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Book Reviews

Front Cover

"Rosamund Elwin and her daughter, Aziza Elwin Carrington."
Photo: Rachel Epstein

Special thanks to the Atkinson College Students' Association, York University, for their generous financial support of this Journal issue.

About the Front Cover

The front cover is a photograph of Rosamund Elwin and her daughter, Aziza Elwin Carrington. Rosamund is co-author, with Michele Paulse, of *Asha's Mums* (Women's Press, 1990), one of three books banned in 1997 by a local school board in British Columbia.

In April, 1997 the Surrey School Board refused to approve the use of resources from gay and lesbian groups and banned the use of three children's books from use in all Surrey schools. The books were *Asha's Moms*, in which a girl named Asha runs into resistance from her teacher when she brings in a field trip permission note signed by her two moms; *One Dad Two Dads Brown Dad Blue Dads* by Johnny Valentine, a Suess-style exploration of difference; and *Belinda's Bouquet* by Leslea Newman, a story about a child who is labeled fat by an adult but regains self-esteem thanks to a friend with two moms.

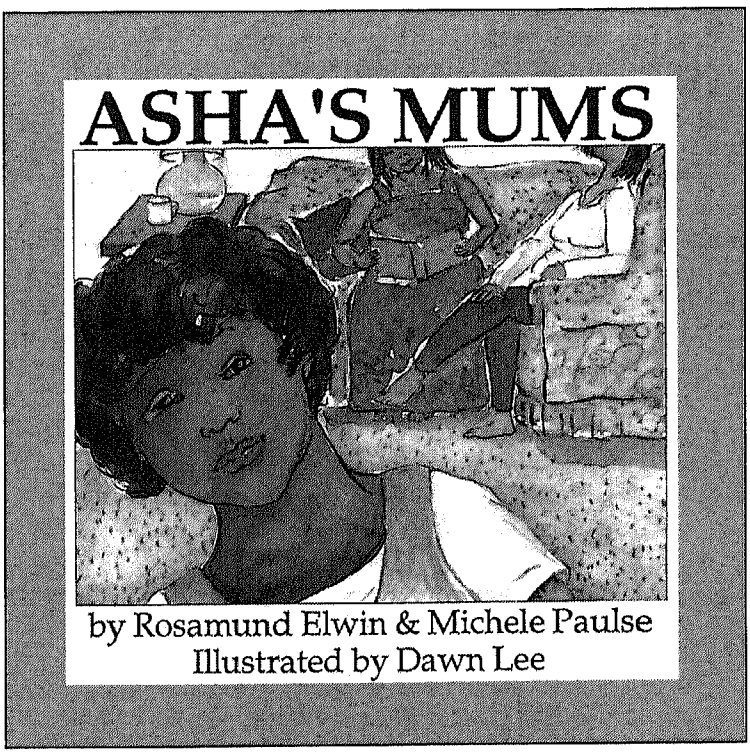
In August, 1997 a group of parents, students, teachers, and authors, including Rosamund Elwin, filed a lawsuit in B.C. Supreme Court arguing that the Board's actions violated free expression and equality rights. The action was supported by the B.C. Civil Liberties Association and EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere). On December 16, 1998 the Supreme Court granted the petitioner's request, arguing that the decision to ban the three books could not be justified. In her decision Justice Mary Sanders found that an accurate description of the books was that they portray or describe same sex families "which ought to be valued in the same way as other family models, that they are peopled by caring, thoughtful, intelligent, loving people who do give the same warmth and love and respect that other families do."

The Surrey School Board has gone to the B.C. Appeal Court to have the lower court decision overturned. The case is expected to be heard in Spring, 2000.

Many of those leading the battle on behalf of the school board are affiliated with far right, anti-abortion religious groups. Robert Pickering, former chair of the Board, was once arrested for blockading the entrance of a Vancouver abortion clinic, has banned condom machines from washrooms in Surrey high schools, and barred Planned Parenthood materials from classrooms. He and Heather Stilwell, current chair, have been active in the Campaign Life Coalition, whose position is that "to have become a homosexual is to have acquired a moral disorder." Pickering has also been a director of the Citizen's Research Institute, which has declared itself against schools teaching that homosexuality is "normal, acceptable and must be tolerated." Stilwell is a

founder and former leader of the provincially registered Christian Heritage party, which advocates recriminalizing sexual deviancy and abolishing the Charter of Rights. To date the Board has spent $714,000 fighting the case.

The fight against the Board's anti-gay moves is supported by many Surrey parents concerned with the conservative stance being taken by public officials. Some have formed a group called Heterosexuals Exposing Paranoia to counter what they see as sexual hysteria being whipped up by the trustees. The argument of those opposing the Board has always been that "prejudice, hatred, and discrimination against gay and lesbian people is a serious problem, especially for homosexual students. It is therefore crucial to ensure that homosexual students and children with same gender parents see themselves reflected in the school curriculum, so as to combat homophobia in our schools and in society at large."



Jacqui Gabb

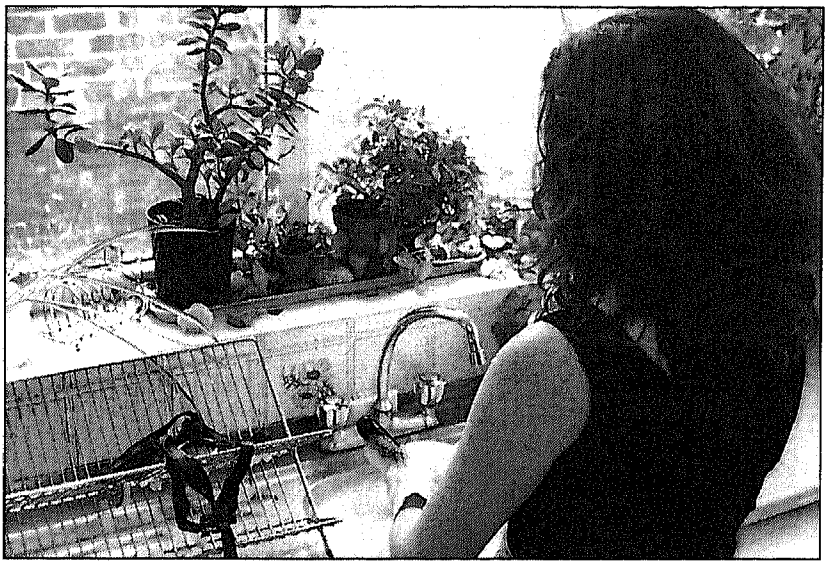
Imag(in)ing the Queer Lesbian Family

Motherhood and lesbian sexuality are antithetical to each other within Western culture. One consequence of this dichotomy is that lesbian mothers are constantly denied any fixity of identity. Always *being* in a state of flux, we are caught in a continual process of *becoming*. This paper reflects on this fluidity, suggesting that queer mothering challenges prevailing notions of "the family." Using illustrations taken from my own and others' lives, I will endeavour to reconcile the paradox of the lesbian family, by destabilising traditional categories of the sex-less mother and sexually-deviant lesbian. I begin by looking at "the family," reflecting upon some consequences of lesbian maternity's disruption of the reproductive narrative. I move on to consider, in more detail, how lesbian families articulate their difference. Drawing on specific examples, I illustrate how lesbian mothers and their children appropriate and queer the traditional language and terminology of "the family." I will then proceed into an analysis of how families typically represent themselves, looking at how "family snapshot" photography arguably sanitises lesbian sexuality. To conclude I suggest "visibility" as a strategy that may effectively reconcile queer / lesbian motherhood. Imag(in)ing ourselves in ways which simultaneously illustrate and/or signify our maternal and sexual identities. Implicit to this research is the belief that, generally speaking, lesbian mothers are good mothers, and thus I refute the need to continually defend our maternal capabilities and the ways in which we raise our children. I take for granted that we are like other mortals. We may occasionally lapse into moments of rage or shut ourselves away in selfish isolation, but nonetheless we still love our children unconditionally and care for them to the best of our abilities. I make no attempt to justify our existence but move the debate on to consider the diversity and transgressive potentialities of our lesbian maternal selves.

There is a growing canon of academic research into lesbian mothering (Lewin, 1993; Dunne, 1998) and "families of choice" (Weeks, 1991; Weston, 1991). Other research seeks to "prove" the normality of our children (Kirkpatrick, 1981; Patterson, 1997; Tasker and Golombok, 1997) and consider the domestic realities of our lesbian family lifestyles (Heaphy *et al.*, 1997; Dunne, 1999). However there is a real scarcity of academic research into sexuality within lesbian families. It is as though desire is presumed to disappear upon the arrival of a child. It does not. Our circumstances may radically change, and so might our energies or inclination, but desire is not absent within the family, it merely becomes encoded as a means to circumnavigate the ever-vigilant surveillance by (familial) others (Gabb, 1999). Using autoethnographic observation of my own "lesbian family" and informal interviews with other parents and their children, I have examined how our familial lives, loves and sexual identities impact upon each other.[1] This observation and the interviews are accompanied by fictive images of my own and others" families. These images are not documents of our lives, but are constructed to critique the traditional meanings bestowed upon snapshots, as candid representations of "normal" family life. They aim to illustrate the contingency of identity: the complexity of lesbian (m)other-ness. They are not used to interpret or illustrate the text, but add another dimension to it. Alongside the text, they attempt to imag(in)e the sexual and maternal identities of the "Queer Lesbian Family."

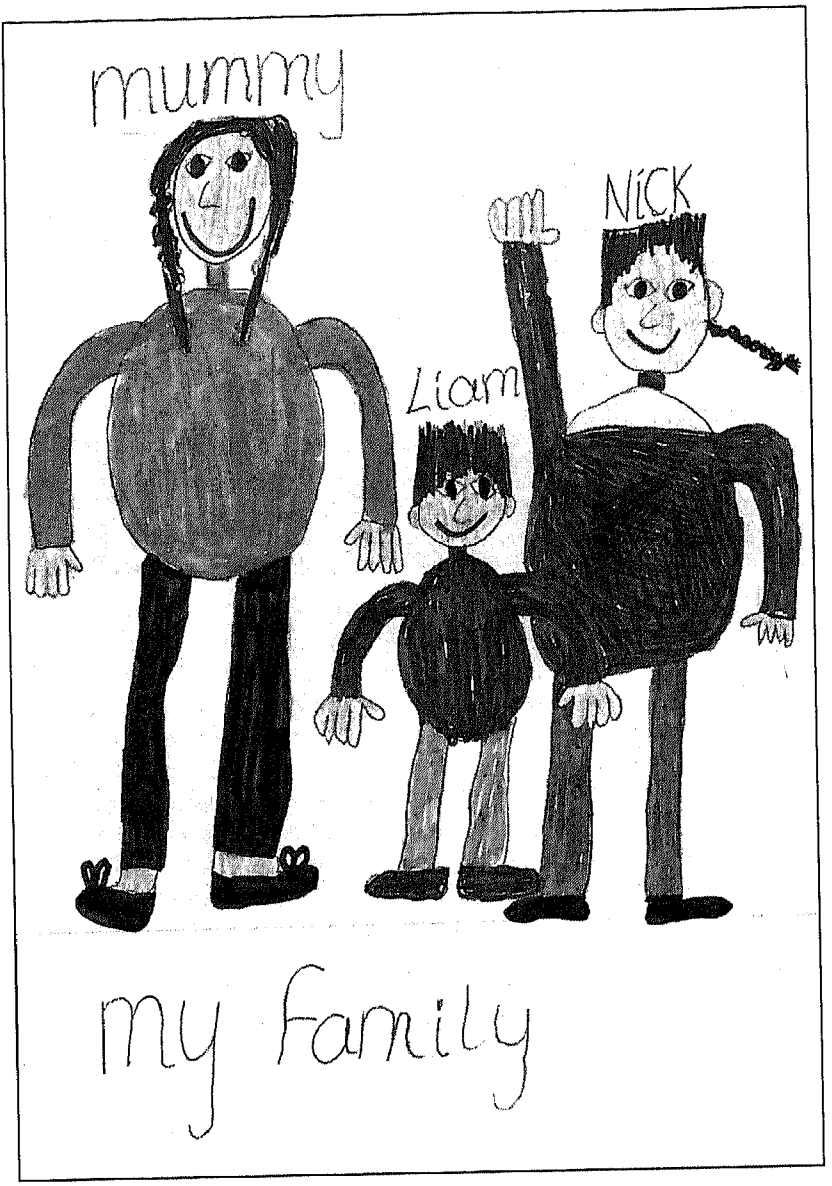
Queering the lesbian family

Lesbian sexuality and Queer may impact upon each other, they may even share certain component parts, but there is no necessary slippage between the two categories. Indeed the woman-identified-woman of traditional lesbian



