BEYOND THE CLOSET DOOR:

THE IMPACT OF HOMOPHOBIA ON THE LESBIAN FAMILY
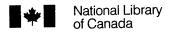
BY

MALLORY NEUMAN

61.

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Faculty of Social Work
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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BEYOND THE CLOSET DOOR:

THE IMPACT OF HOMOPHOBIA ON THE LESBIAN FAMILY

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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of the University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

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ABSTRACT

This study is about the ways in which thirteen families
with lesbian mothers deal with the impact of social
homophobia. Homophobia is defined as fear of same-sex
affection that often results in overt acts of violence and
discrimination. A feminist analysis is used to explore the
ways in which the lesbian family has been invisible in the
literature on families, and in the gay and lesbian
literature. A discussion of the nature of oppression,
particularly as it is manifested through heterosexism and
homophobia, situates the lesbian family in a climate of
hostility.

Feminist qualitative methodology is used which includes
a variety of participatory means of data collection. A
focus group consisting of participants helped design the
interview questions; interactive interviews were conducted
with the mothers and the children; a feed-back loop was
established with some of the participants to allow for
ongoing dialogue regarding the process and analysis of data.
The researcher and her family are also involved in the study
as participants.

Several preliminary findings emerged which include:
the way in which the mother deals with her lesbianism will
be reflected in her child/ren's attitudes; having a
positive support system is crucial to healthy coping within
the family; independent of other factors, such as age or

gender of child/ren, the most important factor in dealing with issues arising from the mother's lesbianism was open and honest dialogue from the point of her coming out or self-identifying as lesbian.

The lesbian family faces constant stressors. While the mother attempts to protect her children from a hostile world, she also attempts to meet her own needs for positive, supportive and affirming community. The lesbian community may meet some of these needs, but it is often hostile or indifferent toward her children. Children of lesbian mothers are faced with similar problems of deciding how they will cope with potential rejection due to their mother's sexuality. A number of suggestions are offered for ways in which social work can respond to the needs of the lesbian family.

Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1:   INTRODUCTION

> This constant tension between defending gays while
> defining myself as straight finally articulated
> itself when I realized that there are not simply
> gay couples with children;   there are gay
> families, where everyone must deal with the
> prejudice surrounding homosexuality"(Paula Fomby,
> 1991:   39).

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of

homophobia on the lesbian family. A central focus for social

work study, either when discussing intervention or research

is the family. While social work literature usually

identifies that there are a variety of family forms, only

one has the status of being "The Family." "The Family" is,

of course, characterized by one father, one mother, children

who are products of procreation between this mother and

father,and peripherally, extended blood-related kin. One

way we know this is because whenever we discuss any other

type of family, we indicate that family form with

descriptives - single-parent, mother-led, single-parent

father-led, extended, blended, foster, and, of course, gay

or lesbian.

A substantial problem with definition occurs when

talking about gay or lesbian families because many believe

that the very nature of homosexuality precludes procreation:

> It seems that the term "gay parent" is a
> contradiction. I usually think of the term "gay"
> as being synonymous with being homosexual and I
> think of being a parent as reflecting
> heterosexuality (James Walters, in David A.
> Baptiste, 1987: 223).

This is true not only in mainstream society, but, until
recently, in the gay and lesbian community as well (Sandra
Pollack & Jeanne Vaughn, 1987; Adrienne Rich, 1986;Kath
Weston, 1991). While gay men and lesbian women have been
having children and actively taking part in raising their
children since time began, gay parenting and the gay family
has only recently gained some acceptance. To many, the very
nature of lesbianism disallows motherhood and vice versa.
If you are one then certainly you cannot be the other.
Further, as Goodman states there continues to be social
attitudes that declare "It is good to be a mother, bad to be
a lesbian"(1980: p. 156). One of the mothers who
participated in this research study stated her frustration
with this exclusion in this way:

> I guess I get angry sometimes - why can't I be who
> I am? You know, and it's dictated by the outside
> world, like with the kids at school, their
> friends, and that's generated by them not being
> out at school (about my sexuality). And I just
> would like to say "I'm their mother." Not that I
> have to go around shouting "I'm a lesbian" but I
> am proud of who I am and the lifestyle that I live
> and I don't think it should be negative. So I get
> this push, pull...I get this really good feeling
> about who I am then as a parent the negative
> stuff.

I decided, for this thesis, to turn to the lesbian

family unit and ask mothers and their children if and how homophobia had affected them, both as individuals and in their families. In doing so, I expected that I would gain some insight into the dynamics that are at work when a family must face specific prejudices aimed at them because of negative social attitudes toward one facet of their lives. The outcome of the study would give us information about the needs of lesbian families, and would ideally inform social workers about some of the issues that must be addressed when dealing with lesbian families. Additionally, the outcome of the study was expected to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of oppression in general.

Social policy analysts and social work theorists have, in recent years, expressed interest in attempting to understand the dynamics of oppression. It is assumed that such an understanding will more thoroughly equip the social work profession to respond to the needs of the groups with which they work. Economic inequality and ideological hegemony based on conservative, individualistic values are most often recognized as the bases for social inequalities (Djao, 1983; George & Wilding, 1984; George & Wilding, 1982; Hardy, 1981). Other writers, such as Bailey & Brake (1975), Galper (1980; 1975) and Gil (1973), have moved beyond an analytical explanation of inequality to take a more critical and prescriptive stand based on socialist values. While this certainly represents a movement towards more

comprehensive understanding, often there are glaring

absences:

> There was little analysis of the role of women as
> the large majority of both social work clients and
> practitioners. Consideration of racism or of
> forms of anti-racist practice was minimal; there
> was no discussion about how to practice with the
> unemployed; older people and the non-able bodied
> were ignored (Langan & Lee, 1989: 5).

Additional attempts to broaden the social service

perspective on inequality and oppression have incorporated

discussion of ideals, values, and myths, as methods of

perpetuating systemic bias:

> The ideal of the two-parent nuclear family allows
> "female-headed" families to be characterized as
> "pathological"...The human and social myths are
> jointly expressed in the tendency of human service
> professionals to focus on the personal problems
> and presumed deficits of their "clients,"
> typically to the exclusion of attempts to address
> social, economic, and political factors which bear
> directly upon personal problems. And together,
> the myths help to gloss over or justify an
> intricate web of domination based on class, race,
> sex, sexual orientation, age, and disability -
> oppressions which are heavily implicated in the
> functions and process of the welfare state
> (Wineman, 1984: 3).

Systemic bias can be seen as a natural by-product of a

social system that operates primarily on a hierarchical

model. One writer discusses the concept of a motherhood

hierarchy, with the heterosexual married nuclear family

appropriate mother at the top, the *marginal* mother in the

middle characterized by heterosexuality but possibly single

or divorced, and the *inappropriate* mother at the bottom of

the hierarchy, who is lesbian and living in a non-traditional family (DiLapi, 1989).

However social work theorists choose to define, interpret, or explain the culture of oppression, it is generally accepted that what determines the nature of relationships within the culture is power (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970; Langan & Lee, 1989; Weick & Vandiver, 1980; Wineman, 1984). In understanding the nature of power, the social work profession will be better able to work appropriately with individuals as well as families, communities, institutions, and all systems involved in human relationships. It is particularly essential that social work research critically examines the nature of power relationships given that a majority of the recipients of social services are women and/or members of other minority groups. As Weick states:

> The twin topics of power and powerlessness are at the heart of social workers' understanding of what it is to be women in today's society...women have been victims of those needing to assert their powers but rarely have they been the ones to enjoy the prerogatives of power...(The problem) arises from the need to understand more deeply the reasons for its persistence and see more clearly the myriad ways in which this pattern of power perpetuates itself (1980: 173).

Lesbian mothers experience powerlessness in our society in at least three ways: as women, as lesbians, and as mothers. If she is a woman of colour and/or disabled, her recognized power base is proportionately diminished again. Her chances of being poor or working class are extremely

high because in terms of social definitions, she is a single mother. (Even when there is a partner present who co-parents, the chances of the household living at or below the poverty line are significant given the male/female wage disparity.) Social work literature is beginning to take on the issues of sexism, racism, poverty, ageism, and ability bias. The discussion of homophobia in social work literature continues to be limited and, as yet, is located primarily within population specific journals (Journal of Homosexuality and Social Work, Selected Papers from Social Work Practice with Women Conference). Much of what there is deals with homophobic violence in general (Ted Bohn, 1984; Jeanine Gramick, 1983; Gregory Herek, 1984; John Wayne Plasek & Janicemarie Allard, 1984). Joan Cummerton (1980), Bernice Goodman (1980), and Joan Sophie (1987) discuss homophobia in general as it affects lesbian women. A number of books published in recent years about gay and lesbian parenting (Katherine Arnup, 1995; Laura Benkov, 1994; Merilee Clunis & Dorsey Green, 1995; April Martin, 1993; Kath Weston, 1991) reflect the reality that the gay and lesbian family is a unit that exists, in spite of the dominant cultural definition of family, that must deal with the dominant cultural fears of hemosexuality.

Homophobia is the fear of same-sex affection that often results in overt acts of violence and discrimination. Heterosexism is the system by which heterosexuality is

assumed to be the only viable and acceptable life option.

The distinction between these two terms is subtle and

important. Heterosexism maintains an hegemonic hold over

our perceptions through neglect, omission and/or distortion

(television, movies, the print media, the education system -

there is seldom any kind of family form other than

heterosexual shown or presented as acceptable). Homophobia

is often manifested much more violently, through active

discrimination: beatings, threats of job-loss, eviction,

loss of children, etc. It is discrimination by design and

intent (Warren Blumenfeld & Diane Raymond, 1989).

Homophobic acts may occur externally and the fear of this

often causes women and men to remain closeted. Internal

homophobia is a natural outcome of living in a homophobic

society.

Interest in this study was first generated through

various conversations with women in the lesbian community in

Winnipeg, particularly mothers. Inevitably, whenever

lesbian mothers started talking to each other, somehow the

subject of homophobia came up, either overtly or implied.

It was, unfortunately, most often accepted as a way of life,

with unspoken acknowledgement and acceptance. For instance

"Janie told her teacher today 'I don't have a daddy, I have

a Sue' so I had to explain that Sue was her babysitter."

While statements such as these were often met with nods and

laughter, each and every one of the mothers probably died a

little inside as they acknowledged the familiar situation. In reality, in a split second, these mothers process a number of realities: first, the assumption that disclosure will be dangerous in some way; second, the need to protect the child with lies if necessary; third, the denial of self; fourth, the denial of a loving partner. I became curious as to how these families thought homophobia had affected them, if indeed it had. When I explored the topic further, it became clear that the study would not only be possible but would be welcome to a community that has little written about itself from a participatory viewpoint.

Chapter two will describe the methodology and research process used. Chapter 3 provides a theoretical framework for the study, situating the lesbian family within the dominant culture. The narrative included in Chapter four is primarily the voices of the women, children and young adults who participated in the study. The narrative pieces centre around the major groupings of data that involve a discussion of homophobia, when and how the mothers came out and told their child/ren, dealing with the outside world, and coping strategies. Chapter five summarizes the study, and offers suggestions for future research as well as suggestions for the social work profession.

1.1 The Study

> In the end, all lesbian parents find a way to
> negotiate the minefield laid by centuries of
> patriarchy and homophobia.
> > (Jane Bernstein & Laura Stephenson,
> > 1995: 14)

Several personal realities informed this piece of
research. I am a lesbian mother. I am a feminist who, at
all times, uses a feminist analysis as easily and as surely
as I breath. To me, this means a number of assumptions can
be made about the research plan, the methodology, the
ownership of the data, the questions asked and the
interpretation of the data. Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna
(1989) refer to this identification of assumptions as
"conceptual baggage." The first assumption, and certainly
inherent in the research question is the acknowledgment that
homophobia exists. This is not to be argued or proven, but
is accepted as an inherent factor of living under
patriarchal capitalism. My view of the world is a constant
fusion of personal and political. I assume that each
personal act will have political consequences and each
political layer profoundly affects us at the personal level.

In my professional life, as a social worker and social
work student, my practice is informed by several theoretical
perspectives that are consistent with who I am as a feminist
and my personal evolution as a social worker and political
activist. First, I hold a strong feminist socialist base.

In practical terms, this means an identification of the power dynamics that are and may be present in any given situation. Feminist socialist perspectives have given me the language with which I am most comfortable: the concept of marginalization; the expression of oppression and the unabashed willingness to name the consequences of oppression in terms of human cost; the understanding that ideals such as self-actualization are perhaps impossible to maintain within patriarchal capitalism; the legitimization and validation for community-based practice; and most important, the understanding that in order to be a truly effective social worker, my goal at all times must be to try to work myself out of a job. This last simple aphorism refers to the ideal of client empowerment: if clients were not in need of social services, social workers would be unnecessary.

A structural social work perspective is used which looks at the ways in which the individual is both affected by and affects her environment. It takes into account history, political climate, economics, time, structure, space, boundaries, culture, and situation. Within the social work literature, the growing body of information on social support networks is particularly helpful, as the findings of the study seemed to bear out.

I started with a great number of assumptions about the question beginning from my existence as a lesbian mother. I

had had my own unique set of experiences with my daughters and knew from my reality what impact homophobia had on our family. It was through the course of conducting this research that I began to understand how truly complex the dynamic of survival within an antagonistic system can be. I also learned in the course of the research that my family and I had been affected in ways that I had not even begun to examine. In dealing with homophobia in the family, mothers make choices all the time about ways in which we will respond to our own needs and fears, our child/ren's needs and fears and external pressures.

In order to treat the research properly, it was necessary to interview mothers and their children whenever possible. As Paula Fomby, the young woman quoted at the beginning of this chapter noted, the whole family must deal with the prejudice arising from homophobia; therefore, the whole family must be included in the study. It was both impractical and unrealistic to interview the family as a unit. I interviewed mothers, and their children, with the informed and written consent of the mothers and the informed and written consent (see Appendix A) of the children. The study is theory-building and exploratory in nature, intended to add to a growing body of literature on the lesbian family.

Thirteen families were interviewed; it is unknown what percentage this represents of the entire number of lesbian

families in Winnipeg, ironically because of the nature of homophobia, which forces many families to remain hidden and invisible. This is a small sample. Every attempt was made to ensure that the sample represented some of the diversity of the lesbian community. This was not easy since this tends to be a population that prefers a high degree of anonymity. Therefore, in selecting the families to interview, I chose to go by general "knowable" characteristics, such as family size, whether the mother was divorced, separated or legally considered single, how long the mother had been out, etc. I attempted to select mothers who associated with peer groups different from mine and each other's.[1] Access to these mothers was gained by word-of-mouth: Joan may know a woman from her baseball team who has a couple of children; Eve's ex-partner is a mother, etc. All of the mothers who I approached and initially interviewed agreed to be part of the study.

The study is exploratory in nature. It begins to address certain questions regarding the nature of homophobia and its impact on lesbian families. The study produced rich results, with data that provides substantial ground on which to proceed in undertaking subsequent work. The most significant findings are:

---

[1]   As with most communities or groups of friends, women in the lesbian community tend to associate with those who are similar to themselves in terms of political beliefs, leisure and social activities, values, interests and experiences.

1. Regardless of other factors, such as age of children when mother came out, or gender of child(ren), children appeared to deal with the issues of their mother's lesbianism more easily if they felt there was a high degree of openness and honesty between their mother and themselves.

2. Mother's comfort with herself and continued demonstrated respect for the comfort level of the children had a significant impact on the level of homophobia displayed by the child/ren.

3. Social support was important to the entire family. Regardless of whether the closeness came from within the lesbian community or from other friends and family members, support was an essential factor in dealing with homophobia.

4. Mirrors: even those children who were the most angry and homophobic felt better once they had discovered that they each had (for example) a close friend whose mother was also lesbian, and therefore a "like self" with whom they could talk.

5. Personal/political awareness and the ability to identify the connections between oppression and personal impact helped reduce the impact of homophobia.

6. The degree of internalized homophobia in the mother was reflected in the child/ren, as was acceptance and openness.

7. While many of the mothers received a great deal of
    support from the lesbian community as lesbians, they
    received little support as mothers. Most of the
    mothers felt they had to find support as mothers from
    sources other than the lesbian community.

These results are discussed in detail in Chapters 4 and 5

1.2 Method

> And so feminism argues that systems and social
> structures, whether concerned with the economy,
> the family, or the oppression of women more
> generally, can best be examined and understood
> through an exploration of relationships and
> experiences within everyday life.
> (Liz Stanley & Sue Wise, 1983: 53)

Because the fabric of our lives lies within the
everyday experience, it was important to use a methodology
that allowed for as much entry into participants' lives as
possible. The truth about anyone's life is that which is
reported by she who lived it and is living it. The best
science can hope to do is corroborate self-reported truth
with some degree of objective reality. To assume that there
is only one objective reality or that there is "truth" is to
block ourselves off to the richness of human experience and
has provided the foundation for centuries of biased and

skewed research which was interpreted as fact. Scholar Dale

Spender states:

> at the core of feminist ideas is the crucial
> insight that there is no one truth, no one
> authority, no one objective method which leads to
> the production of pure knowledge. This insight is
> as applicable to feminist knowledge as it is to
> patriarchal knowledge, but there is a significant
> difference between the two: feminist knowledge is
> based on the premise that the experience of all
> human beings is valid and must not be excluded
> from our understandings, whereas patriarchal
> knowledge is based on the premise that the
> experience of only half the human population needs
> to be taken into account and the resulting
> version can be imposed on the other hand. This is
> why patriarchal knowledge and the methods of
> producing it are a fundamental part of women's
> oppression...
>
> (in Shulamit Reinharz, 1992: 07)

Heterosexual patriarchal knowledge was one of the primary

paradigmatic driving forces underlying much of the research

on lesbian women prior to the mid 1960's and early 1970's.

One major work published in 1964, written by Donald Webster

Cory, one of the first gay men to begin suggesting that

homosexuals should have basic civil rights, is entitled The

Lesbian in America.   This book, which is prefaced by

psychologist Dr. Albert Ellis says about lesbian families:

> No matter what one may think of the essentially
> healthful atmosphere that a relationship between
> two women can create, no matter how much love and
> affection they may be able to pour out upon a
> child, no matter how much security they may offer
> him, no matter to what extent the onus is placed
> upon society and not the participants for the
> stigma that is carried, for the life of shadows
> and concealment that is lived - the fact remains
> that this is a more-than-usually disturbing
> situation for a youth and that he (or she) has a
> less-than-average chance to make it in life (140).

When Cory undertook his research, it was with the clear view that homosexuality was an illness, a deviancy, and his mission was to explain these unfortunates to the world, as he had in an earlier work on homosexual men (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1989). Since Cory's time, social consciousness has been raised to the point where we recognize that a great deal of social science research was not only sexist, but heterosexist, racist and classist, viewing the world primarily through a white, male, middle class framework. Some feminist (Kitzinger, 1987; Maguire, 1987) scholars have written about the need to develop a new paradigm for research that puts women central to research into their lives.

While mainstream traditional research advises us not to get too close to the question lest we make assumptions that would contaminate the formulation of the question, a sociological tradition of qualitative methodology provides a moodel for research which places the researcher within the work. Some feminist methodologists, drawing on the work of qualitative scholars such as Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss (1967) agree that the more intimately acquainted you are with the question, the better you are able to know what is important to ask and why. Feminist methodology takes it one step further by reminding us that when doing research with women (for example), their voices should be central to the study. While it acknowledges the vulnerability to charges

of conducting ideologically driven research, feminist qualitative methodology alsochallenges the researcher to be rigorously honest regarding her or his ideological framework. If all one's cards are on the table, it is easier to gain more complete understanding of the problem. Many feminist social scientists agree with the realization that the "scientific method is not the ultimate test of knowledge or basis for claims to truth that we once thought it was" (Joyce McCarl Neilsen, 1990: 07).

This study was conducted within a feminist framework, using feminist research methodology, or, as Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989) term it, methods from the margins. As will be described in greater detail in Chapter 2, a number of checks and balances were in place throughout the research process that guided the study and ensured that the work remained honourable: before even beginning, I went to lesbian mothers and asked if the question was relevant; the research questions were developed in conjunction with a focus group of participants; the interview guides were pre-tested to ensure that they captured what the participants thought were the important questions; regular input was sought from participants at every stage. In addition, the research was conducted within a framework that clearly identified oppression and the existence of homophobia as forces in the lives of the participants.

Celia Kitzinger observed:

> Once upon a time, the story goes, researchers
> thought that homosexuals were sick and perverted.
> This was because they were blinded by religious
> prejudice and trapped by the social conventions of
> their time: their research lacked present-day
> sophistication and objectivity. Now, in our
> sexually liberated age, with the benefit of
> scientific rigor and clear vision, objective up-
> to-date research demonstrates that lesbians and
> gay men are just as normal, just as healthy, and
> just as valuable members of a pluralistic society
> as are heterosexual people (1987: 08).

This research is intended to describe the experiences of the
women and children; it is not apologist, homogenizing, or
cheer-leading. It tells the experiences of the families in
their own words, as they shared in dialogue with me. This
research does not seek to deny the reality that a family
with a lesbian mother will be affected by the fact that the
mother is lesbian as well as by particular social prejudices
such as homophobia which will affect the entire family.

The research plan and process is discussed in detail in
the following Chapter.

