deborah walked her son Tommy to kindergarten one day, his classmate asked him: "Is this your real mommy or your fake mommy?" The child's question demonstrates the lack of kinship terminology for a two mother family (and that children will do their best to make sense out of one another's lives, even if the adults fail to do so). The lack of terminology is, I believe, a symptom of the emergence of a new kinship role, the second female parent.

Lesbians create this role when a couple decides to raise a

4. Custody problems are not unique to lesbians. Heterosexual women can lose custody of their children if a judge determines that they are involved in an inappropriate sexual relationship or sexual activities (see for discussion Miller 1986). I will return to a discussion of divorce below.

child together. The second female parent is the parent who has no biological or legal tie to the child. Since none of the women I know grew up in a lesbian kinship pattern that would provide a role model for the second female parent, the women who live in this role must sort out why they consider themselves parents, as well as the relationship between their new parental role and that of their partner with whom they are co-parenting. They claim parenthood due primarily to their daily sharing of the responsibilities in raising their children, the emotional bonds created between them and the children, and their relationships to the first female parents. For example, Deborah tells why Tommy is her son:

Because he lives with me, he's part of my everyday routine, he's very much involved with my life, I'm involved with his life, we love each other, we have a relationship, and he is my son, I do have those responsibilities toward him. That's how I can define myself that way.

The second female parent's claim to parenthood based on sharing parental responsibility is reflected in the conflict of a couple who did not begin parenting together. Judith decided to have a baby as a single mother, and, after dating Delia for a few months, she gave birth to her daughter. Out of convenience, Delia began to spend more time living at Judith's house, and, as she took on more and more of the child care, she began to see herself as a parent. But Judith did not at first, her reaction was:

This was my kid who I'd planned to have for five years and spent my life's savings on and it's been the most important thing to my life. You just can't come and say you're the other mother.

Delia's response was "I'm here, I'm living here, I'm doing it and you're not saying I'm a co-mother? What am I?" Judith now believes they had these conflicts because they did not discuss co-parenting before the baby arrived. However, she eventually saw Delia as a parent precisely because of her daily involvement with and emotional connection to their daughter.

The problems Delia and Judith faced negotiating parental rights and responsibilities are somewhat similar to the problems heterosexual couples face when beginning a new relationship with a partner who has children from a previous relationship. In both situations there are two adults with different ideas about parenting, different relationships to the children, and unequal rights and obligations toward the children. However, lesbians differ from heterosexuals in an important way. With heterosexual step parenting, a man does not try to share the role of mother with his new wife, but is sharing the role of father with her ex-husband. Here lesbians are working out a new type of co-parenting relationship, which I will discuss in greater depth below.

In addition to the sharing of parental responsibilities and the emotional bond created between her and the child, the second female parent claims parenthood due to her relationship with the primary female parent. As spouses they share an emotional and sexual bond, a home, friends, everyday ups and downs, in short their lives. They have a strong love that the second parent very often extends to her spouse's child. This became clear to me after meeting Mindy and Laura. Mindy, the birth mother, decided to have

Laura's brother be the genitor because she felt it would create a stronger bond between Laura and the baby. When I asked Laura if that were the case, she said:

Well, there is something nice about having the baby be Mark's [her brother's] child, but I would love any child that Mindy had just as much.

The glow on her face as she said this made me realize that her love for the baby was clearly an extension of her love for Mindy.

Step Mother - This role is created when a lesbian begins a relationship with a woman who has children and takes on a parental role with them.⁵ The role shares the problems of any second female parent, as well as the heterosexual step mother. She has to deal with the lack of social and legal recognition that any second female parent has to deal with, which is made more difficult because she is trying to create a parental role in a family in transition. Often she is doing the parental work 5-6 days a week, creating an emotional bond with the child(ren), while the child(ren)'s father may be parenting one or two days a week. Yet he is socially and legally recognized as a parent and she is not.

Women living this role also have to deal with the same issues a heterosexual step family faces, including an ex-husband who may be antagonistic toward her and her relationship with his children and ex-wife. The step family situation creates more difficulty for the step mother to gain recognition as a parent because each family

5. Not all women who get involved with women with children take on parental responsibilities. Generally these women do not live with the women and her children, as living together often brings about parental behavior.

member is trying to reconstruct her/his role in a dissolved heterosexual family unit where the father may be uncooperative or antagonistic.

Aunt - Although not really considered a parent, I see a number of lesbians creating "aunt" relationships with the children of their intimate friends. Neither the aunts nor the parents consider the aunts parents in that they do not take on a significant amount of the responsibility for the child, but they often are available for baby sitting, or spending time with the child. The children will call the friend "Aunt so and so," and there is a warm relationship between them. For Rhonda:

there are people who are kind of available to me now, in a sense, like aunts to Eric, people who can take care of him, who are intimate with him and consider him part of their family and who treat him like that.

Sally was ecstatic when she found out that her intimate friend Rose was expecting a baby. She was excited and anxious throughout Rose's pregnancy, telling people that she was going to become an aunt. When Sarah was born, she told everyone she was an aunt, and has behaved like an aunt, i.e., talked about the new things Sarah had learned, how cute she was, and showed her picture.

These female parental roles are new to the white middle class lesbians I interviewed, who were raised with the idea that you have one mother, the woman who gave birth to you. However, these roles are not new to American kinship. Stack's (1974) study of urban poor African Americans demonstrates that her research participants do not have a strict biological definition of motherhood, but,

rather, each woman must achieve the right to raise her children and be recognized as a mother. Stack notes that while the biological and social mother are usually the same, in certain situations her research participants separate the biological mother from the social mother, and recognize the woman who raises a child as its "mama." The most common instance in which this occurs is when a teenage girl gives birth and she and her family do not feel she is old enough to properly raise the child. Generally her mother or some other close female relative will raise the child.⁶

Issues in Co-parenting

Carol and Mary, joined my lesbian mothers' group after we had been meeting for about a year. The first time they attended a meeting, Carol joined the rest of us at Susan and Julie's dining room table, and Mary went to the couch to take off their four month old baby's snowsuit and get him settled in. At first, it seemed that Mary was more connected to him, and I thought that she was the birth mother, then Carol joined Mary caring for him as he was uncomfortable. I observed them for about an hour and a half and was unable to determine who was the birth mother, my assumption being that the birth mother would be more connected to him. Finally, Carol solved the mystery when she nursed the baby. However, both were clearly very involved with and bonded to their son.

This couple represents one approach to lesbian co-parenting in which the women view each partner's parental responsibilities

6. Dougherty (1978) found the same pattern in her study of rural poor African Americans in the South.

and relationships to their children as identical. Some view the first female parent as more significant, which, if they disagree, may cause conflict in their relationship. A number of women, influenced by the feminist critique of the dominant nuclear family, feel that the relationships between the two mothers and the children should be identical, and strive for that in their parenting. For some lesbian couples, this has been a goal they have not been able to achieve, and has caused stress in their relationships, some of which ended.

This experience left several women disillusioned, and even rather hopeless about co-parenting between two women. Jill believes that when there is conflict between two women who are co-parenting, the first female parent always goes back to the old definitions. She and some other second female parents were not allowed to see their children after ending their relationships with their spouse, the first female parent, for some temporarily, for her permanently. Of those couples, at least two worked out a custody/visitation agreement so that they were able to share the parenting even after their relationship ended. Other community members acted as mediators to help them negotiate an agreement.

Joyce, the first female parent of a couple that did remain together told me that in her opinion, women who separated wanted it to be equal, and co-parenting cannot be totally equal. She and her spouse Deborah had no expectation of equality in their co-parenting relationship. She firmly believes that there is a stronger bond between herself and her son because of their biological bond, and

recognizing and accepting her stronger bond with their son is how they stayed together. However, her partner disagreed. She felt that at that point (their son was six at the time of the interview),⁷ their roles were identical.

I have a different perspective on the issue. I think a biological bond is important if you think it is important; however, I do not agree with Joyce's interpretation of why the couples in her cohort broke up. If biology were the determining factor, then no lesbian couples would be able to achieve equality in co-parenting relationships, which, as I saw with Carol and Mary, is not the case. Moreover, adoptive mothers would be able to achieve co-parenting because neither woman would have a biological bond with the child. This is true in some cases, and not true in others. Rather, I think that social conditions shape lesbian parenting relationships more than most lesbians realize.

To begin with, the first year of parenting is extremely difficult, regardless of the parents' sexual orientation, and creates a major strain on the spouse relationship. The invasion of a demanding infant into your life, disrupting your relationship, career, and sleep, is overwhelming. Susan, the mother of a fourteen month old, told me that she is not sure how they got through the first year (it seemed like a big blur to her at that point), but she was glad it was over. This stress could be a factor in the early dissolution of some lesbian couples.

7. Four years after the interview, their son is ten and they are still together.

Second, I believe that the dissolution of the four out of five couples of the first wave of lesbian mothers who chose to have children through donor insemination and co-parent, was due to the lack of role models for negotiating a two mother relationship.⁸ Like travelling without a map, no role models means no guidelines for behavior and belief, no guidelines for negotiating conflict. When the experience fell short of their feminist vision of a lesbian family, some were unable to negotiate a middle ground. I believe that had they had roles models, some of them would have been able to create more positive parenting relationships.

Moreover, there was little or no community support for working through this new parenting relationship for those parenting in the late 1970s. Not that there were no lesbian mothers before 1970, there were. There were also small support groups, and a national group that helped lesbians in custody battles. However, in the 1970s lesbian mothering by choice through donor insemination was not the issue it is in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Donor insemination both increased the number of lesbian mothers and created a new set of issues and problems to be addressed.

As of 1991, there are a number of support groups for lesbian mothers, a large organization for lesbian and gay parents and their children in the New York City area, an international lesbian and

8. I date the first wave of lesbian mothers who decided to have children through donor insemination and co-parent from the mid to the late 1970's, and the second wave from the mid 1980s. I have data on 80 lesbians mothers, 10 of whom I categorize as part of the first wave of lesbians to have children through donor insemination in the late 1970's.

gay parent's group that holds an annual conference, therapists who specialize in lesbian family issues, workshops, panel discussions sponsored by new and already existing lesbian groups, to help people deal with these issues. For example, Judith and her friend Janet, both psychotherapists, have facilitated several workshops for lesbian couples who want to parent. Not having these support systems in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the first wave of lesbian mothers through donor insemination faced problems without the guidance of others who had experienced them, as Joyce notes:

We were reading things from California. . .
We were going cross-country trying to find
information. . . to consider in this deci-
sion, how to go about doing this.

The occupational structure in our society is another major issue that shapes lesbian parenting relationships. Designed for the heterosexual nuclear family in which one parent (the mother) stays home caring for the children and household, and the other parent (the father) goes to work to earn an income, this structure does not easily facilitate viable part-time employment that allows for equal sharing of parenting responsibilities. (A college professor is one of the professions that provide such flexibility.)

As discussed in the previous chapter, lesbians have changed the sex and gender components of family relationships, but have not changed the occupational structure. Thus they often replicate to some extent the heterosexual pattern of parenting, i.e., one parent will be the primary care-taker, taking on most of the responsibility for the child(ren), while the other parent will be the secondary care-taking role, remaining in full-time employment and

caring for the child in the evenings and on weekends. Some lesbians, who either take off time for the baby, or who did not enter parenting on a 50-50 basis, at least temporarily replicate the primary and secondary parent roles. For example, Mindy describes herself as the primary caretaker. "We're two women, but its like a stereotype of the second parent, the male parent."

C: Did you go into this equally?

M: No, I lucked out in that she is enormously in love with Penny, and loves her and loves being a parent and all that. But because we didn't go into this equally that's why I feel like it. But this is common. My sister has a seven month old baby, and she feels the same way with her husband. Her husband comes home from work and he went into this equally, and they'll say let's have dinner, and they take turns eating dinner and he'll eat leisurely and she'll eat really fast so that she can relieve him. And that's what happens with Laura. So it's not even about the equal stuff it's about being the mother v. the other parent, I think. Or, I'm not sure about that. There's a significant experience difference between a mother and the other parent. Or the primary caretaker. I'm the primary caretaker. I'm with her the most. If I worked 6 days a week and Laura were with her 5 days a week that would reverse itself.