sexuality (Rich, 1980), often stands in stark contrast to Queer's predication of a (homo)sexual identity. Lesbian queers identify themselves with gay men rather than finding solidarity with other women. They see "gender as a game, played with sign, symbols, whose meanings are constantly shifting and negotiable" (Whisman 1993: 56-7). The term, "lesbian mother," may in itself be queer, insofar as it challenges the heterosexual narrative, but this does not necessarily mean that individuals within this category recognise themselves in queer theory or feel at home within the queering of lesbian and gay activism. Lesbian mothers repeatedly express their identification with other (heterosexual) mothers as opposed to childless lesbian friends (Lewin 1993). Indeed outside the metropolitan areas which embrace lesbian identities (Griffin 1997, p67) there is little evidence that children figure at all within the agenda and lifestyle of often beleaguered smaller communities. So is it empirically possible to reconcile the paradox of the "queer family?" I intend to argue that the lesbian family *does* occupy the cutting edge of queer politics, radically challenging traditional categories of gender and destabilising the hetero-normative within society. In addition, this location on "the front line" is critical, as it not only affects queer politics, but also traditional family structures.

"The family," as a representation of "blood kinship," is still afforded great status within both straight society and the lesbian and gay community. Indeed the determinant that biology is essentially different to choice is so entrenched within our culture that it is almost impossible to displace (Weston, 1991: p31). It is extremely hard to counter the popular belief that "blood is thicker than water" within a society that is still based upon biological family inheritance. However if we are to seriously incorporate all familial (kinship) relations within the debate on "the family," then the excess of signification afforded to "blood



ties" must be acknowledged as a social and historical construction. It must become evident that the prestige bestowed upon the biological family serves an explicit ideological purpose: that biology is a symbol and not a substance (Butler, 1990). However living outside this biologically determined paradigm is not easy. It often resigns you, not only to a life of social exclusion, but also to one of linguistic absence. Even though marginality is not inherently negative, it may even be embraced as a positive expression of our repudiation of the

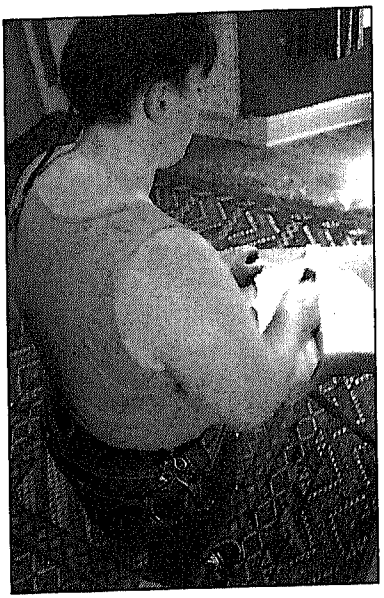
Western patriarchal state, it is arguably impossible to retrieve any positive reading from the linkage of language to the patrilinear narrative.

Articulating lesbian (m)other-ness

Lesbians and gay men have to sift the words and syntax of social discourse in order to find an appropriate language that may legitimise our familial relationships. Some of us may choose to describe ourselves as "alternative," claiming a social status for our relationship whilst also wanting to establish its difference. Or we may define ourselves as "normal," "just like any other" family (Arnup, 1995). The problem with both of these positions is that they serve to reinforce the legitimacy of "the family" as an institution and thereby reinstate a biological, procreative, imperative within family relationships. To be alternative, one must first have something that "naturally" exists: the nuclear family is thereby reasserted within the social order. Paradoxically, to claim that lesbians and gay men have a different, lesser role in relation to the family, is no more accurate than the assumption that straight people have a "natural" access to it. Any attempts to shore up such myths represent gay men and lesbians as non procreative, set apart from the rest of humanity, something which my own, and many other lesbians'," maternity flagrantly refutes.

There is an evident need to publicise the fact that lesbian families are neither normal, nor alternative, but *essentially different.* The gendered relations that exist within our lives construct a radical re-vision of what actually constitutes a family, and examples of this are evident all around us. When Liam, my seven year old son, describes his family, he lays claim to its difference. By stating that I am like a mummy and a daddy to him, he is not filling the gap left empty by the absent father / patriarch, so much as redefining what gendered roles mean in relation to his life. The paternal absence is transformed into a *negotiated presence* of gendered embodiment. His unexpected decision earlier this year, to claim "Father's Day" as my partners' own, further illustrates the inadequacy of language as a means to express the realities of lesbian family life. My partner apparently could not share "Mother's Day" because, he asserted, "she was not his mother." So he claimed the next available, legitimate, space for her. In his actions, Liam was not intentionally queering "the family," he simply expected there to be a recognised special day for his other parent. Who can argue with that! Hence rather than being lost within an unstable array of gender roles, Liam is in fact "writing the family" in relation to his own familial bodies. I wish to posit that such semantic (re)configuration is arguably symptomatic of lesbian (m)other-ness.

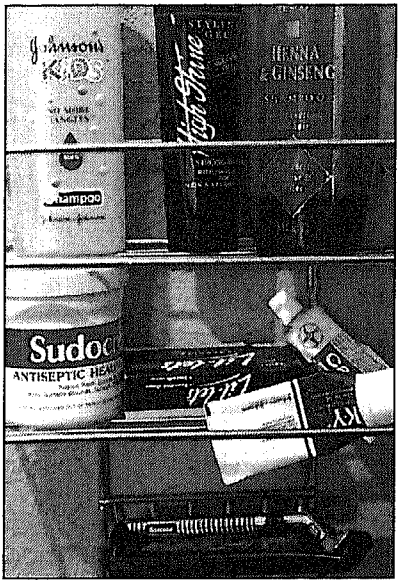
Without the binary of "the sexes," the "natural" (gendered) division of labour falls apart. The gendered roles within most lesbian families are typically negotiated, reviewed and reworked (Dunne, 1998; Oerton, 1997). However this does not imply that individuals merely duplicate the traditional categories of "mother" and "father," but that gendered demarcation and *embodiment* is forever displaced. For example, when Christine, a lesbian co-parent, was



denied access to the Intensive Care Unit where her (non-biological) baby had just been taken, her response was both pragmatic and insightful. Initially thwarted by the ward manager's dogma, that "the Unit was restricted to members of the immediate family," she intuitively located herself within this social discourse, within the only role that was available to her. Given that Margaret, her partner, was the (biological) mother, and that the gate-keeper did not entertain the possibility of a child having two mothers, she asserted herself as "the father." Though she obviously did not embody the materiality of this category, she instead invoked the familial roles that exist within social discourse to realise a "legitimate" identification. Her response not only gained her access, it also queered the naturalising discourses of "the family" and the gendered embodiments that are contained therein.

It is clearly evident that the process of "naming" ourselves holds the most significant of consequences. Within my own family, I have always been a mother to Liam, so whilst knowing my "first name," he prefers to call me "mummy." My partner, who joined our family when Liam was three years old, is referred to as Nick. Though this is her "first name," it has almost come to serve as a noun. She is "*a* Nick," neither mummy nor daddy, but a complementary individual within our family. Though she may take an equal part in the quality and quantity of childcare responsibilities, neither she nor Liam perceive her as *being* a "second mummy." In addition, Nick "names" herself within the masculine, her physical stature can identify her as butch, and yet she is *evidently* a woman. Her (m)other-ness thereby represents a dynamic source of dislocation and belonging, where her social status and sense of self remains forever in flux. The constant transformations which ensue arguably require lesbian parents like Nick to play out a (gender) *masquerade*. Negotiating social roles and private identities within ever shifting parameters, they literally queer "the family" and all our roles within it. The *artificiality* of the naturalising discourses that underpin the myth of traditional family life are made transparent.

Lesbian parents" adherence to existing language does not fail to challenge the orthodoxy of parental roles, nor does it leave intact the categories of "mummy" and "daddy" as unspoken "norms" (Bernstein and Stephenson, 1995). Nick's absence of a parental name does not negate her familial role, or affirm the naturalising discourses of maternity which conflate *being* a mother



with *having* a baby, instead it is a real response to the practicalities of circumstance and experience. After all, lesbian "life partners" (to use the terminology of *Friends*) may come and go, but *being* a "mummy" is for life! Thus to some extent my own and others' reticence at naming our partners as mothers is a defensive reaction to the transience of *all* adult relationships. It may also signify the predication of the mother / child dyad as determinant of familial relations (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 1995). It arguably repudiates the patrilinear narrative of "the family" and sets in place a model that does not read gendered parental roles as a consequence of the reproductive (heterosexual) narrative.

It is largely because of our "unnatural" status—our disruption of the reproductive narrative - that lesbian parents pose such a threat to heterosexual society. We signify the performativity (Butler, 1990) of all motherhood, and analogously by our evident (homo)*sexuality*, we sexualise all parenting. Such potency has made lesbian families extremely vulnerable to criticism and attack from the institutions that structure and contain family life. Lesbian parents face a constant challenge to their legitimacy through the British legal system. We are primarily only tolerated as "suitable" parents when we are "discreet," agreeing to suppress our (lesbian) sexuality both from our children and society at large (Brosnan, 1996, Lewin, 1993). Faced with this ever-present threat to custody, the opportunity to "disappear" has often felt the best means for survival (Rights of Women ,1986). With a brief exception during the campaign against Section 28,[2] the lesbian and gay community has tacitly accepted our invisibility as an inevitable consequence of living within a society that is determined by a heterosexual imperative. It did not become an issue until Queer came along, demanding the public celebration of all transgression, desire, and the visible representation of all our sexual identities (Cooper, 1996: 14).

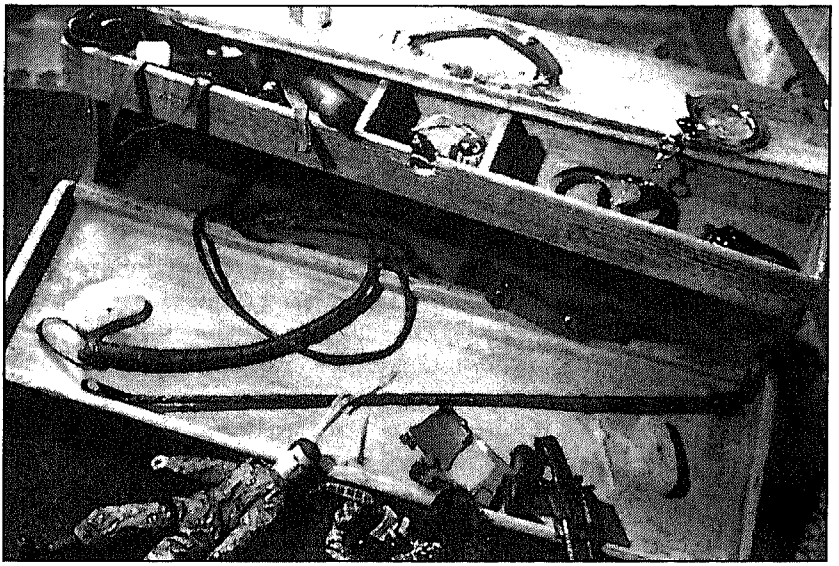
Imag(in)ing our-selves

Queer culture champions the body in all its vagaries, representing a visible physicality that is largely absent from traditional representations of family life. It often refuses the more earnest techniques that have been traditionally associated with feminist arts and media, relying instead upon the constructed "text" and/or parody. But whilst such public displays make visible certain dissident sexualities, they conversely serve to deny the existence of others.