1.3 Conceptual Framework

> For Lesbians, Women's Liberation is not an
> intellectual or emotional luxury but a personal
> imperative.
> > (Sidney Abbott and Barbara Love, 1972: 135)

I entered this research naively, not fully understanding the

complexity of the research questions or the outcomes until I

was well into the process of interviewing and conducting the

initial analysis. Perhaps the research question was not the

appropriate one, I thought, although it is one that needs to

be asked. The following excerpt from my research journal

reflects this feeling:

> *I've interviewed 8 families and feel stuck. I*
> *have so much data...the experience of conducting*
> *the interviews is wonderful. I'm having a lot of*
> *fun and continue to be impressed by the kids,*
> *especially. I feel stopped, though, by the*
> *thought of beginning to attempt to do any*
> *analysis. No clear beginning point is apparent.*
> *Lots of similarities, lots of differences...too*
> *much information.*

The women who I interviewed were both lesbians and mothers.

Both labels represent states of being: both are

intrinsically tied to definitions of self. Both described

who each woman is. Both refer to states of being that, for

most women, are present for life. Letting go of one or the

other means forfeiting a vital part of self.

But lesbians and gays, according to the self-titled

"moral majority," have placed themselves outside the family,

outside the bounds of kinship. Neo-conservative influences, fueled by Christian fundamentalism, repeatedly denounce any attempts made to further human rights for lesbians and gays as attacks on the family. Because the one act upon which the fragile system of the traditional nuclear family is based - the act of procreation through sexual intercourse - is out of bounds to lesbians and gay men, it is somehow assumed that they do not have or are not connected to "family.". "It is but a short step" says Kath Weston "from positioning lesbians and gay men somewhere beyond 'the family' - unencumbered by relations of kinship, responsibility, or affection - to portraying them as a menace to family and society" (1991: 23).

A very recent study was concluded and the findings reported in the local papers under the headline "Lesbian moms study counters popular fear" (The Winnipeg Sun, Jan.5, 1996). The study, conducted in England, reported that after following 25 children who had been raised by lesbian mothers, only 2 of these children grew up to be gay, thus countering the "fear" that lesbian moms will raise lesbian or gay children. As a lesbian mother, I was acutely aware of a small part of me dying as I read this. I don't care about the outcome of the study. My children's sexuality mattered to me only insofar as it was part of what made them the people they are.

While the article did not offer any information about the researcher, I would hazard a guess that it was, unfortunately, a lesbian who had taken the time to conduct research that would assure the world that they could set aside fears of lesbians turning their kids gay. The message received by every lesbian mother is this: In spite of what you are, you can still raise normal kids. This is one example of the way in which research which may have some validity - that is, that gender identification and sexual preference are not simply socially transmitted - may be used to perpetuate homophobia. The problem is not with the research itself but the paradigm within which it is viewed. When we read the headline above and see the word "fear," we learn a great deal about how we should respond to the study. The implications of this type of research are incredibly value-laden. It may be heralded by many lesbian women as supportive research which may help some mothers keep their children in custody battles. In order to do so, however, they may find it necessary to convince a judge that their lifestyle is not contagious and the chances of them raising a "normal" child are high. They may keep their children if they condemn their lesbianism.

The experience of many of the mothers interviewed for this study confirmed this mother/lesbian identity struggle. For even within the lesbian community within which many found kinship and support for themselves as lesbian women,

there was still a lack of support for themselves as mothers. Only a fortunate few had the luxury of having a loving community which supported them as both lesbian women and mothers.

Sexuality is one of the most studied and least understood aspects of human existence. The social sciences and many of the physical sciences are transfixed with the idea of sex. Genetic studies continue to be done to discover whether there is a gay gene (Chandler Burr, 1995). As with the research cited above, I fear that this type of research carries with it a great deal of implicit homophobia. Some gay activists herald it as progressive, providing proof that being gay is a naturally occurring variation among human beings, Others say that it will only be a matter of time, following the discovery of a "gay gene" that bio-chemical intervention will be developed which will cure the genetic carrier. Yet others question the validity of the nature or nurture argument in and of itself. Why bother, they say, trying to figure out how one becomes gay since this question is inherently value-laden and the result of homophobia. Why not just honour and embrace the richness of difference of the lesbian and gay experience and get on with important things? Again, the danger of this kind of research lies not within the question or findings, but within the paradigm that influences how the data is interpreted and what the consequences are.

Chapter three looks at the literature on lesbianism and motherhood. In examining these two areas, I explore different theoretical frameworks, including socialist and radical feminism, and lesbian feminism. Chapter three also looks at the politics of oppression and the meaning and impact of homophobia. It will end with a discussion on internalized homophobia and how families survive with the supports of their chosen families.

1.4 Words and Language

> Language conveys a certain power. It is one of
> the instruments of domination...The language of
> theory - censored language - only expresses a
> reality experienced by the oppressors. It speaks
> only for their world, for their point of view.
> (Sheila Rowbottom, 1973: 32-34)

Homosexual is a clinical term used to describe same-sex sexual activity. It is a clinical term that I do not use, preferring the terms "gay" when referring to men and "lesbian" when referring to women. It is true that not all women who are involved in same-sex relationships identify themselves as lesbian; some prefer the term "gay." The difference in self-naming is often a political one, based on a feminist orientation. Self-described lesbians tend to see themselves as woman-identified women in all ways; gay women associate with a larger culture that includes gay men as well. Some lesbians, particularly those who identify themselves as radical or separatist feel that the gay male culture has little to do with lesbian women since it is male-identified. Many women feel that the term lesbian is too harsh, and use gay as it sounds less threatening.

When I refer to the lesbian community, I mean only the lesbian women's community, including those who self-identify as gay; when I refer to the gay and lesbian community I mean all gay men and lesbian women. The terms "dyke" and "butch" are used occasionally in this work. Both are words which have historically been used as derogatory terms to describe,

at various times, either lesbians, strong women, or women who merely say NO to men. Both words have been reclaimed by lesbians. "Dyke" is a word of pride meaning political lesbian feminist. "Butch" is a term used to describe a strong, assertive lesbian. Like dyke and butch, the term "queer" has been reclaimed by lesbian and gay people as a source of pride. It was used in the past as a source of shame. It now refers to a very out, very proud, usually politically active lesbian or gay. It is the current "politically correct" term.

The term "heterosexual," like homosexual is a clinical, sterile word. "Straight" will be used to refer to heterosexual women or men. Sometimes, participants may use the term "het." In the vernacular, het refers to a straight person and may be used as a noun or an adjective, in the same way that heterosexual is.

"Coming out" is used in a variety of contexts. One kind of coming out is the process that a woman or man goes through when they are accepting or admitting or becoming aware of their sexuality as a lesbian or gay person. This often, but not always coincides with the first same-sex love affair. It is not uncommon for a woman or man to have had one or more sexually intimate relationships with someone of the same sex - to even talk about being in love with a same-sex partner - and still not consider themselves to be lesbian or gay, or even bi-sexual. Coming out in this

sense, then, refers to self-admission. Another kind of coming out occurs when this person begins to tell others about her or his sexual orientation. "Outing" refers to someone else disclosing one's identity as a lesbian or gay, usually without consent or permission. Being out usually means that one is living a fairly open life and does not hide her sexual orientation from the world. Being in the closet or closeted refers to the act of hiding one's lesbianism or gayness.

The language I use in this thesis will satisfy traditional requirements of the graduate degree program. I make no attempts to be separate from the research since I am involved in it both as researcher and participant. Therefore, when I talk about the lesbian community, I am talking about me, we, us. I do not use a universal pronoun. Most often I will use "she or he." One of the bases for feminist methodology, as will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 2, is the requirement that the research educate and contribute to change. Therefore, I do not speak *for* the other mothers and children included in the study but I may add my voice to theirs; I will speak *out* for them, for us.

Finally, a word on the structure of the final two chapters. Finding a way to present the findings in a way that allowed for the voices of the participants to be central was very important, and presented a challenge.

Chapter 4 is written primarily with my comments interweaving the participants' words. A matrix (Table 1, Chapter 2) was designed as an analytic aid. The use of the matrices proved to be exceptionally helpful in the process of data analysis. In Chapter 4, regular references are made to findings that appear on the matrices. It was necessary to decide where to include these Tables. While it made some sense to introduce each one as it was initially referred to, this presented an aesthetic problem as the inclusion of a Table in the middle of the narratives was awkward and disruptive. A second choice was to include the Tables in the Appendices but it was felt that the data was central to the study and should be included in the text. Finally, I decided to put the Tables in the cocluding Chapter. They are located all together, and clearly labelled to make locating them easy for the reader. Locating them together in this way also allows for comparison between families. I trust that this decision will not prove too frustrating for the reader.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

> ...on the subject of motherhood there are no
> experts. What we need, in any case, as women, is
> not experts on our lives, but the opportunity and
> the validation to name and describe the truths of
> our lives.
>
> (Adrienne Rich, 1979: 259)

Much academic research in the social sciences followed a prescribed formula that required the researcher distancing herself from the data, thus giving a pretence of "objectivity." This carried with it the somewhat misguided preconception that only by looking in from the outside, observing without participating so as not to contaminate the data, would the "real truth" be uncovered. In fact, this type of methodology may give a precise description of what is seen on the surface - that is what seems to be the 'objective reality' - but it misses not only the nuances, the richness and layers of human motivation but in many cases the real truth.

Many classic academic research methods tend to be based on a positivist model that claims that

> in any one occurrence there is one true set of
> events (the facts) which is discoverable by
> witnesses and material evidence of other
> kinds...it describes social reality as
> "objectively constituted" and so it insists that
> there is one true "real" reality. And it suggests
> that researchers can find out this reality because

                    they remove themselves from involvement in what
                    they study. (Stanley and Wise, 1983: 193-94)
                                    (in Kirby & McKenna, 1989: 34)

In the social sciences, this most often means that classic

social science research focuses mainly on how to verify

theories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

       Social work, which concerns itself with human behaviour

within the context of a variety of dynamic systems, lends

itself to the use of a research design that acknowledges

those systems and makes use of them to enrich research data.

It would therefore seen reasonable that social work research

would be primarily concerned with generating theory, with

verification as a secondary goal. This approach naturally

requires a leap of faith in that it expects social

scientists to take people at their word. When this approach

to social science is used, the concept of validity takes on

a meaning that differs radically from classic "scientific"

research methods. In employing qualitative methods of

research, validity requires that what we describe be

confirmed to be so by the research participants (Sandra

Kirby & Kate McKenna, 1989).

       Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin define qualitative

research as "any kind of research that produces findings not

arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means

of quantification" (1990: 17). It requires that the

researcher be able to see both the forest and the trees at

the same time, while being able to distinguish the various

groups and sub-groups of trees, not to mention the age, location, and general health of the trees, which ones are being choked off by root systems of larger trees, etc. No small order. Qualitative research involves the building of theory from the data presented, a concept which is referred to as grounded theory (Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss, 1967; Anselm Strauss & Juliet Corbin, 1990; Sandra Kirby & Kate McKenna, 1989). Grounded theory begins with a general area of study. It is then up to the researcher to discover what is relevant to that area, depending on the data that emerges from the study.

Many researchers identify a method of social science research that is qualitative in nature and feminist in definition (Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Maguire, 1987; Nebraska Sociological Feminist Collective, 1988). Kirby & McKenna discuss it as "research from the margins" that is based on "the commitment to advancing knowledge through research grounded in the experience of living on the margins" (64). They incorporate a feminist analysis into their methodology, challenging the notion that knowledge can be created in a vacuum, by an independent, unconcerned, "objective" observer. This borrows from a long tradition of qualitative methodolgy, such as phenomenology, which challenges the concept that there is one objective reality.

This introduces the concept of participatory research, wherein the researcher is part of the study. Participatory

research is a specific style of research that is immensely compatible with a feminist framework. It relies on a "three part process of social investigation, education, and action to share the creation of social knowledge with oppressed people" (Kitzinger, 1987: 03). The important component, in both feminist research and research from the margins, is that research is not *on* people (or communities), but is *by, for,* and *with* them (Kirby & McKenna, 1989: 29). This distinction helps define the role of the researcher as well as introducing a critical paradigm for research methodology.

2.1 Feminist Methodology

> So I must dare to begin with myself, my own
> experience.
> <div align="right">(Robin Morgan, 1978: 03)</div>

I am a lesbian mother undertaking research on lesbian mothers and their children. If I were to attempt to remove myself from the data, it would require a superhuman effort to check and double check my assumptions. In the end, it would be nothing more than pretence as I cannot become something that I am not: an objective observer. Recent years have given us a growing body of work about feminist research. Feminist research cannot be simply defined:

> ...U.S. natural scientist Cindy Cowden defined it as stemming from two "personal beliefs: that reductionist science is inadequate to understand organisms, whether they are spiders, starfish, or women; that we can only understand organisms by seeing with a loving eye." British sociologist Liz Stanley wrote that "'feminist research' is absolutely and centrally 'research *by* women' because I see a direct connection between 'feminist consciousness' and feminism." Canadian political scientist Naomi Black wrote that feminist research "insists on the value of subjectivity and personal experience." (Reinharz, 1992:03)

Shulamit Reinharz further states that rather than trying to discuss what feminist research *is*, the alternative is to discuss what feminist research *includes* (04).

Sociologists Judith Cook and Mary Fonow (1990) discuss five basic epistemological principles used by feminist researchers in the field of sociology. These are: (1) it is

necessary to acknowledge and attend to the significance of gender and gender imbalance as a basic feature of social life, including the practice of social research; (2) consciousness-raising is a specific methodological tool and is a general orientation; (3) the norm of objectivity which assumes that the subject and object of research can be separated from each other and that personal/grounded experiences are unscientific must be challenged; (4) concern for the ethical implication of research and the recognition of the exploitation of women as objects of knowledge; and (5) emphasis on the empowerment of women and the transformation of patriarchal social institutions through research.

In Doing Participatory Research: A feminist approach, Patricia Maguire (1987) discusses the need for developing an alternative paradigm in order to conduct feminist *participatory* research. This alternative stands in contrast to the dominant paradigm which has become associated with empirical-analytical inquiry. Conversely, an alternative form produces interpretive knowledge, "i.e. the understanding of the meanings given to social interactions by those involved" (Maguire, 1987: 16). Maguire suggests that this new paradigm carry with it the understanding that knowledge is generated not only for its own sake, but to provide a basis for self-examination and understanding with an eye on social change:

> Critical knowledge, a combination of self-
> reflection and a historical analysis of
> inequitable systems, is produced by emancipatory
> or critical inquiry. Critical inquiry is
> structured to uncover the systems of social
> relationships and the contradictions which
> underlie social tensions and conflicts...Critical
> inquiry is used to help people see themselves and
> social situations in a new way in order to inform
> further action for self-determined emancipation
> from oppressive social systems and relationships.
> In turn, action informs reflection, and people see
> themselves and their social conditions more
> clearly. The dialectical relationship between
> inquiry and action or theory and practice is
> explicit (1987: 16).

It was possible, through the process of moving through the different stages of doing this research, to reflect on the degree to which this praxis took place. I heard time and time again from families who changed how they thought about their situation simply through participating in the focus group and thinking about the research questions. Many said at the onset of the interview that they had done a significant amount of reflection on the subject from our first conversation to the interview date. It was not uncommon for participants to begin the interview saying they had been relatively unaffected by homophobia, and then by the end of the interview, be able to describe several ways in which their family was affected.

2.2 Research Process

> Feminism taught me to recognize that the personal
> is political. These experiences made me even more
> aware of the role that personal values,
> experiences and choices play in the research
> process. (Maguire, 1987: 05)

My interest in conducting this research developed as a
result of several factor. I am a feminist and therefore any
academic research I would undertake would be strongly rooted
in feminist methodology. Further, following an extensive
review of literature, I discovered that there was very
little research that dealt specifically with how lesbian
families perceived homophobia to have an impact upon them.

As a lesbian mother I was all too painfully aware of
the experiences of my family as we absorbed the homophobic
shocks of the outside world. While my experiences and those
of my daughters remain uniquely our own, I also knew that
many other lesbian mothers and their children had similar
experiences. Therefore, third, and most important, when I
spoke with other members of the lesbian community, both
mothers and not, about the research question "How does
homophobia impact the lesbian family?" the response was
overwhelming...the women I spoke with wanted this research.
The decision to proceed was based on my perception that I
had community approval.

I began with a list of four general questions upon
which to begin to formulate questions. These questions
arose from my own experiences, from preliminary

conversations with lesbians in the community, and from
reading the literature that was available to date:

1.   How do lesbian mothers deal with homophobia in
themselves, their children, their community?[2]

2.   How do the issues change as children grow from
infancy to childhood, from adolescence to adulthood?

3.   Are lesbian mothers 'just like' heterosexual
mothers as some recent comparison studies imply
(Pollack& Vaughn: 320-321)? Or does the status of
lesbianism in our culture ensure that, to some degree,
lesbian mothers <u>will</u> experience motherhood differently?

4.   How do families deal with health, legal,
education, and social service institutions?

The study was to be limited to approximately fifteen
(15) families of mothers and their children. The end number
of families interviewed was thirteen (13). The smaller
sample allowed in-depth interactive interviews with all
participants. Included in the sample are interviews with
myself and my children. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin
(1991) and Kirby & McKenna (1989) discuss the importance of
using the researcher's personal experience when conducting

---

[2] I did not assume that the informants would identify
themselves as being homophobic. I <u>did</u> assume that homophobia is
a dominant cultural attitude that affects everyone..

qualitative research as one source of theoretical sensitivity.

The Nebraska Sociological Feminist Collective (1988), Patricia Maguire (1987), and Kirby & McKenna (1989) all identify as essential to the feminist research process the willingness of the researcher to bring herself to the research. Kirby & McKenna call this "being honourable": "..."Being honourable" in the research process means openly recognizing our experience of marginalization and using it as our touchstone" (1989: 31). As a lesbian mother and a long time committed feminist, I wanted to do research which was relevant, meaningful, honourable, and adhered to the principles of feminist activism and academic rigour. "Among these principles are the essentialness of accounting for the experience of the researcher in the research, of giving priority to the voices of the participants, of an egalitarian research process and of contextualizing the research" (Kirby & McKenna, 1989: 21). Therefore, adding my experiences to the interviews, and those of my children, allowed me to keep my voice in the research in a way which was balanced with the other participants.

The families were selected from a much larger pool (total N unknown) to reflect the range of family forms that exist within the population of lesbian mother led families in Winnipeg. For example, there are families with two partners, both of whom have a child or children; women who

have grown children who never came out to their children; families with older or grown children who grew up with the knowledge of their mother's lesbianism; mothers who have lost custody due to their lesbianism; mothers who became pregnant through insemination; adoptive mothers; etc. Attempts were made to select participants based upon the diversity of their situation (in order to represent a broad range of families, with the shared characteristic being the mother's lesbianism) and their willingness to participate in the study. Initial access to participants was gained through personal contacts. The first six families interviewed were families I knew. The remaining six were families who allowed their names to be passed on to me through word of mouth in the community. Once word was out that I was looking for families to interview, many mothers indicated interest in being interviewed.

An initial phone call to the mother in the family served as an early screening process. I was attempting to get a variety of families to participate and it was important that I interview children as well. Therefore, the initial screening for interviews was based in part on the following criteria:

1.   The mother had to be "out" to the child(ren).

2.   The children consented to be interviewed by me.
A letter of confirmation was sent to all participants (attached to Appendix A). At the time of the interviews,

written consent was obtained from the mothers and written

permission to interview children obtained from the mothers

of minor children (Appendix A). All children who were able

to write or print their name signed their own consent and

release forms. Permission to interview them was also

obtained on tape prior to beginning the interview. The age

cut off was seven years old.

One of the first steps taken in the data collection

process was the organization of a focus/advisory group.

Krueger describes the focus group as "...people who possess

certain characteristics, (who) provide data of a qualitative

nature, in a focussed discussion" (1988: 27). I initially

invited six mothers with whom I had had early discussions to

participate. The group that finally met consisted of four

women (and myself) who were representative of some of the

diversity of the lesbian mother experience. The purpose of

this discussion group had several components:

    1. Develop a consensual definition of homophobia;

    2. Identify the research questions considered by the

    key informants to be the most important;

    3. Use the information received to develop an

    interview guide that is sensitive and relevant; and

    4. Discuss the ethical considerations surrounding

    confidentiality and with the group members develop a

    strategy for assuring anonymity and confidentiality

    that would satisfy participants and academic protocol.

The group process provided a dynamic beginning for the research. While the participants did not, nor were they expected to, develop the research questions, they provided the basis upon which the final interview guide was developed. For example, one of the questions they had was whether factors such as socioeconomic class affected the way in which families functioned and coped. Other questions arose about families of origin: for example, relationship with parents and siblings, where they grew up (urban or rural), etc. Rather than asking them "Do you identify with any particular class", I was directed to keep the question more broad and ask a general question about family background. In that way, as well, it would allow the participant to state what she felt was important regarding the question.

The final interview guide for the mothers (Appendix B) was then pretested with two mothers to ensure that the questions were easily understood, that it generated the depth and range of data desired, and that it flowed easily and logically. One of the participants agreed to interview me for the pre-test phase. This was very helpful as it gave me the opportunity to experience the interview and to make any revisions to unclear or awkward areas of the guide. It also served the secondary purpose of helping me remain focused and forcing me to really think about theoretical sensitivity as I was about to undertake the research

process. Interview guides for children and teens/young adults (Appendices C and D) were developed using the adult guide in order to ensure that the questions asked were similar to those asked their mother. In order to accomplish this, attention was paid to the details of using the same language, but making the questions age-relevant. These guides were similarly pre-tested with two children and two teens.