On the other hand, Susan and Julie both seem equally bonded to and involved with their son, and it would be difficult to determine who is the birth mother from observation. Of course one might argue that it is Susan's biological connection to the baby that has created her strong bond to their son (her brother is the genitor), however, it would not determine equality. One would assume that Julie's stronger biological connection and her pregnancy and lacta-

tion would cause her to have a stronger relationship to the child, if one were arguing for biological determination.

Rather, I think that their work schedules had the most to do with their co-parenting relationship. Just before the baby was born, Susan found a viable 3/5 time job. The two weekdays that she has off, she spends with the baby. Julie was able to negotiate part-time work with her employer, so that she can come home early the days Susan is not home with the baby. Susan does not like the job very much, but she wants to keep it because she cannot find anything else on a part-time basis.

April and Beth have yet another twist on lesbian co-parenting. They believed that the biological bond between the birth mother and the child and the social role of being the primary care-taker both create strong emotional bonds. They decided to divide the biological and social roles, i.e., the first female parent went back to work after the baby was born, while the second female parent stayed at home and cared for the baby. April, a corporate attorney, had the baby and went back to work because her income was more significant and could support the family, while Beth, a school teacher stayed at home with the baby.

Susan and David provide a similar example from within a heterosexual marriage. While not qualifying as a true "house-husband," David runs a seasonal business out of his home while Susan has a nine to five job in Manhattan. Susan is very involved with the children in the evening and on the weekends; however, they both describe David as the primary parent because he spends the

most time caring for the children.

I know of about thirty couples of the "second wave" of donor insemination babies, who have survived the difficult first year and seem to be doing well. Some of them have the goal of equality and have been able to achieve it, while others have no such expectation. Rather they believe, as with heterosexual parents, the first female parent will be more important in the child's life for the first year. Then after this the second female parent will become increasingly more important and eventually things would even out (some believe because of the biological bond coupled with nursing, while others believe that the stronger bond is due to their work schedules). The variation in their experience leads me to reject a biological cause for lesbian parental roles, and look to a social basis for these roles.

Male Parental Roles

Most white middle class Americans believe that biology creates kinship, i.e., that the genitor is the father. In cases where the genitor is not involved in the child's life, people may refer to him as the "real" father. This folk belief is institutionalized within our legal system, which grants the genitor parental rights and holds him financially responsible for a child, even if he has no relationship with the child or its mother.

Many lesbians are creating new male as well as female parental roles. In most cases involving donor insemination these lesbian couples either eliminate or redefine the social role of the genitor. I have observed four ways in which lesbians involve men

in parenting their children.

The Unknown Donor - The first role I call the unknown donor. Here the women get an anonymous sperm donor either through a sperm bank or an intermediary, and thus eliminate the social role of the genitor. The women who choose this route generally feel that the most important issue in parenting is the quality of the care the child receives, rather than the gender of the parents. Therefore, two women can raise a child as well as, or even better than, a woman and a man. For example, at a lecture on lesbian mothers, one lesbian mother who was co-parenting with her spouse, raised her hand to say that "objectively," having two mothers was better than a mother and a father.

In addition, they want to create their own family and co-parent as a couple, and often fear that a known donor will want to take on a parental role and possibly take legal action for custody or visitation. Rhonda discusses these issues: donor:

I did not want to know who the father was and I didn't want the father to know who I was. You can do it differently and if you want to have a father involved it's a hell of a lot easier in a lot of ways but considering that I had this relationship with a woman I didn't want to have a third person involved because . . . I didn't feel like having some guy get involved in the situation. Plus, I had heard that there were people who had done this who had fathers who had been supposedly not willing--not wanting to be involved and then changed their mind after the baby was born so I didn't want to have to contend with that.

The Known Donor - In the second role, the known donor, the women ask a man they know to be a sperm donor, but not to partici-

pate in the actual raising of the child. This is usually done privately since, with only one exception to my knowledge, most sperm banks operate anonymously. This role is similar to the unknown donor in that the couple wishes to co-parent alone; however, they generally believe that for emotional, social, and medical reasons, the child should know its genitor.

This is a very difficult role to negotiate, and is therefore not common. It seems easier to negotiate some kind of a relationship, or to be anonymous. For example, Delores and Rebecca, who have been together for ten years, feel that they are a family, and want to raise their child on their own. They do not want to incorporate a third party into their family. However, they are not comfortable with an anonymous donor. They feel that not knowing who its father is would be a problem for their child, given the importance Americans attribute to the social role of "father." Unfortunately, they have been having a hard time finding a donor. They have approached quite a few men, and at some point each man became uncomfortable with the limitations on the role, and believed he might want to take a more active part in the child's life.

The Uncle - The third role I call the uncle role. Here the couple chooses a man to be the genitor, often a friend or sometimes a biological relative of the second female parent, such as a brother. He sees the child on a regular basis, developing a warm and loving relationship, but they do not see him as a parent because he is not involved in the day-to-day responsibility in raising the child. Again, the sharing of responsibility for the

child takes precedence over a biological connection in defining parenthood. A man who is not the genitor can be in the uncle relationship with a child in addition to or instead of the genitor. In fact many women want loving adult men in their children's lives and actively seek them out.

To illustrate, Mindy chose her spouse brother to be the genitor of her daughter Penny. He wants to be an active parent, but because he lives out of state, can only visit occasionally. Penny calls him Daddy, yet Mindy sees him as in the uncle role:

She doesn't fully comprehend the experience of "daddy" the way she comprehends me and Laura as her parents. She's grows up with us as the parents and he's gonna be this loving person who's daddy.

She chose this route, as opposed to an unknown donor, because she believes the cultural significance of a father is important in our society, and wanted Penny to have a father:

at least she'll have a daddy, like other people have a daddy. I don't know what it will be like for her. I can only hope because we live in New York it's not uncommon.

The Male Parent - The fourth role a man can take in participating in lesbian parenting, is the male parent role. This is similar to the uncle role, however, all concerned define him as a parent in addition to the second female parent (if there is one) because he shares the responsibility in raising the child. Most of the women who choose this option have had a relationship with the man, so it is not the same fear as having a strange person incorporated into their family. For example, Ruth and Mary decided to

ask Harvey to be the father of their child. They had a friendship with him that they worked on during the planning stages, and through Ruth's pregnancy and since Max's birth, they have been incorporating him into their family. Harvey has been with them at most social events at which I have seen Ruth and Mary since Max was born two years ago.

Theoretically the co-parent does not have to be the genitor, but I have not heard of such a case. I have heard, however, of a lesbian couple and a gay male couple raising a child together where they all define themselves as parents (they moved out of state before I could interview them). In this situation there are two male parents as well as two female parents.⁹

I have discussed these four ways in which men can be involved in lesbian parenting as different roles for the sake of discussion. With the exception of the unknown donor, they are, in reality, more fluid. Sometimes a man may begin in one role, and develop into another. For example, he may feel he just wants to be a donor, then he may gradually take on more responsibility as time goes on and the child grows and he builds a relationship with her, and her female parents are more comfortable with the idea.

As with motherhood, these definitions of fatherhood may be different than the ideas about fatherhood with which most of my informants were raised; however, they are not new to the American kinship system. Stack notes different ways in which her research

9. For a discussion of a lesbian couple who had two children with a gay male couple see Pollack 1987.

informants define fatherhood as well as motherhood. They differentiate between biological parenthood and social parenthood, and the genitor must be actively involved in the child's life to achieve both. For example, one young woman, Billy, was raised by her mother and her mother's boyfriend, Jason:

Take my father, he ain't really my daddy,
he's no father to me. I ain't got but one
daddy and that's Jason. The one who raised
me (Stack 1974:45).

Denise, an African American research participant, expressed a similar view on her biological father and step father. She thought of her step-father, Ralph, as her real father because he was the man involved in raising her on a day-to-day basis. This is not to say that she dismissed Peter (her biological father) as insignificant. On the contrary, she was extremely upset by his death and made an effort to get to know more about his life and his family. However Ralph was her "daddy," and Peter was, as her friend referred to her own genitor, her "sperm daddy."

Finally, I would like to note that the AIDS epidemic has had an unfortunate impact on lesbian parenting. In the past many women chose gay male friends as donors or uncles or parents for their children. Many are deciding against this route because the virus can be transmitted through semen, and they are afraid that if the man is infected they could become infected through insemination. Because the disease is not understood well, and because testing is not 100% reliable, this presents a genuine threat.

For both the women who wanted to co-parent with close gay male friends, and for the men who wanted to have children with a

biological connection to them, this is a very upsetting situation. However, I do not think this is a permanent situation. The lesbian baby boom began at the same time as the AIDS epidemic. When people became aware that the disease is transmitted through sexual relationships, it had already spread through a significant portion of the gay male population. However, as a new generation of gay men become sexually active after the spread of information regarding safe sex, the threat of AIDS eliminating gay men from being sperm donors will lessen significantly.

The Emergence of Lesbian Parenting

As with the definition of family and the lesbian spouse role, I am interested in how lesbian parenting emerged in American society. To find the answer, I looked at the economic, technological, social and ideological factors involved.

For lesbian parenting to exist, women must be genuinely independent from men. To begin with, lesbians must be able to financially support themselves to be able to set up households of single mothers or couples and their children. Therefore, the economic independence of women was a prerequisite for lesbian parenting. As I discussed in Chapter One, women's labor force participation has increased steadily since the onset of World War II and it is now possible for women to live without men, i.e., outside of the heterosexual family. In addition to economic independence, lesbians require reproductive freedom, i.e., a method of conception that does not include sexual relationships with men. The widespread availability of sperm from sperm banks has greatly increased

lesbians' options for parenting, and has enabled them to have a greater influence on how they experience and define parenthood.

Lesbians have created new parental roles and relationships and definitions in the social context of variation and change in how people live their daily lives in general, and how they experience parenting in particular. In the 1950s, when most of my research participants were growing up, over 70% of Americans lived in traditional nuclear family households, with a wage-earner husband/father, home-maker wife/mother and dependent children. By the late 1980s, that household type was only 15% of the households in America (Mintz and Kellogg 1988:203). Even those who lived in nuclear families lived less "traditionally," as more and more women worked outside of the home. In 1950 25% of married women were in the labor force, and by 1980 that number was nearly 60% (Mintz and Kellogg 1988:204). More than half of all married women with school age children were in the labor force in the 1980s (Mintz and Kellogg 1988:204).

Moreover, an increasing number of households with children in contemporary America are headed by single women. The divorce rate doubled between the mid 1960s and mid 1980s, and tripled between the mid 1950s and mid 1980s (Gatlin 1989:144, Mintz and Kellogg 1988:204). As the divorce rate grows, there are more single parents, especially mothers. In addition to single parenting through divorce, the number of never married women with children

has increased in all population groups.¹⁰ Moreover, not only are more women raising children as single mothers, but illegitimacy is no longer the social stigma for mother and child that it had been in the 1950s and before.

The increase in single mothers has not been without its problems. Given gender differences in access to economic resources in American society, the members of female-headed households generally live at a lower standard of living than those who live in households headed by men. For middle class women (like most of my research participants), who have access to a decent income, living within female-headed households does not have such a significant impact on their lives and the lives of their children. However, for women who do not have access to a living wage, this has a significant impact on them and their families, i.e., they live at or below the poverty level (Mullings 1989). Despite the difficulties involved in living within female-headed households, the increase in their numbers has created a social environment in which single parenting has become a more socially acceptable pattern, as demonstrated by the use of the term "single parent families" rather than "broken homes" (April Martin 1989; Mintz and Kellogg 1988).

The above behavioral changes demonstrate a growing trend toward different forms of parenting. In addition to changes in behavior, people have changed how they define parenthood since the

10. In 1960, 7% of families with children were single mother families. In 1984, that number rose to 23%; 56% of all African American families and 17% of all white families were single mother families (Bergmann 1986).

1950s. It is my impression that the lesbians I have worked with have taken beliefs already existing in American society, and combined them to form their new ideas about parenting.