Lesbian families have arguably always existed, but such lives are not readily apparent. Given the edict of our judicial system which states that we should be "discrete" to protect our children's innocence (Rights of Women, 1986), it is not surprising that we contain our private lives, primarily only making them visible within the sleeves of the family photograph album. And though these portfolios may be an implicitly transgressive document of social reality, their format, let alone dissemination, can hardly be described as a spectacular (queer) display. It would be hard to argue that traditional family snapshots represent the cutting edge of queer photography. Therefore my endeavour to queer the lesbian family may in practice need to start by locating a suitable means of representation. So is it possible to depict both our motherhood and lesbian sexuality within the family album or merely document our lives? (Cade, 1991: 115-119). Can we "queer the family album?"

Lesbian families and/or motherhood have been traditionally represented by pictures of devotion: the eternal mother, Madonna and child. Though such images may heighten the awareness of lesbian families they do little to actually represent us, in fact they arguably obscure our sexuality beneath the shroud of selfless maternal love. Images showing loving embraces, devoted smiles and wholesome values are great advertisements for "the family" (Ashburn, 1996), yet they deny our dangerous (queer) sexuality (Smith, 1991). Of course I do not wish to imply that lesbian families should be without love, nurturing and caring considerations, but these should not be at the expense of our sexual identities as lesbians. Lesbian mothers do not automatically stop being sexual just because they have given birth. To continue the cultural myth that mothers are the sexless, self-less others of their needy children, merely perpetuates a patriarchal logic that subordinates women through wifehood (Van Every, 1995). Women transform from sexual object to nurturing subject as we enter into motherhood, being always defined by the reproductive (heterosexual) narrative. Sex becomes *productive* rather than pleasurable, and our sexuality becomes obscured by the practicalities of parenting. Lesbian conception narratives refute this functionalist imperative. We offer new familial forms that are not reliant upon the binary logic of "the sexes." We challenge the gendered embodiment of parental roles everyday of our lives.

But can we (re)present ourselves outside the patriarchal framework of motherhood? Snapshot photography has traditionally been used to document family life (Williams, 1994). Though some feminist photographers have productively critiqued this form, subverting its claim to the normalcy and privacy of the nuclear family unit (Spence, 1995), this has not really impacted upon images of the lesbian family. Texts that visually illustrate our lives are typically "coffee-table" portfolios (Seyda and Herrera, 1998), lacking any of the critical rigour and/or sexual imagery of other lesbian photography collections (Boffin and Fraser, 1991; Bright and Posener, 1996). Lesbian families are still primarily represented within safe, sanitised, conventional poses, which replicate rather than challenge the nuclear family form. Though I do not wish to



deny the value of such texts, I do contend that there is now a pressing need to incorporate images that represent likeness and family lineage, alongside new forms that signify our desires and sexual identities. If we wish to queer the lesbian family then it must be made visible. Such a strategy may not be possible or desirable for all. The real fears and consideration of lesbian mothers caught up in custody disputes, problematic access agreements, and/or who cannot make public their sexuality and lifestyle for whatever reason, must be acknowledged and respected. Choice and visibility are always relative and personal, being deeply effected by social and cultural context.

However even "innocent" family snapshots that appear quite conservative to us, may be quite enlightening to others. Images that capture the love and mundanity of our lesbian family lifestyles become far more transgressive when placed alongside ones that depict the complexity of our maternal and sexual identities. This juxtaposition of images does not undermine the security of our home environments but instead challenges the *myth* of the a-sexual family. It represents lesbian families as simultaneously loving, nurturing *and* sexual environments. Analogously, the public dissemination of such representations, which defy traditional readings of sex-less family life, might actually serve to queer the snapshot form as well as making evident the sexual nature of "the family" (Fineman, 1995). In this light, the transgressive potentialities of such images may actually make the (queer) family album the most appropriate and arguably apposite place to start imag(in)ing the queer lesbian family.

Conclusion

Queer is a movement, an activism and an identity, but unless it wants to initiate its own self-destruction—imploding beneath the weight of its exclu-

sions—then it must be truly inclusive. Although queer declares a welcome to all individuals, it demands that we sign up, unreservedly, to its mandate. Lesbians are openly accepted, but only when they embrace the queer umbrella: *being* a lesbian is not quite enough to "qualify" you as queer, you must demonstrate your "*dangerous* sexuality" (Smith 1991). But what exactly constitutes a dangerous identity, and who decides on its criteria is unclear. If one accepts that lesbian parents embody a direct challenge to the hetero-normative, then surely lesbian parents "qualify" as dangerous and thereby our queer status is assured. Hence the problem may be less a matter of inclusion than visibility: we must be seen before we can be counted. This is not to impose a doctrine of public sexual expression, whereby the tyranny of "good mothering" is replaced by another (queer) orthodoxy. Instead it moves towards realising the often conflicting component parts of our lesbian family lives.

How, when, or even if, one's lesbian sexuality becomes revealed must remain at the discretion of the "mother" and her children. But I do contend that by revisiting the primary call of feminism - that "the personal is political"—we can begin to bring together the composite parts of our-selves. By reconfiguring the "family album," its contents and its form, we thereby open it out to a far wider audience. Our familial and sexual selves become one, and a discourse on queer lesbian motherhood implicitly begins. However if we are to imag(in)e the queer lesbian family in this way, then we need reassurance and support. We must feel that queer truly offers us a secure space that we may call our own, where our lives as parents are not denigrated as "unoriginal" (Turner, 1998), or dismissed as conspiratorial "breeders." Where the potentialities of our lives, and those of our children, are seen as progressive. It is this Queer space that has yet to be created: the Queer Lesbian Family is arguably already here.

[1]This is part of a broader empirical study that I am currently undertaking as part of a D.Phil. research project into lesbian families with children in Yorkshire, U.K.

[2]Section 28 of the British Local Government Act, May 1988, prohibited local authorities from "intentionally promot[ing] homosexuality," including the promotion, by teaching and publications, of homosexuality and 'the pretend family' within schools.

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Mielle Chandler

Queering Maternity

Let us hypothesize the last maternal speech, preceding her execution for the crime of servitude. Will she reassert her dissidence from a patriarchal capitalist individualism? Will she cry out against agonism and rabid accumulation in the face of need and vulnerability? Will she even bother to explain, to ears which condemn their own dependence, her innocence? Will she claim the servitude for which she is banished from esteem as something applied, like a pesticide or a pathologising category, upon her soul? Or will she silently compose her own requiem, tired, emptied, humiliated, and with nothing left to give?

A brief introduction to the general problem as I perceive it

It is, in part, through a repudiation of the maternal within the self, forced by a paternal despotism which permeates our civilization and reproduces itself within and through dominant familial structures, that maternal forms of selfhood continue to be degraded, mocked and reviled. Desirable selfhood continues to be understood, through liberal notions of individuality and equality, as monadic fraternity. It is my contention that the tragedy which in recent history denied and repressed in boys their maternal identity has now, in the name of liberatory feminisms, been extended to persons of both genders. The liberation of women has meant the near-complete eradication of the maternal. Daughters have donned the symbolic penis and joined the brotherhood. Although the call to separate an impetus to domination from masculinity has gained a certain popular appeal, a much larger social transformation has seen femininity embrace ethics of domination. The repudiation of the maternal has infiltrated, at a molecular level, the changing performances of femininity. It is my belief that we are witnessing a silent spreading of the subjugation,

repudiation, longing for, and desiring of the maternal.

Queering maternity[1]

In one of my favorite papers, *The Subject and Power*, Foucault tells us that it is not power, but the subject, which, all along, has been the general theme of his work. "My objective," he writes, "has been to create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (1982: 777). The mode I am particularly concerned with in this paper is the objectivizing of the subject in what Foucault terms "dividing practices': "on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way" (Foucault, 1982: 785). The dividing practices with which this paper is concerned are those which tie mothers to the identity "mother." The problematic constraint, as I see it, lies not so much in the identity itself, but rather in the separation of this identity from non-mothers. In other words, the problem is that the category allows an existence external to itself which generally disallows mothers leave from the practices which bind them and absolves everyone else from participation in, and responsibility for, maternal ethical relations with the other. Divisions between "kin" and "stranger," perpetuate ethicalities in which those who enact relations of gift and responsibility for the other, restrict these enactments to their "own" children.[2] Such divisions not only perpetuate inequalities once understood as foundational to women's oppression, but also service the persistence of egoistic sensibilities and agonistic subjectivities.

This paper takes up Foucault's suggestion: "*We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries*" (Foucault, 1982: 785) (my italics). My plea is for the refusal of the type of individualization which is linked to the fraternal-democratic, capitalist state and the two-gendered system. My plea is in the form of a request to cross the dividing lines between mother and non-mother, responsibility and non-responsibility, kin and stranger. It is my hope that such a crossing could potentially not only allow us, mothers and non-mothers alike, to revive dormant aspects of our own identities, but could allow the children to grow up with the psychosocial potential to form bonds not restricted to the monogamic family structure, to identify with the objects of their desires instead of repudiating and disdaining them, and to cultivate ethics, sensibilities and capacities of multiplicity and maternity. It is my hope that such a crossing could allow us to revive and revalue our own maternal aspects as politically efficacious and downright radical.

My partial and provisional suggestion, partial in its necessary incompleteness and provisional in an attempt to avoid setting up yet another dogmatic framework, (and yet I have seen provisionality used by some as an excuse to slip

away from responsibility), is for a proliferation of identification, a flooding, unfolding of gender binaries within which maternal relations have been constrained. My suggestion is for the refusal to be caught, and to bind ourselves and others, within a two gendered system of entrapment within a single gender and the severing of identification from desire. But more than this, my suggestion is for a refusal of polarized subjectivities which sever some of us from, and tie others to, maternity; which restricts maternal other-oriented modalities of selfhood to narrow realms and subjugates it to prescriptive fraternal monadic modalities of selfhood, agonistic ethics of democratic equality, and "public," "political" realms. My suggestion is for the cultivation of maternal relations in all spheres and with all others.

Identification and desire

> this child who is tied to being a son in relation to me,
> this child who is tied to being a son in negation of me

Engulfment

We all begin as maternally identified. According to Chodorow's (1978) ontogenic narrative, our selves are initially formed through engulfing the maternal, and it is the retaining of the maternal within the self which first allows the self to become a self and to emotionally weather separation from the mother. The infant takes the maternal figure/s within itself, and she, he, they remain within the infant when she, he, they leave. Maternal figure/s, that is, those who mother the child, are the constituents of the child's primary self-identification. I would like to push this thesis of other-in-the-self slightly further in two directions. On the level of gender identification I would like to suggest that the child's first gender, any child's first gender, is maternal.

Secondly, and this seems to me a much more difficult point, on the level of subjectivity, a child's first modality of selfhood is qualitatively maternal. This is not to say that infants and small children are "little mothers," though toddlers tend to delight in role reversals, but rather to say that there is a relational quality, a modality of being which takes place in the bonds formed through the interactions between mother and child. Chodorow terms this modality of being as "self-in-relationship" and claims, along with Benjamin, that it forms our fundamental sociality. We all have, according to this thesis, an overwhelming propulsion to recreate the qualitative aspects of our early bonds with the maternal. While women tend to recreate these bonds through themselves becoming mothers, men tend to satisfy this propulsion through heterosexual relationships with women. Benjamin takes this analysis further to explain domination and submission as the impetus to return to maternal bonds gone awry.