An interview schedule was then drawn up which allowed for a minimum of time between interviews for processing. All interviews took place over a three month period. Mothers and their children were interviewed separately, during the same visit whenever possible. All but one interview were conducted in the participant's home. The one exception was an interview which was conducted in my home with a mother (whose daughter was too young to be interviewed). All interviews were held at the convenience of the family being interviewed.

Each child in the family was interviewed separately, with two exceptions. In these cases, the children were given the option of being interviewed alone or together, and they agreed that they wanted to be interviewed together. This, perhaps, helped them feel more comfortable and supported through the interview. Not all children in every family were interviewed. There were a variety of reasons

for this. The matrices included in Chapter 5 indicate which children were not interviewed and why.

All interviews were tape recorded with the informed and written permission of the participants. At the onset of the interview, I showed the participant where the pause button was on the tape recorder and instructed them to use it if they so desired. I requested their permission to take written notes during the interview. These notes helped, at various times, stay on track or explore a question in greater detail, make connections, or help us return to another area if the interview strayed from the guide. The guide was intended as just that - a guide - to serve as a reminder of the information I wished to gather. The interviews were interactive conversations in which the participants had a great deal of control over the process once the interview began. The pre-screening and orientation "off the record" informed participants in detail of what the research question was. Many of the questions on the guides were open ended to allow for a great deal of personal interpretation by the participants. This method of data collection is consistent with the methodology as described by Kirby & McKenna (1989) and Ann Oakley (1992), This added significantly to the richness of data that was collected.

The length of interview ranged from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours, for the mothers, with the average length being 1 hour. The interviews with the children ranged from 20

minutes to one hour in length. The total volume of

transcribed data is several hundred pages.

From the beginning of the research process, at the time

when the research proposal had been accepted and the data

collection process and interview guide approved by the

Ethics Committee, I had started to keep a research journal

of my own thoughts on the research question. This is what

Sandra Kirby and Kate McKenna (1989) refer to as "conceptual

baggage." I kept this journal with me, made entries during

and after interviews, before interviews, while doing library

research, and sometimes in the middle of the night or while

sitting at a red light. This was used to help me reflect on

the data and begin the process of analysis. The use of a

journal was essential, as Kirby & McKenna emphasize, in

helping me stay focused. At one point, when I was feeling

lost in the data, I was able to refer back to an entry that

renewed my sense of direction:

> *I think I have it. I interviewed Carla and her*
> *daughter today. I think I've got the place to*
> *begin...the anomaly that I needed to find to place*
> *everything else in perspective. Carla lived with*
> *her lover for years and never came out to her*
> *kids...never told them she was queer. Her*
> *daughter, a teenager, found out by accident,*
> *overhearing a conversation. Her daughter is*
> *furious, outraged, and very, very homophobic.*
> *This was the first kid I met who was not very*
> *comfortable with her mom's lesbianism. Question:*
> *does the difference have to do with coming out*
> *honestly to the children or does it have to do*
> *with mom's internal homophobia. Can they be*
> *separated? If mom weren't internally homophobic,*
> *would she not have told the kids? Some of the*
> *other differences between this family and others*
> *interviewed so far: suburban living vs. core*

*residential community; relative isolation vs.
connection to a larger community; no feminist
identification vs. feminist identification.*

2.3 Data Management

The data consisted of the tapes and the transcripts of

the taped interviews with the participating families, notes

and reflections from the journal I kept, follow-up phone

calls with some of the families, journal, magazine, and

newspaper articles, and casual conversations with different

women in the lesbian community. As previously stated, the

volume of transcribed data from the tapes amounted several

hundred pages - an overwhelming amount of data.

The first half dozen interviews were conducted with

families that I knew within the community. These families

were selected initially primarily on their willingness to

participate in the study, their accessibility to me, the

willingness of their children to be interviewed, and their

diversity in terms of experience and circumstances. I had

put the word out in the community that I was looking for

more families to interview and referrals were beginning to

come back to me. Within any gay or lesbian community there

is, for good reason, a great deal of suspicion about

research. Much of what we have read about ourselves under

the umbrella of research categorizes us as either abnormal

or immoral (Warren Blumenfeld & Diane Raymond, 1988; Martha

Kirkpatrick, 1987). Gaining access to the community for the

purposes of this research question was due largely to who I am and my credibility within the community. The fact that I was openly participating in the research, and inviting input from participants along the way helped establish this credibility.

As soon as possible following each interview, the tape was transcribed. These transcriptions, using the questions from the interview guide and the information contained in the journal began to show emergent categories for analysis. Comparative analysis (Kirby & McKenna; Glaser & Strauss) was used to begin making sense out of the data and to allow me to begin thinking about what I was being told. Using comparison only, however, is problematic due to the fact that the interviews were not homogeneous...interviews were conducted with mothers as well as children. It was necessary to look at similarities among mothers, and it was also important to look at family consistency. Did children remember certain facts the same as their mother did? Did they understand events the same or differently? Were perceptions and interpretations of events the same or different? When differences occurred, what caused the difference? Between families, it was important to look at several factors that may have influenced how the family dealt with homophobia. Reflecting between interviews, referring to the journal and using constant comparison, certain general outcomes were surfacing. As the interviews

progressed, there seemed to be some factors that stood out. Of these, the most important ones had to do with internalized homophobia, existence of a strong support system, and early disclosure of mother's lesbianism to the child/ren.[3]

2.4 Process of Analysis

Each participant is the best authority of her own experience. One of the most fascinating parts of the analysis involved checking the interviews of the mothers and the children against each other, especially in some areas where I would expect concordance, for example, when the mother came out to the child. Some of the differences and similarities are described in detail in Chapter 4. It was useful to develop an analytic aid to help make sense of the overall data. Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin refer to this tool as a conditional matrix which "enables the analyst to both distinguish and link levels of conditions and consequences" (158). Each family was examined on a matrix that included the following: (see Table 1)

---

[3]   The early disclosure here refers to how soon following the mother's awareness of her lesbianism she informed her child/ren. It does not mean telling children when they were young as opposed to older.

TABLE 1

CONDITIONAL MATRIX

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			
Internalized Homophobia of child			
Homophobia in immediate family/network			
Strong Support System - lesbian community			
Strong Support System - other			
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)			
Acceptance level of child (as reported by mother)			
Degree of "out" to the world			
Early disclosure to child/ren[4]			

Analysis of the matrix will be explored fully in Chapter 5.

In order to begin making sense of the specifics of each interview, I developed a code book which was used to organize the data (Appendix E). The coding system emerged from differences and similarities among participants, and from journal notes and categories readily identified by the interview guide. A simple coding system was used on the

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[4] Disclosure here refers only to when the mother disclosed her lesbianism to her child/ren in relation to when she came out. Early disclosure refers to coming out to the child/ren relatively soon following personal discovery,

transcribed interviews which identified the coding category, whether the response is from a mother or child, the interview number, and the response number. Children within a family are identified by a letter (a,b,c). More than one child was assigned a letter based either on the order in which they were interviewed or on the order in which they first responded to the questions (in those families where more than one child interviewed at a time). This was then used as a locator which, written on the transcribed interview, might read CF1:4AMR3. This response means that the participant is a Child, the category is Family - birth/other, the interview is number 4 and this is either the first or the only child interviewed, R3 is the response number and the paragraph in which the response is located. Similarly, MF1:4S3 indicates M(mother)F1(family - birth/other):4(Interview number)S3(response number). These two examples show a mother and child whose response refers to the same category (family - birth/other).

Then came the time-consuming process of going through each transcribed interview and coding. In order to make it easier to identify categories, and find the material in the interviews, I used a variety of different coloured pens and pencils. As the categories began to emerge, I began to feel like I was looking at one of the computer-generated "Magic Eye" pictures where one pattern is clearly visible until you ew it in such a way that allows the hidden picture to

emerge. As I began to recognize patterns, I checked them against others (constant comparison) and referred back to the literature to discover if there was agreement there. I had established a network with some of the women involved in the study, and I called them from time to time, to let them know how the work was progressing, and to check my perceptions.

It became clearer at each step of the research process that the work that I had undertaken had the potential to answer some important questions for the families involved. In that way it would fulfill one requirement of participatory research for knowledge creation which will explore and change all forms of oppression. In a very real way I began to be aware that I was being touched on a deep level by the research, not only through my contact with the families, but by the nature of the question itself.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Marriage, motherhood and the family are three of the most powerful institutions of patriarchal hegemony. Homosexuality in general threatens these institutions and lesbian motherhood in particular flies in the face of much of what the patriarchy holds sacred. This chapter examines motherhood and lesbianism from the perspectives of radical, socialist and lesbian feminism. It then looks at the dynamics of oppression, and the history and impact of homophobia. This chapter concludes with a discussion of social support as it relates to the experiences of lesbian women.

3.1 Motherhood and Lesbianism

> Real lesbians don't have children. This is
> proclaimed with equal loudness by both straight
> women (and men) and "real" lesbians. Real
> lesbians have never been fucked (perhaps rape is
> an exception). Real lesbians have never had sperm
> inside their bodies. The thought of sperm makes
> them sick. Real lesbians are not interested in
> children - especially male children. Real
> lesbians find children boring and tedious. Real
> lesbians have much more important work to do.
> (Dian Day, 1990: 35)

A common assumption is that being a lesbian and being a mother are mutually exclusive: if you are one then certainly you cannot be the other. Until recently, lesbian mothers were invisible not only in the literature on Motherhood, but

in Women's Studies and Gay and Lesbian literature. For many

women who discovered their lesbianism after the birth of

their children, the two areas of their life seem to be in

conflict. One mother who participated in the study, Lorna,

talked about her conflicted emotions when she began to

understand that she was a lesbian woman:

> I have these kids who I'm crazy about and I have this
> life and I made these choices in the past that sort of
> negate my now saying, Oops, there was something that I
> didn't quite realize before but now I realize, and,
> Boy, it's a biggie...

In 1976, Adrienne Rich's Of Woman Born: Motherhood as

Experience and Institution was the first major theoretical

work to come out of the Women's Movement that provided

insight into, and a language to talk about, motherhood as an

institution (Pollack & Vaughan, 1987: 12). Central to

Rich's thesis is the assertion that the experience of

motherhood is tied to patriarchal institutions that affect

all women. Lacking from the original work was any detailed

discussion of the unique position of lesbian mothers:

> At that time it seemed important to discuss
> lesbian mothering as an integral part of the
> experience of motherhood in general, not to set
> lesbian mothers apart, in a separate chapter
> (1986: xxx-xxxi)

In a 1986 reprinting, Rich prefaced her book with a lengthy

introduction wherein she reconsiders her earlier decision by

stating that "It is precisely because the lesbian is

different that a value system bent on prescribing a limited

set of possibilities for women can neither tolerate nor affirm her" (xxxii).

Adrienne Rich's work is grounded in radical feminist theory which holds that the root cause of women's oppression lies within patriarchy. It is useful to provide Rich's definition of patriarchy:

> ...(N)ot simply the tracing of descent through the father ...but any kind of group organization in which males hold dominant power and determine what part females shall and shall not play, and in which capabilities assigned to women are relegated generally to the mystical and aesthetic and excluded from the practical and political realms...At the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit with its division of roles, its values of private ownership, monogamous marriage, emotional possessiveness, the "illegitimacy" of a child born outside legal marriage, the unpaid domestic services of the wife, obedience to authority, judgement, and punishment for disobedience (1972: 78-79).

Rich, like many radical feminists, believes that the oppression of women by men under patriarchy is the "primary" human oppression:

> ...in that it occurred first historically; is the first oppression that an individual human being learns about and participates in; and is the most widespread oppression, occurring in virtually every human society and placing nearly every human being in an oppressed or oppressing sex class (Douglas, 1990: 15).

Radical feminists were the first to introduce the concept of the personal as political which brought many "private" issues out of the isolation of the home and into the public arena (Jaggar, 1988: 101). Since the realm of (North American) women was primarily domestic, the radical feminist

perspective spoke directly to many women who had previously felt themselves excluded from traditional political thought. The radical feminist theorists also broke ground with discussion of sexual politics, a term first introduced by Kate Millett in 1969 to describe power-structured relationships based on dominance of one group over another. This opened the door for discussion of sexual relations: for the first time, bringing lesbian relationships out of the "closets" and inviting frank discussion of and development of radical lesbian politics. It is therefore within the writings of the radical feminist theorists that we first find extensive discussion of lesbian women.

Jaggar (1988) discusses three areas in which she identifies major problems with radical feminist politics. These problem areas have to do with the radical feminist emphasis on women's culture, emphasis on women's control over their bodies, and the call for separatism. Other writers have criticized radical feminist politics as lacking class or race analysis. Socialist feminism, on the other hand, while providing an analysis of oppression which takes into account political economy and class inequality, has until recently largely ignored lesbian existence and reality.

While socialist feminism has to some extent failed to include analysis of lesbian existence, it has certainly not ignored motherhood. Motherhood, and the politics of

reproduction are core to socialist feminist theorists

(Alison Jaggar, 1988; Marilyn Waring, 1988; S. J. Wilson,

1986). A great deal has been written on this subject and it

is important to this work insofar as an understanding of the

economics of motherhood is central to the lives of the

families who participated in this study.

Author Ann Ferguson, in <u>Blood at the Root</u> (1989),

presents a feminist theory of the connections between

motherhood, sexuality, male dominance, and the economic

system which not only takes into account but speaks directly

to the existence of lesbian mothers. Essentially, Ferguson

manages a nascent blending of radical feminist and socialist

theories to emerge with a conceptual approach she identifies

as sex/affective production. Her central claim is that:

> ...there are historically various ways of
> organizing, shaping, and moulding the human
> desires connected to sexuality and love, and
> consequently to parenting and social bonding. It
> is in part through these systems that different
> forms of male dominance and other types of social
> domination are reproduced (78).

Ferguson further states:

> The standard Marxist idea of an exclusive class
> position for each individual no longer captures
> the complicated and contradictory reality of
> productive relations in racist capitalist public
> patriarchy. Rather, there are at least four
> different historically developed class
> relationships that can characterize a person at
> the same time: race class, sex class, family
> class, and individual economic class (119).

The three overlapping systems of social domination of

capitalism, racism and sexism interact to define an

individual's material interests in our society. Ferguson's work is important in that it begins to address some of the issues that are faced by lesbian mothers.

For all but one of the mothers interviewed, economic factors were a major concern since their status as lesbian mother was equivalent to single mother. One of the most significant findings from this study was the discovery that most of the mothers interviewed experienced a lack of support within the lesbian community for themselves as mothers, and many identified economic condidtions as being a large problem, directly connected to their lesbian status. Merle, for example, said that there were times when she felt so incredibly disillusioned by the lack of support that she received as a mom in the community that the thought of leaving that community, finding some guy to marry was very appealing. She felt that at the very least she wouldn't have to do it all on her own anymore, at least she could hope for some financial support. One of the differences, she acknowledges, between herself and a heterosexual single mom, is that "this is it." There's not even the *potential* of relief through marriage.

3.2   The Politics of Oppression

> The oppressed suffer from the duality which
> has established itself in their innermost being.
> They discover that without freedom they cannot
> exist authentically. Yet, although they desire
> authentic existence, they fear it. They are at
> one and the same time themselves and the oppressor
> whose consciousness they have internalized. The
> conflict lies in the choice between being wholly
> themselves or being divided; between human
> solidarity or alienation; between following
> prescriptions or having choices; between being
> spectators or actors; between acting or having
> the illusion of acting through the action of the
> oppressors; between speaking out or being
> silent...
>
> (Paulo Friere, 1989: 32, 33)

I was recently listening to a political commentator on

the national public radio station discussing the three

front-runners who were vying for the leadership of a

national political party. The commentator who was being

interviewed, a woman, seemed to be fairly knowledgeable

about the issues and was quite articulate in discussing the

general issues. She was asked to hazard a guess as to the

outcome of the upcoming convention. The race was between a

relatively unknown but popular woman, a high profile gay

man, and a third candidate, a (white, one presumes

heterosexual since his sexual preference was not discussed

as an issue) man who was being seen as the dark horse. The

commentator summarily dismissed the likelihood of the woman

getting elected as it was seen as too soon following a

rather unsuccessful term of leadership by the incumbent

leader, a woman who was stepping down. The gay man had,

according to this commentator, the support of the *special interest groups*, whom she went on to list as "the gays, women, the poor, Native people,and Immigrants." She felt, though, that the third man had the support of "everyone else - the mainstream" and therefore stood a good chance of getting elected. I did some quick calculations in my head (I was driving at the time); according to these criteria, everyone else, that is the mainstream, or white heterosexual men, probably amounts to a mere 25 per cent (and this by a very generous estimate), hardly enough to constitute a victory at any poll.

The above story illustrates several points. First, it would be unthinkable for anyone to state and get away with saying something like "John Smith is not likely to win as it is too soon for another man to win following the defeat of the party headed by Jim Doe in the last federal election." Second, the special interest groups that were listed represent a *majority* of the population and yet it was the small remainder that was referred to as the mainstream. This statement went completely unchallenged by the host of the program. Third, the commentator was a woman who was obviously intelligent, successful and respected in her field and yet she presented these statements in a manner that was oblivious to the real content of what she was saying.

Oppression is about a handful of people making the rules, owning the money, dictating the means of production

and the means of reproduction, and being *perceived* to be the
mainstream. The tools of oppression are the myths, rituals,
beliefs, laws, and customs that are reinforced through the
institutions of oppression: the family, the economy,
churches, schools, prisons, workplaces, and the social
welfare system. Everyone who does not fit within the small
circle of the mainstream is marginalized to a greater or
lesser degree. One of the more successful methods of
keeping these large numbers of marginalized peoples in line
is to keep them set against each other. This is done
through many methods, but scapegoating and stereotyping are
two of the strongest, most effective and pervasive means
(Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988; Goodman, Lakey, Lashof, &
Thorne, 1979).

Stereotypes are formulaic definitions of people based
on sweeping generalizations that may or may not contain some
truth. Stereotypes perpetuate myths about groups of people,
are usually negative, are always harmful in that they allow
us to view only the surface and not recognize the person
beneath the stereotype. Therefore, a whole group of people
can get reduced to a single trait or cluster of traits
(Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988). Stereotypes are self-
perpetuating in that once a person accepts a particular
stereotype, she or he will tend to notice more the behaviour
consistent with the stereotype than anything else.

Stereotypes often help support the identification of scapegoats. Scapegoating occurs when a particular person or segment of the population is identified as the cause of problems. Recent history - specifically World War II and the wide spread slaughter of Jews, homosexuals and others - shows us that real and profound evil can occur against those who are the identified scapegoats, by those who accept the myths and the stereotypes. Other examples include the witch burnings and, closer to home, the institutionalization of Native North Americans as the colonizers accepted the *savage* stereotype. According to Blumenfeld and Raymond, three conditions must be necessary for a group to be scapegoated: 1) prejudice must already exist against that group or individuals; 2) the individuals or group must be perceived as too weak to fight back; and 3) society must sanction the scapegoating through its institutions ((1988: 223). It is very easy to make a strong argument that all three pre-conditions exist for lesbians and gay men.

Prejudice certainly exists against homosexuality: homophobic jokes and other statements regularly go unchallenged, one of the worst - and accepted - playground epithets is "fag," parents banish their children from their home upon discovery of their child's homosexuality (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1988; Kath Weston, 1991). The relative invisibility of the lesbian and gay population renders them in many ways unable to fight back against the

scapegoating. Many people may know lesbians or gays well -
at work, as a neighbour, as their child's teacher, or the
minister, or the store owner on the corner - and not have
any idea about their sexuality. They may, then, think that
the only gay and lesbian people who exist are the ones who
seem to fit the stereotypes. Institutionalized prejudice
against lesbians and gay men is everywhere. Primary
relationships, often long-time and as much a marriage as any
heterosexual union, are not legally sanctioned; lesbian and
gay partners have no legal rights to inherit or have medical
signing authority or right to coverage in health and dental
insurance plans (except as specified by some individual
progressive companies and agencies); lesbian and gay
partners who are co-parenting children have no inherent
legal rights; lesbian women continue to lose custody of
their children in the courts on the sole basis of their
sexual preference.

It may well be asked what purpose is served by
scapegoating lesbians and gay men. One part of the answer
is simply moral superiority. Nowhere has this been more
evident than in some of the early discussions as the AIDS
epidemic was reaching into different sectors of the North
American population. In the first days of the
identification of HIV and AIDS, the disease surfaced
primarily in the North American gay male community and was
called "The Gay Plague." Next to nothing was being done in

terms of research and intervention. The discovery of this new plague added renewed zealousness to the new christian right: they were able to cite biblical passages about god sending plagues to punish immoral behaviour. Abhorrent as it was, it was common to hear people express the opinion that it was god's own personal method of getting rid of . homosexuality. Then, when the disease began to surface in other segments of the population, the language began subtly changing. Children who developed HIV and AIDS following a blood transfusion or in utero from their mother, women who developed it from heterosexual relations with and infected partner were called the "innocent victims." This left gay men (and later intravenous drug users) with the implied title of evil malefactor: they were the ones responsible for this disease, for not only bringing it upon themselves, but inflicting it on others as well. Fortunately, with time and education, this kind of language and attitude is no longer publicly accepted, but I venture to say that it has not completely gone away.