To begin with, more people are letting go of a rigid biological definition of parenting. In the face of the new reproductive technologies, the definition of a parent, particularly a mother, is no simple fact in contemporary America. In a culture where biology is believed to create kinship, those reproductive technologies that separate the biological parent and the social parent (e.g., anonymous donor insemination, surrogate motherhood, in vitro fertilization where the egg of one woman is carried in the uterus of another woman), raise the question: who is the "real" parent? The parent with the biological ties or the one who is raising the child?¹¹

Similarly, the movement for change in the adoption process suggests that more people are accepting the idea that biology does not necessarily create parenthood. Underlying the decision to keep adoption closed is the idea that the biological tie is stronger than the tie created through day-to-day nurturing, and, therefore, the biological parents would be a threat to the adoptive parents if the child knew their identity. Now some adoptive parents and biological parents see the adoptive parents as the "real" parents for the same reasons that lesbians define the second female parent as a parent (i.e., the day-to-day nurturing of the child and the creation of an emotional bond between them), and they are comfort-

11. The "Baby M" case is probably the most famous case which raises this and other questions about defining parenthood brought by the new reproductive technologies.

able knowing each other.

This is certainly not true for all adoptive parents. Some are still uncomfortable without anonymity and want to keep adoption closed. However, there are some people who are comfortable with and choosing open adoption, which suggests that they are comfortable with a non-biological definition of parenthood.

In addition to these adoptive parents, as I discussed above, the poor urban African Americans in Stack's study defined the day-to-day tasks involved in raising a child as creating a parental bond in addition to or instead of the biological tie. For these people, parenthood is not created by biology alone, but must be achieved through assuming the on-going responsibilities of nurturing a child.

My research participants have adopted the idea held by some Americans that daily nurturing determines parenthood. This idea fits well within the framework of their overall definition of family based on "love," which stresses "nurturance" and "growth." Within adult relationships both parties should experience personal growth and help others in achieving personal growth. With parenting, one is physically as well as emotionally involved in another person's growth. The difference in the parenting relationships is that there is one-way nurturance on the part of the adult. However, this does not mean that parents get nothing in return for their care. On the contrary, in response to the questions "Why did you choose to have a child?" my research participants report wanting the experience of raising a child, nurturing it to adult-

hood, and the uniqueness of the experience of the emotional bond created through that relationship. Viewed within the family ideology of "love" that values emotional attachments, children are an emotional asset for women.

In addition to the idea that behavior can create parenthood, as mentioned in the previous chapter, lesbian feminists believe that women do not need men to live happy and healthy lives. They have combined this idea with the idea found in the society at large that you do not need two parents of different genders to successfully raise children. Therefore, they are able to reject the commonly held idea that a child requires both a male a female parent to develop into an emotionally healthy adult.

Again, this is not exclusive to lesbians. On the episode of the *Geraldo* television show mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one woman in the audience, about fifty years old, said that a lesbian family was an "unnatural" environment in which to raise a child. Geraldo Rivera then asked the woman's daughter (apparently in her twenties) if she agreed with her mother, and the younger woman said she did not.

There are not too many June and Ward Cleavers around. It would be nice, it would be nice. But two loving parents, I don't think the gender or the sexual preference are the most important things in raising a child. I mean divorce, drinking problems, money problems, are much harder than either of those problems, I think (The Geraldo Rivera Show 2/25/89).

The use of "June and Ward Cleaver" refers to the sitcom *Leave it to Beaver*, about a typical American family, which ran in the late

1950s and early 1960s. This young woman was stating that from her observations many peoples' behaviors and beliefs regarding family have changed since that time.

Finally, a growing acceptance of the separation of sexuality and reproduction makes lesbian reproduction more acceptable. In the 1960s the separation of sex and reproduction meant sex for pleasure, i.e. sex without reproduction. The acceptance of medical intervention in the conception process, i.e., removal of conception from the marriage bed, has flipped the coin on the separation of sex and reproduction. Now people are accepting the idea that you can have reproduction without sex, making lesbian parenting, which does not involve sexual relationships, more acceptable.¹²

This is not to say that reproduction without heterosexual intercourse is widely accepted. For example, a woman in the audience of a talk show questioned whether a lesbian and gay man really loved the child they had together because they did not have sex but used alternative insemination. On the institutional level, the Catholic Church, one of the largest conservative institutions in this and other countries, is strongly against the separation of sex and reproduction. In addition, these positions demonstrate that some people in contemporary America hold the traditional perspective on parenting. Yet there is a loosening of this perspective among some people. From my observations it seems that lesbians have focused on these "cracks" in the American kinship system,

12. Here I am speaking of lesbians who choose to parent after living as a lesbian, not lesbians who have children from previous heterosexual relationships.

i.e., those ideas and patterns that contradict the traditional beliefs, and have combined them in a new way to create their behavior and beliefs regarding parenting.

Issues in Social Recognition

In parenting, lesbians face issues similar to those they face in living in a lesbian couple, i.e., a lack of social recognition and acceptance of their parenting roles and relationships. After a couple comes to terms with their definition of lesbian parental roles, they then have to deal with having their definitions accepted by the rest of the world, including other lesbians, heterosexual friends and family, members of the medical profession and school administrators. For, in our society, most people view living as a lesbian and being a mother as mutually exclusive experiences (Lewin and Lyons 1982). Most women try to educate the significant people in their lives, in effect, asking them to understand and accept their relationships, and generally, after a time, they are successful.

The Lesbian Community - I have discussed lesbian parenting from the perspective of the lesbian mothers. However, there is no agreement within the lesbian community on parenting. Some women simply do not like children and do not appreciate having them around. For these women, the lesbian baby boom has been a nightmare. As Naomi told me, "I became a lesbian to get away from having kids, and now everyone is having them." These women perceive lesbian life as a way to remove themselves from the heterosexual family system and they do not know why someone would want

the responsibilities of children.¹³

Most recently, there has been controversy over the use of anonymous donor insemination and closed adoptions. Some birth mothers who gave their children up for adoption, and some adoptees who have emotional pain from the adoption process, believe that the biological ties of parenthood are extremely important and a child has a right to know his or her biological father. From their life experience, the biological model of kinship is just as, or even more significant than the new model based on care-taking. They express their opinions in open forums and lesbian and gay publications and ask that lesbians reconsider their parenting decisions in light of their experiences.

Family of Origin - Lesbians find it necessary to teach the members of their families of origin about their parenting beliefs and relationships if they wish to maintain relationships with them. As previously discussed, people (especially parents) from conservative backgrounds, have difficulty with their lesbian family member giving birth to or adopting a child. Those who are more liberal about sexuality and family life generally more easily accept their lesbian family members' decision to become parents, and those in the middle will just take time. Joyce's parents, conservative Irish Catholics, were upset that she had a child out of marriage. In the past they had rejected her sister who got pregnant before marriage, and did not speak to her until she got married. Event-

13. For a discussion of her decision not to have a child, see Irena Klepfiez 1987.

ually they came around with Joyce. She attributed their change of heart to their advancing years and the fact that she was the only one of her siblings living close to them.

Like Joyce's parents, most people do come around eventually. Having a new baby in the family is generally enough of a joy to help people accept the women's sexual orientation. Moreover, the birth or adoption of a child can sometimes help heal the rift between a lesbian and her parents. It may be the first time that she is doing something that they understand, something that is within their framework of family life. For some parents, the most upsetting thing about learning that their daughter is a lesbian is the thought she will never have children. Thus, learning that motherhood is possible while living as a lesbian, is delightful news.

Rhonda told me that she sees her parents more often and feels closer to them since she adopted her son, basically because they want to see him and she wants him to know them:

They take care of him for me sometimes which is really a bonus. I can leave him there overnight so I can stay out late. I've done that maybe seven or eight times in the last year. If I want to go to a demonstration or something they'll take him for the day. They've really helped me out and it's made me a lot closer to my parents in that sense.

Anne had a strained relationship with her parents, and she and her spouse June had little to do with them. When Anne told them she was expecting twins, there were delighted at the prospect of more grandchildren. Since then they have become much more open and accepting of Anne and June, and more involved in their lives.

They, along with an aunt, uncle and cousin, attended a shower that Susan and Julie had organized for Anne and June. June thought it was very important for them to attend because they got to see that they have very loving and generous friends. "They think if you're a lesbian you're lonely and isolated, that no one likes you." They also got to see other lesbian (and two gay male) parents, and could see that it was indeed possible to be a lesbian and have children.

It can sometimes be more difficult for parents of the second female parent. For people who see biology and adoption as the definition of parenthood, and/or have difficulty accepting their daughter's lesbianism, accepting their daughter's female lover's child as their grandchild can be an even greater step. Responses vary, depending on the individuals involved and how they generally respond to difficulties in life. Many initially say they will not relate to the child as a grandparent, and then later on do accept the child as a grandchild. For example, Deborah's parents did not see Tommy as her son or their grandchild. "He's not our blood," they told her. After six years of struggling with them, her parents surprised Deborah when they introduced Tommy to her grandmother as "Deborah's son."

Grandparents, where there is a biological connection (i.e., the brother of the second female parent is the genitor), have an easier time. In these cases the biological connection to their son is a parental tie they understand and accept. For example, Laura's brother is the father of her spouse Mindy's baby. Laura's parents came to visit during the course of our interview, and readily

accepted Penny as their grandchild, due primarily to their son Mark's relationship to the child.

Siblings, especially sisters, usually have an easier time. They are generally from a generation where ideas about sexuality, gender, and family are not as rigid as their parents' ideas, and can more easily accept their sister's decision to have a child. Joyce's sisters were supportive of her decision to have a baby, and were instrumental in healing the rift between Joyce and her parents. Similarly, Phyllis's sisters were excited about being an "auntie" when they learned that her spouse Agnes was having a baby.

Other relatives, such as grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins, vary in their responses to a lesbian relative having a baby. There is less of a pattern and their reaction has more to do with their previous relationship with the women. However, people are generally accepting of a new baby in their family.

Medical Establishment - The medical establishment can be both a blessing and a nightmare for every woman (and man) seeking reproductive care. However, for lesbians it is a major arena where they are faced with an ideology and social organization that does not recognize their kin relationships. From beginning to end, a lesbian (and her spouse if she is in a couple) may face individuals and institutional rules that assume only heterosexually married women get pregnant and give birth and do not know how to deal with her and her family. In addition they are subject to the personal opinions and attitudes of medical personnel regarding lesbians.

This begins, of course, with conception. Feminists have

demonstrated that while the new reproductive technologies may help women gain greater control over their reproduction, in using them, women also surrender a certain amount of control over the reproductive process. Sperm banks are part of the new reproductive technologies, and, like most technological innovations, are used within social contexts. As I will discuss in greater detail below, in American society, the medical establishment is controlled by white middle class men, and sperm banks were created to help married white middle class women have children (Corea 1985).

Many women avoid medical intervention as much as possible. With the known donor, he simply provides her with the sperm and she can inseminate herself. However, this is difficult with an anonymous donor. Some women have asked friends to act as intermediaries between them and an unknown donor. These intermediaries approach the men on their friends' behalf, and promise anonymity to all parties. When it is time to inseminate, the donors give the intermediaries the sperm, and the women inseminate themselves.¹⁴ However, if a lesbian cannot find a donor, she must go to a doctor because only a doctor or other medical professional can order sperm from a sperm bank. A few of my research participants who were trying to conceive are medical professionals and were able to have the sperm delivered to their homes.

Doctors' responses to lesbians conceiving through donor insemination vary from supportive to judgmental. There are doctors,

14. In California these intermediaries are sometimes called "bumble bees" (Weston 1988).

particularly lesbian doctors, who are more than willing to inseminate lesbians. Paula, a lesbian doctor, orders sperm for women, teaches them to inseminate themselves the first time, and then they inseminate themselves for the remainder of the necessary times. This is important because the conception process can be very time consuming and expensive. Some women find doctors who, while they do not particularly understand their lesbian patients, are supportive and try to help them conceive. After being referred to a doctor who she found helpful and supportive, Julie asked how he felt about having lesbian patients. He said that he would not particularly seek them out, but would not turn them away.