The growth and development of selfhood is accompanied by, and dependent upon, engulfments of maternal figure/s and internalizations of maternal

relationships. It is upon this psychosocial analysis of early development that Chodorow rests what I consider her most radical claim: *within all of us who have been mothered, regardless of our sex or gender, lie the foundations for mothering, lie the abilities to engage in maternal relations, practices, self-understandings and ethics.*

Repudiation

And yet, we do not all mother. When we do, those of us who do, mother within exceedingly narrow realms, barely extending maternality beyond the others we consider kin. Chodorow (1978) begins to explain this by way of an analysis of gender formation within the modern Western heteromonogamic family structure (which, I might add, is unraveling faster than I write). In its current configuration, heterosexuality requires and perpetuates a gender polarity which outlaw desire for the gender one identifies with. Within a kinship system in which maternity is fused with femininity, one must disavow one's maternal self in order to identify with masculinity. Within a political culture where dominant masculinities have been the templates with which "freedom" and "individuality" have been defined, freedom and individuality have come to require a disavowal of maternal modalities of selfhood.

To return to Chodorow's explanation: All children begin as maternally-identified, but only daughters exhibit and re-enact this identification as mothers. Only daughters become mothers. The paradigmatic daughter, as belonging to the same sex-gender category as the mother, does not need to disavow her earliest identification in order to identify with the gender imposed upon her. Although she cannot *have* the mother as an object of desire, such a having being antithetical to identification and reserved for the father and, through the substitution of another female figure, the son, she can *be* the mother. Identification is for her a relatively undisruptive process. Because her gender identity does not require a rupture from or repudiation of her earliest identification, the daughter's self-understand is formed as continuous with the m/other and as in relationship with the m/other.

The gendering of sons as masculine requires a repudiation, within the self, of all that is associated with femininity, including the maternal. In order to identify as masculine, sons must distinguish themselves through early negation, as not-mother. This radical break not only with the m/other but with the early self, a self in relation, a self as vulnerable, shapes the self-understanding of sons as immaternal, unrelated, and invulnerable: monadic. Further, the negative nature of masculine identificatory processes—the formation of masculinity as not-mother and not-feminine—feeds masculine belittlement, disregard, disdain, and contempt for those who enact femininity and maternity:

> ... boys define and attempt to construct their sense of masculinity largely in negative terms. Given that masculinity is so elusive, it becomes important for masculine identity that certain social activities

> are defined as masculine and superior, and that women are believed unable to do many of the things defined as socially important. It becomes important to think that women's economic and social contribution cannot equal men's. The secure possession of certain realms, and the insistence that these realms are superior to the maternal world of youth, become crucial both to the definition of masculinity and to a particular boy's own masculine gender identification. (Chodorow, 1978: 182)

What I find particularly fascinating in Chodorow's discussion of the role of mothering in gender formation, is the marrying of certain modes of selfhood, the self as connected and in-relation, and the self as monadic, to maternal identificatory and disidentificatory processes. Chodorow then explains gender inequality, and masculine tendencies to domination, as stemming from these modalities of subjectivities, as stemming from the type of selves we become through our identificatory process with the maternal. In other words, *drives to enact relations of domination require specific forms of subjectivity*. It is specific modalities of subjectivity and forms of selfhood embodied in dominant masculinities and correlated to specific ("masculine") ethics, types of attachment, and practices of relating to the other, which give rise to the domination of persons whose modes of subjectivity and practices of relating are primarily maternal.

The subjugation of maternal modalities of selfhood takes place not only externally between differently-gendered groups and individuals, but also takes place intrapsychically, within the self. Conventional masculinity requires the internal suppression and disavowal of the m/other within the self. But what I consider even more distressing is that, within our current system of valuation, in order to be a free and individual self one must subjugate one's own maternal modes of being to a fraternal agonism. I draw from Judith Butler's (1997) discussion of gender formation to exposit and expand upon the first point before going on to explain the second.

Butler's variation of the gender formation narrative, while keeping with Chodorow's tradition of heteromonogamic incubation, differs, firstly, in framing gender formation in terms of homosexual desire, and, secondly, in a focus on repudiation as endemic to the formation of both bipolar genders. Further, while in Chodorow's rendition of masculinity, engulfment precedes and makes repudiation both necessary and possible, for Butler it is repudiation which is the primary force motivating the incorporation of the other. "Internalization preserves loss in the psyche; more precisely, *the internalization of loss is part of the mechanism of its refusal*" (my italics). Or, to be consistent with the language I have been using, one engulfs the other in order to cope with the loss sustained upon one's repudiation of one's desires for the other. "If the object can no longer exist in the external world, it will then exist internally, and that internalization will be a way to disavow the loss, to keep it at bay, to stay or

postpone the recognition and suffering of loss" (Butler, 1997: 134). The parallell understood in terms of gender performance, then, is that gender is *copying and refusing to copy*, desiring and refusing to desire, simultaneously.

As in Chodorow's (1978) rendition, desire and identification are agonistically polarized. A daughter's giving up of her first love object, the mother she, like all young children, fiercely, tyrannically, desires, becomes possible only on the condition that she incorporates the mother into herself, becoming, in a sense, the lost object of her own desire. The daughter identifies with the mother because she cannot have the mother. Similarly, the son, within this convoluted heterosexual matrix, in order to deal with the loss of the *father* as an object of desire, must incorporate the father into himself, and so become part of the same defining category, as identified with. I quote Butler, with pleasure, at length:

> Consider that gender is acquired at least in part through the repudiation of homosexual attachments; the girl becomes a girl through being subject to a prohibition which bars the mother as an object of desire and installs that barred object as part of the ego, indeed, as a melancholic identification. Thus the identification contains within it both the prohibition and the desire, and so embodies the ungrieved loss of the homosexual cathexis. If one is a girl to the extent that one does not want a girl, then wanting a girl will bring being a girl into question; within this matrix, homosexual desire thus panics gender.
>
> Heterosexuality is cultivated through prohibitions, and these prohibitions take as one of their objects homosexual attachments, thereby forcing the loss of those attachments. If the girl is to transfer love from her father to a substitute object, she must, according to Freudian logic, first renounce love for her mother, and renounce it in such a way that both the aim and the object are foreclosed. She must not transfer that homosexual love onto a substitute feminine figure, but renounce the possibility of homosexual attachment itself. Only on this condition does a heterosexual aim become established as what some call a sexual orientation. Only on the condition of this foreclosure of homosexuality can the father and substitutes for him become objects of desire, and the mother becomes the uneasy site of identification.
>
> Becoming a "man" within this logic requires repudiating femininity as a precondition for the heterosexualisation of sexual desire and its fundamental ambivalence. If a man becomes heterosexual by repudiating the feminine, where could that repudiation live except in an identification which his heterosexual career seeks to deny? Indeed, the desire for the feminine is marked by that repudiation: he wants the woman he would never be. He wouldn't be caught dead being her: therefore he wants her. She is his repudiated identification (a repudiation he sustains as at once identification and the object of his desire).

> One of the most anxious aims of his desire will be to elaborate the difference between him and her, and he will seek to discover and install proof of that difference. His wanting will be haunted by a dread of being what he wants, so that his wanting will also always be a kind of dread. Precisely because what is repudiated and hence lost is preserved as a repudiated identification, this desire will attempt to overcome an identification which can never be complete. (Butler, 1997: 137)

The self becomes a self through the incorporation of differently gendered others, the first other being the mother. We are, thus, multi-gendered. However, within a two-gendered system of binary heterosexuality, the self must repudiate, disavow, repress, subjugate (pick your word) elements of ones own identity, modalities of one's own subjectivity, in order to exhibit the "correct" gender and desire schema and the corresponding "correct" modality of selfhood. As the genders associated with the sex "woman" change, become "liberated" to include egoist, monadist, agonist, and dominatory tendencies, maternal modalities of selfhood (the self as for the other, as in relation, as empathetic, as giving without expectation of return) become subjugated even within selves whose gender identities correspond to the sex "woman."[3]

Chodorow (1978) suggests, by implication, the possibility of preserving masculinity while removing the impetus (driven by the panicked fear of being the object of one's masculine desire) to dominate women.[4] The existence of such a possibility supports my suggestion that we are witnessing a spreading of forms of subjectivity bent on domination. Forms of subjectivity traditionally attributed to masculinity, are becoming dominant within female and feminine personhoods, walks, apparels, and desires (one can have a monadic and agonistic self-understanding and still desire rippling muscles or household appliances—my desire is for a dishwasher). Some of the very modalities of selfhood Chodorow would have selected out in a process of masculine socio-sexual evolution are now becoming dominant within both genders. Instead of the extrication of dominatory tendencies from masculinity, we are witnessing the addition of the master, the liberal individual, and the fraternal rival, to femininity.

Chodorow's claim is this: It is "the asymmetrical organization of parenting in which *women* mother" which "is the basic cause of significant contrasts between feminine and masculine identification processes" (1978: 173). Allow me to reframe this claim: because persons who identify with the gender attached to the sex "woman," mother[5] within a bipolar sex and gender system, and because men do not, within this system, mother, girls formulate understandings of themselves positively and as in-relation with others, while boys formulate understandings of themselves negatively, as not-in-relation, or as monadic. It is this negation of the maternal and her gender that leads to the domination, disdain, contempt and, desire for, an instrumentalizing, ob-

jectivising, and jealous treasuring of, women. If parenting sons so that their identity forms negatively is the cause for such an impetus to domination, one could simply suggest that women remedy this by mothering all children as though they were girls, by refusing to cut away certain children due to the makeup of their organs. This is not, hwever, the remedy Chodorow outlines.

Chodorow's (1978) remedy instead is that men do more parenting, thus providing boys with positive role models. That is, Chodorow's remedy is to replace a bipolar gender hierarchy with a more egalitarian bipolar gender system.[6] Her suggestion is to level the playing field. Put another way, Chodorow's suggestion is for the equal (I use the liberal definition here) parenting of children by two parents within a monogamic two-gendered nuclear family system. And yet, if we focus on forms of selfhood, on the type of self one enacts (as other-concerned or egoistic, etc), instead of on specific gender performances (femme, butch, bear, queen, etc), we can see that it is not mothering by *women* which perpetuates the domination of women by men, but rather, it is mothering by mothers within a system which affixes the female and the femme to the maternal and privileges maternally antithetical practices and subjectivities which is the progenitor of not only the traditional domination of women by men, but of a cultural malaise of agonistic and dominatory sensibilities, practices and processes which permeates all relations and infects many modes of being. It is not that maternity has been devalued because of its attachment to femininity but rather that *femininity has been devalued through its affiliation with, or, more aptly, affixture to, maternity*. Extricating femininity from maternity does not reverse the valuation of maternal practices and modes of selfhood any more than affixing the maternal to masculinity would (such an attachment would simply result in a devaluation of maternal enactments and aspects of self of some maternal butch or masculine persons). What is commonly understood as gender inequality is perpetuated by a system of binary modalities of subjectivity. Untied from newly liberated gender performances, subjugated selfhoods remain subjugated.

It is not that I disagree that "the elimination of the present organization of parenting in favor of a system of parenting in which both men and women are responsible would be a tremendous social advance." And I certainly do not disagree that "such advances do not occur simply because they are better for "society," and certainly not simply because they are better for some (usually less powerful) people" but rather "depend on the conscious organization and activity of all women and men who recognize that their interests lie in transforming the social organization of gender and eliminating sexual inequality" (Chodorow, 1978: 219). My point is simply that sexual equality does not necessarily translate into equality between forms of subjectivity, or between the practices and ethics tied to these forms. Indeed, Western "civilization," in its current configuration, *requires* domination by agonistic and dominatory forms of subjectivity. Dominatory forms of subjectivity, in order to self-identify, require an other against whom to enact domination. The current system of

egoistic, agonistic, rights-based equality, rather than reaching for political systems and ethics beyond domination, simply instills an element of egalitarianism into a field of contestation which has domination as its overriding impetus. Indeed, what I find particularly unsavory is the system's unspoken stipulation that, in order to participate in democracy, one must engage in contestation and subjugate one's maternal aspects to a rivalrous self-oriented form of selfhood. Nor does instilling an element of egalitarianism into a two-gendered system alter the two-gendered and bipolar fact of the system. A level playing field may be a good beginning, but it is far from optimal.