Another belief that has a strong moral implication is the pervasive judeo-christian based attitude that the sole purpose of sex is and should be for procreation. While this was discussed previously in terms of state control of the means of reproduction, it is essential that we not ignore the strong moral base to this belief, since this seems to be what drives so many prejudices. This myth often coexists

with the belief that lesbians and gay men are child-
molesters. The rationale for this myth follows the
following argument: homosexual sex cannot produce children;
lesbians and gay men must find ways to increase their
numbers if their 'kind' is to survive; therefore, they
recruit and seduce children into their lifestyle. This
formed the fundamental basis for the 1977 "Save the
Children" campaign that was spearheaded by fundamentalist
Anita Bryant following the publication of her book <u>The Anita
Bryant Story: The Survival of Our Nation's Families and the
Threat of Militant Homosexuality</u> (Lillian Faderman, 1991:
199).

When Friere talks about the duality which is
established in the innermost being of the oppressed, he is
describing the lesbian and gay experience. One woman who
participated in this study spoke of her pain:

> I knew I was different when I was 3. I knew there
> was something different about me...I was attracted
> to girls. And I thought "this shouldn't be, it
> shouldn't be..." And I used to go to church all
> the time cause we were told to go to church and in
> church you learn that men and women belong
> together so I was really confused. I was confused
> at how I was feeling and why I was feeling what I
> was feeling...I fought it with alcohol...I didn't
> want to believe what I was and so I drank. I went
> out with men when I drank...that was the only time
> you ever saw me with a man...

Oppression, as has been stated, can be and is reinforced
through many means. It is the particular tool of homophobia
which is of interest to this study.

3.3 The Meaning and Impact of Homophobia

> It is virtually impossible to view one
> oppression, such as sexism or homophobia, in
> isolation, because they are all connected:
> sexism, racism, homophobia, classism, ableism,
> anti-Semitism, ageism. They are linked by a
> common origin - economic power and control - and
> by common methods of limiting, controlling, and
> destroying lives. There is no hierarchy of
> oppressions. Each is horrible and destructive.
> (Suzanne Pharr, 1988: 53)

The effects of homophobia are manifest in ways that

many of us, including the families who participated in the

study, are not even able to identify, much less articulate.

As the researcher I had to be aware at all times of how I

have been feeling while conducting this work. I undertook

to do the research believing that it was important work, and

the feedback from the participants certainly confirmed this.

However, I too often found myself being very secretive and

selective about whom I shared my thesis topic with. I was

at times silent, vague, apologetic and outright dishonest in

response to the question of my thesis topic and depending

upon who was asking the question. There were times when it

was very clear that my own fears kept me silenced, even when

the topic of casual conversation may have been something as

general as the frustrations of completing a graduate

program. I would not participate in conversations of this

kind as I feared that someone would ask me about my research

topic. I knew that by merely disclosing the topic I would be outing myself and was not always prepared to do so.

We live in unsettling times. On the one hand there appears to be a greater acceptance of gays and lesbians. Lesbian and gay characters are beginning to appear regularly in the popular culture: on television dramas and situation comedies, in the movies, and certainly on stage. Several mainstream magazines have featured articles pertaining to gay culture. In recent years, popular culture figures have come out openly and unapologetically about their sexual preference. The tragic rise of the A.I.D.S. epidemic is partially responsible for the increased visibility of gay men. Movies such as "Philadelphia" and "Longtime Companion" have given us sympathetic Hollywood images of the impact of A.I.D.S. on the gay community. It would be pleasant to think that this recent visibility has had widespread impact on general acceptance but many lesbian and gay activists feel that they reach only those who are already sympathetic. The impact on the antagonists is far more sinister.

Many would argue that the increased visibility of gays and lesbians in mainstream culture has served to increase homophobic fervour among, especially, those who identify with the new christian right. Homophobia juxtaposed with the new right creates an aura which says gays and lesbians are scary. A familiar myth says that homosexuality is not okay, that lesbian and gay people will harm children. This

theme is used time and again by hate-mongers and is certainly not new...the previously mentioned "Save the Children" campaign in the mid-1970's grew in strength in direct proportion to the visibility gained by the then new gay rights movement.

The concept of children being at harm by a particular group of people is one which is particularly powerful and an effective tool when hate-mongers attempt to garner support for their cause. Over time, various myths have surrounded certain cultural groups, for example, Gypsies steal children. The thrust of the anti-gay and lesbian campaign has centred on protecting children. Of course parents want to protect their children, but what happens when the "enemy" is within? If the very person from whom you are supposed to protect your children you are told time and again, is the person you see in the mirror every day?

Homophobia or the irrational fear of those who love and sexually desire members of the same sex is a concept which has only recently made its way into everyday vocabulary. I would venture to say that this is so because it was such an accepted part of the culture that it needed no name until the consciousness-raising brought about by the Lesbian and Gay Liberation Movement. Homophobia is, however, as much a part of the society in which we live as are racism, sexism, classism, ageism, ableism, and heterosexism. The feminist perspective recognizes that overriding all of these forms of

oppression is patriarchal dominance. The foundation on which the whole system is based is economic power and control.

It is important to recognize that since we are all raised and live within this system, it is virtually impossible to not be affected by homophobia. One does not need to be beaten by a gang of gay-bashers to be victim to the wrenching effects of homophobia. Everyone, lesbian, gay, bisexual, or heterosexual has absorbed the pervasively heterosexist assumptions of our society. Many mothers are faced daily with the potential loss of their children, their homes, their jobs based solely on their sexual preference. One mother interviewed for this study told me:

> My ex-husband initially at least was really accepting but as time went on, with the separation, he went through a time when he threatened to try to go to court and get my kids because I'm a lesbian. At times I was really terrified that he would use my lesbianism as a way of getting at me...my job...I'm out at work but sometimes I'm really aware of my vulnerability...Every once in awhile I'm aware that if he got mad at me he's got something that he can use. And he's in the same profession as I am (a helping profession) and all he has to do is tell a few people...

This mother is aware at all times of her vulnerability to exposure for no reason other than the pervasive fears engendered by homophobia. The external attitudes that are so all-consuming are mirrored in each and every one of us and even the strongest and most confident radical lesbian at times is, I am sure, tormented with inner conflicts and denial, particularly if she is a mother.

To this point, I have defined homophobia in a psycho-social sense based primarily on the classic use of the term "phobia" meaning fear - of "homo" - the same. Joan Cummerton (1980) gives a cultural definition of homophobia that is useful for providing context of the far-reaching effects of this particular form of oppression. Homophobia is, she states:

> ...any belief system that supports negative myths about and stereotypes of gay men and lesbians. More specifically, it includes (1) belief systems which hold that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is justifiable, (2) language that is offensive to gay people (such as "queer" or "dyke") and (3) any belief system that does not value homosexual life-styles equally with heterosexual lifestyles (104).

The greatest power of those belief systems that justify homophobia lies in the insistence that homosexuality is immoral (sinful) or abnormal (sick) (Suzanne Pharr, 1988). It is no wonder then that until recently, much of the literature that was available on lesbian women or gay men was to be found under "Deviancy" (Martha Kirkpatrick, 1987). It is still true that the gay and lesbian lifestyle is frequently included in sociology texts on deviancy. It was only within the last generation that Homosexuality was removed from the DSM - the diagnostic manual which tends to be the legitimizing "bible" for assessing psychological disorders. The abnormal (sick) perspective is reinforced by and often used in conjunction with the immoral (sinful) argument. Those who argue the righteousness of homophobia on sinful grounds do so with a myriad of quotations from the

Bible. Many historians and modern theologians counter that most often the citations put forward are interpretive and revisionist (Warren Blumenfeld & Diane Raymond, 1988).

Those who are blatantly homophobic are so with explicit and implicit societal approval. As recently as 1969 police in major American cities regularly raided bars that were known or suspected to be lesbian and/or gay bars and arrested patrons for doing such immoral acts as dancing with a same-sex partner (Warren Blumenfeld & Diane Raymond, 1988; Lillian Faderman, 1991). Lesbian and gay partners have few legal rights. The concept of lesbian and gay parents fostering or adopting children continues to be debated on the grounds of sexual orientation rather than the fitness of the individuals who apply to parent. A Canadian lesbian or gay man may be turned away at the American border and denied entry to that country if their sexual preference is known. The American military has dishonourably discharged women and men for their sexual orientation. Lesbian mothers continue to be concerned that their parental rights may be questioned on the grounds of their sexual preference.

Apart from the legal sanctions directed against lesbians and gays, homophobic attitudes are reinforced through social codes of behaviour. Theologian James S. Tinney (in Warren J. Blumenfeld & Diane Raymond) suggests that there are several overlapping categories by which collective homophobia is manifested (1988: 258). First is

the denial of culture. Women, African-Americans, Native
Canadians and other minorities have been instrumental in
raising consciousness regarding the exclusion, invisibility,
and revisionism in history in reference to their specific
realities. By the same standard, lesbians and gay men have
had no history or culture if we are to believe the
historical records that are available.

Related to the denial of culture is the denial of
popular strength, which simply refers to the minimizing of
actual numbers of the population. The population is
perceived to be deviant and existing soemewhere else,
certainly not in the neighbourhood. Someone can be living
next door to a lesbian couple for years and continue to
wonder why the nice girls next door never seem to go out on
dates.

The third area is fear of over-visibility. This is
shown in some seemingly innocuous statements such as: "I
don't care who you sleep with; you are just a person to me."
or "Why do you have to announce that you're lesbian? I
don't announce to everyone that I have a boyfriend." The
message that comes across to lesbians and gay men is that
their sexual preference isn't very important or ought to
stay hidden. Minor displays of affection - hand holding,
standing close, or giving warm hugs to your partner in
public - things that heterosexual people take for granted -
are used as examples of being too "blatant" or "flaunting."

Even Monday morning discussions at work about week-end activities must be kept invisible; the lesbian and gay co-workers will be the quiet ones who most people at work know very little about. It may also be that people readily accept their co-worker or neighbour or brother or sister who "passes" - that is, she or he may live a fairly low-key life with or without a partner - but they would be unwilling or unable to accept someone who was overtly "queer."

As with other minorities a number of factors tend to come together that lead to the creation of defined public spaces for lesbians and gay men. For many years, the only meeting place that many had was in the bar. While this has changed to some degree, there are still exclusively lesbian and gay bars. While many say that this offers a safe place in which to socialize, the counter argument is that all private bars do is add to the ghettoization of the community since it means that the rest of the world does not have to deal with it. In large urban centres, there is generally an area of the city that is clearly identified as a lesbian and/or gay friendly area to live and do business. Indeed, this was a factor for many of the participants in this research study when deciding where to live and raise their children. One mother stated "...we knew there was some gay and lesbian community in Wolseley and we came to Wolseley for that reason..." As we will see, the decision about

where to live was an important one for all the families
interviewed, for this very reason.

A final area of societal homophobia is that of
tolerance. Many well-educated advocates of human rights
tolerate homosexuality and favour civil rights and (for
example) protection under the Human Rights Code in spite of
the fact that they may be terribly unaccepting of the
thought of lesbian and gay sexual activity. This kind of
attitude may ultimately lead to patronizing which, the
women's movement taught us so well, can be as or more
damaging than blatant discrimination.

3.4   Internalized Homophobia and Self Respect

> Women's love for women has been represented almost
> entirely through silence and lies. The
> institution of heterosexuality has forced the
> lesbian to dissemble, or be labelled a pervert, a
> criminal, a sick or dangerous woman, etc., etc.
> The lesbian, then, has been forced to lie, like
> the prostitute or the married woman...I myself
> lived half a lifetime in the lie of that denial.
> That silence makes us all, to some degree, into
> liars.
> <div align="right">(Adrienne Rich, 1979:   190)</div>

We have seen that there are a number of social, legal
and cultural behaviours and attributes that support a
homophobic society. What, then, is the impact of systemic
oppression on the individual?

We all live in the same world that teaches us that
same-sex desire and sexual activity is morally repulsive,
sinful, psychologically immature or damaging, or that it

does not exist at all. It is to be expected that we all internalize these attitudes, as surely as we have internalized racist attitudes by virtue of living in a racist society. It is inescapable.

The research question for this study is "What is the impact of homophobia on the lesbian family?" As the next chapter will show, the most significant question that each family had to deal with came from coming to terms with their own internal struggles regarding the sexual preference of the mother in the family. The literature certainly supports this (Alpert, 1988; Arnup, 1988; Benkov, 1994; Clunis & Green, 1995;). In one of the few studies that interviewed children of lesbians, Louise Rafkin includes this quote from a 23 year old man:

> I have some advice I would like to pass along to
> gay parents whose children are any age. First,
> secure a good line of communication with the child
> by letting him or her know exactly how you feel
> and that it is not wrong or strange that you are
> gay; it just happens to be your sexual
> preference. Being gay is not a problem; it's an
> opportunity to create a "birds and bees"
> conversation which will give a child a head start
> in this sexually repressed society...If
> homosexuality is not made a problem in your
> family, it won't show up as one (1990: 165).

The responses to internalized homophobia can and do take a variety of forms: long-term denial, contempt for those who are more "blatant," distrust of other lesbians, projection of hatred onto another minority group, attempts to pass as heterosexual, marrying a member of the opposite

sex for social approval, isolation, depression, suicide, alcoholism, and drug addiction. There are even self-help groups that have been established to help "recovered" or "former" homosexuals.

Even those who are most "out" - at work or school, with their family of origin, with the world in general - need to constantly assess their surroundings, in order to ensure their own safety. In recent years in Winnipeg, men have been beaten for merely walking down the street alone in areas that are believed to be frequented by gay men. Regularly, when walking in the area of the local women's bar, women get yelled at from car windows. Being called "fucking dyke" is the least of the insults hurled. I was personally beaten up by a number of R.C.M.P. cadets for refusing to dance with one of them in a bar. When the police finally came, they reprimanded me and my friends. It was my friends and I who were banished for life from that particular night-club for being "rowdy." We were five women sitting together, all friends who didn't get the chance to see each other often, having a few drinks, talking and laughing and enjoying our own company. I was approached to dance by a young man. I politely refused and he became aggressively insistent. One of my friends attempted to intervene and he and his buddies began to call us names including, of course, dyke, queer, etc. Eventually they left, only to be outside waiting for us in the parking lot,

where they attacked us. I learned that night that just the threat of lesbianism is enough to endanger women and as a lesbian I learned that my life was always at risk. It made me very afraid for my children.

Lesbian families with children choose a variety of ways in which to deal with these kinds of fears. One of the most consistent means of survival is to build a community for yourself that allows haven from the rest of the world. The importance of social networks cannot be emphasized enough, particularly within the lesbian community, and especially as the families in this study expressed it.

3.5 Lesbian Families and Social Support

> What to make of the relationships that lesbians
> and gay men label lovers and claim as kin, erotic
> ties that bear no intrinsic connection to
> procreative sexuality or gendered difference?
> (Kath Weston, 1991: 137)

The fields of mental health and social services have

seen a rise in recent years in the development of social

support theory (Ann Oakley, 1992; Lambert Maguire, 1983;

James Whittaker & James Garbarino, 1983). Maguire gives the

following definition of social support:

> Social support is *not* treatment (or even guidance)
> although it may include some aspects of both. It
> is a feeling and attitude, as well as an act of
> concern and compassion. It is what friends, good
> neighbours, and relatives provide. When these
> kith and kin link together for the purpose of
> helping, they form a social support network (51).

Social work theory, particularly an ecological perspective

that involves systems theory, is very compatible with the

elements of social support. In many ways, social support

theory is one of the few relevant frameworks we have for

understanding the phenomena of the strength and importance

of the lesbian and gay community to its members.

James Whittaker describes the social support network

as:

> (A) set of interconnected relationships among a
> group of people that provides enduring patterns of
> nurturance (in any or all forms) and provides
> contingent reinforcement for efforts to cope with

life on a day-to-day basis (Whittaker & Garbarino, 1993: 29).

For most people who come out as lesbian or gay, there is a drive to seek out like others. Since the emergence of a strong gay and women's liberation movement in the 1960s and 1970s, gay and lesbian people have moved towards urban gay and lesbian communities. Even the language that is used within the community is closely connected to kinship. I have had, at various times, a man or woman described to me as "one of the tribe," "in the family," a sister or a brother. This experience is similar in other cities, other communities (Kath Weston, 1991). The seeking out of community is essential in the establishment of identity. Further, according to Eileen Levy (1989), the literature suggest that an inverse relationship exists between the adoption of a lesbian identity and stress experienced by lesbians, or, the stronger the lesbian identity, the less stress is experienced by the woman.

Many gays and lesbians, upon coming out and either facing or fearing rejection from their birth family, will distance themselves, and either move to another city entirely which will allow them more freedom, or will seek out a community that exists within the city in which they live. Most large cities have lesbian and gay communities that naturally attract those who are first coming out, once they know what to look for. Often, entry into the lesbian

and gay community feels like entry into a secret society. Sometimes, but not always, a supportive community may be located within a geographic locale. Kath Weston says "Among lesbians and gay men the term "community" (like coming out) has become as multifaceted in meaning as it is ubiquitous" (1991: 122).

Community has been vital to a number of lesbian women and gay men in that it helps provide identity. Often, coming out stories are accompanied with tales of seeking out and finding the local "community." It would be a mistake, however, to presuppose that this is a community defined by sameness. It is a community unlike many others in that it is defined only in relational terms: if you have a same-sex preference, you may belong. The community is made up of as many sub-groups as you can define.

When I came to Winnipeg in the late 1970's, the lesbian community was reeling from a recent tragedy. A woman in the community, a mother, had killed her two children as a solution to her isolation. She was, of course, mentally ill, as everyone acknowledged, but the tragedy split the small, tightly knit community in two. Many condemned her outright: how could she do this to her children? Others took personal responsibility: how could we have allowed a sister to reach such depths of despair without helping her? There is, of course, no resolution to such questions and the effects of the tragedy eventually faded away. What was left

was the opening of the dialogue within the local lesbian community on the place of mothers and children within that community. It raised such questions as Is there room in the lesbian community for children? How much is that community willing to support mothers and children? What about male children?

Two decades later, with many children having grown up within that environment, the same questions are being asked, and the stakes, according to some of the mothers interviewed, are much higher. When my children and I entered the community twenty years ago, there was no question as to how I came to have them. I had been recently involved in a sexual relationship with a man. Some women accepted my children and delighted in having children around at various functions. Others wanted nothing to do with them, seeing the presence of children as either a nuisance or a disgrace. I found friendship and hostility, support and rejection.

Today, lesbian mothers are facing the same kind of community ambivalence, but with a new twist. Now it has become almost in vogue to have children, but only if it is done in such a manner that it is politically correct, such as through donor insemination, fostering or adoption (Katherine Arnup, 1995; Laura Benkov, 1994; Merilee Clunis & Dorsey Green, 1995). One of the mothers who was interviewed for this study has been challenged by others

within the community for not being "clean" in the way she
conceived since she arranged to have sex with a sixteen year
old male, with his knowledge, for the express purpose of
getting pregnant.

One study conducted by Eileen Levy entitled "Lesbian
Motherhood: Identity and Social Support" (1989) draws the
following conclusions:

> In general, then, the findings related to some of
> the lesbian-identity variables suggest that the
> lesbian mother occupies a marginal position within
> both society and the lesbian community. Although
> the women endorsed contact with others as an
> important coping strategy, they also were aware of
> their marginality in the larger community, and to
> a lesser extent, within the lesbian community.
> They identified the lack of social support,
> support from the lesbian community, and support
> groups for lesbian mothers as areas in which they
> perceived unmet needs (49-50).

Levy's findings were supported and reinforced by the
families who participated in this study, as we shall see in
the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4: LIVED BY ME

I'm not selling the screenplay to my life for no
fifty dollars.
We could get tape recorders.
We can be writers, too.
You don't need to know how to type no more.
We can write as good as he can write if what he's
writing is what we're talking. We should've got
co-credit or something.

When that article comes out, it's gonna say,
Written by him.

It should at least say,
Lived by Brandy and Tina

(Jane Wagner, 1987, p. 130).

The research contained in this thesis is gathered,

analyzed, and presented by me. It is lived and spoken by

the remarkable women and children who chose to share their

stories with me.

The core of this chapter is written in narrative style.

The voices are those of the mothers and children who were

interviewed, saying in their own words that which is

important to them. I have interwoven commentary with the

narrative in order to highlight some of the important

categories that emerged from the interviews. While most

participants said that using their first name was acceptable

and only some asked that they be given a pseudonym all

participants are identified by a name other than their own

in order to protect their anonymity. Other identifying

characteristics have been changed, and some specifics which
may reveal participants' identity will have been omitted or
altered. Any omissions or alterations will not affect the
content of the data. Each mother and child are treated
discretely; while they participated as families, each
member of the family has her or his own voice independent of
other family members. I do not always identify family
affiliations except when it is necessary for context or
because there is similarity or difference that is
significant to the analysis of the data.