On the other hand, Jenny went to a doctor with a private sperm bank and presented herself as a single mother, not mentioning her sexuality. The doctor was very judgmental and negative, saying that sperm banks were for married women who could not conceive with their husbands, and that he did not approve of single women having children. The only way he would consider working with her was if she saw a psychiatrist. Finally he said: "We have to draw the line somewhere you know. [Even] lesbian women could come in." She left the office very upset and angry.

As Martin (1987) demonstrates, women often rebel against the medical establishment's attempts to define and control human reproduction. In this particular case, lesbians have found ways to get around the medical establishment's attempts to limit the access of sperm to married women, and use sperm banks for themselves.

Moreover, the widespread availability of sperm from banks has

tremendously increased their options for conception. For example, Jill, a woman in her fifties, told me that she got married when she was in her twenties even though she knew she was a lesbian. I asked, from my 1980s lesbian feminist perspective: "Why did you get married if you knew you were a lesbian?" She replied

Because in the 1950s you couldn't go to a sperm bank and get yourself pregnant. I wanted to have children, so I got married and when I had all the kids I wanted, I left my husband.

I have spoken with other women in her age group, who knew they were lesbians but got married because they wanted children. Having the use of sperm banks, has, therefore, greatly increased the options available to lesbians who want to have children outside of the institution of heterosexual marriage.

Once a woman is pregnant, she must find an obstetrician for prenatal care and delivery. Sometimes the gynecologist who helped her conceive also has an obstetrics practice, but, more and more, doctors in New York are specializing their practices and separating fertility specializations from obstetrics. If she is in a couple, usually her partner will go with her on visits. They then have to teach their doctor or midwife about their relationship and negotiate for spouse and parental rights for the second female parent. Some women find that midwives are more open to a lesbian couple. Agnes felt she wanted as little medical intervention as possible in the birth process, and felt she would be better off with a midwife.

As with the general population, many lesbians want to have natural childbirth, and take classes for that purpose. Here,

again, the framework is wife/mother and husband/father, which can be very alienating for a lesbian couple or a single lesbian. Agnes chose a particular childbirth class in the neighborhood because in a presentation the teacher said she had single mothers and lesbian couples in her classes. Soon the word spread about her, and the teacher had enough lesbians to have a special lesbian class.

Hospitals are institutions with their own social organization, and usually women do not find out about the rules until the time of birth. Again, the labor and delivery rooms are set up for heterosexual married couples. Due to the efforts of the women's health movements of the 1970s, most hospitals in the 1980s allowed fathers to be present in the labor and delivery rooms. The right to be present in these rooms while a woman is giving birth is commonly referred to as the "father's right." Lesbians have to negotiate to have their partners and/or friends in these rooms with them. While they have developed a relationship with their obstetrician and may have discussed issues with her/him beforehand, in many instances the obstetrician does not arrive until the delivery. The women then work with a labor nurse, usually someone they have not met until then, during the earlier stages of labor. So, when a woman is in labor experiencing extreme physical and emotional stress, is when she has to negotiate with the staff to accept her spouse as a parent.

Increasingly, as the lesbian baby boom grows, more and more hospitals in New York City are serving "alternative families" and are becoming more and more open and flexible. However, this open-

ness is still at the staff's discretion, and is based upon their personal attitudes towards lesbians. When Rachel was giving birth, she was accompanied by her spouse Patricia and the baby's father Michael. They were all allowed in the labor room, and found the labor nurses to be extremely helpful and supportive. However, when Rachel required a Caesarian section, the anesthesiologist was not so supportive. As he was administering the anesthesia, Rachel waved to Patricia and Michael who were at the window looking in. The doctor asked her who they were, and when she told them, he said "Do you think that's fair to the baby?" Aside from the fact that it is none of his business, to say something like that to a woman to whom you are administering anesthesia to prepare for abdominal surgery is totally unprofessional.

Once the baby is born, the parents must find a pediatrician to care for the child. Judith feels very good about her daughter's pediatrician, and recommends him to other lesbian mothers. She was single when her daughter was born and she first began to bring her to the pediatrician. However, he has been quite comfortable working with her spouse Delia, once they became more seriously involved and Delia began taking on parenting responsibilities. Lillian and Ronnie, on the other hand, were not so lucky. They went to a pediatrician who was recommended by heterosexual friends, and they felt assaulted.¹⁵ When they told the doctor they were

15. Again, a network is extremely helpful in finding a doctor who works well with lesbian parents. Lillian and Ronnie's heterosexual friends found this doctor to be excellent. However, she obviously treats lesbian patients differently than heterosexual patients, which heterosexuals would not neces-

lesbian parents, she was shocked and judgmental, asking them how they could do that to the child. She also asked them what their family thought, and Ellen's father wrote an irate letter to the doctor admonishing her for being judgmental and telling her that he was very supportive of his daughter and her family. They found another pediatrician.

Schools - By the time the child is old enough for school, the family has generally come to terms with who they are and presented themselves to family and friends. Now they encounter a new group of people to whom they must present themselves as a family: teachers, administrators and the child's peers. Are they going to tell the school that they are a lesbian family? If so, how? If not, how are they going to present themselves?

When Sharon went to register her daughter Melissa for nursery school, she was the only lesbian parent in the orientation meeting. She felt vulnerable saying that she was a lesbian mother within the group. In private with an administrator she thought she would say rather easily that she is co-parenting with another woman and ask how they would handle that; however, she stumbled over it. The woman understood and said that they had other such families, and it would be fine with her, but qualified her position by saying "we don't proselytize." This turned Sharon off. She wasn't asking her to proselytize; she simply wanted her daughter and family accepted for who they are. She decided to try another school.

sarily discover. Pediatricians, the good and the bad, are often the topic of conversation at lesbian mother events.

On the other hand, when Joyce and Deborah brought their son to pre-school, they expected to have to explain their family to the heterosexual teachers. They were quite surprised to find that they understood and accepted them both as Tommy's parents. The teachers later explained that in the past they had students who were children of lesbians. They not only understood and accepted the idea of lesbian parenting, but they were able to help the other children at school to understand and accept it as well.

For those who choose not to tell the school, or if the parents have separated but the second female parent is still involved in a parenting relationship with the child, they have to decide on a term for the second female parent that will demonstrate that she has a parental role in the child's life, and is more than a family friend. The terms women use include "god mother," "aunt" or "legal guardian," because these terms suggest to many people that a person has parental responsibilities.

Legal Issues

Status of Parental Roles - Despite their definitions, legal definitions of parental roles are at best in flux and at worst, conflict with lesbian definitions. The second female parent lacks any legal rights as a parent. This can present problems because she does not necessarily have the right to make medical decisions, or represent the child at school. Some of these issues can be handled with legal tools such as a power-of-attorney. However, the real problems can arise for the second female parent if her relationship with the primary parent should end through either

separation or death. Given that our legal system reflects the biological model of kinship, if she petitions the court for custody or visitation she finds that at best she is on shaky ground.

For example, a second female parent lost custody of her six year old daughter after the death of her spouse, the first female parent. Experts testified on her behalf that the child should remain with her because she is the child's surviving parent. However, the biological, and thus, legal grandparents won custody even though they were in their seventies, had little contact with the child, and had a history of abusing their own children (*Womennews* 1986; *Lesbian Connection* 1986).

In addition, if the couple breaks up, the second female parent has no legal right to claim visitation or custody if her ex-spouse does not want her to see the child. In two situations that I am aware of where this happened, women had friends act as mediators to help them come to a fair and reasonable decision. However, in some cases the second female parent did not get to see the child again. For example, Bonnie had raised Todd for five years, two of those years without Todd's first female parent, Pamela. But when Pamela wanted Todd back, and did not want Bonnie to see him again, Bonnie had no recourse. She knows what is happening in his life through mutual friends, but she has not seen him in five years.

At present in New York State, there is no legal recognition of the new roles parental lesbians are creating. A second female parent in New York State sought visitation rights to her child after she and her spouse had broken up. They planned on having the

child as a couple, and after the separation, the second female parent continued to contribute financially to the child's support and to visit with her. However, at some point the first female parent wanted to end the visitation and cut off all ties between her ex-spouse and her daughter. Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund, a lesbian gay rights public interest law firm, represented her. She lost the case in both the lower court and on appeal in the State Supreme Court.

Lesbian definitions of male parents also conflict with the legal definition. Under the American legal system, the genitor is the legal father, regardless of his relationships with the mother. While a lesbian couple and a donor may decide to negotiate his role in their lives and the child's life, legally he is recognized as the father. If a man decides that he wants to alter the agreement and have a more extensive relationship with the child, and if the female parent(s) are unwilling, he can take the first female parent to court to petition for more visitation.¹⁶

These examples demonstrate that the lesbian definitions of parental roles, placed in a legal forum, are fragile should someone, including one of the lesbian parents, contest them.¹⁷ How these conflicts are handled in the future will be significant. Because lesbians and gay men are not having their definitions of

16. For a discussion of the legal issues involved in lesbian parenting, see Nancy Polikoff 1987b.

17. The new reproductive technologies question the definition of parenting and parental rights in general, as demonstrated by surrogate motherhood. For a discussion see Chessler 1991.

relationships recognized by the legal system, some members of the legal community are organizing mediation centers for lesbians and gay men to negotiate conflicts in their lives. Of course this will only benefit those who are willing to negotiate. A mediation program cannot force an uncooperative first female parent to allow the second female parent to visit a child.

Divorce - When a heterosexually married woman decides to get divorced and live as a lesbian, she may have difficulty gaining custody of her children. In court, she has to prove that she is a fit parent. As I mentioned previously, our kinship system sees motherhood and lesbianism as mutually exclusive (Lewin and Lyons 1982). She must argue against this. In a conservative judge's court, it is enough to say that she is a lesbian. Some women have no problem because the fathers do not want custody. However, it is something he can potentially hold over her head, e.g., use as a bargaining chip in the divorce settlement, or if he is lax in his child support payments (Lewin 1988).

Harriet lives in New England¹⁸ and the judge in her jurisdiction is very conservative. Her attorney believed that he would probably give custody to her husband if he knew she was a lesbian. Her husband used that in their negotiations over their settlement. He threatened that if he got the kids he would take them back to England (where he is from) and she would probably never see them

18. I was not aware of any custody cases in my field site at the time of the research. However, most lesbian mothers are well aware of the possibility of a custody case, and I mention court cases to describe the legal context in which lesbians parent.

again. After a struggle, she finally said in effect "you can have all the money if I can have the kids," and he agreed. She believes that he was giving her a hard time all along because he wanted to get a better financial settlement.

The United States Supreme Court's *Hardwick* decision of 1986 (which upheld the constitutionality of Georgia's sodomy laws), affected a lesbian mother's custody case in Georgia. The court viewed the mother as engaging in criminal activity, even though she had never been arrested, simply because she admitted that she was a lesbian. She did not win custody of her child.

To summarize so far, lesbians are creating new female and male parental roles. However, these roles lack social and legal recognition. As with the lesbian spouse role, I believe this is because these are newly emerging kinship patterns.

The Significance of the Lesbian Baby Boom

In discussing how we had spent our weekends, I told my heterosexual friend Jack that I attended a baby shower for a lesbian couple. He looked puzzled, and then tried to ask me questions about lesbian parenting. "Is one of them the fath . . . no, I mean, who's the. . . no" The idea of lesbian parenting was so far out of his realm of experience that he could not even formulate a question. He is not a conservative heterosexual. On the contrary, his lifestyle is what I would describe as "counter-cultural musician." Jack is in his late 30s and has never married. He has lived alone, lived with a girlfriend, and lived in an alternative community. Despite the fact that he has lived outside of the

traditional marriage system, he could not conceptualize lesbian parenting.

Jack's response, and the responses of other people who have difficulty accepting lesbian parenting, demonstrate the symbolic significance of lesbian parenting. Most Americans define a set of parents as one mother and one father. Lesbian parents often present a family with two mothers and no father; this is ethnographically significant because, as with lesbian couples, it challenges the notion of the interdependence and complementarity of male and female in the American family in general, and in the context of parenting specifically.