What Chodorow (1978) fails to question is the presupposition of mutual exclusion; the presupposition that one cannot simultaneously identify with and desire the same, that subject and object designate antithetical ontological states. Yet, as Butler points out "identification and desire can," and *do*, "coexist". Indeed, "their formulation in terms of mutually exclusive oppositions serves," of course, "a heterosexual matrix." There are butches who desire each other's struts and femmes who engage in mutual flirtation. It is my hunch that the outlawing of intrapsychic multiplicities, specifically, the apartheid of identification and desire, presents one of the roadblocks along the illusive yellow brick road leading beyond domination. Indeed, the co-operative co-existence of identification and desire may be imperative for engendering collaborative social and political possibilities. The gender concept "queer" offers (a) possible amorphous and shifting framework/s for such co-operative co-existances.

Performances of gender are also performances of subjectivity, indeed "the very possibility of becoming a viable subject requires that a certain gender mime be already underway" (Butler, 1993: 314). That is, subjectivity within the current system is necessarily gendered in its becoming. Our possibilities for theorizing change, as well as our subjectivites, are limited by this system. And yet it is a system that provides exciting material with which to work. Potentialities lie in the inherent instability, the continual shifting of amalgams, of gender and subjectivity. Gender and subjectivity are not ridged formations, but rather they are, in most permutations, viscous, moving, changing, in spite of our best attempts at stability, singularity and coherence.

> ...a stone butch may well seek to constitute her lover as the exclusive site of erotic attention and pleasure. And yet, this "providing" butch who seems at first to replicate a certain husband-like role, can find herself caught in a logic of inversion whereby that "providingness" turns to a self-sacrifice which implicates her in the most ancient trap of feminine self-abnegation. She may well find herself in a situation of radical need, which is precisely what she sought to locate, find, and fulfill in her femme lover. In effect, the butch inverts into the femme or remains caught up in the specter of that inversion, or takes pleasure in it. On the other hand, the femme who..."orchestrates" sexual exchange, may well eroticize a certain dependency only to learn that

> the very power to orchestrate that dependency exposes her own incontrovertible power, at which point she inverts into a butch or becomes caught up in the specter of that inversion, or perhaps delights in it. (Butler, 1993: 317)

The stability and singularity of subjectivity is no more self-identical than the stability and singularity of gender (Butler, 1993: 314). The specter of coherent subjectivity, like that of gender, is achieved "through the apparent repetition of the same" (Butler, 1993: 314). Such repetitions within current binary systems require the repudiation and subjugation of the other or opposite. The paradigmatic dutiful wife and mother of "Leave it to Beaver" engages in the formation of her own subjectivity (or perhaps we should say non-subjectivity) as continuous with, as extension of, through repetitive re-enactments of selflessness. The paradigmatic emancipated dyke of my Toronto milieu repetitively deviates from traditionally heterosexual enactments of "woman" in such a way as to establish herself as loudly separated. Polyamourous (within narrow boundaries), she denies elements of subjugated relationality through panicked engagments in hedonistic activities.

One of the ways oppression works is "covertly, through the constitution of viable subjects and through the corollary constitution of a domain of uviable (un)subjects—*abjects*, we might call them—who are neither named nor prohibited within the economy of the law. Here oppression works through the production of a domain of unthinkability and unnameability" (Butler, 1993: 313). While lesbianism has made its way into the thinkable, and, in a number of social venues, dominates as the legitimated name and regulatory category, it has done so, in part, by claiming for itself, as itself, dominant forms of subjectivity. The unthinkable, the unnameable, the abjective, what I refer to as the maternal, is further subjugated as a condition of the ascent to liberation for oppressed groups.

In this way the migration of dominant forms of subjectivity has taken place. The dominating forms of subjectivity, of the fundamentally antagonistic Western ego, thrive within capitalism's "new woman." The feminine greedily engulfs aspects of masculine subjectivity, leaving the maternal repudiated, disembodied and without an advocate. Such is one of the newest forms of colonization. Insidious it is, in its invisibility, its penetration of the soul, of one's mode of self, while seeming to leave identity intact. Insidious it is, as the newly colonized call themselves victorious.

What I find radical, indeed, mutinous, in Chodorow's work is the assertion that we all begin as maternally-identified, that the foundation for maternal qualities is laid in every person who has been mothered, and that it lies dormant in all of us who do not engage in maternal practices, ethics, relations and self-concepts. I have use this assertion to expand upon my belief in the, although often dormant, overwhelming potential for giving freely, empathizing with the other, taking responsibility for the other, and engaging in communication with

a will to understand. It was toward social potentials beyond domination that Chodorow called for a sharing of parenting between the genders. It is towards social potentials beyond domination that I have attempted to "queer" Chodorow's call for shared parenting. My provisional supplication is formed though an incomplete analysis of the polarization of identification and desire. My focus has been on how this polarization binds us, not only to identities of gender, but to specific forms of subjectivity which I consider to a certain degree extractable from the constituting veneer of gender we all play as drag. It is toward refusing to be bound to specific and antithetical subjectivities, toward refusing to participate in polarizations which feed domination, and toward an interpermeation, a mixing, a flowing of the divided—individual/abject, self/other, kin/ stranger, subject/object, doer/done to, good/bad, masculine/feminine, etc—that I offer the following as both invitations and appeals: 1. Engagements in maternal practices as, in a sense, "queer': as both the same as and other than the other, as in-relation with and separate from. 2. Desubjugations of maternal forms of subjectivity through engagements in maternal relations regardless of one's categorical positionality 3. Proliferations of maternal practices, forms of subjectivity, and ethics, into self-other relations of all kinds.

[1]Mothering Defined: Gender is practice. One becomes a gender, genders, gendered, through repetitive enactments and reenactments which shape one, internally, externally, as specifically gendered, which shape body and consciousness. Subjectivity is practice. One becomes a subject through practices of self, which include repudiations and engulfments of others and Others. To mother, in my usage, is to engage in maternal practices. These change historically, culturally and individually but share similarities of giving to freely, caring for, empathizing with (that is, putting the self in the place of the other in an attempt to understand the other), and taking responsibility for the well-being and even the actions of others. I use the term "maternity" to designate not the specific relation of mother to child, but rather these practices of subjectivity as self-in-relationship and the ethics of responsibility and empathy. Understanding maternal practices as practices, and as practices which shape subjectivity, not only provides implications in the reformulation of gender systems, but also provides a challenge to the forms of subjectivity with which our current rights-oriented and individualistic democratic systems are built.

[2]There is here another division which I wish to contest, between one's "own" children who, as kin, are considered not to be strangers, and the stranger for whom those who mother their "own" children may feel justified in taking little or no responsibility for. One is tied to "kin," another to "stranger.'

[3]I find it difficult to use the term "feminine" here as the gender modalities associated with "woman" seem to increasingly become less "feminine'.

[4]Chodorow's concrete suggestion is that if men spend more time parenting, boys will have positive models to identify with, therefor their masculine

identification will be formed positively as qua-father instead of not-mother. With a positive identificatory process they will not need to develop belittling and contemptuous attitudes toward women, the maternal, or the feminine.

[5]I use the term "mother" as designating practices or enactments.

[6]Sharing devalued labour between persons of two genders within a heterosexual nuclear family structure does little to revalue the labour itself, it simply divides it more equally between the two adult participants of such a family. It is also inportant to point out in this point of the text that Chodorow does discuss communal child-rearing formations favorably, pointing to how children raised within such structures are less individualistic and more group-oriented than those raised in nuclear families.

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Rachel Epstein

Did You Ever Have to Finally Decide?

Decision-making has never been my forté. Those close to me will attest to the agony—-the public nature of the process, the extended opinion-seeking conversations and ruminations over pros and cons. In the end, after all the input, I don't always take the advice I seek. Somehow I arrive at a decision that feels closest to right in my head and heart. But, of course, the question can always be reopened by anything interpreted as evidence of having made the "wrong" choice. Some of this difficulty with decision-making stems from a syndrome called FMS (Fear of Missing Something), the symptoms of which are fear of missing opportunities for fun, for learning, for growth, for earning money. Having children is a sure-fire remedy for this syndrome, as one finds oneself missing almost everything.

Some of it is an illusory desire for control. Making "right" decisions means controlling outcomes and that means being in control of one's life. I am only beginning to recognize that,in fact, my view is partial, that I don't always know what is best, and that sometimes efforts to control create a mess. In Buddhist practice decisions are made in an environment of spaciousness, of not-grasping, not-controlling, and trust in the universe. There is a lesson here for those of us for whom surrender does not come easy.

Having children, I've noticed, involves a lot of decision-making, particularly if you're doing it without easy access to sperm. The decision-making starts early—unknown/known, fresh/frozen, clinic/home, height, weight, blood type, ethnicity, race ... the decisions boggle the mind. We chose an unknown donor from a sperm bank—that one was easy compared to what was to come. At 16 weeks I had to decide whether to have amniocentisis. After the usual gruelling process, I decided to have the test. Just my luck, the needle wouldn't go through the amniotic sac on the first try. I lay there willing the baby/foetus

to stop moving to avoid the risk of being hit by the needle. I realized, for the first time of many, that they don't always do what you want them to do. And there I was, decision-making queen, having to decide all over again whether to repeat the test.

In the latter part of my pregnancy, we sat in intense, heated, protracted discussions with rooms full of lesbians, discussing *the circumcision question.* It's ironic, don't you think, that women often attributed with man-hating, ball-breaking tendencies should quite willingly and earnestly spend hours fretting over the penises of the unborn, empathizing with the anticipated pain of boy-children, and grappling with the philosophical, ethical, biological, religious and social complexities of the issue.

Luckily, I had a girl.

Next came immunization. Informed by the natural healers around me, I became convinced of the medical dangers of immunization and we decided not to do it. An unpopular decision, particularly with my parents. When a progressive doctor in Vancouver published an article in the local paper on the importance of immunizing, two copies arrived in the mail on the same day, one from each of them.

The other unpopular decision, at least in some quarters, was choosing to breastfeed for more than three years. My daughter and I were both into it, my partner generously gave us room to find our way to an ending, but nursing someone you can talk to, who can read a book while she nurses, does not sit well with some people. We finally ended it with a "no more milk" party, at which we both got treats. She got to eat as much chocolate ice cream as she wanted and was given her first pair of roller skates. I was presented with a pair of roller blades, and my daughter and I rolled off to a new phase of our relationship.

Recently, we had to make what was perhaps the hardest decision. Whether or not to try and have another full-time, live-in child. While there are several children in our lives, ranging in age from three months to 17 years, who are nestled deep in our hearts in that familial sort of way, our original plan was that we would each aim for a pregnancy. I went first due to advanced age, a significantly larger passion to be pregnant and an irregular cycle that led me to believe it would be difficult to get pregnant. Blessed by the Goddess of Fertility, who operates in inconsistent and random ways, I got pregnant on the second try. Since then the joys and labour of childrearing, combined with the fact that we both forgot to get careers earlier in life, has meant our life has filled up with work and school and kids and there has never been just the right moment to try for that next kid. Not to mention the ups and downs of a going-on-13-year relationship that is the container for all this activity.

Now my partner has turned 40 and I'm 43. She's experiencing that predictable, though not universal, but torturous when it comes, dilemma about whether to try and get pregnant before it's too late. We know we're good at this, and that another kid growing up in our family would indeed be lucky. But where would we put them, what would we do for childcare, and most significantly, can

we go back to the world of sleep deprivation, burping the baby, constant vigilance, cleaning up the food under the high chair and chasing the toddler. I watch close friends who, after trying for many years to conceive, are now taking care of a newborn. I remember the intensity of the joy in it, the love and amazement in watching a baby grow up. But I'm not sure it's right for us right now. We keep coming back to the subject, and get hit in the face with our ambivalence, and the grief that awaits if we decide not to. For me, I've only done this once in my life, and it doesn't seem enough. My partner has been a non-biological parent twice, but wonders about that other experience. I long to see a baby born from her body and for the opportunity to parent from a perspective not grounded in biology and social tradition.