4.1 Who We Are

> There have always been lesbians who were mothers,
> lesbians who struggled with the decision to have
> children, lesbians who have gotten pregnant
> against their will, lesbians who have adopted
> and/or been foster parents, lesbians who have had
> children in heterosexual marriages, lesbians who
> have raised the children of relatives and friends,
> lesbians who have lost their children, who have
> had their children taken from them, or who have
> felt the necessity to give them up, lesbians who
> have been open, and lesbians who have hidden their
> lifestyles from their children.
> (Sandra Pollack & Jeanne Vaughan, 1987: 12)

Thirteen families participated in this study, including
my own. I began by speaking to friends, who in turn
referred me to friends and acquaintances of theirs (snowball
sampling). While there were many similarities, the
families were also diverse in terms of background and
circumstances...there proved to be no such thing as a
typical lesbian mother headed family. What was true for

all of the mothers interviewed was that they all had their children through the act of sexual intercourse with a man or men. This is significant in that many lesbian women today are choosing pregnancy through artificial insemination by donor, either donated sperm from someone they know or from an anonymous donor from a clinic. Eight women were married to the father of their child/ren and were either divorced or legally separated with divorce pending. Of these eight, five fathers had regular contact with their child/ren and there was minimal or no contact with the other three. Two women had children with fathers from common-law relationships that had ended many years prior. Two others had children with fathers through what were considered to be sexual affairs, that is, there was no expectation of a lasting relationship. One woman had sex with a young man, with his agreement, for the express purpose of getting pregnant. This last woman was the only participant who planned a pregnancy while she was involved in a lesbian relationship. For the rest of the women, their children were born before they came out as a lesbian, or while they were in the process of self-discovery. One woman had her youngest child in a last-ditch effort to prove that she was not lesbian:

> ...I guess that I spent some time there (denying
> my sexuality) and in my last hurrah to say "I will
> be straight, Damn it!", (my youngest son) was
> conceived...

Family sizes varied from one child to five (in one family, two foster chidlren had recently left the home). The age range of the children was from 5 years old to 22 years old. I was able to interview at least one child in each family, with the exception of one family. The only child in this family was five years old and I had decided, through the direction of the focus group and the approval of the Ethics Committee, to interview only children age 7 and older.[5] The mothers were all employed outside the home or were studying full-time. Five of the mothers were involved in a committed live-in relationship with another woman.

The majority of the women were involved in or training for what may be seen as professions that are woman-dominated fields - social work, teaching, clerical, or child care. Two women are artists. At the time the interviews were conducted, four families shared custody with child/ren's fathers, one mother had visitation arrangements with her children who lived with their father, and the remainder of mothers had exclusive guardianship, with varying degrees of paternal involvement. In two families, the children were grown and living on their own. Two of the women had grandchildren and two others were going to become grandmothers within a few months of the interview. Ten

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[5]   The one exception to this was the family with three children, ages 4, 7, and 10, who very clearly asserted that they wished to be interviewed together.

families lived in residential urban communities in Winnipeg,
and three in Winnipeg suburbs. One mother is Treaty
Indian, one is Metis and the remainder are Caucasian.

The data in each mother's interview is compared and
contrasted with each other mother as well as with her
child/ren's. The child/ren's data is further checked
against their mother's as well as compared with the other
children who were interviewed. The information presented is
primarily in the voices of the participants...only citations
from external sources will be identified through quotations
or indentation and proper annotation. As each speaker is
introduced, her or his name will be bolded. The content of
their words will be in italics. For the most part, their
words are written as they were spoken, with some editing
done for ease in reading and understanding. Occasionally I
paraphrase someone's words, but the content is never
compromised. Some of the participants are quoted more often
then others. I have tried to include all relevant data,
which sometimes means that the citations are fairly lengthy.
Any deletions will be noted by me as three dots (...).

The presentation of findings is broken down into the
three large categories which emerged as significant within
the interviews. The first section deals with definitions,
external perceptions and experiences with homophobia and
internalized homophobia. The second talks about coming out
and being out, integrating some of the information on

homophobia and how this affects the individuals within the family and the family as a whole. The final section deals with how the families cope, through the identification of and reliance on social supports.

4.2 Buying the Lies: The Impact of Homophobia

> Fear of the label "lesbian" has driven many into
> matrimony, mental hospitals, and - worst of all -
> numbing, dumbing normality.
> (Mary Daly, 1978: 20)

All of the participants were asked for their definition or opinion of what homophobia is. The definitions ranged from a few words such as "fear of gays" to those that were primarily politically framed. **Merle** said that *homophobia comes from the same place that sexism does and it operates on a number of different levels. It operates socially in a very broad sense, politically and psychically, emotionally, mentally. It's used to dictate that people will form certain relationships. It's used to maintain control over the kind of relationships we form. And I think that it is used very much to maintain the sense of the patriarchy. The only correct family form is married...man, woman, kids. It's used to negate and deny other family forms and it is used very much to control women. Homophobia against men is, I think based on sexist principles, it is based on the same principles that have to do with denying the validity or*

existence or rightness of everything that isn't dictated by
white, heterosexual males. It happens in subtle ways, with
the stuff that tells us that as women loving women we are
somehow subversive, so that you end up internalizing that.
Then there's the blatant stuff, being beaten, having your
kids taken away from you, or being fired or denied a job
because you are out. All kinds of things...having your
livelihood threatened, having your home threatened, having
your family threatened, and hating yourself. Or adding that
(homophobia) to the amount of stuff that women already have
to hate themselves with!

Kerry's definition is similar. *It is, she says, a
whole range from being just a basic fear of homosexuality
to, and of course, that what you feel in yourself. You
can't underestimate psychology involved here, that people
are afraid of their own sexuality... it ranges from that to
homophobia as a whole society thing based on the
patriarchy...homophobia is really a tool in a lot of ways
for maintaining female oppression. For lack of a better
word, I think it has to do with keeping status quo, really.
I hate using that kind of language. I do. But I think it's
very effective by forcing everybody to think that there is
only one option, which is to follow the path of
heterosexuality and get married. I think it's very
damaging.*

Jude agrees. She says *homophobia is a judgement based on an attitude or a value that there's only one way to be and that's to be heterosexual and to be homosexual is to be disliked or hated. You get the message from society that there's something wrong with you. And you know everything reinforces it. Psychiatrists used to think you were mentally ill and that continues to be reinforced. I end up feeling that there's something wrong with me, that's how I'm seen.*

Other voices echo the above: **Rhonda:** *It is ignorance, people's fear. People are afraid of something that they see as deviant and wrong.* **Maggie:** *Irrational fear and hatred of homosexuals.* **Karin:** *Homophobia is a fear of the "other"...the standard definition - a fear of gays and lesbians because it's so different from yourself...I guess it's mostly just fear of the difference. Plus, there's this whole negative mythology that's been developed around homosexuality, things like paedophilia, disease, and all that, but the definition as a fear, whether it involves knowledge or non-knowledge, even if there is knowledge, it can be a generalized fear, a real malicious hatred.* **Lorna:** *An irrational fear and hatred towards homosexual people; it's more just the fear because of thinking there's something really terrible about it and they should be protected from it.*

The response from the children to this question varied. Sixteen year old **Danny** said *it is fear of homosexuals*, and **Shannon**, also sixteen, says that *homophobia is being against gay people*. **Sonja** defines it as *people being afraid to be around gay people, to talk about being gay and just feeling uncomfortable with it in general*. Ten year old **Sydney** said *it is someone being afraid and not understanding a homosexual person*, and her little brother, 7 year old **Michael** volunteered, much to his sister's dismay, that *it means like if you're afraid of tarantulas or spiders*. **Sam** is fourteen and he *thinks it's more people who have homosexual tendencies and are afraid of them so they reverse it so that they can prove they are not gay*. **Zoe**, age 16, tentatively *asked if it (homophobia) was when you were afraid of them,* and 15 year old **Sherry** said she *didn't know what it was*. Sherry's brother, **Rick**, said he'*d heard the term before but didn't have a definition*. For all the interviews, after participants responded to the question, I offered my definition of homophobia as "fear, dislike or hatred of lesbians, gays and bisexuals that often results in acts of discrimination" as this is the definition that was the most acceptable to the members of the focus group.[6]

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[6]Since conducting this research and reflecting on how homophobia has affected everyone, I would change this definition to drop the word "often." I have come to believe that it always results in discrimination, whether visible or invisible.

One of the most powerful definitions came from one of the mothers, **Suzanne**, who said *it's when people find out who you are, what you are, how they look at you, it's being different.* For many of the mothers, homophobia was an external force against which they fought. Most recognized that they had internalized some degree of homophobia by virtue of living in a homophobic society. Others, like **Suzanne**, struggled with believing that she was inferior because of who she is, having literally internalized social hatred. She clearly recognizes this self-hatred: *I didn't want to believe what I was and so I drank...that's really what I did. Drank to forget. To forget who I am, to forget what I am.*

Carla, as well, feels personally and internally bound by homophobia. *I'd love to be open, she claims. I'd really love to be open, to have the kids and their friends so that they could feel relaxed and they know who I am as a lesbian mom but it's not possible. People judge. People are scared it's going to reflect back on the kids so I've lived a quiet lifestyle, very quiet.* And **Darlene** had a *talk with her daughter about it (lesbianism) not being catchy and how her parents were straight and she's gay so her kids aren't going to be homosexual because she is.* This is social homophobia at work in its most insidious way, with a mother telling her child not to worry that she may be like her mother since the odds are against it. She was not talking about an illness,

but about who she was, and yet it was framed in the language of illness or defect.

Maggie *has had times when she thought she should stop this and go back...just forget this and go back to live with her husband and resume her old life because sometimes it was just too difficult.*

The effects of internal homophobia naturally have an impact on the relationship between the mothers and their child/ren. The nature of the impact seemed to depend on the degree to which the homophobia is first of all acknowledged, and second, situated within a political framework. Internalized homophobia in the mothers interviewed can be seen on a continuum[7]. There were some who revealed a great deal of personal shame and self-loathing based on their sexuality, who truly believed the social dictum that homosexuality is sick or sinful. Both Suzanne and Carla certainly struggled with this, as can be seen from the above quotes. They struggled to accept themselves but were very far away from feeling any sense of self-acceptance, much less pride in who they are. On the other end of the continuum are those mothers who had acknowledged that they had some degree of internalized homophobia because they live and were raised in a homophobic society. However, they were

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[7] The idea of continuum is explored in greater depth in the following chapter, wherein I discuss the use of the conditional matrix.

able to control these feelings and use them, not for personal condemnation, but to scrutinize the system that would call them inferior. For the most part, they had a political framework, and the supports that allowed them to reject self-loathing.

Kerry, in particular, had a great deal to say about internal homophobia, as an out, very non-apologetic lesbian. *Of course, she said, I believe I probably internalized homophobia. But, I think things that your parents, hammer into your head stay with you. If your parents tell you from day one that it's wrong or immoral to be gay or lesbian, it takes alot longer to get rid of it. So, I think that I've...sure I've internalized some homophobia from society. I don't think you can not have, with mass conditioning. If you want to talk about our own attitudes, I mean that's probably the hardest thing to talk about. But it has affected us as a couple. Sometimes, I've actually gotten through that. Maybe it's helped me become academically involved so that I have more of an analysis, but I remember thinking, I shouldn't be doing this. This is wrong. Even though I'm attracted to a woman. Like I said, this was before I went to school and I think about how many lesbians in the past have thought that because homophobia made them feel that way. Stopped and gone and got married or just not had a fulfilling life because of that. It's made me think sometimes...I mean you don't see yourself, you don't see*

women making love on t.v.. You don't really think it's right. You only see a man and a woman doing it, you know. So, that affects me. You internalize that and sometimes it's very hard to get beyond that. It's been years since I've had trouble with it although I do have trouble with it on an everyday bases in some respects. The trouble is as a couple. Sometimes I think maybe I should just go....be with a man. Who couldn't I suppose. It would be easier. You wouldn't have to deal with hatred. I think alot of what affects me with homophobia is invisibility.

Karin recognized that her own awareness of homophobia, and her fear for her son, influenced how she prepared him to deal with the world: *Right away I told him that some people thought it was wrong for two women to love each other and that some people would put people down or might attack you because they were afraid of people who were a little different from them. And he understood that right away, it was kind of sad that he had to censor, self-censor, but it's also necessary. I don't regret telling him that. I think we need to give children what they need to protect themselves in a hostile world.*

When Karin had the conversation with her son about self-censoring, he was 4 years old. **Sam** was 14 when I interviewed him and his attitude revealed a great deal about how he has processed the information about his mother's sexuality: *Sometimes I feel uncomfortable when certain*

friends are over cause some of my friends are homophobic so I feel uncomfortable when they're around at my place. Only a couple of my friends know; some of my friends, I don't care if they know cause I'm pretty sure they wouldn't care...I'm open in general. But I still think I'm a little homophobic from like television and everyday life and the messages that other people transmit, like some lesbians and gays are homophobic. I think everyone's a bit homophobic.

Internal homophobia is experienced by many of the women from within the lesbian community as well. **Merle** *described the experience of being at a lesbian social when another woman approached her, unaware that she was the mother of the children who were dancing up a storm on the dance floor. That woman was, said Merle, really really upset about these children being here and was talking about how unconscionable it was for someone to have brought these kids here to see all this...Well, I looked around and I said "Yeah, you're right. It isn't the greatest atmosphere in here, it's really smoky, and there's all this drinking going on." "I didn't mean that," she said. She was talking about exposing the children to the lesbian community and being exposed to women loving women.* At least five other women who participated in the study reported having similar experiences.

This attitude in the lesbian community, they believe, is a direct result of homophobia in a number of ways. First

of all, there is the assumption that this behaviour (two women dancing together, holding hands, hugging, kissing, basically doing anything that people do at social gatherings) should not be seen by children (children are often present at, for example, straight wedding socials), the natural inference being that it is shameful, disgusting, should remain hidden. Along with this comes some righteous indignation that we (lesbian mothers) have no right to inflict our lifestyle on innocent children...life is too hard as it is, etc.

Second, some women identified a punitive quality about this attitude. **Merle** believes *the reasoning goes something like this: Het women make active choices about whether or not to have children, it is seen as not only their right but their obligation and a privilege, an option that is always open to them. If a lesbian wants a child, it is seen as a right that has been forfeited: if we choose, or are in this lifestyle however we got here, then one of the sacrifices we have to make is that we give up the option of having kids.*

Third, there are regular debates raging within the lesbian community about how women get children.[8] Some feel that if you have children through sexual relations with a man, then you have recently or have living proof of having slept with the enemy; others feel that artificial

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[8] This area is explored in greater detail in Chapter 3, under the general discussion of lesbianism and motherhood.

insemination is not appropriate since the child will be deprived of knowing her or his father. One mother, **Kerry,** got pregnant after having had sex with a young man for the express purpose of getting pregnant. She related this incident: *As a parent you're much more aware of homophobia, you're much more sensitive to it. It's not just me they're going to be hurting, it's a little kid who could reject me. I never was afraid of that until I was at a party a few days ago. A woman said to me "You know, your kid's going to run away from you one day," or something to that effect. When I asked her what she meant, it was because of the way I had her, it wasn't quite clean or something. Of course, that was her own fear of coming out and all that, but she really got me upset. What? Because I'm a lesbian my kid's going to reject me?...I feel like that's internalized homophobia. It's like saying that men have rights to their seed, their sperm, that they have some kind of right because he had sex with me, because he came inside me. I don't feel he has any rights. We raise the child. Obviously, I'm not really an advocate of men's rights.*

Finally, at least four of the mothers identified a connection between homophobia and the transient nature of lesbian relationships. **Merle** said, *it's difficult also, going into relationships with that in the back of your mind. That was the way it was, the norm that there seems to be in the community that relationships won't last. That makes it*

*especially hard when you have kids. I think it's because we
don't really believe our relationships are important, we
don't honour them in the same way that the straight world
does.* **Maggie**, also, spoke about this: *At least since I've
come out it seems to me that a lot of lesbian relationships
don't last...that could be due to homophobia and the fact
that society just doesn't sanction the relationship.*

The families in the study all experienced homophobia to
varying degrees, as we have seen. So far, this discussion
has focused on internal homophobia as experienced by the
mothers in the family. It must be noted that the manner in
which the mothers dealt with internal homophobia and the
degree to which it was present had a profound effect on the
child/ren. For the most part, those women who understood
and had dealt with internal homophobia, identifying it as a
tool of oppression, were also able to impart this to their
child/ren. The reverse was also true. If the mother viewed
herself and her lesbianism through a deviancy framework, the
child's attitude in most cases reflected the mother's. For
example, Carla's daughter, 16 year old **Zoe**, readily agreed
to be interviewed but was visibly uncomfortable every time
specific words such as gay, lesbian, and homophobia were
used. When I was giving her the standard introduction to
the study, she grimaced when I said "lesbian mom." *Well,
she said, I don't really like it cause it's kinda
weird...I'm not a lesbian myself so I don't really know*

anything about it cause I don't talk about it at all...If my mom were to announce that she's lesbian up and down the street I'd curl up into a ball...when my mom and her friends talk about it I feel really uncomfortable; it's not my lifestyle and I just find that I can't agree with anything they say so I just go into another room. Suzanne's children, 13 year old **Annie** and 8 year old **Jamie**, *also refer to it as weird.*

Similarly, as internalized homophobia was mirrored by comments of the child/ren, so was acceptance and openness. Adrian is 18. His mother, Eve, is open and comfortable about her sexuality. **Adrian** says of his mother *I'd like to note that my mom's lifestyle because of her sexuality is very strong and very positive. I think I'd be a very different person if I'd been raised by my father. My mom's been a very important influence in my life.* 10 year old **Sydney** *thinks it's great that her mom is a lesbian because she meets a lot of people she probably wouldn't meet if she wasn't, and also, it's a lot easier to be non-homophobic when one of your parents is lesbian.* Other children also had opinions about their mother's sexuality and homophobia. **Sonja**, for example, *began by commenting on her perception of her sister, Nichole's reaction to her mother's lesbianism: I think Nich is more homophobic than I am. She doesn't really talk about it, but she tells everyone that Mom's gay and maybe that's an outlet for her to deal with homophobia.*

But I think deep down she still hasn't dealt with it; I think she has a lot to deal with. I think talking is very important within the families and the silence is what creates homophobia, too. Not talking about it is like it doesn't exist. Talking about it, it's there and this is part of your lives and this is a reality. I talk about it freely, I think it's cool. I'm glad my mom's gay because I'm glad she's happy. I think we need more gay people in our society.

Of course, while the influence of the mother is important, it is certainly not the only one that will affect how the child/ren will deal with homophobia. According to **Darlene**, she *delayed coming out for several years out of fear of her ex-husband's response.* When she did, she said: *When I came out to my kids, when all my kids knew, he was just awful. He told all the kids that I was a fucking faggot and a fucking pervert and a fucking homosexual and that (my lover) was the same and that we were sick, depraved...it was awful...my daughter came home in a panic. He's really, really homophobic. Rick (my son) afterwards was okay, he says it's okay, he jokes about it, but my oldest son took it the hardest and didn't speak to me for a long time.*

The most disturbing interview I did was with 18 year old Rick. **Rick** seemed to have fully integrated his father's attitudes and was quite open in his homophobic comments. *I*

don't like fags, he said. Well, lesbians I don't mind, but

fags, I don't like fags. They're just not my kinda

people...I don't know any and I don't want to...I'd probably

beat the shit out of them if I did, I just don't like fags.

Watching women together turns me on. I just don't like

fags.

It is no wonder when these kind of comments are heard
from the mouths of those we love - our family - that we
internalize some self-hatred. Many women interviewed talked
about feeling at times like they should just "go back" or
change or have a relationship with a man because it would be
so much easier. There are few who did not have at least one
experience with social or institutional homophobia, or at
least, consciously modified choices out of fear of reaction.
For others, the acts were more direct. For example, I was
beaten by police rookies. **Darlene** *had to listen to her*
husband's venomous diatribe, and mother's stated wish for a
cure for her. Her mother also has said from the beginning
that all homosexuals procure and that gay women and men like
to teach so they can procure children to be like them.
They're all perverted according to the bible, her mother
says. **Darlene** *works in a social service agency and knew*
that a co-worker was warned by her boss not to hang around
with another woman who was a very out lesbian. **Merle's**
mother claims to be comfortable with it and will, behind
Merle's back, ask her children if they really wouldn't

rather have a man around. **Kerry** *was kicked out of nursing school for being suspected of having an affair with a woman in her dormitory.* **Andrea** *was fired from a job because her boss saw her with her lover's arm around her shoulder; he called her a sicko and said she would attract the wrong kind of clientele (this was a restaurant located in the Osborne Village area of Winnipeg, an area where a great many gay men and lesbians live, work, and do business).* **Lorna**'s *in-laws pray for her and urge her to go to Homosexual's Anonymous.*
A few of the mothers had to deal with their children's questions when neighbouring children were suddenly not allowed to play with them. **Carla** *and her family were driven out of their home after she told a neighbour...others found out and then the windows were shot out of her house and people on the street began to avoid the family.* **Suzanne** *used to hear the old people in her home community tell her "It's wrong...it's wrong what you're doing, to go to another woman and have sex with another woman." She would walk down the street and people would yell Lesbian or Dyke at her. In the city, in her apartment block, other women come into the laundry room when she is there, and will call her a name - usually dyke - and walk out. One time, she found a pair of her son's white pants in the laundry room...someone had picked them up and written 'Dyke's pants', 'lesbian jeans'*

*all over them so she stuffed them into the garbage before
her son could see.*

Yes, indeed, homophobia affects the family.