For example, a number of talk shows have had lesbian parents on as guests, and far and away, the issue of a child not having a father seemed to be the most distressing aspect of lesbian parenting to the audience members of these shows.¹⁹ In addition, many believed that having two mothers would be confusing for the child, and could not substitute for a father. Their responses, as that of my friend Jack, support Yanagisako's (1988) suggestion that American folk models of proper child rearing hold two parents of the opposite sex as a necessity in proper child development.

In addition to the symbolic significance, lesbian parenting has political significance. By having children outside of the male dominant heterosexual family system (especially through anonymous donor insemination), lesbian parents are challenging the gender

19. I think that the elimination of the male role is an issue that, as a man, threatened my friend Jack.

politics involved in reproduction. Yet this political significance can be difficult to see. For example, a lesbian friend asked: "Why are so many lesbians having babies in the Reagan Era?" It seemed to her to be a very conservative thing to do. Similarly, a few heterosexual friends have commented "So what, everyone is having babies today." The reasoning seems to be that, given the baby boom of the 1980s in the population at large, the lesbian baby boom is not different or significant.

My response to my friends who question why lesbians are having children is that just because conservatives are in favor of having children does not mean that lesbians (or others) having children is a conservative thing to do. My perspective is that lesbians are influenced by the larger society that says women should be mothers. Most lesbians have the same desires as heterosexual women, to find a partner, settle down, and when they feel secure in their careers and relationships, some decide to have children. After all, lesbians are products of this culture, not visitors from another planet.

However, anytime an individual or a social group behaves in a certain way, it must be viewed in its social context. In contemporary America, many people, especially conservatives, see parenting and homosexuality as mutually exclusive categories (Lewin and Lyons 1982). Lesbians are combining the two and are acting in a way that is both conservative and radical. They are behaving in an "appropriate" manner for females (having children), but in an "inappropriate" context (in lesbian relationships). So lesbians

experience themselves as doing something conventional, yet are perceived by people in the dominant culture as doing something radical. This creates a rather confusing experience of parenting, which I refer to as the paradox of lesbian parenting.

Moreover, I believe that heterosexual feminists do not readily see the political significance of the lesbian baby boom because it does not fit neatly into current heterosexual feminist paradigms of the politics of reproduction, in particular, the struggle for abortion rights and the critique of the new reproductive technologies.

Since the late 1960s, white middle class heterosexual feminists have focused on the right to legal, safe and affordable abortion on demand in their research and political activity regarding reproductive freedom. Abortion reflects a heterosexual woman's right not to have children, which feminists have argued for because they believe in a woman's right to control her reproduction, to sexual freedom, and to a positive identity as a woman that is not dependent on motherhood. African American women and working class women, have criticized the focus on not having children, because they feel it denigrates motherhood and family, which have been central to the identities and survival of many women in these communities. Instead, they believe feminists should expand the definition of reproductive freedom to include the right to raise children with proper health care, education, and in a safe environment (Joseph and Lewis 1981; Erlien 1989; CARASA 1979). While white middle class heterosexual feminists have expanded their definition of

reproductive freedom, abortion remains a primary focus, particularly since the recent conservative federal and state governments have gradually chipped away at abortion rights in this country.

In their perspectives on reproductive freedom, white middle class lesbian mothers share with women of color, working class, poor women, and Third World women the focus on the right to have children. For, unlike their heterosexual counterparts, abortion is not a primary need for lesbians. Pregnancy does not result from lesbian sexuality, so lesbians do not "accidentally" get pregnant. In fact, they have to go very far out of their way to get pregnant. Their pregnancies are almost always by choice.²⁰

The feminist critique over the new reproductive technologies raises other areas of conflict between the perspectives of some heterosexual feminists and lesbians on reproductive freedom. Feminists have criticized the recent developments in reproductive technology because with them the medical establishment can, and often does, wrest control of the reproductive process from women (Corea 1985, Rapp 1990 Katz-Rothman 1986; Franklin and McNeil 1988). However, the experience for white middle class lesbians has been different. The reproductive industry has greatly facilitated the lesbian baby boom by making sperm available in sperm banks.

Artificial insemination is not really a new reproductive technology in and of itself. It is actually a rather simple

20. Of course a lesbian could get pregnant unexpectedly if she is raped, or if she has a sexual relationship with a man (which does happen). However, these are the exceptions not the rule.

procedure. Medical intervention is not needed; lesbians have done quite well on their own using turkey basters and syringes. However, the testing of donors, collection, storage, and dissemination of sperm specimens on a large scale is done primarily through sperm banks, which developed within the reproductive technology industry and are controlled by the heterosexual male dominated medical establishment. In fact, Gena Corea (1985) suggests that, despite the simplicity of the procedure, the medical establishment has taken a long time in developing artificial insemination by donor as a medical procedure in this country due to its potential to threaten the male dominant nuclear family.²¹

Corea further suggests that artificial insemination took hold when the medical and legal establishments found ways of using artificial insemination that would fit within the existing male dominant nuclear family. These include: attempting to make artificial insemination a medical procedure by requiring a doctor to obtain sperm from a bank; attempting to limit access to artificial insemination to married women only; passing off children born to married women through artificial insemination as the children of their hus-

21. As an indication of the lack of interest in AID, within the first 11 years, 24 babies were born in the United States by AID. However, six years after the birth of the first baby born through in vitro fertilization, 200 babies had been born from this procedure. In vitro is a much more complicated and difficult process with a much lower success rate, but it is a procedure that interrupts the woman's, not the man's, part in reproduction.

bands;²² and providing donors with parental rights to children born to single mothers on the grounds that it is in the best interest of the children to have a father (Corea 1985:49-57).

Despite the medical establishment's intent to limit the availability of sperm in sperm banks to married women, as I have demonstrated in this chapter, lesbians have obtained sperm from banks and the availability of sperm through banks has greatly increased the ability of lesbians to have children. Moreover, by using sperm from anonymous donors in sperm banks, lesbians are removing reproduction from the domain of heterosexual relationships in general (and the male dominated nuclear family in particular), eliminating men from parenting, and taking control of reproduction. In a society based upon male dominated families, lesbians having children without men weakens, even more, their control of women and children within the family. Thus, while it has not been the intent of the medical establishment, this new reproductive technology has been quite positive for lesbians.

While the availability of sperm banks has facilitated the lesbian baby boom by increasing white middle class lesbians' options to parent, women with less economic means have much less choice because the use of sperm banks is extremely expensive. As

22. This is accomplished by failing to keep records, knowingly or unknowingly falsifying birth certificates, matching the donor and husband of the wife as closely as possible, inseminating women in one menstrual cycle with the sperm of two or three different men to eliminate the possibility of identifying the genitor, and suggesting to the women and their husbands that they keep it a secret from family, friends, and their children.

of 1989 the cost of one insemination was about \$125. Given that women usually inseminate twice a month, they spend at least \$250 a month on sperm. In addition, only physicians can order sperm through a bank, which means that one has to pay for a doctor's visit as well as the cost of the sperm. Thus women were spending about \$300-400 per month to inseminate, and generally need several months to a year of inseminating to conceive. Some medical insurance companies will reimburse part of these expenses; some will not. However, if you do not have that kind of money, nor access to medical coverage that will pay for it, the use of sperm banks is not a possibility.

Many women with fewer economic resources have had friends act as intermediaries to get sperm anonymously for them. This eliminates the high cost of medical intervention. However, it also eliminates the testing providing by medical intervention. With the development of the AIDS crisis and the possibility of infection through insemination,²³ the use of anonymous donors without testing is not a possibility for most women.²⁴

23. To my knowledge, there are no statistics on women who have acquired HIV through artificial insemination. The information on women and AIDS in general, and lesbians in particular, is limited. I have heard through the grapevine of at least one case in which a woman acquired the HIV infection through donor insemination. However, the point I wish to make here is that for women making the decision to conceive through donor insemination is not how often it has happened, but that it can happen.

24. Not all sperm banks are careful about testing or keeping records in general. However, the more reputable ones are testing donors for HIV infection at the time they deposit a specimen, and then within a period of time (three to six months) to see if they have developed the infection. If the

Similarly, the availability of sperm banks has not equally benefitted women of color. Most of the African American lesbian mothers I know have children from previous heterosexual relationships. I know that some women have had children after living as lesbians; however, it is more difficult to get African American donors than white donors through banks. I do not know of any African American lesbians who have conceived through a sperm bank, only through informal known and unknown donors. Given that sperm banks were developed to aid white middle class heterosexually married women conceive (Corea 1985), this is not surprising. Moreover, it seems equally or more difficult to obtain sperm from donors of other racial groups. Thus, sperm banks have not equally benefitted women in different economic and racial groups.²⁵

The issue of reproductive freedom is multifaceted and complex. I raise the potential conflicts between heterosexual and lesbian issues in reproductive freedom so that feminists will discuss them and work toward the goal of arguing for the reproductive rights of certain groups of women in a manner that will not infringe upon the rights of other groups of women.

donor remains HIV negative, then they will make the specimen available.

25. In post-doctoral research I would like to further pursue how women in different racial and economic groups conceive.

CHAPTER SEVEN: ETHNOGRAPHIC AND THEORETICAL CONCLUSIONS

Summary of the Case Study

In the preceding chapters, I have argued that my lesbian research participants are creating new kinship patterns including: women living as spouses; new female and male parental roles; the elimination of the social role of "father" in those cases where they conceive children through anonymous donor insemination; and kinship networks that support these patterns. These patterns are ethnographically significant because they conflict with the common American belief of the complementarity of two genders in their definitions of family, love, sexuality, and marriage.

While these patterns differ from the patterns of white middle class heterosexuals regarding to sex and gender, they are consistent with the emphasis on the couple relationship, romantic love, the importance of children, and familial love. Moreover, lesbians have redefined family in the context of the questioning of the meaning of family in American society in general. Specifically, my research participants are a part of a process of kinship change in American society that involves emphasizing the fulfillment of emotional needs over an ideal of duty within marriage and family relationships. For these women, as well as other Americans, this process has involved defining family as those individuals with whom they have emotionally intimate relationships in addition to (or in some cases rather than) biological and affinal kin.

In this chapter, I will discuss the theoretical implications of this study. First, I will discuss how my research builds upon the issues discussed in Chapter One concerning the assumptions anthropologists work with regarding sex, gender, family, and kinship. Then I will discuss how my research can contribute to an understanding of the increasing importance of meeting emotional needs in familial relationships. Finally, I will return to a discussion of the place of the organization of emotional life in feminist theories of kinship and gender.

Before I can begin the first discussion I must clarify which aspects of my research participants' kin patterns have actually changed and which have remained the same. This requires reconceptualizing the domestic domain. To achieve that goal, Rapp (1982) suggests that anthropologists shift the focus from the normative nuclear family to households and their organization. She notes that under capitalism: 1) households are the places in which people pool their resources and turn these into the necessities of life; 2) the nuclear family has been the ideal way in which people form households; and 3) gender has been the primary method of dividing labor and responsibilities within each household (i.e., men have had primary responsibility for financial support of the household, and women have had primary responsibility for domestic work and child care).

Shifting the focus away from the ideal nuclear family and onto the household allows us to examine lesbian relationships within the study of the domestic sphere. I have observed that

lesbians are changing the membership and organizational patterns of kinship units, i.e., households and networks. Rather than forming households based upon heterosexual nuclear families, they are forming households based upon their sexual relationships with other women, i.e., with their lesbian spouses. In addition, they are changing the method of dividing household responsibilities. Since both are women, gender is not used as the division of household labor. Rather, each member of the couple maintains the household both financially and with her domestic labor.

Moreover, lesbians are expanding their egocentric kin networks by creating another separate, yet overlapping, network consisting of friends. In the ideal of middle class American kinship, life-long relationships based upon diffuse and enduring solidarity occur primarily between blood kin. As discussed in Chapters Three and Six, lesbians create kinship networks consisting of intimate, social, and community friends in which they learn how to live as lesbians and maintain their new kinship pattern.