Last month she actually inseminated. We hadn't really made a decision but went ahead anyway. We needed to get this close to it. The next two weeks were tense; moments of fear, excitement, dread, disbelief. I thought, "we're going to be the first lesbian couple to go through all the time, energy and expense of getting pregnant through a clinic, only to turn around and have an abortion!" It seemed somehow typical of our decision-making style. Reminiscent of the time we rented another apartment for six months because we were feeling on top of each other in ours, and thought we could use the second one to get some space. Six months' rent later we had used the other apartment for a total of two nights, but needed to have spent the money to know we were choosing to live together.

She wasn't (and isn't) pregnant, and was hugely relieved to find this out. Important, in fact, crucial, information for our decision-making process.

This decision has been a hard one, partly because the practicalities that mediate against us having another kid are not ones we are so positively attached to. But I think the decision has been made, and there is grief. There are days I think maybe we could change our minds. Why just this month I met two women who were 43 and 46 respectively when they gave birth.

Nope, decision-making has never been my forté.

Noreen Shanahan

Follow the Leader

Pressed against pane
her hands claw
shift this swift burn
of exposure.

She unhinges the rusty latch
bedeviled by generations
of slapdash painters.

On the ledge
a sparrow ruffled by slaughtering breezes
pauses before skitterish flight.

A mother follows
her child's reach into trust.

Attention to swellings, bruises
tiny feet, wrinkled in warm salted water
slivers, happily garnered in play
ease to surface.
A chasm might split the earth
or maybe the softness of cedar chips
angled beneath monkey bars
catches dripping laughter.
A mother follows her child
into trust.

She studies
again this voiceless plea
for solitude.

Once blank faces
gestures of curious life
etch *eloquence*
still the moment passing.

Susan Dundas

Lesbian Second Mothering

I am a child and infant psychiatrist, and the biological and non-biological mother of my children. My partner and I have been together, for better or worse, for 14 years. We have experienced the death of both our biological mothers during our relationship. My mother died three weeks before the birth of our son. On her admission to palliative care three days before she died, she felt my partner's belly and spoke her regret that she would not see our baby. My biological daughter, born 2 years later was named after her. My partner's mother became grandmother and nanny to both of our children for their first two-and-one-half years. She died when my son was only six, and my daughter four. My children may not consciously remember either grandmother when they become parents, but their grandmothers have and will continue to profoundly affect their development.

This is a story about mothering. I have kept a journal from early in my partner's pregnancy until the early days of my own biological child's life. Parenting made it difficult to continue the journal or perhaps my creative energies were otherwise preoccupied. These journals remain, however, to remind me of those early feelings as I integrated the loss of my own mother and the responsibility of being a parent. My mother died when I was 32 years old and yet my thought at that time was that "I had become an orphan." The pregnancy had been a distraction from my grieving, but not as much a distraction as I might have imagined. I had no idea how to be a non-biological second parent to my first-born child. I had no references or mirrors to view my reflection. The sense of separateness or confusion about my role in my son's life began at the beginning.

We chose an anonymous donor and a lesbian-friendly gynecologist. She was warm and real and the donor remains fairly unreal to me. Pregnancy came

quickly. My partner called me at work and told me. I was in shock. I was confused. "She" was pregnant and yet I was going to become a parent. This wasn't surrogacy or adoption. I wasn't pregnant, or was I?

At eleven weeks after conception, my partner experienced a bleed. I was immediately struck by grief and panic. She remained calm. She had a "sense" or a "feeling" that our baby was okay. It was a weekend and we had to wait two days for the ultrasound. I could not be reassured that he was okay until I saw his very active little body on the ultrasound. She had an instinct that I could only be reassured by an ultrasound. This experience underlined a feeling I would struggle with throughout my early parenting experience—insecurity. During prenatal classes we were the only lesbian couple. At one point the trainer asked the mothers to go to one side of the room and the coaches to the other. I was again confused by words, if not by meaning. I knew what she meant, but I was reminded again that my role did not have descriptors. We, as a family, would need to write the script and make it up as we went along. As a child psychiatrist, I spoke about parenting to people all the time, but nothing I read or observed during my training taught me how to behave or explained what I was feeling.

The delivery was exciting, frightening, thrilling and, for me, painless. I did not have labour, although I was very tired by the end of it all.

Our new baby boy came into the world healthy and unprepared for the family that was his birthright. After six days we bravely went out for a cappuccino with our baby on my belly. In one store a woman commented on our beautiful child. She then looked at me, apparently just post-partum, and commented on how well I looked after the pregnancy. I thanked her and turned to find my partner rolling her eyes. I thoroughly enjoyed these mistaken attributions when they came and rarely corrected their assumptions. I felt as if I were given glimpses of the inner world of a club to which I had a birthright, but I had not yet been initiated. I worked very hard to achieve status to belong to that club. My partner breast-fed, so the first few days there was little direct mothering I could do for him, although I offered as much support to my partner as possible. Soon, however, my two weeks off were over and the separation in our roles intensified over the first six months. Although I took one day a week off from the time of his birth and actually spent more time with the children than my partner, the primary attachment to his biological mother remained clear.

I remember being aware of a strong identification with feelings described to me by the fathers I saw in my practice who had had their first child. I felt isolated, lonely and helpless at times. These feelings mingled with joy and elation that I had a dream come true. Somehow, however, I felt more like an observer of my dream than a participant.

I recognized jealousy and envy, and a strong desire to have my own biological child. Not all second mothers feel this way. I also became acutely aware of how parenting triggers narcissism and how this became more preoccupying for me due to my grief over my own mother's death. I believe all

these feelings can mold our relationships with our own children in ways we do not desire if we cannot separate our own narcissistic needs from our roles as parents.

In time, my grief made room for another little person to assert himself. We began to find each other. I became, in my mind, one of his generic "mamas". All grown women were "mama" to him and he was surrounded by women who sought the job. As mentioned earlier, my son's first caregiver was his "amma" which is Icelandic for grandmother. Our closest lesbian friends slipped easily into the roles of Godmothers as they, too, sought to become parents. My son was the first among four children who would eventually be born to these four mothers.

I struggled with the dilution of my role, but worked hard to dispel the injuries to my mothering self-esteem and decided that my son would eventually tell me who I was to him.

I realized in time that my early support role to the relationship between my partner and my son would replay itself throughout our lives. I recognized the value of this role to him and them. My own needs were overcome by my acceptance of the separation between my "fantasy" infant-mother relationship and the real relationship that my son most needed with me. This was not mothering as I imagined it, or fathering as I understood it to be. I was, however, clearly a parent.

The efforts I was making to become pregnant during the first years of my son's life only intensified my grief and my role separation. After two years of recurrent loss, I recognized that the needs of my son outweighed the cost of the drive to seek that fantasy infant. I decided on an end point to this struggle with relief. We agreed that after two more cycles of alternative insemination, my partner and I would switch roles and she would try to get pregnant again. I became pregnant on the next cycle.

Being a biological parent started for me even before conception with the choice of sperm donor, through the insemination process, and right into the moment of conception. I "knew" this baby was a girl and noted all kinds of attributions during the pregnancy that she would come to dispel. I believe I even made attributions to the eggs I saw on ultrasound.

At 14 weeks, I felt my daughter move inside me. Already I knew my relationship to her would begin differently than my relationship to my son. The baby was "real" far more immediately as I began to accept the responsibility of decision-making, even before she was born.

The new baby also changed my relationship with my son. It drove my partner and my son more intensely together. At the same time, he had a separation from his nanny/grandmother as he entered day care.

The breast-feeding, the nights awake with an asthmatic infant, and the maternity leave, all contributed to the early primary bond between myself and the infant. My son was apparently quite angry at me and this new little baby, and he let me know it regularly. Although his anger made me vigilant about the

baby, it taught me a little bit about my role in his life as well.

It took a few months for life to settle into a routine again, but eventually the members of this family began to find their places and their attachments. Each individual as they assert their personality has subtly changed roles in relation to each other. It has become more like a square-dance with four main dancers, and various others coming and going within the main circle. Sometimes the partners switch depending on the children's needs at any point. As time goes on, the children will move further from the original partner to find their own partners, and the dance will go on.

The main lesson for me has been around the development of parenting identity. A parent-child relationship is directed by many internal and external factors in both parent and child. Like a dance, the relationship needs to allow for both dancers to express their style and creativity. I believe my role as second mother to my son taught me so much more about this as our rhythm was not as easy to find. I was struggling to lead and offering a role to him which he did not really need. When I began to let go of my own pre-assumptions about what I should be doing or feeling as a mother, it became easier to find his rhythm and fit into his world. It became clear early on that my internal preoccupation with loss made little room for what could be created.

Liz Herlich

The Sacred Art of Conception

I guess it's not a surprise that Canada Customs would be interested. It's not the kind of package that can slip by too easily; with an 8" x 11" label on one side that reads "Notification For Loading of Dangerous Goods." Shit, I hope not. I guess that is always the fear. I mean, you do your research and ask as many questions as you can, but, in the end you know there's risk that you just might be loading yourself up with dangerous goods. Relax. It's just the dry ice. Packers get nervous around dry ice on aeroplanes, so there you go—just some safety precautions.

But why the interest from Agriculture Canada? Seventy-two hours. That's how long the woman at Federal Express counter said Ag. Canada can hold a package without notification. "Go have a coffee and come back in an hour or so," she says, seeing I'm shaken by the news. We don't have 72 hours.

If they open the package this is what they'll find: A waxed cardboard box filled with dry ice and a white envelope containing instructions for care and use. If they search through the dry ice they'll find a sealed baggie and if they open that sealed baggie they'll find more dry ice and then if they continue searching they'll find three wads of cotton and in the centre of those wads of cotton they will find a plastic vile the size of a bullet with the number 368 written on it in black felt pen and inside that vile they'll find .8cc's of what I believe to be non-infectious human semen.

I wonder what it means for Agriculture Canada to be inspecting human semen for infection. Part of me enjoys the idea. Does Ag. Canada really have that technology at hand? Chlamydia, Gonorrhoea, Syphilis, CMV IGC, CMV IGM, HIV antibody, Hepatitis B and C, Ureaplasma/mycoplasma, Tay Sachs, Urinalysis, Semen culture, Chemistry panel, Sickle cell anaemia, I know more about this guy's health than I want to. But if I had known Ag. Canada was going

to be so helpful, I wouldn't have been so careful. I could have put a classified ad out somewhere and then Ag. Canada could have taken care of the rest and saved me the expense.

Have they thought out the implications? If Agriculture Canada is in fact setting up a little laboratory downstairs in the Federal Express office, was this the start of new policy? Were they about to screen all semen entering the country?

I imagine rows on top of rows of men from all over the world warehoused on metal shelving sitting neatly side by side and waiting for their turn for inspection. "Are you bringing any gifts?" The inspector asks. And what of those found to be infectious? Are they denied entry or is that just stamped on their penises so that potential sexual partners are made aware of the risk?

Or perhaps the issue here is that this semen is travelling alone. Perhaps according to Ag. Canada and Canada Customs, semen, like children, must travel accompanied by an adult.

I pray that they read the instructions before they do their inspecting. In bold letters at the top of the page they will see written: "*Do not expose vials to room temperature for more than three to four seconds. A thawed vial that is re-frozen destroys sperm motility.*" This stuff is sensitive. It's also expensive. .8cc's stored and tested at the Sperm Bank of California plus travel cost me three hundred and ninety American dollars.

I have my coffee and imagine things depleting -dry ice and my lover's egg. According to our calculations her egg was ripe at some time around eight o'clock this morning giving us twelve hours to do something about it.