4.3 Coming Out and Being Out

> With children, the outside world becomes
> unavoidable unless you isolate them completely.
> (Sarah Schulman, 1990: 24)

Every woman interviewed went through a coming out
process - of discovering that her sexual orientation was
towards other women or another woman rather than men or a
man. For most, this discovery was described as a type of
home-coming. It was not an awareness that happened
suddenly. The process of coming out is as complicated and
circuitous as most personal journeys are. All of the women
interviewed in this study had sexual relationships with a
man or men before they came out. Some of the women were
married or had been involved in long-term, very serious
relationships with men. Many of the women spoke about
getting married in spite of being attracted to other
females, almost as an attempt to disprove that anything was
"wrong." **Carla**, for example, said *she was never attracted
towards boys when she was younger, only girls, but she went
against what she was feeling and got married instead. And
was very unhappy. When she came out she felt like it was
time to live for herself.*

For all of the women, the fact that children were involved was always a central issue. *Because she knew she wanted to have children,* **Lorna** *said, it was a very confusing factor in her coming out...she had considered that she might be lesbian at a younger age but discounted it because her certainty that she would have children seemed contradictory. When she finally did acknowledge her lesbianism to herself, Lorna said, it was because it could no longer be denied. Her youngest child was a nursing infant when she came out to herself, as she put it. The knowledge was a process for her, a dawning of admission, and finally acceptance.* **Merle**'s experience was similar. *I started figuring things out, she said, started realizing that I was probably in love with Ellen. And that was it, it just changed from there, things fell into place. I hadn't had a relationship with a woman. I came out without ever having slept with another woman and started talking about it.*

While the majority of the women interviewed were very comfortable with their sexuality as far as affirming who they were as sexual women, the reality of dealing with their children in the world has proven to be one of the biggest challenges. It was not easy for any of the women to decide how they would prepare their children for the homophobia they were bound to experience. All of the mothers wanted to protect their children, and this meant different things to different families. For some mothers, it was important to

sit down and have a conversation specifically about homophobia. For others it meant hiding – remaining in the closet both to their child/ren and to the rest of the world in order to protect their family. Joann Loulan, lesbian mother and psychologist and author of several books on lesbian sex and relationships, has said:

> Many gay parents do not talk with their children about the fact that they are gay. By "protecting" them from knowing who we are, we act as though there is something horrible about us.
> (Joann Loulan, 1984: 19)

The matrix[9] is helpful in seeing an association between the degree to which children were homophobic and how early following their coming out the mother told their child/ren. **Carla** recognizes this clearly. *She did not tell her children, in spite of living with her woman lover for 6 years. Her two sons and daughter lived with them but she passed off her partner to her children and the rest of the world as a friend who was helping out with expenses. When her daughter did find out about her mother's lesbianism, it was through overhearing a conversation between her mother and another friend.* **Zoe** *is still angry two years later because she (her mother) didn't tell her, she kept it from her. She thinks it would have been alright if she'd known earlier but she's mad cause her mom didn't tell her. Zoe's*

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[9]   Refer to Chapter 4, Tables 2-14.

rating on internal homophobia was very high, from the total interview. *She would curl up and die, she said, if her mother was really out.* **Carla** believed she was doing what was best for her children. *I thought it would be a lot harder for them to deal with growing up, she said. And I thought it would be better telling them when they were old enough to understand and sit down and have a talk. But now I firmly believe that it's best to tell kids when they're young, let them get used to the lifestyle rather than waiting till they're an older age.*

Rick, who is extremely homophobic, was also very angry with his mother Darlene for not telling him sooner. She had delayed coming out to her children for a number of years, because she was concerned about their father finding out and challenging custody. When she did tell Rick, it was a year after she had told his younger sister, and that made him even more angry.

Like Zoe, Annie and Jamie said they found out by accident. **Jamie,** he said, *set his mother (Suzanne) and her girlfriend up, because he knew what they were doing (kissing) and he pretended to be doing something else and then he and his sister walked into the bedroom and saw them.* Their mother remembers it differently, but all agree that there was a relationship with another woman for a long time before any discussion happened. Both children were very angry that their mother had kept something from them for so

long. And both children reported feeling very uncomfortable with their mother's lesbianism.

To a large degree, Carla, Darlene, and Suzanne have internalized a great deal of shame in who they are and this message has been transported to their children in a variety of ways. Even while Carla muses that she would tell her children earlier if she had it to do again, it is tinged with guilt in who she is: letting them get used to "the lifestyle." The very assumption that this is something to protect the children from carries with it the assumption of shame, of living in the shadows.

This can be contrasted with the attitudes of some of the other families. In those families where the mother talked to the child/ren immediately following her personal discovery, the acceptance level of the child/ren was considerably higher[10]. *I was really out,* **Merle** said, *to the kids right from the time that I came out. Because I had them so young, from the time that they started being verbal, and even before then, I talked to them all the time. They were the people who were around, the ones that I talked to. So when I came out it was just sort of natural for me to be talking to them about it. And I don't know if they understood or what they understood but it was a developmental thing. I explained it to them as I thought*

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[10] See Tables 2-14 and discussion following presentation of findings.

they would understand. As they got older our conversations changed. Merle's daughters, both now grown, agreed with this: neither could remember a coming out occasion. It just always was, their mom was a lesbian and it was normal. **Sonja** *laughed when she talked about bringing her fiance to her mother's house: ...I just assumed he knew. And then we were in her study and he was looking around and he saw a couple of books and he said, "Sonja, is your mom gay?" and I said "Yes." He's going, "Why didn't you tell me this before?" and I thought I had. That was really bizarre...I think it's almost something I assume people know now but then I'm not sure. I guess to me it's just normal.*

At least one mother, **Rhonda,** cannot remember the words or circumstances at all: *My first relationship with a woman was when the kids were really young and it just didn't come up. Then I was involved with (a man) for a long time and when I finally came out again, I didn't realize that they didn't know. It didn't seem that there was anything unusual about it that needed to be talked about.*

Karin, Andrea, Kerry, Lorna, Corinne, Maggie and Merle all came out when their children were fairly young and all talked with their child/ren immediately and as age appropriate about lesbian and gay issues. Jude, Eve, and Rhonda came out when their child/ren were older but spoke to them immediately regarding their lesbianism. All of these children, 13 in total who were interviewed, ranging in age

from 5 to 23, displayed relatively little evidence of
internal homophobia. Of the other three families, where the
mother delayed talking to the children, the attitudes were
quite different, with the children displaying anger and
homophobia.

One of the decisions that needed to be made in all the
families at one point was how to "street-proof" the children
regarding social attitudes, particularly regarding gay and
lesbian issues and homophobia. For some of the mothers,
this conversation happened in conjunction with coming out to
their families, if the child/ren were old enough. For
others, it happened when it was age appropriate. **Karin** *told
Sam at age 4 or 5 that some people thought it was wrong and
might attack or try to hurt you because they are afraid of
difference.* **Merle** *told her children that they probably
shouldn't say lesbian at school because their teachers and
others might not understand...It was hard, she said, and she
hated doing that, because she grew up with so many secrets
in her own family so she hated feeling like she was setting
them up like that.* **Lorna**, *as well, talked about preparing
her children to deal with the world: I haven't ever wanted
to ask them to keep a secret. They understand that it's not
safe to just tell anybody. So what we have said is we tell
people who we have come to trust about how we live. Because
the truth is that most people out there don't understand how
we live. And once we come to know or trust someone then at*

that point we explain to them, tell them this personal part, about how our family is. On the other hand we say you never need to feel like can't say anything; you never need to feel like you've done something wrong if you tell someone who acts badly, it's not your fault. When my partner was working in the school system there was some risk because when they're little you never know what they'll say. So there is that, there is that sense of personal risk about who they'll tell. On the other hand the risk of having them feel like they can't tell or of having them keep a secret is more dangerous.

In a book titled <u>Reinventing the Family</u>, psychologist and lesbian mother Laura Benkov states:

> All lesbian and gay struggles can become bogged
> down by fearful retreat to the closet or,
> conversely, pushed forward by the willingness to
> venture out, but both the difficulties of emerging
> and the profound impact of public declaration are
> especially clear in the case of gay and lesbian
> parents (1994: 31).

As Lorna's words above help illustrate, coming out is not a solitary effort. When a mother comes out in this homophobic system, she is not only coming out herself, but for her whole family. The reverse is true as well. In being honest with our children and arming them with the truth about who we are, and, further, in trusting them to make decisions for themselves regarding this information, we are also giving them permission to make decisions for us. Just as we can out them, they can out us. Merle's younger daughter, **Sonja,**

used to greet everyone at her door when she was about 6

years old with "Hi! Are you lesbian? Who are you lesbian

with?" Her older daughter, **Nichole,** when she got to be a

teenager, *decided that it was cool to have a lesbian mom,*

and told everyone indiscriminately, almost for the shock

value, she thinks now. There was a time, Nichole said, when

she felt the need to advertise it because she was angry at

her mother. She had a really negative attitude towards a

lot of things in her life and she was always ready for a

fight, you know, telling people to see what would happen,

like "I dare you"...it was really a rebellious thing.

Lorna's children shared this conversation regarding

their own coming out:

Sydney (age 10): *A lot of my friends know because a lot of*

my friends are really mature and can understand it but in

classes like Michael's grade (grade 2), you know, they

wouldn't understand unless they had lesbian or gay parents.

And, Jon (age 4), do any of your friends know? (Jon shakes

his head) No, I didn't think so. But it's our choice to

talk about it.

Michael: *Yeah, I just don't talk about it much, but I tell*

my friends that my parents are divorced or separated. I

tell them that but I keep my mouth closed if they try to

talk me into sharing some of my secrets. I just think

that's okay because once they find out my mom is lesbian,

they'll tease me about it. Cause when they found out that

my friend is Bangladeshi they started teasing her. And when I found out that mom was lesbian I thought the same thing would happen to me.

Sydney: *And because there's so much talk about, like kids in our class, in the school, they'd never think that one of the kids had a lesbian mom or gay father, so they just talk about it like they don't really know anything about it.*

Thirteen year old **Annie** *decided that she would not be telling any more of her friends because she told her best friend when she first moved to the city but she didn't believe her.* **Sherry** *is also reluctant to tell people:* *It's very hard to decide who to tell. You have to really trust them and their understanding. You have to know them, befriend them for a long time. You have to trust them as to things that are important to you already, they haven't told anyone.*

The world is a great deal easier to live in without an enormous secret looming over the family as many of the participants confirmed. The process of coming out and the degree to which the family is out is a decision that each mother, and consequently each family deals with. Darlene was one of the mothers who had the most to deal with in terms of rejection from her family. She was met with a great deal of overt hostility, threats and name-calling from her ex-husband. At least one of her children, Rick, has embraced his father's intolerance for gay men. With these

kind of factors to deal with, it is all the more significant
when **Darlene** said: *It's just that the more out I am the
less problems we seem to have. Because there's more room to
move. You don't have to figure out a way to manoeuvre, this
is just the way it is. There's personal power in it. The
only thing I ever ask Sherry (my daughter) is please, don't
ever, ever deny who I am.*

I decided very early on that I needed to be out, **Merle**
said. *It was a question of me being out so that my kids
could hear me explaining very clearly who their family was
and so that they could hear the words I used and understand
that I was proud of who I am, who we are. It's exhausting
to come out. I did it all the time, it's always there,
whatever decisions I made regarding everything from where
I'd work to where we'd live to where the kids would go to
school. And being out is the only way we (lesbian moms) can
prepare our kids with this particular family secret. It's
not like other secrets, like incest, addictions, abuse...the
"common" family secrets. But it is a secret nonetheless and
we have to strike this balance between giving our kids the
impression that we aren't ashamed of and are in fact proud
of who we are and who we love, while letting them know the
rest of the world can be hostile toward that. So there's
this strange balancing act that we need to do with our kids
in order to prepare them to meet that in the world. And I
think the only way that we can do that adequately is by*

giving them a political message...I don't know if this is true for all lesbian families, but for me, one of the things that has had an impact on the way I raised my kids was my lesbianism. We had a concrete, live-in example that we were able to draw on and use to illustrate political connections. I am a feminist and I raised them to be anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-homophobic. They were raised within a particular community and I think their lives were incredibly enriched by being part of that community. Of course, there were problems with that community as well, but I think they learned a great deal and some of the values that they picked up growing up in a woman-centred family and within a woman-centred community have served them well and will continue to serve them well. They both know who they are, what they want, and are very clear that no-one is going to tell them otherwise.

Merle identifies that the woman-centred community she refers to is the local lesbian feminist community. In the course of raising her children, her family of origin was not really involved, she said. While they weren't overtly homophobic, they were fairly distant and had never been a great source of support for her and her children. She decided when her children were pre-schoolers that she would need to look elsewhere for emotional support, kind of build a family. And that is, she said, what the women's community provided for her: a chosen family.

4.4 Coping: Chosen Families

> Lesbians and gay men challenge "family
> values" rhetoric by expanding the definition of
> family - emphasizing relational aspects like love
> and commitment over any particular family
> structure. We challenge the myth that places
> lesbians and gay men on the side opposing children
> and families. And in reclaiming our relations to
> family life, we assert our humanity in the face of
> dehumanizing forces (Laura Benkov, 1994: 07).

Family is a powerful word. For some, it evokes images
of warmth and nurturance, eliciting feelings of security and
confidence in belonging. For others it means just the
opposite - hostility, rejection and insecurity. Whatever
our childhood experiences, the people with whom we spend the
first several years of our lives are indelibly a part of us.
We have learned to either trust or be wary, praise or
criticize, love or loathe ourselves. Social Work teaches us
that one of the primary needs of human beings is social
affiliation or the need to belong. The most enduring and
universal unit of social affiliation is the family. Most of
us assume that the family will continue to be a source of
strength and belonging throughout our lives as that is what
we are all taught to expect. When the family in which we
have been raised, however, becomes a hostile atmosphere, a
natural response for many is to seek out a group which will
be welcoming and accepting. This is the case for a great
many gay and lesbian people whose family of origin has
proven to be less than accepting.

It became clear in the course of conducting this research that one of the areas that was significant in terms of how the family dealt with homophobia was the degree to which the mother had strong, positive social supports. In all cases where a positive support network was present, the entire family identified this, independent of each other. It seemed as though the mother's network allowed children "mirrors" - the identification that they were not alone with this particular family issue. For some of the families, the mother made a conscious decision to live in a geographic community that was identified as lesbian-friendly, or richly heterogeneous in terms of class, race, culture and ethnic origin, and family form.

Merle, for example, said that *when her kids were young, they lived primarily in a woman-only community. We lived, she said, in inner-city communities in large cities with a lot of feminist women around. I chose that lifestyle and those areas intentionally, in a sense, protecting my kids and letting them know there were other lesbians around. I tried to expose them to as broad a range of people as I could and when they would complain that we weren't like anyone else, I would challenge them as to what their friends' families looked like. Going through that exercise what they would find out was that very few of their friends had a family that looked same as "everybody elses." The biggest similarity was that they were all so different -*

some lived with grandparents, some had divorced parents and lived between two houses, some had several generations living in the same house, some even lived communally. The nuclear family on T.V. wasn't necessarily the way of reality.

In a similar fashion, **Lorna** *and her family made a clear decision to move from the country to an area of Winnipeg that is known to have a gay and lesbian population when she came out. We kind of isolated ourselves from our family, she said, and we knew there was some gay and lesbian community in Wolseley[11] and we came to this area for that reason.* **Andrea**, as well, *considers that she and her daughter are lucky to be living in this area (Wolseley) because she thinks there are quite a few lesbian moms, and at least a better awareness.*

For other mothers, as well, geographic community was a seriously discussed subject. **Darlene** said that *she and her daughter talked about moving to the Wolseley area. I told her that part of it would be okay because there'd be more gay people and that she might feel better about our family. She (her daughter) wasn't too thrilled with the idea and then we started looking at houses and decided that we preferred newer houses and we also decided that it was just*

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[11]   It is commonly known within the lesbian and gay communities in Winnipeg that the Wolseley area is not only lesbian-friendly, but at least one of the local elementary schools is very supportive of lesbian families.

about time that other neighbourhoods got integrated with gay
people. If we don't go in there and live like normal people
and act like normal people with normal lives and normal
children and PTA and the whole fucking thing, then we're not
going to get anywhere. So we'll be staying in a more
suburban community.

As I was looking at the emerging issues, I remembered a
recent trip I had taken. I have been very out from the
minute I recognized and was able to put words to my evolving
lesbian sexuality. It was a choice I made to not hide, not
apologize, not live in fear. For many years I maintained
that I was very open, very out, and relatively unaffected by
homophobia. And then I went to San Francisco and Berkeley,
California to visit friends. After being in the city - both
San Francisco, and Berkeley - for only a few days, I began
feeling different - lighter, freer, stronger, more open,
happier. I was alone a great deal, in a large American city
that I did not know, having very recently broken up with my
partner (one of the reasons for the trip) and yet I felt
stronger and more whole than I had ever remembered feeling.
As I was walking down the street in Berkeley one morning,
going to a local bakery for breakfast, I stopped suddenly,
aware of what was different. I saw two women coming toward
me holding hands and laughing and talking with each other.
Sitting at a sidewalk table were two other women having
their morning coffee, sitting close enough and talking with

the intensity that clearly identifies these two as lovers, newly discovered to each other. I walked in to the bakery and eavesdropped on a conversation between two women and one of the owners of the bakery who were discussing a friend of theirs who recently broke up with her lover and whether they were going to the Clean and Sober dance that night. I remembered the day before, when I was walking with friends in the Castro area of San Francisco and seeing so many lesbians and gay men going about their public lives openly: no closets here! *It felt so incredibly good to be home.* There were people like me on the sidewalk, in the stores, visible. The local free newspapers were all reflective of a lesbian and gay community. I had lived most of my life to that point only seeing my people in dark smoky bars, locked away as though engaging in some kind of subversive, illegal activity. I'd lived most of my adult life as an outlaw.

The memory of this experience, long forgotten, came back to me as I was thinking about these interviews and what the women were saying was important in their lives. I reflected on that time that impressed me so with the importance of community and belonging. Until then, I accepted the outlaw label to a large degree, not aware on a conscious level that that is what I was doing. I had assumed I was relatively unencumbered by the restraints of social homophobia until I thought about all the subtle ways in which I modify my behaviour, the ways in which I accepted

the cliches and lies: for example, I would pull my hand away from my partner's when we were in public because "my private life is nobody's business." My guard remained up all the time, aware of potential sources of hostility. When my guard went down, it was only when I was in the presence of my circle of friends who were my chosen family.

Chosen family is key, **Kerry** thinks, *to survival for herself and her family. While she is close to her parents and her sister, she said: I really consider the lesbian community and my close lesbian friends are really like the family to me. They're very involved with AJ; there's just a hell of a lot of aunts, so to speak.* Similarly, Karin and her son, Sam, identify the lesbian community as their family.

Fourteen year old **Sam** *maintains close ties with some of Karin's old girlfriends, visiting them out of town and sometimes spending a week or two at a time with them.* For her part, **Karin** has *felt distant from her biological family: ...both my parents have pretty well written me off. There's only one sister that I feel close to and can share things with. Beyond that, at different times we've had a close circle of people we were very close to, mostly lesbian friends, one heterosexual couple, but it's a different kind of family. People come and go a lot more and still live their own lives and so most of them have moved away. Most of the time they stay supportive although it fades over time*

as they move on, which is different from biological family where people you don't know you can call up and stay with just because of that blood tie. So there's a bit of sadness to that for me, but it is a more transient kind of family. Most of my focus is within the lesbian community so even when I don't feel close ties with particular people, I still get it from that community just by the commonality of our lives.

The lesbian community is important to **Lorna** and her family as well: *I have straight friends who make up the fewest numbers of my friends and with whom I spend the least amount of my times but yeah, I have a close supportive simply wonderful bunch of lesbian women who form the community that I mostly live and play in. And to some degree work in. I have that other advantage of working in a place that is progressive and left of centre and that it's possible to be out which is a huge privilege. And the kids are part of that because they socialize in those circles as well as others...and play with children and are in contact with older kids and children younger than themselves who are children of lesbian moms so they don't feel isolated in their experience, they know lots of other kids like them.* Lorna's children confirmed the importance of this community in their lives when **Sydney** said *she knew the horrible things people said about homosexuals just wasn't true because they knew so many wonderful gay and lesbian people.*

In general, the families who identified a strong supportive network, whether that was from the lesbian community or from other sources such as long time friends, extended family, or even ex-lovers, coped much better with external homophobia than did those that were more isolated. The matrix[12] for each family shows that of the thirteen families interviewed, nine who indicated a strong support network also show a low rate of both internal homophobia and a high rate of acceptance by the child/ren of the mother's lesbianism. Further research would be necessary to determine direct correlates and/or cause and effect between healthy social support networks and ability to deal with a family situation that is considered anathema by many.

In staying with the findings on community, it must be noted that there was a marked duality for many of the mothers in that they felt the same community that was so important to their identity and survival as a lesbian was terribly lacking in support for their family, or their status as a mother. Loralee MacPike, author of one of the recent books on gay parenting that deals primarily with parents coming out to their children says about the gay and lesbian community and parents:

> While there is some acceptance of the decision to have and raise children, there is little real support for gay and lesbian families who wish to integrate into our own little community. If

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[12]   Tables 2-14, Chapter 5.

anything stifles the coming out process and
discourages honesty, it is the lack of acceptance
of gay and lesbian families within this formerly
supportive networks (1989: 237-238).