Furthermore, lesbians have a somewhat different concept of emotional and social intimacy than the traditional ideal of middle class heterosexual people, which is that emotional intimacy should occur primarily between spouses and, to a lesser extent, siblings.¹ Many lesbians do not draw clear distinctions between sexual relationships and friendships, and have emotionally intimate relation-

1. I stress that I am speaking here of the ideal. However, I'm not sure if this ideal of emotional intimacy occurring primarily between spouses and siblings is the reality for most middle class heterosexual women. Women's friendships, in general, deserve further anthropological research.

ships with both spouses and intimate friends. Intimate friendships are relationships that are something between close friendships and sibling relationships in traditional American kinship, i.e., relationships in which women create a strong emotional bond, receive a strong sense of belonging, and give a commitment.

Lesbian kin networks and intimate friendships are not new forms in the U.S., but rather a new membership pattern for the white middle class women I worked with. Carol Stack's study of urban, poor African Americans demonstrate that pair bonding and networks composed of predominantly blood kin are not the rule for many of her research participants. Those people expand kin networks beyond blood and affinity, by creating relationships with others based upon shared interests, common experiences and the exchanges of money, resources, and services needed to survive in poverty. In addition, relationships between females can be emotionally, socially, and economically more significant than male-female relationships for the women in the community she studied (see also Joseph and Lewis 1981).

I also suggest that both African-Americans and my lesbian research participants redefine family and kinship because both groups have kinship patterns that differ from the white middle class male dominant heterosexual family pattern. The daily experience of living in a family form different from the heterosexual nuclear family, and belonging to a network of others who live the same kinship pattern, facilitates change in the meaning of family for both groups.

Finally, there is change on the symbolic level of kinship. As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, the idea of two oppositional yet interdependent gender systems is central to the American symbolic system. Heterosexuals have difficulty conceptualizing lesbian kinship because it is based on people of the same gender and, therefore, contradicts the belief in the interdependence and complementarity of men and women that Americans associate with sexual love, marriage, and family. In addition, lesbians have created a new meaning of the term "family," one based upon having a strong emotional bond, behaving in a mutually nurturing manner, rather than assuming such behavior exists between individuals with a biological or affinal tie.

As discussed in Chapter Five, my research participants have changed the sexual and gender components of kinship; however, much of how they live their lives is similar to their parents' lives, and the lives of the heterosexual residents of Park Slope within the same age range, race, and class backgrounds. They live their lives within households composed primarily of couples that operate within a network of extended kin. For while they have altered the sex and gender component of kinship, they have not altered the economic and occupational structure, nor have they changed the ideal of romantic love, which also shapes kin patterns. Thus, the households and kin networks my research participants construct seem to be based on a combination of their sexual orientation as well as their race and class backgrounds.

To summarize so far, this case study demonstrates that the

economic structure, the occupational structure, and the prevailing ideas about love in America have as much (or more) to do with domestic organization as with the biological basis of sex and gender. I now turn to a discussion of what we can learn from this case study about theoretical issues in kinship and gender.

Theoretical Implications of the Case Study

As I discussed in Chapter One, Schneider (1984) suggests that anthropological theories on kinship have been grounded in sexual reproduction, because theorists have not separated their folk models of kinship from their theoretical models. Because the fundamental assumption in Western notions of kinship is "Blood Is Thicker Than Water" (Schneider 1984:165), this idea is the basis of western anthropologists' theoretical approach to the study of kinship.

As also previously discussed, Yanagisako and Collier see kinship and gender studies as one and the same thing, and further suggest that feminist theories of gender suffer from the same problem, i.e., that underlying feminist theories of gender differences are the assumption that biological differences between men and women are at the root of social differences. Their suggestion for feminist scholars is to question that assumption and conduct research that would investigate if there are the differences between men and women.

The data presented in the previous chapters further argue against a biological/reproductive approach to both kinship and gender. To begin with, the data on adult familial relationships

between intimate friends and spouses as discussed in Chapters Three, Four, and Six, do not support such a model. The women in these relationships do not have biological or affinal ties yet they define each other as "family," which, for them, means people who behave in mutually supportive and nurturing ways. They have created familial relationships through social interaction over time. Further, the emotionally and socially supportive relationships these women engage in maintain adults, i.e., they are relationships in which adults nurture and support one another. They are relationships that do not necessarily have anything to do with biological reproduction or child socialization. These relationships suggest that kinship is not based exclusively on biological ties nor on sexual reproduction.

Moreover, even in relationships for biological reproduction, the data dispute a biological/reproductive definition of kinship. In cases of lesbian couples co-parenting through donor insemination, the lesbian couples have separated the genitor and the social parent, making them two distinct roles. The genitor does not take on a parental role unless he behaves as a parent. In some cases he does behave as a parent, and he and the female parent(s) consider him as such. But it is his behavior, and not only his biological tie, that creates parental relationships. The second female parent, on the other hand, has no blood or legal tie to the child, yet defines herself as a parent based on her parental behavior toward the child and her spousal relationship with the first female parent. Again, the tie is created through social interaction (as a

parent and as a spouse) rather than a biological or affinal tie. These parental relationships suggest that parental roles are socially constructed and not the direct result of biological ties.

My data further dispute a biological/reproductive model of kinship by demonstrating that kinship is not based on a heterosexual two gender system. In Chapter One, I discussed how an African woman-woman marriage demonstrates the social construction of gender roles. In those societies, an older woman and a younger woman created a structural marriage. The older woman steps into the structural roles of "husband" and "father," and the members of her societies recognize her as such. However, African woman-woman marriage still assumes a heterosexual two gender system, with a woman taking on the social role of a man, and her wife having sexual relations with a man to conceive. My lesbian research participants alter the gender system of American society one step further because their kinship patterns are based upon homosexuality and a single gender system. Neither woman is taking on a male role, but both are social women. The two women function as spouses, i.e., they are sexual partners as well as emotional, social, household, financial and sometimes parenting partners. For those women who do parent, they use donor insemination for conception, not heterosexual relationships. Thus they are contradicting both the belief that marriage is based on heterosexuality and the heretofore standard behavioral norm in America that only men and women can form spouse relationships.

These women's relationships also contradict the theoretical

assumption that heterosexuality and a two gender social system are at the foundation of kinship. Again, these notions stem from western anthropologists' ideas that kinship is based on biological reproduction, and that sexuality and reproduction are inseparable. Traditional kinship theorists have assumed that since a mother and a father are necessary for sexual reproduction and have different reproductive roles, nuclear families with gender differentiated roles are therefore universal (for examples see Fortes 1969 and Fox 1967). Here, lesbian relationships demonstrate that homosexuality and reproduction are compatible because these women separate sexuality for pleasure from reproduction.² Conversely, by demonstrating that heterosexuality is not necessary to create kinship ties, that kin relationships can be based on homosexual relationships, the data further dispute a biological/reproductive model.

This is not the only case which demonstrates the separation of sexuality and reproduction, and the compatibility of homosexuality and reproduction. Several societies in Melanesia have institutionalized male homosexuality that is compatible with heterosexuality and reproduction. For example, the Etoro not only accept male homosexuality, they believe that it is necessary for boys to have sex with grown men in order to reach manhood. These sexual relationships are structured by the kinship system, and are compatible

2. Some lesbians do engage in heterosexual intercourse to conceive, rather than using alternative insemination. However, these are not in the context of a relationship, but are usually one time or limited occurrences.

with heterosexual marriage and reproduction (Kelly 1976).³

I did not collect data that would enable me to demonstrate how femaleness and maleness are constructed. That was not my goal.⁴ However, I collected data on the creation of parental roles which dispute the belief that the nuclear family with differentiated roles are universal. The data on lesbian parenting demonstrate that social parental roles are not the manifestation of reproductive roles because one woman, the second female, parent has no biological reproductive role, male or female. As stated above, she has a social role created by social interaction, and the genitor, who has a biological role, has no social role.

Moreover, the co-parenting relationships among lesbian couples demonstrate the social construction of parental roles in the family. As I discussed in Chapter Five, lesbian couples vary in how they divide the parenting responsibilities, bond to their children, and perceive their co-parenting relationships. Some lesbian couples temporarily replicate the traditional heterosexual nuclear family gender roles in which one parent temporarily takes on the role of a primary care-taker and the other takes on a secondary or part-time parental role.

These couples demonstrate the social construction of gender

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3. For further examples of institutionalized male homosexuality in New Guinea see Herdt 1981, Herdt ed. 1984 and Creed 1984.
 4. However, As I mentioned in Chapter Four, I found evidence that lesbians have different gender concepts and believe that an examination of gender variation among lesbians would yield fascinating information of the social construction of gender. Kathleen Weston is presently conducting such research.

roles because neither member of the couple is a man with a biological reproductive role, yet one assumes a male role and one assumes a female parental role. The social construction is revealed in how they decide who will assume the male role. Their decisions are largely shaped by their employment schedules because the primary American occupational structure is designed for a two parent family, with one parent who engages in full-time wage earning work and one parent who has the primary parenting responsibilities in the home.

These couples also demonstrate that the occupational structures greatly influence the parental roles lesbians and heterosexuals create. Since neither could negotiate viable part-time work to equally divide child-care, one had to choose to remain at home and take on more responsibility for the child, while the other remained in her full-time job and had less responsibility for the child. With heterosexual couples, the person remaining at home with the baby is generally the mother, because in contemporary America, women on the average make less money than men. Therefore, in most cases, it makes economic sense for the father to remain at work because he makes more money.

In addition, those lesbian couples who do not replicate the male and female gender roles in traditional heterosexual nuclear families further demonstrate the social construction of gender roles. Neither woman takes on a male or female role, but, rather, they do one of two things: either combine both roles into something new, or both take on secondary parental roles and hire a

child care worker. Those who both have jobs that allows for flexibility and/or part-time work are able to work out a schedule to share the parenting equally or close to it. These include college professors, therapists, social workers, etc. An increasingly common pattern among middle class lesbians and heterosexuals alike, is one in which both parents remain in full-time employment and hire a child care worker to care for the child(ren) during the day when they are at work. Here they are both part-time parents, and divide the child care equally when they are both at home. However, neither woman assumes the traditional mother role. The creation of their roles demonstrates that our economic and occupational structures shape gender differentiated parental roles.

Love is What Makes a Family

In Chapter One, I discussed the fact that social scientists such as Lasch (1978) and Bellah et al. (1985) suggest that the new definition of familial love based on emotional intimacy rather than duty is not conducive to forming strong social bonds because the authors believe that the emphasis on meeting individual emotional needs in relationships is incompatible with commitment and social obligation.

This egalitarian love between therapeutically self-actualized persons is also incompatible with self-sacrifice. It must be based on the autonomous needs of two separate individuals - needs that may come into conflict. . . In the therapeutic view, a kind of selfishness is essential to love (Bellah et al. 1985:100).

In Chapter One, I also stated that Cancian disagrees, and

suggests instead that meeting individual needs in emotionally intimate relationships is conducive to forming strong family ties. She further suggests that there are two new blueprints of "love" (adult relationships) based upon "self-fulfillment, flexible roles and intimacy and open communication" (Cancian 1987:39). One model emphasizes self-sufficiency and independence over mutual support and commitment, while the other model emphasizes mutual support and commitment over self-sufficiency and independence.

The data I presented in the previous chapters oppose the idea that the emphasis on meeting individual needs in relationships is in conflict with commitment and obligation in relationships, and instead, support Cancian's suggestion that this emphasis is, in fact, conducive to strong, family bonds. To begin with, in Chapter Three I discussed the new definition of family, and the beliefs involved that exemplify the interdependent model of love Cancian has described. The women believe that familial relationships between adults should involve mutual nurturing, meeting each others' emotional needs, sharing intimate feelings, and open, honest communication. In addition, the women also value commitment, reliability, and responsibility, as demonstrated by Rhonda, when she said that those who are family to her are those with whom she has a life commitment.

We care about each other, we will be something to each other in the future, when we get to be old ladies we'll take care of each other. There's a question about long-term commitment.