I have to get my story together. I suspect that helping a lesbian couple have a kid wouldn't be a high priority for Federal Express or for Customs Canada. But what if this was an act of love for a dying brother who, out of desperation, travelled to California for some miracle cure. He and his wife wanted desperately to have children and while no one knew exactly how much time he had left, we all knew it wasn't much. Every month was precious so he shipped his semen and missing this shipment could mean his not having the chance to see his child. I wouldn't blurt out the whole story of course, just hint at some tragic family goings-on. And I know that I'm angry and upset enough about what's really going on to produce a lot of tears and apologies all at the same time if necessary.

And it is possible that I'm selling everybody short. Remember how things went at the dry ice factory? A Friday afternoon in August. We had made our order a little early that cycle and we needed to keep the stuff cold for a few days. A line up of people waited for the dry ice they'd need for the beer and ice cream they were taking up to their week-end retreats and when asked what the ice would be needed for I answered "It's for sperm." The three beefy guys behind the counter all stopped what they were doing to look at me.

"It's a long distance relationship but we like to have sex regularly," I smile and I'm thinking "C'mon guys, work with me. Keep it light" Luck was on my side that day. They thought this was a hoot and much more challenging than

ice cream so the three of them converged, and, forming a huddle, we exchanged details about how it was packaged and how long we'd need to keep it frozen and in the end they gave me extra ice at no charge - just in case I needed it - and sent me on my way with a hearty team cheer of "Good luck!" and "Come again!" (Really!)

Okay, here's the plan. It's 10:30. I will walk back to Federal Express. They will hand me my package unopened and by 11:00 the box and I will be sitting in the hallway waiting for my love, and her egg, to come home.

Dawn Comeau

Lesbian Nonbiological Mothering

Negotiating an (Un)familiar Existence

Lesbian mothering is considered by some an oxymoron: Women who spend their lives with other women, and who don't have sex with men, are thought to be unlikely to have children. Del Martin and Phyllis Lyon, the founders of the Daughters of Bilitis, the first national lesbian rights organization, captured this sentiment in their 1972 book, *Lesbian/Woman*. They wrote:

> Mothers in our society may be odd or strange, but never 'queer'—or so most people believe. Lesbians obviously can't have children. Theirs is a 'sterile' relationship that is nonprocreative. 'Poor things, they will go through life without ever being fulfilled as women—never knowing the joys and heartaches of motherhood,' or so the story goes. Well the news is that many lesbians are mothers, and they are raising their children well, or raising them poorly or raising them indifferently, just as their heterosexual counterparts do. (140-141)

Lesbian motherhood came into visibility in the early 1970s because an increased number of lesbian mothers began to fight for custody of their children who had been conceived within prior heterosexual relationships. Because of these origins, much of the early research about lesbian motherhood seeks to convince the public that the lesbian mother is "normal" and that it is in the "best interest of the child" to remain in her mother's custody, regardless of the mother's sexual orientation. As a result, researchers have compared lesbian mothers to single heterosexual mothers. The rationale for this is that if single heterosexual women can successfully raise their children without a father figure in the home, lesbians can too. Consequently, research has intentionally minimized the experiences of lesbians who have co-parented children with

other women. These relationships prompt the homophobic question: might the courts interpret the lesbian's intimate relationship as harmful to the child?

Research has also neglected to address the role and identity of the co-mother. Although not biologically connected she shares responsibility in raising, loving, and economically supporting the child. Her role is particularly complex because without a biological connection many have a hard time imagining her relationship with the child. Therapist, mother, and co-parent Sally Crawford confirms this cultural ambivalence towards nonbiological co-mothers. She states, "Family is defined in a certain way in this culture, and although this definition is shifting somewhat, the lesbian two-parent family is most likely to be recognized as the single-parent family, and this recognition, conveniently for the larger culture, skirts the lesbian aspect" (1987: 201). Even within the small body of literature on lesbian motherhood, the co-mother's beneficial role is often ignored. In addition, race, social class, able-bodiedness, and geography, all affect how lesbians are able to form and maintain a family relationship. These factors, too, tend to be overlooked in the literature. The few extant studies inclusive of the co-mother's perspective lack a race and class analysis; most focus upon white, middle-class, educated lesbians.

This overwhelming paucity of material leaves lesbian nonbiological co-mothers without role models or guidance in their day-to-day lives as they negotiate their parental roles. Their struggles to be recognized as parents, impeded by their lack of legal rights, is the impetus for my research. My research examines and explores how a woman who embodies such a position of nonrecognition negotiates relationships with her children, partner, family of origin, and community. This research will contribute to the dialogue on the many experiences of lesbian co-mothers, and inform future studies regarding lesbian families.

Given the scholarly silences regarding the nonbiological parent, I pose two questions in my research; how does the nonbiological co-mother in a lesbian family develop and build a solid foundation from which to negotiate her role in the public realm? How does her role shift when she returns home to the private sphere?

In most cases, lesbian families are able to safely discuss, deliberate, and define their family unit in their private sphere. But, when in public, their relationships are misunderstood or questioned by a society which perpetuates homophobia and heterosexism, and refuses to validate their family dynamic legally or socially. Crawford claims, "Clear boundaries around the heterosexual family are encouraged and respected by the larger system in many significant and little ways. The boundaries around the lesbian family usually are unrecognized, ignored, or reacted to with hostility and negative judgment" (1987: 202). In a society which heavily values the biological bond between mother and child, how does a co-mother explain her relationship to uninformed onlookers? To those who believe parents can only be a mother and a father, must the nonbiological mother become the father? Questions from family friends, and

strangers, such as "Who is the *real* mother?" symbolize the lack of recognition nontraditional families receive. As one non-biological mother stated, "I get tired of people always asking my partner about our kid. It's almost like I'm not here" (Pies, 1988: 101). Another woman commented, "When I first got pregnant, I had to keep reminding everyone that there were two of us having this baby. Everyone kept talking to me as though [my partner] Leigh wasn't involved at all" (Pies, 1988: 101). Crawford states the following about the identity of a lesbian co-mother:

> No matter how strong her presence and involvement in the family, it is she who bears the brunt of invisibility. It is she who disappears, it is she who is disenfranchised—by the school, by both families of origin, by the outside world, sometimes (even more painfully) by the children or by the friends in the lesbian network who do not see her as a parent nor understand the unique pressures of her position in the family. (1987: 195)

This lack of recognition and language to describe a lesbian family can permeate and damage the relationship between the parents. Pamela Gray, a non-biological co-parent, documents the impact of her partner's privileged status as a biological mother in her journal. Her writing charts her first two years as a co-mother. She wrote, "I was hurt ... when a woman came up to us and asked, 'Well, whose baby is it?' and Kathleen [her partner] said, 'Mine.' I understood why she said that, but it hurt anyway" (1987: 135). The rules of hetero-patriarchy which mandate only one mother are embedded even in the minds of lesbians who choose to parent equally together. This is demonstrated by Gray's partner's instinctual reactions to call the baby, "mine." Gray writes later, "I still fell awkward and nervous in public, and also so aware of my outlaw status. I have an identity that is completely alien to 99.99 percent of the people who see me with [my child]" (1987:136). Crawford explains, "Lesbian families are often unsure how to describe or explain their relationships to the outside world, because there is no culturally acknowledged language for these connections" (1987: 202).

Many couples report feeling a unique pressure—and a sense of being ostracized from both heterosexual and gay communities. Jane Bernstein and Laura Stephenson, a lesbian couple who chose alternative insemination,[1] documented their struggle to negotiate the role of the nonbiological mother in "Dykes, Donors and Dry Ice: Alternative Insemination" (1995). Bernstein and Stephenson articulated that even the gay and lesbian literature that speaks of "two mommies" inadvertently reinforces that there should be a "mommy" and a "daddy." They emphasize the need to go beyond the "two mommy" and the mom and dad dichotomy. Although it appears to be a dilemma with language, it signifies the rigidity of socially constructed roles. Bernstein and Stephenson stated, "Put plainly, if you are not a 'mommy' or a 'daddy,' you are unacknowl-

edged in the public life of a child ... at some point every parent wants to be recognized as the central figure in their child's world—by teachers, neighbors and, yes, total strangers" (1995: 12).

In most parts of the United States, current law forbids two people of the same sex from being legal guardians of a child. Therefore, when a lesbian couple chooses to raise children through alternative insemination, one mother—the lesbian nonbiological co-mother—is left bereft of any legal rights as a parent. This legal nonrecognition is dictated by our dominant society which defines family in heterosexual terms: one mother and one father. This definition challenges the lesbian co-mother's mere existence. Beverly Evens, a feminist scholar and family therapist, states, "The role of the nonbiological mother (the co-mother) is one without legal, cultural and emotional definition" (Evans, 1992: 131). There are an estimated 1.5 to 5 million lesbian mothers who reside with their children (Davies, 1979 qtd. in Falk, 1992: 55) and scholarly efforts can contribute to establishing legal, cultural, and emotional definitions for their partners who play an integral role in raising their children.

This research collected personal narratives from lesbian mothers who became parents through their partners' alternative insemination (not heterosexual liaisons or adoption). I have completed four in-depth interviews in San Diego, California. All of my participants have been white, college educated, middle-class women. My participants either heard about my study from friends of friends, or a flyer at a Family Matters conference which is the local chapter of a national gay and lesbian parenting organization. This conference was attended by mostly white women, and my respondents reflect this. Three of the participants were 35, and one was 40. Of these four women, three are birth mothers as well as nonbiological mothers.[2] My goal is to continue interviewing to attain a more diverse sample. The interviews have lasted from one to two and a half hours, and have taken place in their homes or in one case her private office at work. Two of the four women were a couple, and all participants were joined in a commitment ceremonies and referred to themselves as "married." Two of my participants have secured legal rights to both of their children through second parent adoption. The other two are still in the process. When I began my study I intended to only interview women who are nonbiological mothers. However, at this point, it has been lesbian families in which each partner has born a child that have responded favorably to being interviewed. I speculate that these families may feel more comfortable discussing the lack of recognition they receive as nonbiological mothers because they are also a biological mother and this provides some security. In addition, because each partner experiences both roles, they may relate to each other's feelings more closely. All of my participants reported frustration when dealing with the lack of recognition nontraditional families receive.

Barbara and Leah are a couple who have been together for fifteen years, and married for seven. They are both 35, Jewish, consider themselves a middle class family, and both have a master's degree in social work. Leah had their first child,

a girl, who at the time of our interview was five, and Barbara had their second child, a boy, who at the time of our interview was six months old. Both Leah and Barbara expressed difficulty with negotiating their role as the nonbiological mother. However, Barbara experienced a more difficult time as the nonbiological mother. Leah was the first one to have a baby. Barbara was a nonbirth mother for four and half years, until she became pregnant herself. Although at the time I spoke with them they were both experiencing both roles—biological and nonbiological—it seemed Leah had adjusted to her nonbiological status easier because she had carried a child before partnering a nonbiological child. They both spoke of Barbara's tumultuous struggle with her role as a parent.

Barbara revealed how Leah continually supported her role as a mother when she was feeling alienated by family, friends, and community. Barbara, conversely discusses how Leah received more attention as the birth mother and this often made Barbara feel left out. As a result, Leah made great efforts to accentuate Barbara's role as a parent. Barbara explained,

> *I really have to thank Leah ... and credit her on how hard she worked to always include me—even in the grocery store when we received comments like "Oh you're pregnant, what does your husband think?" Or blah blah blah ... and then having to sit there and say "I don't have a husband and this is my partner and we're having this baby together ..."*

Barbara and Leah refer to themselves as an "educational unit" because they constantly correct people's false assumptions about their family. This challenging and exhausting self-legitimization is similar to the findings in sociologist Fiona Nelson's study of Canadian lesbian families (1996). Nelson explains that in order for lesbian families "to live a 'normal' life, they must constantly tell people that they *are* a normal family," even when "educat[ing] others prove(s) to be a fatiguing process for some women" (127). Throughout my interview with Leah and Barbara, they continually elucidated their efforts to educate those around them.