MacPike goes on to describe the ways in which she perceives

the community to be unsupportive: there is a lack of child

care arranged for social and political events; fear of

existing families to make themselves visible fosters the

illusion that these families don't exist; general feeling of

lack of active acceptance (1989). This perception was

reinforced by the mothers in the study, and stated the

strongest by those who were not involved in a committed

relationship and who identified themselves primarily as

single parents. **Karin** was particularly adamant about this

lack of support. While she drew on the lesbian community

for her support as a lesbian woman, she was particularly

clear in her frustration with this same community for not

accepting her child:

There is a sense of very little support from the lesbian

community as a mother. Also from the feminist community.

Even more so from the lesbian community. Actually there are

times when I have a great resentment towards some of my

closest friends because they have no desire to have

children, it's not part of their reality, they've never

cared for children in any way and they don't get it when

they want to be going out all the time and I'm like I can't

go out...I need to spend a certain amount of time with Sam

also that I just don't have money at my disposal or that I
can't just get up and go get any kind of job or that I can't
go anywhere on the spur of the moment...they're not very
supportive... Oh, and this is a classic. It drives me nuts.
These women will talk for hours about their dogs and cats,
cute little anecdotes, all about their illnesses, all about
their day to day care, fur ballsremedies, all that, and I
bring up Sam and it's dead silence and nobody wants to hear
it. And I'm so affronted. And yes I understand how people
really value their pets and animals' lives should be not on
a lower level but if I had a choice between the quality of
care of a child and an animal, I'd choose the child. Any
day. And I find it offensive that they value their pets and
they don't value my parenting and my child. And then, oh
lots of stuff within the lesbian community. Stuff like
you're not allowed to bring your children to the bar (a
private social club where children are legally
allowed)...when the women's bar first opened up I had a
choice. I could afford to go to the bar or I could afford
babysitting and I couldn't afford both and there were times
when I took Sam to the bar and women took great offence and
one 'supposed' friend argued that it wasn't the place for
children it was bad for children to be there. And she
thought it would be a bad influence on children... I don't
know if it's that kids aren't a part of most of our lives or

what...some of these women even work with kids. Maybe
they've just divided their lives.

Merle, as well, echoed many of Karin's feelings. She,
however, was quite clear that she tied homophobia to this
reaction as well. *She feels that the reason the lesbian*
community is so hostile towards children has to do with
homophobia and the perception that the nature of lesbian
relationships is too pathological to bring children into. I
think that's part of it, she said. And I had a sense for a
long time of wanting to turn my back on the
community...being really tired of the struggles we had to go
through. On the one hand I used to understand
intellectually why someone may not want to be involved with
someone who had kids, on the other getting really tired of
all the lip service that was paid to supporting lesbian
mothers. And also understanding that we are women...we live
in a world where our income is considerably less. Always.
We have to work really, really hard for everything we get
and we don't ever have even the option of having someone -
as in a husband - support us.

Jude, Lorna, Andrea, Kerry and Corinne also had similar
opinions on the lack of support from the lesbian community.
All of these women, when asked if they felt they that their
lives were the same or different from other mothers,
responded that they felt they had a lot in common with other
single mothers. **Andrea** said *she has a lot in common with*

other single mothers...more than with other lesbians who have no kids. I find myself isolated from both groups most of the time, she said. Cause it seems like in "the community" that there's just different issues. I mean, when you have a child and not a whole lot of money, you end up being isolated from people who don't have children. You have different priorities...of the few women in the community I'm in touch with, it's "Come on down to the bar on Saturday, Andrea," and well, I can't. I have to work. Or a bunch of us are getting together for coffee at such and such's house and I can't cause I don't have a sitter. So I do think I have more in common with other single moms...but, then again, most of them, the ones that I know, anyhow, are mostly hoping that a knight on a white horse is going to come into their life and take them away from all this; they have dreams of finding a rich husband.

In order to attempt to bridge the gap between their motherhood and their lesbianism, some of the mothers helped form a Lesbian Mother's Support Group. Lesbian Mother's Support Group (LSMG) has been around in one form or another in Winnipeg since the early 1980's. It was originally started by a group of women with children in order to meet and discuss common issues and concerns regarding their children. A secondary goal was been to organize and plan family activities to allow their children to meet each other and therefore build their own resources. At the time of the

interviews, the group was floundering, with few regular members. They had not met in some time. LMSG occasionally dies out for awhile and then gets resurrected, usually when some new leadership emerges. There is no formal membership; it operates on a drop-in basis, meeting on a rotating basis in the homes of the members. Membership numbers fluctuate greatly and no-one is sure how many belong on a regular basis. For the mothers who have been recently involved, they talked about the importance of this group over time, particularly in helping their children find and associate with other children of lesbian mothers.

Karin said, *regarding the Lesbian Mom's group: It's also interesting when we have the lesbian mother's group...like, I expected a lot of the women I knew who had kids those in the political group, that they would come because of the political correctness of support systems and all that, but it was women from all over the city, from the suburbs and some women who were just coming out and who wanted a social vehicle...but, it's funny cause I would then go to the bar and I would see these women there and they never took their kids, even to a dance where kids were welcome, I never saw them take their kids.*

Darlene's family might have been one that Karin was referring to when she talked about suburban moms not bringing their children to events where children were welcome. Darlene's family had little involvement in the

lesbian community and showed relatively high levels of homophobia within the family. Her 15 year old daughter, **Sherry,** however, *discovered that the mother of one of her closest friends was lesbian as well. This helped a lot, she said, in dealing with her mom.*

Finally, even the children recognized the duality involved in having lesbian mothers because they experience it as well. **Sonja** *felt that it was important for lesbian moms to be particularly aware of this. She said that they (lesbian moms) should be careful, as her mother did, to explain things to their kids and not just ignore their feelings. Kids who grow up with a lesbian mom are going to be more confused than those who grow up in a heterosexual house. I know a couple of kids, one girl in particular, who wasn't allowed to be herself. Her mother wanted her to be something she wasn't...wanted to fit her into the gay lifestyle. That's wrong, cause if the kid's going to be gay, she's going to be gay. It was like that mom put being gay before she put being a mom. Fortunately my mom never did that but I know other kids of gays whose parents did and it was really hard on them, it wasn't fair.*

The sentiment expressed by Sonja above was clear from the literature as well. In <u>Different Mothers</u>, Louise Rifkin includes several stories from children of all ages who had been raised by lesbian moms. One young man, now age 27, comments on how separated he was from his mother's

community: "The lesbians who did not have children were the ones who screwed everything up. There was a stigma among them about having kids...My mother was busy being a lesbian when she could have been a parent" (1990: 115, 117).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In answer to the question "How do you conclude a qualitative study?, Harry Wolcott (1990) answers "You don't." The findings from this research have opened doors and generated many more questions than the one I began with. I was profoundly changed by the process of conducting this research. I learned a great deal, both about myself, and about other lesbian families. Some of what I learned made me extremely uncomfortable. Mostly, I was touched by the openness and willingness of these families to let me into their homes and ask them some very personal questions. I was also moved by the thirst that the families had for knowledge about how others experienced some of the difficult issues they did.

The purpose of this research was to discover the degree to which homophobia had an impact on the lesbian family. A small sample of thirteen families was interviewed. These families were selected from a much larger population in Winnipeg, with every attempt made to interview families based on their willingness to participate in the research, and their diversity. The process of gathering the information was honourable to both the principles of qualitative, feminist-based methodology and to the

participants who gave their time to this study. The
following two sections will present a summary of the overall
findings from the focus group, taped interviews, and follow-
up conversations.

In order to summarize the data, it is helpful to review
the matrix for each family. This was a useful tool for
organizing the enormous amount of data that emerged from the
interviews. As patterns emerged that were consistent
throughout - both within and between families, mothers, and
children, these variables were added to the matrix. The
final list of variables included:

Internalized Homophobia of mother

Internalized Homophobia of child

Homophobia in immediate family/network

Strong Support System - lesbian community

Strong Support System - other

Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)

Acceptance level of child (as reported by mother)

Degree of "out" to the world

Early disclosure to child/ren

In attempting to operationalize the variables I used an
ordinal scale with three properties: low, medium, and high.
The differentiation between variables was based on content
of the interviews. In most cases, it was easy to make a
determination based on specific responses. For example, in
looking at the level of internalized homophobia, one mother

who referred to coming out as "coming home" was marked Low
and another who had a difficult time bringing herself to say
the word lesbian was marked High. If the children were
openly able to discuss gay and lesbian issues, and if they
told me they were comfortable with it, they were entered as
Low. Similar decisions were made regarding the other
variables. If a mother discussed belonging to a supportive
lesbian community, she was entered as High; Medium if she
described affiliating with the lesbian community but not
feeling much support. Low if she did not affiliate with a
lesbian community, or if she felt no support from it. The
same criteria were used in assessing the support of another
community.

The variable "early disclosure to child/ren" was given
High if the mother told her children very soon upon coming
out and Low if she did not tell until much later. This
question was answered clearly by each participant.

Each family is represented on its own matrix. These
matrices are included on the next several pages and are
followed by a brief comparative analysis of the data. This
is followed by a discussion of the implications of the study
for lesbian families and for social work.

TABLE 2

MATRIX FOR KERRY & FAMILY

MOTHER: KERRY
CHILDREN: A.J., age 6, not interviewed (too young)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network			X
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)		NA	
Acceptance level of child (as reported by mother)	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 3

MATRIX FOR MERLE & FAMILY

MOTHER: MERLE
CHILDREN: 2a. SONJA, age 21, interviewed
            2b. NICHOLE, age 22, interviewed

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child (a)			X
(b)			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network			X
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child (a))	X		
(as reported by child (b))	X		
Acceptance level of child (a)(as reported by mother)	X		
child (b) as reported by mother	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 4

MATRIX FOR JUDE & FAMILY

MOTHER: JUDE
CHILDREN: 3a. SHANNON, age 16, interviewed
3b. LANA, age 14, not interviewed (refused)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network			X
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by child)	X		
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by mother)		X	
child b (as reported by mother)		X	
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 5

MATRIX FOR ANDREA & FAMILY

MOTHER: ANDREA
CHILDREN: 4a. REGAN, age 7, interviewed

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network			X
Strong Support System - lesbian community		X	
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by mother)	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 6

MATRIX FOR LORNA & FAMILY

MOTHER: LORNA
CHILDREN: 4a.   SYDNEY, age 10, interviewed
                     4b.   MICHAEL, age 7, interviewed
                     4c.   JON, age 4, interviewed

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child (a)			X
child (b)			X
child (c)			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network			X
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (a)(as reported by child)	X		
child (b)	X		
child (c)	X		
Acceptance level of child (a) (as reported by mother)	X		
child (b)	X		
child (c)	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 7

MATRIX FOR MAGGIE & FAMILY

MOTHER: MAGGIE
CHILDREN: 6a.   MARLY, age 11, interviewed
                     6b.   CHRISTOPHER, age 5, not interviewed (too young)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network		X	
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)	X		
Acceptance level of child (a) (as reported by mother)	X		
Acceptance level of child (b) (as reported by mother)	X		
Degree of "out" to the world		X	
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 8

MATRIX FOR EVE & FAMILY

MOTHER: EVE
CHILDREN: 7a.   ADRIAN, age 18, interviewed
            7b.   PAULA, age 16, not interviewed (unavailable)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network		X	
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)			X
Acceptance level of child (a) (as reported by mother)	X		
Acceptance level of child (b) (as reported by mother)	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 9

MATRIX FOR KARIN & FAMILY

MOTHER: KARIN
CHILDREN: 8a.   SAM, age 14, interviewed

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child			X
Homophobia in immediate family/network	X		
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other			X
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by mother)	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

TABLE 10

MATRIX FOR SUZANNE & FAMILY

MOTHER: SUZANNE
CHILDREN: 9a.   ANNIE, age 13, interviewed
            9b.   JAMIE, age 9, interviewed

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother	X		
Internalized Homophobia of child	X		
Homophobia in immediate family/network	X		
Strong Support System - lesbian community			X
Strong Support System - other		X	
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by child)			X
child b			X
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by mother)		X	
child b		X	
Degree of "out" to the world		X	
Early disclosure to child/ren			X

TABLE 11

MATRIX FOR CARLA & FAMILY

MOTHER: CARLA
CHILDREN: 10a.   ZOE, age 16, interviewed.
            10b.   TOM, age 18, not interviewed (not asked)
            10c.   JOEY, age 21, not interviewed (not asked)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother	X		
Internalized Homophobia of child	X		
Homophobia in immediate family/network	X		
Strong Support System - lesbian community			X
Strong Support System - other			X
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)			X
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by mother)		X	
child b (as reported by mother)		X	
child c (as reported by mother)			X
Degree of "out" to the world			X
Early disclosure to child/ren			X

TABLE 12

MATRIX FOR CORINNE & FAMILY

MOTHER: CORINNE
CHILDREN: 11a.   CRIS, age 23, interviewed
            11b.   SEAN, age 19, not interviewed (unavailable)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother		X	
Internalized Homophobia of child		X	
Homophobia in immediate family/network	X		
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)		X	
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by mother)		X	
child b		X	
Degree of "out" to the world			X
Early disclosure to child/ren		X	

TABLE 13

MATRIX FOR DARLENE & FAMILY

MOTHER: DARLENE
CHILDREN: 12a.   RICK, age 19, interviewed
            12b.   SHERRY, age 16, interviewed
            12c.   GORDON, age 24, not interviewed (out of town)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother		X	
Internalized Homophobia of child a	X		
child b		X	
Homophobia in immediate family/network	X		
Strong Support System - lesbian community		X	
Strong Support System - other		X	
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by child)			X
child b		X	
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by mother)		X	
child b		X	
child c			X
Degree of "out" to the world		X	
Early disclosure to child/ren		X	

TABLE 14

MATRIX FOR RHONDA & FAMILY

MOTHER: RHONDA
CHILDREN: 13a.   DANNY, age 16, interviewed
             13b.   PATTI, age 19, not interviewed (out of town)

	HIGH	MED	LOW
Internalized Homophobia of mother			X
Internalized Homophobia of child		X	
Homophobia in immediate family/network		X	
Strong Support System - lesbian community	X		
Strong Support System - other	X		
Acceptance level of child (as reported by child)		X	
Acceptance level of child a (as reported by mother)		X	
child b	X		
Degree of "out" to the world	X		
Early disclosure to child/ren	X		

As we examine the matrices above, we are able to clearly distinguish some patterns. There appear to be two distinct kinds of families. Nine families have several commonalities: low homophobia in mother, child and family network; strong support system; high degree of openness regarding mother's lesbianism; and high acceptance levels of the children. The remaining families showed distinct differences from these first nine families.

For example, Table 6 (Lorna's family) shows that the levels of internalized homophobia in the entire family system are low. At the same time, there is a strong support system, high acceptance level, Lorna is very out and she disclosed early to the children. In contrast, Table 11,

Carla's family, shows a pattern that is almost reversed. The level of homophobia in the family system is very high. There is little support from any source, low acceptance levels throughout the family, Carla is not out to the world, and she did not disclose for several years to her children.

The two family systems that seem to dominate this study give us the basis upon which we can begin formulating some theories regarding the healthy functioning of the lesbian family. For example, how closely tied is social support to the idea of strong self-identity? While we see that the families in which the mother disclosed to the children early, the children show lower levels of homophobia, is this the result of anger over what is percieved as deception, or the absorption of the mother's internal homophobia? This same question can be asked regarding acceptance level of the children. These and other questions are raised in the final section of this chapter, as I discuss future research.

5.1 Summary of Mothers

Many families were able to point to specific instances of overt homophobic violence, name-calling, and rejection. Others denied any real impact or experience with homophobia. Each and every family did a routine balancing act based on social homophobia that affected them profoundly, whether or not they were conscious of it. Most of the thirteen families interviewed were quite aware of the forces of homophobia, others less so.

Carla, Suzanne and Darlene were the three mothers in the study who had the most difficulty dealing with their sexuality, finding the language, right time or overcoming the fear required to be out to their kids. As we have seen, some of the differences showed up on the matrix.

Other factors that were important for the women were affiliation with a supportive community, whether or not it was the lesbian community. This meant a community in which she was free to be herself as a lesbian woman. Some found this within their families, many did not. Some were able to maintain equilibrium through working in a supportive, lesbian positive work environment. Others found coming out at work to be a source of anxiety as they were met with homophobic comments.

A significant outcome showed up in the lack of perceived support within the lesbian community for themselves as mothers. Many felt that they were personally

suspect for having given birth and that their children were dismissed and not acknowledged. Economics was an issue for most of the mothers as many of them were single parents.

One of the questions asked of the mothers had to do with whether they felt the same or different from other mothers. The overwhelming response was that they felt the same as other single mothers but also different because they had the multi-layered aspects of lesbianism to deal with. This supports other research that also shows many similarities between the experiences of lesbian mothers and single mothers in general (Mildred Pagelow, 1980).

For most participants, there was strong agreement between the mothers responses and the children's. The families where this differed were also the families who had the greatest number of problems resulting from homophobia. One possible explanation for this might be connected to general patterns of communication within the households, particularly concerning the subject matter of mom's lesbianism. For example, one mother stated that her perception of her children was that they were relatively free of homophobia and accepting. Her son, however, was frighteningly homophobic, making reference to wanting to gay bash.

Finally, as the mother was more out to the world - at work or school, with family, etc., the whole family seemed to cope better with the knowledge of her lesbianism. Those

who were more closeted were also more vulnerable to external homophobic forces, another finding supported by the literature (Eileen Levy, 1989).

To summarize, then, this study makes clear several common features of lesbian mothers, all of which are corroborated by the literature. First of all, lesbian mothers have a higher than average chance of being poor since "lesbian mothers share with their heterosexual counterparts the lower standard of living for all female heads of households" (Kirkpatrick, 1987: 204). Second, there is a continuing possibility for many of the loss of custody their children, either through being deemed unfit to parent, or to their children's father (Arnup, 1995; Martin, 1993; Pollack & Vaughn, 1987; Stone, 1990). Decisions regarding coming out, to what degree, and to whom, must be assessed on an ongoing basis as it can potentially involve violence, the loss of a job or housing, rejection and ridicule, being shunned and isolated.

The mothers need to find ways to educate their children about homophobia in order to keep them safe and help them understand what their family experiences. While they need the haven of an accepting community, they find little support within the lesbian community, which is often ambivalent towards children (particularly male children). Finally, lesbian mothers all seek to protect their children

from the stressors involved in them having to deal with their mother's lesbianism.

The areas in which the mothers differ had to do with the choices they made regarding some of their commonalities. For example, when and how to inform (or not inform) the children about their sexual preference; if, when and how to come out to family, at work, in the neighbourhood, etc. These decisions were often influenced by whether the mother viewed lesbianism from within an illness or oppression framework. She must make choices regarding how she will deal with the daily stressors involved in being lesbian: will she separate from or embrace the lesbian community?

Mothers are able to help alleviate the stress for their children by collaborating with them on developing survival strategies. For example, in teaching them about this particular family secret, it is also important to arm them with the permission to keep it a secret in order to avoid unwanted or potentially dangerous hassles and confrontations. The families who seemed to manage best were those in which the mother had empathy with her children and was able to accept their children's feelings. They were able to talk through most of the issues, and the mothers were able to help the children prepare to deal with world. These families reported clear boundaries (sensitivity regarding books, pictures, overt displays of affection) and

the children did not feel victimized by their mother's sexuality.

Eda LeShan says, in the introduction to Joe Gantz' study on gay families:

> Prejudice and isolation hurt families. Lack of self-acceptance created by social attitudes hurts families. But as for the internal strains of family living, the very same challenges and problems can occur in any home (1983: xiii).

5.2 Summary of Children

In spite of a variety of differences in terms of age, gender, age when mother came out, living arrangements, etc., there were a number of similarities and enough differences to begin to make some assumptions about outcomes of this study. First, children who inform their friends about their mother's lesbianism face the possibility of rejection or ridicule by friends, rejection by friend's parents, and/or some pressure to keep this family secret.

In the process of synthesizing the information about their mother's sexuality, all of the children interviewed had some strong opinions about its impact on them. In coming out to their children and encouraging open discussion about their lesbianism, the mothers made themselves extremely vulnerable to their children. *The discussion is difficult,* said **Corinne,** *because the lesbian issue always becomes about sex; there is shame involved because it has to do with rubbing body parts together. And the bottom line is that no kids like to think about their parents having sex.* Further, it is true that childhood is a difficult time. One of the children in Rafkin's study states; "Growing up is a hard enough thing to do, and I sometimes resented my mother for making it harder. I was a normal, insecure, developing pre-teen: (1990: 102).

There is also the added pressure, for most children with lesbian mothers of having to work out their sexuality

in what is a "charged environment." Louise Rafkin states of
her study of children of lesbian mothers:

> Sexuality is an issue that seems to be given more
> airplay in lesbian families. Most of the kids in
> the book who are past puberty feel that their
> options and understanding of their own sexuality
> have been greatly helped by open communication
> with their mothers and/or mothers' friends (1990:
> 15).