Moreover, in Chapter Four, I demonstrated that my research

participants carry out these ideals in actual behavior. They assist each other in practical ways (e.g., shopping, cooking and cleaning when someone is ill, painting each other apartments, caring for one another's pets, etc.). They also care for one another in more serious times of need, such as in old age, illness and death. I described how Delia and her spouse Judith, cared for Delia's sister during her illness and are raising her children since her death. I also discussed how a number of women cared for friends who have AIDS, as well as their parents in their old age and during serious illnesses.

Furthermore, I suggested that, for my research participants who have an ideology of family based upon "love," commitment and obligation are not in opposition to "love" as Bellah et al. (1985) imply. To begin with, the practical help they provide creates a generalized system of exchange from which they can later receive assistance. More importantly, it is my opinion that the critics of the family ideology of "love" do not really understand this philosophy. Many of the people I know (both heterosexual and homosexual) see the ability to love others as a goal in self-development. Full maturity means the ability to care for others, not just yourself. Moreover, the experience of loving unconditionally will actually bring one to self-development. Thus, unconditional love, commitment, and obligation are an integral part of an ideology of "love," and not in opposition to it.

In Chapter Five, I demonstrated that spouse relationships are based upon "self-fulfillment, flexible roles and intimacy and open

communication" (Cancian 1987:39). Again, self-interest is inextricably bound with obligation. Both partners are equally responsible for the relationships; both partners are responsible for caring for one another. One cannot gain one's own support without being supportive to one's partner.

In Chapter Five, I discussed parenting relationships. The parent-child relationship demonstrates commitment, obligation, and responsibility in family relationships, in that the relationship is not mutual, but the adult cares for the child. However, as with adult relationships, obligation is not without self-interest. My research participants highly value the experience of raising a child, nurturing it to adulthood, and the uniqueness of the experience of the emotional bond created through that relationship. Viewed within the family ideology of "love" that values emotional attachments, children are an emotional asset for women.

Bellah et al. (1985) suggest that relationships based upon meeting emotional needs are inconsistent with strong social bonds because such relationships lack morality. The only social obligation is to be emotionally open and honest. From my observations, the focus on meeting one's emotional needs is not weakening social ties, but changing them. Rather than having social ties based upon duty to individuals with whom one has a biological tie, people are valuing ties that are conducive to their personal growth and happiness, i.e., evaluated by behavior, regardless of whether or not there is a biological tie. The process involves altering or severing certain family ties and

creating new ties; it does not promote social anomie.

Moreover, Bellah et al. (1985) see the language of therapy as taking the place of the language of kinship. My research participants discuss their lives in therapeutic terms; however, they achieve the therapeutic goal of having their emotional needs met in the context of *relationships with others, i.e., friends they define as family*, not social isolation.

Love, Nurturance, Gender and Feminist Kinship Theory

Finally, I would like to return to the issue I raised in Chapter One regarding the absence of an analysis of emotional life in feminist kinship theory. To summarize, I suggest that feminist anthropologists have not incorporated the organization of emotional life into their theoretical frameworks of gender and kinship. I also suggest that we do so in order to fully understand women's reality, as well as gender relations within the family.

Criticizing a theoretical perspective and creating a more useful framework are two different things. I would like to present some ideas discussed in the work of the feminist philosopher Ann Ferguson, who provides a useful theoretical framework for incorporating emotional relationships into theories of gender, family, and kinship. In her book *Blood At the Root: Motherhood, Sexuality and Male Dominance* (1989), Ferguson suggests that people have a need for social bonding (which she called sex/affective energy) that includes sexual intimacy as well as other forms of bonding, like parenting and friendship. All societies organize these relationships in systems which Ferguson calls sex/affective production.

These are systems which socially construct "sex/affective energy", that human physical and social interaction which is common to human sexuality, parenting, kin and family relations, nurturance and social bonding (7-8).

The notion of sex/affective energy developed here assumes that sex/affective interest can be as fully satisfied (hence as healthily expressed) by Platonic as well as by orgasmic interactions (Ferguson 1989:79).

She views the activities involved in sex/affective production (which she calls sex/affective activities) as necessary social labor and suggests that we investigate social bonding relationships in their social and historical contexts to determine the nature of those relationships. Are the exchanges and relationships relatively equal or is there an imbalance?

Ferguson's framework is useful because it makes women's reality visible. By defining emotional activities as socially necessary labor, we validate much of what women spend their time doing. As I mentioned in Chapter One, there is a great deal of work involved in maintaining emotional intimacy and emotional health in adults, as well as children. Moreover, Ferguson's framework could enable us to document yet another potential aspect of gender hierarchy, i.e. unequal emotional exchange among men and women.

While Ferguson's framework is useful for incorporating the organization of emotional life into theories of gender and kinship, I think it may be difficult to operationalize. It may be distasteful for American anthropologists to view emotional work as work because it diminishes the affective quality, i.e., we believe that

we nurture out of love, not money. Yet, we must remove our folk model from the analytic model, and analyze nurturing behavior and its significance to gender relations. Moreover, work suggests a product; what does emotional work produce? As with much of housework, there is no tangible product at the end of the activities involved in emotional work, thereby making it difficult to measure.

Finally, after arguing that emotional life is connected to power relationships, I caution an attempt to locate nurturing behavior in relation to the market because we may be incorporating into our theoretical model the capitalist ideology that market relations and activities are more valuable than relations and activities that do not relate to the market. By focusing on the relationship between emotions and power relations we may be implicitly suggesting that women's activities are not important in and of themselves but only as they relate to the political economy. I want to suggest that there may be aspects of nurturing that have nothing to do with the political economy, and that feminist scholars, must entertain and investigate that possibility.

While there are problems with Ferguson's framework, overall I think it may be useful to feminist anthropologists seeking to incorporate the social organization of emotions into theoretical frameworks on gender and kinship.

Summary

To summarize, the women I worked with demonstrate an increasingly important cultural need in contemporary America, that is, to feel engaged in emotionally intimate relationships with others.

The growing popularity of psychotherapy, self-help groups, support groups and twelve-step programs (specifically ACOA in which people are encouraged to care for their "child within") demonstrates the significance of personal growth in contemporary America. While this is a trend throughout the society in general, my research participants have taken it a step further by defining as family those individuals with whom they have an emotionally intimate relationship. Contrary to what some social scientists have suggested, the relationships formed through emotional intimacy combine self-interest with obligations to others.

Moreover, I believe that the results of my research support previously suggested ideas that biology does not determine kinship, sex and gender are socially constructed, and the nuclear family is not universal. Furthermore, my research supports the idea that anthropologists should no longer use the nuclear family form, nor other kinship and family forms based upon biology and/or reproduction, as unique paradigms for analyzing domestic relationships within the U.S. or elsewhere.

Instead, researchers might employ models (such as the one suggested by Collier and Yanagisako) that investigate the issues the biological/reproductive model assumes. However, I have also suggested that such a framework should also include an investigation of the organization of emotional life in our investigations of kinship. Such investigations will bring us toward a greater understanding of family and kinship in contemporary America and in other cultures around the world.

APPENDIX A

CASE STUDIES

Ethnographic Present - 1988

Robin Weinberg

Robin is 34 years old, works as an editor for a publishing house, and earns \$42,000 a year. At the time of the interview (1988) she had been living with her spouse, Colleen Quinn, for four years, two years in an apartment they rented and two years in a two bedroom coop apartment they bought together.

Robin grew up the only child in a middle class Jewish family in Westchester, a suburb of New York City. Her father had his own successful business. When Robin was growing up, her mother was primarily a home-maker, but also an art student. Now she focuses all of her attention on her artwork. Robin describes her childhood as

privileged. I had everything I needed and wanted, and then some. I was also exposed to high culture, I mean, art, music, and theater, since my mother was an artist. I had this sense that I would be cared for, and that I didn't have to worry about material things.

She found that her upbringing worked against her in early adulthood, because she had difficulty learning to live independently.

I wanted to be a writer, but I couldn't make a living at it. I had a string of the usual jobs: waitress, house-cleaner, house-painter, telephone salesperson. Then I realized that this was getting me nowhere, which was terrifying. The differ-

ence between me, a writer, and my mother, an artist, is that she had my father to support her and I didn't. I mean, the scariest thing for me about being a lesbian meant that Prince Charming was never going to come riding up and take care of me. I wasn't raised to worry about earning a living; my husband would do that. I went through a lot of changes to really accept that I had to support myself. Finally I went back to school to get a Masters in Creative Writing. After I graduated in 1983 I got my present job and have been there since.

She came out in college, when she was in love with Stephanie, with whom she was having a serious relationship that lasted two years. They separated after graduation, and Robin had a series of what she describes as

semi-relationships. You know, not very serious or long term, but very intense while they lasted. It was fun for a while, but when I was about 27 it started getting old. I felt tired of being on a love-fest roller-coaster, and wanted some stability. I didn't find it for a couple of years, until I met Coll.

She refers to Colleen as her "partner," because she is dissatisfied with "lover" and "girlfriend."

When we were dating girlfriend was fine. But that is a less serious term to me. Now we are married, basically. I mean, we not only have sex, we live together, we've made a home together, and now we are having a child. That to me is more than girlfriends.

Emotional intimacy, commitment, and reliability are the determining criteria in her describing Colleen as her partner.

The important thing in a partner or life partner relationship is the emotional intimacy. That's sort of the bottom line. I

mean if you don't have that you've got nothing to go on. It's important to me to feel connected to Colleen, and to be able to get support and nurturance from her. Of course it's a two way street; I have to give the same in return. But that's the bottom line. Then you have to have a sense of commitment, you know, like you can trust the person, like they're gonna be there if you need them. I never really felt that with anyone before I met Colleen. She is the most reliable person I know. I really trust her and I know she would be there if I need it. Well it's happened already. When my dad had a heart attack three years ago, she was there for me, well for my whole family, 100%. That's unusual and hard to come by. So I realize that I'm very lucky.

They split their expenses equally and have a joint household checking account and individual savings accounts. They generally share the expenses of household items, but not always luxury items.

We don't always want the same luxury items like a VCR. I'm a t.v. and movie freak, she is not. So she didn't want to split the VCR. Then again, I'm not a good cook, and she is, so she has all these kitchen gadgets that she paid for herself.

They have had a hard time with housework, because Colleen is very fastidious and does a lot of housework, and Robin does not like to do housework at all.

Hey, I came from a home where somebody else always did the housework, my mom or the cleaning woman we had. I really didn't have to do much around the house. I really like a clean home, but I don't like to clean, so when I lived on my own my apartment was always messy. We argued a lot about that, but, finally we came to some sort of compromise. I do more than I really would prefer, and she does tolerate a messier apartment, well, I should say that she puts up with the house not being as

clean as she would want. We both really sort of met half way. But it was a struggle.

Her reasons for defining a person as "family" are similar to the criteria for a spouse, emotional intimacy, commitment, and reliability. She named Colleen and three close friends as family.

You know, these are people who, well, I can really be myself with and I can look to for support and I can give support to. That's important to me, to know that I have an impact on people, and these people I have an impact on. And also knowing they're gonna be in my life for a long time. I mean, even if they move away, will still have a relationship. I don't really know why, it just is.

She and Colleen did not go into parenting equally. Colleen always wanted to have a child and Robin wasn't thrilled with the idea.

You know, with my family history, I'm used to *being* the kid not *having* a kid. And Coll is just the opposite. Being the oldest of six kids, she was always like a little adult even when she was a kid. So it was easy, well not easy, but *possible* for her to think of herself as a parent; it was not possible for me to. But we've really worked on it and I'm still really scared, but I'm also very excited. Now that some of the women in our mothers' group have babies, and we've been spending more time with them, I'm really excited about having a baby.

After their son William was born, she was more excited than scared. She later told me that she loved having a child and now understood what all the other women were talking about, although it was still scary. Moreover, she realized that she, indeed, was capable of taking care of another person.

I think it's kind of helped me to grow up a little more, being responsible for someone else and realizing that I'm doing a good job at it! Plus he's an incredible kid. I mean he's so smart and outgoing with people. I think we lucked out. Maybe I'm a little biased, but I think he's a really special kid.