Questions such as is sexual preference inherited or learned
are important to young people, since they have probably had
to deal with negative attitudes from others regarding their
mother's sexuality. Many of the children in this study,
particularly the older ones, acknowledged that the awareness
of their mother's lesbianism forced them to examine their
own sexuality. The ease with which these young people
handled this scrutiny was proportionate with the level of
internal homophobia they displayed and with the degree to
which their family was out to the world. This did not
necessarily mean that they were open to the possibility of
being gay; rather, it meant a willingness to honestly
examine their sexuality, and a fearless examination of other
tough issues. **Nichole**, for example, *freely admits Yeah,
I've been afraid of being gay. Growing up I had a sexual
attraction - well not a sexual attraction - I had a close
female friend and we kissed and I thought 'Oh my god! I'm
gay."* I went into a crisis and I think I acted out sexually
with men to prove I wasn't. And then one time in a
counselling session, I discovered I am straight, but it's

okay to think that another woman is beautiful: I can still think 'Hey, she's attractive.' And it doesn't need to mean anything. For years I thought that if I found another woman attractive that meant I was gay. And it panicked me because I didn't want to be gay: I wanted to have a "normal" family. I wanted to be married, I wanted to have a husband and kids and I wanted the house and wedding and honeymoon.

Nichole's sister, **Sonja,** thinks that her mom's sexuality has affected her in may ways: It's made me a very open-minded person. It's made me aware of just the hatred in society towards gay people. I think it's made me a better person. Regarding my own sexuality, it confused me for awhile. I was wondering if I was going to be gay or is this hereditary. It's definitely opened my mind. At first it scared me because I didn't know. I think because my mom's gay I thought about it more than any other person would. I still think about it sometimes when I see gay people in movies and stuff like that. I just don't know. Maybe I'll be gay in ten years. I don't know...The early fear was - I would have to make a lot of decisions. It's so much easier being straight in our society. Being gay is a difficult thing and that scared me cause I wanted 'normality' and I was afraid that that wasn't how my life was.

18 year old **Adrian** used an interesting metaphor to talk about the conclusions he had drawn in the process of

thinking about his sexuality: *I wonder about that still. I often ask myself as to whether I saw my own sexuality as influenced by the fact that society doesn't look on it favourably. I have this theory that sexuality works like a car heater (indicator in some newer cars) - there's a really long triangle of blue and a really long triangle of red and one side is all blue and one side is all red and the majority of people are in the middle and have bisexual tendencies and that most of the people are there and there's very few people who are all straight or all gay and the rest of us just make decisions around that. I've never really found myself strongly attracted to a male but it's not that it couldn't happen...it's not something that I've felt and pushed away. And right now I'm very much in love with my girlfriend. It's my first relationship and it's healthy and I'm happy so I guess I hope it stays that way...I guess my mom's sexuality has affected the way that I look at my sexuality but it hasn't affected me in any way like fear that because my mother's gay I'm going to be gay.*

Sam, age 14, said *I think everyone questions their own sexuality at one point but I think that because Karin (his mother) is a lesbian that I might be more likely to be gay because I'm not afraid of it like other people might be. So I think basically, it would be more that whatever I choose would be more my own choice than society's choice.*

As stated earlier, the children's response to questions about the impact of their mother's lesbianism on their own sexuality was tied to the other factors such as level of homophobia, early coming out and the degree to which the family is out. In those families where there was a higher level of discomfort regarding the issues, the children were not as open or introspective as those we have already heard from. **Sherry**, for example, when asked about whether her mother's lesbianism has influenced her sexuality, responded with a firm and fast *"No!"* *She then went on to say that she did talk about it with a friend who also has a gay mom and they were subsequently reassured by their mothers that it was not catchy.* **Zoe,** as well, responded with *No! I like guys. I always will. I think people who are lesbians would know, would just know like that if they were.* The matrix for each of these families shows a greater degree of homophobia within the family, coupled with a low level of community and family support.

For the majority of the children who were interviewed, a commonly recurring term was "normal." Regardless of other factors regarding their age, gender, or anything else, above all it was important that they be perceived as normal. What was especially interesting in terms of this study was the fact that for many of the young respondents, the concept of normal (or not normal) was <u>not</u> connected to their mother's lesbianism, particularly if she had disclosed to them early.

For many children, normal was the way their mom was. What was hardest for some of them to deal with was the not-normal of their parent's divorce or separation (and divorce, of course, is quite normal for a rising number of families.)

At around the age of ten or eleven, many of the children began letting their mothers know that they needed to make some accommodations such as putting books with lesbian titles away and keeping their bedroom doors closed to avoid friends' questions. These accommodations were generally made easily in most families. In all, the level of openness and understanding of these children was sophisticated beyond their years. Most of the children had solid political analyses that included an indictment of racism, sexism, and certainly homophobia. The bottom line for all the children who were interviewed, even those who were angry with their mother for not telling them sooner, was that they dearly loved their mother, and displayed a great degree of protectiveness for them.

5.3   Recommendations for Social Work

> The social work profession has always defined its
> basic role as mediator and defender of the
> oppressed — the poor, the racially abused — and as
> protector against the exploitation of children,
> workers, and women. This ideal is nonexistent
> where gay people are concerned.
> (Goodman, 1980:   173)

It is most important for social workers to understand
the dynamics of homophobia and how it can affect individuals
and the family. In spite of the fact that we have made some
strides in accepting lesbian and gay people, the instances
of homophobic reactions in the field are many and perhaps
most damaging is the deafening silence regarding gay and
lesbian human rights.

Perhaps, if social work learns nothing else, it is
that the experience of coming out as a lesbian or gay man in
a hostile world is frightening, and can be terribly
isolating. Every measure should be taken to familiarize
social workers with resources that might be available to gay
or lesbian individuals, or to the children of gay and
lesbian parents.

Social workers need to assume the responsibility to
educate themselves and society about the nature of
homophobia and its impact on the lesbian family. They can
take responsibility for ensuring that the agencies that they
work in examine their attitudes, policies, and practices
regarding lesbians and gay men and work to challenge
homophobia when they encounter it. They can challenge their

unions to put same-sex benefits clauses into their contracts. Gay and lesbian social workers should come out to help get rid of negative stereotypes.

Schools of social work should revise their curriculum to acknowledge the existence of the variety of family forms, including the lesbian family. While education is not enough in and of itself, it is important that social workers and social work instructors begin to use a language that normalizes lesbian and gay parenting.

Since so many of the problems experienced by the lesbian family have to do with environmental issues - that is, external discrimination - social work should concern itself with changing the environmental conditions (Levy, 1989). This means working towards social change, of course, but it also means recognizing the importance of social support for the lesbian family. An application of the knowledge of social support is primary when considering intervention strategies with the lesbian family. Just as social support is so central to the individual lesbian mother in the development of a healthy identity as a lesbian woman, it is equally essential to optimal functioning as a mother.

In very practical terms, social workers can familiarize themselves with the supports available to lesbian families. They can refer mothers to groups such as the Lesbian Mothers Support Group. If no such group exists, they can help form

one. They can support such groups as Parents and Friends of
Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and if no group exists locally,
they can start one. They can help children of lesbians by
developing support circles for them. They can use the
library resources that are available to ensure that families
get books such as some of the recent parenting manuals
(Arnup, 1995; Benkov, 1994; Clunis & Green, 1995; Martin,
1993; Weston, 1991). Finally, as Joan Cummerton states:

> Although social workers try to eradicate
> homophobia or heterosexism in themselves, it is
> still easy to lapse back into it because it is
> constantly reinforced. The least they can do for
> a client is to make sure that they are not
> assuming that a client is heterosexual and to
> connect a gay client with gay professionals or
> peer advocates so that the client may experience
> pride in his or her identity, support for
> excessive stress, and validation that one has to
> be strong to be gay and have survived so long.
> (1980: 112)

5.4 Into the Future

As an exploratory study, this work has provided the
foundation from which to suggest further research. To date,
much of the research available on the lesbian family
concerns comparison studies with heterosexual families
(Pollack & Vaughn, 1987). Additional research must be
careful to focus on the lesbian family in its own right.
Further studies might begin to use some of the correlates
that surfaced through this work. One study that would be
helpful is a comprehensive look at social support networks

of the lesbian family that would tie the data to self-esteem. This may be useful to develop a typology of lesbian families that would show, as this one seems to, two clear family forms: there is the family with a mother who has a clear sense of self and a strong supportive community, and the mother with an unresolved identity and no supportive community. What other variations exist?

This study included the impact of the children's father on the lesbian family in a peripheral manner, although a significant amount of information was included in the interviews. Further research might look at how fathers deal with the news of the mother's lesbianism, and how the family is affected by his reaction.

A study of parenting styles in lesbian families may be informative. From this study, we can begin to speculate that the more open and democratic the family is, the easier it is for the children to deal with lesbianism and homophobia. How much of this is a function of parenting style and how much a function of external homophobia?

Finally, what have we learned? I was profoundly affected by the process of doing this research, and by the data I collected. It goes without saying that the families that I met were remarkable. Everyone was acutely aware of the potential impact of homophobia on their family. Everyone made the best decisions they could with the welfare of their family first and foremost. The one voice that

weaves its way throughout is that of the importance of
coming out. If we face the demon down, it can no longer
control us. Similarly,the more secrets we have, the more
power we give away. If I am able to give anything back to
the families who participated it is this: through the very
act of participating in this study you came out. Through
talking so openly about yourself and your family about such
hard issues, you shed some of the weight of homophobic fear.
Each step is a move towards freedom, a revolutionary act.

> And as we all live the truths that are ours to
> proclaim, we change - we change ourselves, change
> our children...change the world. The courage and
> action of the (children) and women who tell these
> stories is a step toward the liberation of us all
> (Loralee MacPike, 1989: 246).

Thank You!

APPENDIX A

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN INTERVIEW
AND
RELEASE INTERVIEW INFORMATION*

I agree to participate in an initial interview concerning the impact of homophobia on lesbian mothers and their children.

I will participate in the interview under the following conditions:

*   I will allow the interview to be tape recorded. I understand the interview is being taped so that nothing is missed and so my words are not changed or misunderstood. I further understand that I can turn off the recorder any time during the interview.

*   I understand that I can withdraw from the research project at any time.

*   I agree to allow Mallory Neuman to use the information from the interview in the research project, report, and publication. However, I understand that my confidentiality will be protected by disguising names and any other identifying information.

*   I understand that I have a right to recieve and review a draft copy of the thesis report. After reviewing and discussing the transcript with Mallory, I can suggest modifications for accuracy, clarity, or new information.

Signature_____

Date   _____

In addition, I give my consent for Mallory Neuman to interview my child or children listed below, with the understanding that the same conditions above apply, providing the child or children agree and give their informed consent.

Signature_____

May interview (names and ages of children):
1._____
2._____
3._____
4._____

* This consent form is adapted from Pat Maguire, 1987. <u>Doing Participatory Research: A Feminist Approach.</u> Amherst: The Centre for International Education.

Dear_____,

While we have talked previously about the project that
I am undertaking, this letter is intended as a formal
introduction to myself and my research.

I am a graduate student in the Faculty of Social Work,
University of Manitoba. The research I am conducting is to
become my Master's thesis. Very generally, I am interested
in what the impact of homophobia is on lesbian mothers and
their children.

Before I ask any others to risk sharing personal
information with me, I would like to tell you something
about myself. I am a lesbian mother of two adult children.
I was out as a lesbian from the time that my children were
very young and have raised them for the most part as a
single mother. I was an out lesbian with my children from
the beginning. We have had many discussions about the
impact of my sexual orientation on them as they were growing
up; we concluded that many of the difficulties we all
experienced came from social attitudes. The particular
attitude we isolated was homophobia. I have a variety of
questions that I'm interested in exploring around this
issue, questions which are based largely on my own
experiences. I want to find out what the experience of
other women has been.

My method of data collection is in keeping with my
philosophy on feminist-based research within the lesbian
community. This is guided by three ethical principles:
    1. It is essential to recognize and ensure the
    importance of confidentiality.

    2. It is important to be honest about who you (the
    researcher) are.

    3. It is important to get feedback and share the
    results with the women you are studying.

In asking you to participate in this research, I wish to
assure you that every effort will be made to protect your
confidentiality and anonymity. You are also entitled to
withdraw from the study at any time, and to refuse to share
any information you do not feel comfortable with.   I am the
only person who will have access to your names and
identifying characteristics.

The majority of you who recieve this letter will be
asked to allow me to interview you and your child/ren.

These interviews will be as in-depth as possible and length
of time needed will vary depending on what you have to share
with me and your family size. It will be best that we book
half a day in time. Some of you will be asked to
participate in a preliminary focus group which will serve as
a brainstorming session to help me develop the questions to
use in the interviews. I have decided on this method in an
attempt to recognize and credit the diversity of experience
within our community. As I stated above, I know what I want
to ask from my experience; I want to incorporate the
diversity of experience in this thesis. This will also
ensure that my work stay responsible to the community from
the beginning. Those who participate in the initial 'focus'
group may be asked to attend another group meeting half-way
through the interview process as well in order to maintain
ongoing contact and feedback. I am hoping to interview a
minimum of fifteen families (max. 18), with seven or eight
in the focus group.

     I will be following up this letter within the next few
weeks to set up interview times with you. From the response
I have received so far to my proposed research, I know I can
thank you in advance for your enthusiasism and willingness
to participate. I'm looking forward to meeting with you and
your family.

Sincerely

Mallory Neuman

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide
MOTHERS

I am interested in how homophobia impacts the lesbian
family. I'm trying to discover the different ways that
lesbian mothers and their children have confronted and
dealt with homophobia, both as individuals and as a
family unit. For example, one of the things I was
aware of as I was raising my children was that I had to
prepare them in a number of ways to "ward off"
potential negativity from teachers, friends, and
friends' parents. I came to see this as homophobia
that was socially imposed but that became internalized
as I began to prepare my children with our family
secret. They picked this up as they grew older and
began to let me know when we had to make further
adjustments in order for them to remain comfortable at
home.

I have asked you to sign the consent form. The
interview is being tape recorded. Again, I would like
to stress the confidential nature of this interview.
If at any time you are uncomfortable, please feel free
to push "pause" and stop the recording.

1. Do you have any questions or comments before we begin?

2. Could you start by telling me about yourself. Where
   did you grow up? Tell me about your family as you were
   a child. When did you come out? How did your family
   react (if they know)?

3. Will you give me a history of your relationships – both
   heterosexual and lesbian. How did your children come
   to you?

4. Tell me about your family now. How do you present
   yourself to "the world"?

5. What's it like, raising children as a lesbian mother in
   a social system that most often sanctions one type of
   family form only?

6. What do you understand homophobia to be?

7. What experiences have you had with homophobia? How
   have you, your children, and your family as a whole
   been affected by these?

8.   What do you tell your children about being gay/lesbian?
      How did you "coach" them to prepare them for dealing
      with the world?

9.   How do the issues change as your children grow up? If
      you have young children, what do you anticipate to have
      to deal with in the future? If your children are
      grown, how have things changed over time? Would you do
      anything differently? Are there different things to
      deal with, with male and female children? In what ways
      do you think your lesbianism has affected your children
      or may in the future? On what do you base this?

10.   Do you perceive your life to be the same as or
      different from other mothers? In what ways? What do
      you think are the most important issues you need to
      deal with?

11.   Will you have more children? On what will you or have
      you based this decision?

12.   What do you think is most important in raising
      children?

13.   Do you have any questions for me?

14.   Is there anything you'd like to add?

APPENDIX C

CHILDREN FOCUS

Written consent will have been obtained from the parent, and
from the child/ren. I will introduce myself, explain what I
am doing and assure the child/ren that I will not be
discussing our conversation with anyone else, assuring them
of confidentiality and anonymity.   The questions for the
children are divided into three separate instruments,
designed to ask age-appropriate questions. The division
lines are somewhat arbitrary - ages   7-11, 12-16, 17
and up. I will begin each interview with the questionnaire
designed for that age group but "borrow" up from the other
age groups if it seems appropriate for the childrens'
understanding of the questions, comfort level, etc. I will
get verbal permission on tape from them and show them where
the pause button is, inviting them to turn it on if they get
uncomfortable.

AGES 7 - 11

How old are you?

Tell me about your family. Who do you live with? Are
there important family members who don't live with you?

Do you know what "gay" means?

Do you know what lesbian means?

What do you know about lesbians?

What do you think about your mom being lesbian?

Do you think it affects you? How?

Do your friends know that your mom is lesbian? People
at school like your teacher?

Do you ever hear things at school about lesbians?

Do you ever hear anything on T.V. about lesbians?

Do you have friends who live with a mom and dad?

Is your life different from theirs? In what ways?

What would you like to do when you grow up?
Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

APPENDIX D

<u>AGES 12 - 17</u>

How old are you?

What grade are you in?

Tell me about your family. Who do you live with? Are there important family members who don't live with you?

What does lesbian mean?

Do you remember how you found out that your mom is lesbian?

What did you think about it then?

How do you feel about it now?

Do any of your friends know? If not, why not?

How do you decide who to tell?

Recently there have been a number of "gay bashing" incidents, some that have resulted in someone being killed. Have your friends or group talked about these? What do they say?

What do you know about being gay? About being lesbian?

Where do you think you learned this?

What do people at school think about gay or lesbian people?

Do you think your mom being a lesbian affects your life?   How?

Do you have friends who live with a mom and a dad?

Is your life different from theirs? In what ways?

Is there anything you would change about your family if you could?

What do you want to do when you grow up?

Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Is there anything else you want to tell me?

YOUNG ADULTS

How old are you?

What are you doing now?

Do you live on your own?

Would you tell me about your family? Who are/were the important people in your life as you were growing up? Include the people who didn't live with you as well as those who did.

When and how did you learn about your mom being lesbian?

What was your reaction then?

How do you fell about it now?

Did any of your friends know when you were younger? What about now? Have things changed over time? How have you decided who to tell?

Where have you learned your attitudes about gay and lesbian people? Is this different from your friends?

Did you feel different from your peers as you were growing up? In what ways?

Has your mom's being lesbian affected you in any ways? How?

What do you think are general social attitudes towards gay and lesbian people?

When did you begin to be aware of these?

Have they ever influenced the way you acted or talked or felt about your mom?

Do you know what homophobia is? One definition is that it is fear, dislike, or hatred of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals that often results in acts of discrimination. Do you think your family or you or your mom has ever experienced this?

Do you think you've ever felt this?

Has your mom's lesbianism affected your decisions about your own sexuality?

Would you have changed anything about your life as you were growing up?   What and why?

Do you think you'll have children?

What will you tell them about gay and lesbian people?

What do you think are the most important things in raising children?

Do you have any questions for me?

Is there anything you'd like to add?

APPENDIX E

CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS: MOTHERS

MA1	AGE OF COMING OUT
MA2	ACCEPTANCE OF CHILD/REN IN LESBIAN/GAY COMMUNITY
MC1	CUSTODY ARRANGEMENTS
MC2	COMING OUT - PERSONAL DISCOVERY
MC3	COMING OUT TO BIRTH FAMILY
MC4	COMING OUT TO CHILD/REN
MC5	COMING OUT TO OTHERS
MC6	COMING OUT TO CHILD/REN'S FATHER
MD1	DIVORCE
MD2	DISCRIMINATION - GENERAL
MF1	FAMILY: BIRTH
MF2	FAMILY: CHOSEN
MH1	HOMOPHOBIA - DEFINITION
MH2	HOMOPHOBIA - EXTERNAL
MH3	HOMOPHOBIA - INTERNAL
ML1	LESBIAN COMMUNITY: + OR--
MM1	MOTHERHOOD - BIRTH OF CHILDREN
MM2	MOTHERHOOD - LESBIAN
MM3	MOTHERHOOD - SINGLE
MM4	MOTHERHOOD - SAME OR DIFFERENT FROM OTHERS
MN1	NEEDS OF CHILDREN
MP1	PRESENTATION OF FAMILY TO THE WORLD (SCHOOL, WORK)
MP2	PERCEPTION OF CHILD/REN'S AWARENESS RE: LESBIANISM
MP3	PREPARATION OF CHILD/REN (STREETPROOFING)
MP4	POWER
MP5	PERCEIVED EFFECTS ON CHILD/REN
MR1	RELATIONSHIP (CURRENT)
MR2	RELATIONSHIP HISTORY
MS1	SUPPORT NETWORK
MS2	SEXISM
MV1	VIEW OF SELF

CATEGORIES FOR ANALYSIS:

CHILDREN

CA1   AGE

CA2   AGE WHEN MOM CAME OUT

CA3   AWARENESS OF LESBIAN/GAY ISSUES

CC1   MEMORIES OF MOM'S COMING OUT

CC2   COMING OUT: TELLING FRIENDS AND FAMILY

CC3   COMING OUT: REACTION TO MOM'S DISCLOSURE

CD1   DIVORCE

CD2   DISCRIMINATION: GENERAL

CD3   DEFINITION OF LESBIAN/GAY

CE1   EFFECTS ON SELF OF MOM'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION

CF1   FAMILY - BIRTH/OTHER

CF2   FRIENDS

CF3   FAMILY - DIFFERENT FROM OR THE SAME AS OTHERS

CF4   FAMILY - WHAT WOULD LIKE TO CHANGE

CG1   GUARDIANSHIP/LIVING ARRANGEMENTS

CH1   HOMOPHOBIA - DEFINITION

CH2   HOMOPHOBIA - EXTERNAL

CH3   HOMOPHOBIA - INTERNAL

CL1   LESBIAN/GAY - SOCIAL ATTITUDES

CL2   LESBIAN/GAY - COMMUNITY

CL3   LESBIAN/GAY - DEFINITION

CN1   NEEDS OF CHILDREN

CS1   SEXUALITY - OWN

CS1   SEXUALITY - MOTHER'S

CV1   VIEW OF SELF

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