After a year, she defines herself as a parent, because she is involved in the day-to-day care of their son, and the emotional bond they have created in his first year:

Yea, I see myself as his mother. I mean, I do all of the mother stuff: feeding him, changing him, bathing him, dressing him, and now that he's walking, chasing around after him. But also, I'm very connected to him and he's very connected to me. When I'm away from him I really missed him, and think about him and worry about him, and he cries when I leave.

They think that he will probably refer to Robin as "Aunt Robin" when he is old enough to speak. However they are waiting because

a lot of women spend time wondering what their kid will call the "other mother" and then the kid decides himself. So we'll see what happens.

Colleen Quinn

Colleen is a 37 year old corporate attorney who earns \$120,000 a year. She is the spouse of Robin Weinberg. She grew up in a stable, working class, Irish Catholic family in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn. Her father is a police officer, and her mother began working in the cafeteria of the local Catholic school when Colleen was ten years old. At that time, Colleen took on a good deal of

domestic responsibility.

Colleen always knew she was a lesbian, and had her first sexual relationship with a woman at age 18.

I was a real tomboy. I never did girlie things, you know, like playing with dolls and dressing up. I loved sports, I was better at sports than most boys my age. . . I always knew I was different, that I liked boys as friends but that I couldn't see myself in love with them, but I didn't know what that meant when I was a little girl. By the time I was in high school, I knew what it meant, but didn't know what to do about it. Then when I went to college I meant other lesbians and figured out what to do.

She doesn't like the term lover because it is too limited; it only refers to their sexual relationship. She prefers partner because it is more descriptive. The obligations of a partner are similar to those of a friend, but also include a sexual relationship and a domestic relationship:

A friend is someone you have a strong emotional connection with, and you care for and who cares for you. A lover is a friend you're also having a sexual relationship with. But a partner is a lover you live with, you know, and you create a home with.

Colleen always wanted to have a baby; she never saw her life without having a child.

I always knew I would have a baby, but I didn't know how I was gonna do it until about five years ago. I am the oldest of six, and there was always a baby in my family; either my mother had a baby or one of my aunts or cousins. (I'm from a very large family.) So I grew up with kids and love children, and love watching them develop from little tiny things to adulthood. It's amazing.

Her parents were very upset when they learned that she was a lesbian and then again that she was pregnant.

They really freaked out when I told them that I was gay. I mean, I don't know why it came as any surprise to them; I never had a boyfriend and never expressed any interest in men or getting married and I always talked about girlfriends. But they are Irish Catholics and can deny beyond belief. I mean people could be having sex right in front of them and they would say these people are just good friends. So when I finally told them that Robin and I were not just good friends, that we were lovers, they couldn't handle it and told me they didn't want to speak to me ever again. But that didn't last too long, maybe about a month, and then my mother tried to talk me out of it, and we fought a lot. My father, on the other hand never mentioned it because that would mean he would had to acknowledge it. But they've finally come to some kind of acceptance of Robin and me, you know, in their own way. They never say the words "lesbian" or "gay" or "lover" or anything that would acknowledge sexuality, but they treat her well, like my siblings' spouses.

Colleen demonstrates the two separate kinds of family.

I've got two kinds of family, the "old family" and the "new family." . . . "Old family" includes my parents, brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, etc. You know, the old "blood is thicker than water stuff." . . . And my new family consists of friends that are family to me.

Criteria for a defining someone in her "new family" include loyalty, emotional intimacy, and history:

Loyalty is a big thing to me. My friend Joanna says it's because I'm a Taurus. Who knows, but anyway, it's important to me to know that I can count on people when I need them, and it's very important to me to be

there for others when they need me. That's what family means to me, that you stay with people, not just in the good times, but in the rough times too, that goes for "old family" and "new family." I guess the real difference with "new family" is that these are people I've chosen in my life because I like them, mainly I like them because we have been able to have a strong emotional connection. That's really important to me, to feel that I'm close to someone, that we have like a soul connection, that I can be my real self with them. And they are people who I have been through stuff with, you know, we've known each other long enough to know that we can count on each other. We had big fights and we've gotten through them. You know, real life stuff.

Those that she considers "new family" include her spouse Robin, and four intimate friends.

Tracey Jenkins

Tracey is a 36 year old social worker who earns \$48,000 as the director of a drug program in a City hospital. She is an African-American single mother. Tracey is from a stable working-class family; her father was a school teacher and her mother a saleswoman in a large department store. She grew up in the Bronx, married when she was 24, and had her daughter when she was 26. Her marriage ended shortly after the birth of their daughter, when she realized that she was a lesbian.

I had always gotten along much better with women than with men, but I didn't get it, you know, I didn't realize that I was sexually attracted to women until after I was married. When I finally did, it was like, oh, yea, right, that's what I've been feeling, and I realized that I had to leave my husband.

Initially her parents were upset (they are Baptists and homosexuality is against their religion), but eventually they came around. "Family ties are stronger than prejudice in my family." After she left her husband she lived with her lover Rose for five years, and when they broke up, she moved to Brooklyn. She lived in a few different apartments, and then decided she wanted to own her own home. "I was sick of landlords and their bullshit." She couldn't afford it on her own, so in 1983, she and two friends bought a three family house and each took an apartment, where she still lives with her daughter, now 10.

Tracey was in two relationships after she broke up with Rose, one lasting six months and the other a little under a year. She hasn't been in a serious relationship in two years dating several women but no one seriously. She referred to Rose, the only woman with whom she had a serious relationship, as her lover. She doesn't really like the term, but has settled for it.

None of the terms are really satisfying, but partner is too business-like, mate sounds like something from a Nature show, and spouse is something on a computer form. I like lover because it has the word love in it.

Her ex-husband regularly visits her daughter and pays child support.

He was really upset when I left him, especially since I left him for a woman. But he's gotten over that and we've been able to get along pretty well, and he is, and always has been, a good father to Tanya.

Her ex-lover, Rose, still sees Tanya as well.

We may have had our problems, but she and Tanya had a good relationships, and I wouldn't take that away from Tanya. They enjoy doing things together, and Tanya could always speak with Rose openly about just about anything. That's important for a child, especially when they enter adolescence. I feel blessed that Tanya has Rose in her life.

Family, to Tracey, means

those you can count on. They're the ones who stay with you through thick and thin, and who you hang with through the same. I remember when I first realized that my friend Lorraine was family to me. We had been friends for about 6 years, and, well, I had never really thought about it up until then, you know, nobody like you came and asked me who was in my family. But, anyway, her mother died very suddenly down in Georgia, and, I didn't even have to think about it, there was no question, I knew that I would go down there with her to be with her, and it was because she was family to me. She still is.

Maria Giordano

Maria is a 29 year old elementary school teacher who earns \$31,000 a year, and is single. Maria is from an working-class Italian-American family, and she grew up in Canarsie Brooklyn. Her father is a sanitation worker and her mother has had various jobs working in neighborhood stores. She has two sisters and one brother.

She went to a local college and lived at home, at which time she was dating Michael:

We had been going out for about two years, and, I really liked him a lot, but I felt there was something missing. Then, just before I graduated, he asked me to marry

him. I sort of panicked. I mean I didn't want to marry him and I couldn't really come up with a reason why. Then I spent some time soul-searching and realized that it was because I was not really into men.

Her parents struggled with her sexual orientation, but have now accepted it.

It was, and I guess still is, hard for them. For my father, I think it's his conservativeness; having a lesbian daughter is hard for him. My mother is different. In some way she can understand it, I mean, she is the type of woman who is much closer to women than to men, and she has said things like "I can understand wanting to be with a woman" or "It can be hard to live with a man." But, I think the hard part for her is that she's afraid for me, you know. She doesn't think a woman can make it in the world alone, and she's afraid that something will happen to me. The idea of having sex with a woman wasn't that hard for her to understand, but living alone or just not living with a man to protect you, that's hard for her. I've tried to tell her than just because a woman is married doesn't mean nothing will ever happen to her. She doesn't really believe me, but, over the years, I think seeing me be happy and living on my own, that has made her less scared and a little more comfortable.

Maria moved to Park Slope three years ago because most of her friends live in the area.

I joined a women's softball team shortly after I came out, and I made a lot of friends on the team and in the league. Many of the girls live in that neighborhood or close by, so I decided when I left home that I wanted to be closer to them.

Lives with two friends in an apartment

It's a great apartment with a lot of space and, since its rent stabilized, we have a reasonable rent. That's amazing in this

neighborhood. I'm really lucky I found Julie and Tina, they're great roommates, and have developed into great friends.

Maria exemplifies how some lesbians incorporate both the traditional definition of family based upon blood and affinity, and the new definition of family based upon an emotionally intimate relationship. Her parents and four siblings are very important to her:

I'm from an Italian family where family means everything, you know, you stand by your family no matter what, you do for your family and they do for you, and on and on, even if you don't always like them, and, for the most part, that's been true with my parents and brother and sisters. . . So that's what's important for me with friends that are family, you hang in there with each other. The difference is that you don't always like the family you were born into, but you can choose friends who are family. I like my new family, you know, as people, more than some of my old family. We have more in common, I can speak to them more freely and openly and more intimately. Well that's not totally true, I mean, it's true about my friends that are family, but I'm also very very close to my sister Theresa, and I can talk to her like I would a close friend. But in general, that's the difference between friends that are family and family family. I love both groups of people, but the relationships are just different.

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

General Demographic Information

Name

Address

Telephone Number

Age

Occupation

Gross Personal Income

Work History

Length of residence in the neighborhood

Education

Class Background

Parent's Occupations

father

mother

Where She Grew Up

Religion

Race/Ethnicity

Feminist/Nonfeminist

Organizations or group you belong to

Household Information

Length of residence in household

Residence/household history

Household Type

Members of Household and relationship to ego

History of Household membership

In whose name is home own/leased

Household expenses

How do you allocate income to meet expenses, e.g., do you pool resources, or contribute to a household budget? If the latter, how do you decide the amount that each will contribute, e.g., equally or proportionally based on salary?

Do you have household or joint bank accounts?

How do you decide on allocation of resources over and above your expenses?

How do you decide on major household purchases, e.g. furniture, appliances, etc.?

Sexual History

Can you tell me your coming out story? i.e., When you came out, how you came out, why you came out? How did the people in your life respond, i.e., friends family of origin?

Are you sexually active now?

If so with whom?

What is the nature of your relationship?

Length of Relationship

Nature of relationship?

Can you give me a history of your sexual relationships?

Do you still have relationships with these women?

Kinship Roles and Terminology

[To ask of sexual partners, household partners, friends, family of origin

What term do you use to refer to _____ [lover, spouse, partner, roommate, housemate, friend, etc.]?

What term does _____ use to refer to you?

How would you define a _____?

What do you see as _____'s responsibility or obligation toward you as your _____?

What do you see as _____'s responsibility or obligation in the household as your _____?

What do you see as your responsibility or obligation toward _____ as her _____?

What do you see as your responsibility or obligation in the household as her _____?

[Is there a difference between their responsibilities and obligations toward one another?

[Is there a difference between their responsibilities and obligations toward the household?]

[If so, what are the differences based on?]

What term does (will) your child use toward you?

How would you define a _____?

What do you see as your responsibility or obligation toward the child?

What term does (will) your child use toward _____?

How would you define a _____?

What do you see as _____'s responsibility or obligation toward the child?

How would you define a _____?

[Is there a difference between their responsibilities and obligations toward the child?]

[If so, what are the differences based on?]

Definition of Family and Relatives

Who are your family members?

[after each person] Why is s/he a family member?

Who are your relatives?

[after each person] Why is s/he a relative?

Mothers

Why did you decide to have a child?

What does being a mother mean to you?

" " in relation to being a woman?

" " lesbian?

Circle Game

[Present the interviewee with a page with three concentric circles]

With you in the center, please place the people in your life in relation to you on the three circles.

[Ask of each person] who is s/he?

how long have you known her/him?

Can you describe your relationship with her/him?

e.g., why is this person important to you?

What do you get from relationship with this person?

What do you give?

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