Even in the safety of their home, and with their immediate family, the nonbiological mothers I interviewed expressed many fears and concerns about their lack of biological connection and how that weakened these social relationships to the child. When the baby was first born, Barbara felt confused about her role as a parent and expressed feelings of guilt because she wanted and expected more validation then she received from her partner, extended family, and friends. She recalled:

> *It's sort of embarrassing to say this but I think there was probably a part of me that ... wanted to have some of that attention too ... or some of the recognition that, you know ... I kinda felt like behind the scenes I was working my butt off to do this and do that and the stuff you don't see. You don't see my stomach growing [but I'm working just as hard at being a parent].*

Her sense of invisibility was ever-present. She continued,

> *I think one of the things that happened for me and that I didn't expect was that I was very worried about being left out. And, you know, what sort of happens is this baby gets all of the attention and then the birth parent gets "how ya doing? How ya feeling?" ... and then ... there's this nonbirth mother ... I just don't think people knew what to do with me ...*
>
> *And they would say [to Leah] "Oh the baby looks just like you" and you know all of this stuff. If just felt like, again, I was doing a lot and I wasn't getting any credit for it. Not that I needed that ... I just didn't expect it....*

Barbara's reactions also reflect her doubts as to whether her parents would accept their child as *her* child. As Barbara explains, "I really wanted my family to see that this was my child too ... I really wanted my mom to acknowledge that ... and they have. But we've worked hard at it." Barbara and Leah have made several trips to visit their extended family, and each time they must reinforce to relatives that they are a family unit and must be treated and accepted like their heterosexual counterparts.

Throughout my interview with Barbara, she repeatedly expressed her need to "get over her ego" and feelings of inferiority. However, it seemed to me that her needs were hardly egotistical or demanding. Rather, she is describing feelings of invisibility. I asked her if she spoke of these feelings with Leah. She said:

> *I think we talked about it but after the fact and that was probably unfortunate. But I don't think I knew. She'd say, 'What's wrong?' and I'd say, 'I don't know.' And I don't think I knew at the time. I knew I wasn't acting appropriately, or I wasn't feeling like I was acting appropriately ... But I didn't know what to do about it. I really didn't ...*

After my interview with Barbara, I spoke to her partner Leah about coping with Barbara's feelings of nonrecognition. Leah revealed:

> *Well I think there are major issues. I mean I think there are a lot of things you don't encounter until you actually go through it ... [I] don't think you realize how much attention is focused on the pregnant woman. I felt like after I had [the baby] I was continually having to get people to include Barbara in their conversations when they congratulated us ... when they had showers ... [I had to remind them that] they were having this for both of us ... and they needed to validate her being a parent as well ...*

Balancing their perceived roles as parents created immense pressure for Leah. She feared the psychological implications on their relationship if Barbara was unable to bear their next child. The pressure of an asymmetrical relation-

ship was tremendous, and Leah expressed that she did not want to endure Barbara's emotional turmoil as the nonbiological mother a second time.

She explained:

> *I felt very challenged... I told myself that if Barbara couldn't get pregnant, I would never try again. I would never ... there were so many issues for grieving because she wasn't the birth parent and I just didn't want to go through that a second time where I had to validate her even more. It was difficult sometimes. I didn't feel like I could totally enjoy nursing and things people said to me because I felt I needed to deflect and have them include her. You know? And people don't.*

After struggling for several years, Barbara was able to get pregnant. I questioned Leah about her new role as a nonbiological mom. She expressed similar feelings of nonrecognition, although she believes her feelings are not as intense as Barbara's because she has experienced giving birth already. On numerous occasions Barbara is the only one recognized as the parent. For example, she regularly hears people say, "Barbara, good luck to you and your baby." Leah commented, "That is more frequent than not ... it's not because people don't realize [we are both the mothers] because we tell people! I think it is because they feel awkward—they don't know what to say." Around the time of Barbara's baby shower, Leah's invisibility was magnified. As she explains, "People would say to me, 'What does she *need* for the baby?' And I'd be like, what does *she* need? We are doing this baby together!" Leah articulated that comments excluding the nonbiological mother as a parent come from close family and friends who *should* know better. In the *Lesbian Family Life Cycle*, social worker Suzanne Slater explains, "In the eyes of most heterosexual people, the nonbiological or nonadoptive parent is simply not a parent at all. With no legal or biological claim to the children her role is widely seen as redundant, since the only parenting role recognized for women is 'already taken' in the family" (1995: 97). Clearly, my respondents experienced this feeling.

Anne, a 40-year-old Caucasian, nonbiological mother, encountered similar situations to those detailed by Barbara and Leah. Anne entered her current relationship with a child from a previous heterosexual relationship. However, after being with her partner for five years, they decided that they would have another child and her partner would carry the baby. After much thought and consideration, they decided that they would use sperm from Anne's brother to inseminate her partner. To date, this arrangement is working out fine. Within a year of birth Anne secured rights to the baby through second parent adoption.[3]

The relationship between Anne and her partner is even more complex. Anne's partner is Philippina and her child is biracial. Anne described prejudicial encounters with strangers in the grocery store. She received questions such as "Oh [the father] must be so proud of him, is the father Asian?" Because her

partner is a woman of color, instead of validating her partner's role as a parent, they are quick to assume she is the "hired help." There have been several occasions at the doctor's office when Anne's partner is presumed to be the nanny. Anne said:

> *When we are both out we will both carry him and I'm sure we confuse people because sometimes they will decide that I am the parent and then I'll pass him over to my partner and she'll start breast feeding him. They must think ... "wow, not only does she have a nanny but she has a wet nurse too!"*

For women of color who are nonbiological mothers, racism and classism can pervade people's reactions to their parental role and family. Although Anne laughs when she tells this story, she later expresses her concerns for her baby who will grow up biracial and in a lesbian family surrounded by a society that exudes racism, homophobia and heterosexism. Anne mentions that at one time, the gay and lesbian parents group in San Diego was comprised of ethnically and racially diverse families. However, in the past couple of years the meetings have been attended by mostly white families. She articulates that she knows lesbians of color are having children, but she speculates that they may not feel comfortable at these meetings. This is of great concern to her and her partner, and mirrors what ought to be of greater concern for the gay and lesbian community. Like feminist scholars, members of the lesbian community need to confront racism, classism, and other complex systems of oppression, as well as privileging of biology.

Anne, Barbara and Leah experience being a biological and nonbiological mother simultaneously, and proclaim that there are drastic differences in these experiences. Leah and Anne insist that their experience as a birth mother was more intense. Although they were clear that they love both of their children equally regardless of biology, the formation of the relationships differed. Anne said:

> *I found that the process was slower and scarier because there was this deep down fear ... you know ... is this really going to mesh? Is this really going to happen? Am I really going to feel like that is my kid?*
>
> *It just wasn't the same visceral, physical, kind of feeling that I experienced when I carried a child. Its taken time and its taken him growing into his personality. And him, you know, greeting me enthusiastically when I come home ... the little moments when he does ... the physical bonding things like leaning his head on my shoulder and all that ... and the 'ahhh' (and she sighs). Finally the physical feeling has come. But it took much longer. And, there was, you know ... a deep down fear ... a question as to whether it would happen ...*

Anne's sentiments resemble the results clinical psychologist Barbara

McCandlish found in her study on lesbian families. The lesbian nonbiological mothers in McCandlish's study "reported searching for cues that the child responded to her ... Without any defined legal and social role, the partner was wholly dependent on the child's response and the biological mother's expectations to give them a place in the family" (1992: 147). Like Anne, Leah describes the bond with the child she carried as more intense and physical than the connection she has with the child her partner carried. She said:

> *Being a birth mother for the first time, I was so in touch with my baby. I had her with me all day you know? And I would feel her. I mean I would do things like lean up against my desk and she would kick against my desk. I was very, very, very into the whole thing ... I was bonded from the minute I knew she was in there. I was so bonded ...*

However her experience as the nonbiological mother was very different. She attributes this partially to the fact that she was busy caring for their first child, and that Barbara did not have an easy pregnancy. Leah explained:

> *Barbara didn't have a good pregnancy. She felt sick and uncomfortable and I was very much put off by that ... It was hard for me to bear when the baby was in utero. I mean I was excited, I was glad we were having another baby, but I didn't talk to him much, not much ... there is a different connection.*

In addition, Leah believes that the connection differs because she is not breast feeding Barbara's child, and she is back at work full time. As a result, she has less time to spend with her family and the time she does have is often occupied by their oldest child.

After hearing my participants talk about the challenges of being a nonbiological mother, I asked them if they had discussed the potential conflicts—either with their partner or other lesbian mothers—between being the biological and nonbiological mother before the birth of their first child. Barbara stated:

> *I think we probably needed to talk about it more. But I don't think we knew what to talk about, you know? Leah had a hard time getting pregnant so I think that kinda helped me avoid talking about that ... I don't think it was conscious but it was a kind of avoidance ...*

I asked Anne if she had expressed to her partner her concern over being invisible as the nonbiological mother. She responded:

> *Ummmm (long pause) ... I think I did express that but I don't remember very clearly if we spent a lot of time discussing that issue ... I don't think*

we really talked about that too much....

Later on in the interview, she came back to this question. She elaborated:

You asked me if I had talked with other gay and lesbian families about the issue and its a good question. My God, really? Why didn't I?

Anne further explained that the topic was often avoided in the gay and lesbian parenting support group. She stated:

... we found out that it was such as difficult topic and that's one of the reasons why it wasn't a frequent topic. And in fact the big joke—by the founder of the group—was that every time we talk about it—couples break up! (big laugh, and then she quiets down). Isn't that scary?

Since the lesbian community does not have definitions and language to describe its own families, it is difficult to avoid conflicts and anticipate necessary conversations. Each interviewee had a set of close friends who they looked to as a role model for family. Unfortunately, in each case, the "role model couple" had broken up after having their children. This proved discouraging to my participants. In addition, it illustrates why we must continue to promote discussion about challenges and obstacles in lesbian families. Neither Barbara and Leah, nor Anne and her partner had discussed arrangements in case of a break up.

Kathy is a 35-year-old nonbiological mother of a six-month-old girl. She has been with her partner for five years, and married to her for three years. When I interviewed her, she and her partner were in the process of creating a legal contract which guides their mutual obligations to their child in the event of their separation. Kathy and her partner decided that only one of them would carry all of their children in order to maintain a biological relationship between the kids. Although Kathy expressed some remorse over not experiencing child birth herself, overall she is comfortable in their decision. Kathy emphasized throughout her interview that she believes the bond she is developing with her daughter is as substantial as a biological bond. However, because of the legal system which makes it difficult for two lesbian mothers to gain equal custody, she fears that her role as a nonbiological mother can be subverted. At the time I interviewed Kathy, she was in the process of becoming a legal parent to her child through second parent adoption. This process requires her partner to relinquish fifty percent of her rights so that Kathy can be assigned that fifty percent. After their first meeting with an attorney, Kathy's partner revealed that she wasn't sure she wanted to permit Kathy to gain access to legal rights. Kathy painfully recounts hearing this news from her partner:

She said, 'I'm having a hard time deciding if I want to let you adopt.' I was

ready to kill her ... I was getting mad because for me this was really important because if I was a man I would have rights ... so I'm like, this sucks ... and she has all this power and she can tell me I don't have rights to my child!

[My partner] keeps telling me that she knows I have every right to her but she just didn't know what the bond would feel like ... she didn't know how incredible it would be ... I told her that it sounds to me like this is a good reason for me to have the next baby.

This specter of "ownership" often divides a couple. Kathy has economically, physically and emotionally acted as parent, and this news from her partner was devastating. At this point in time, although Kathy believed that her partner would consent to the second parent adoption, she was horrified with her lack of power. She said, "my partner could walk out the door with my baby and I could never see her again. And there is nothing I could do about it." Kathy's vulnerability exemplifies how second parent adoption, while in many cases is an excellent means for lesbians to circumvent the law and become equal parents, is itself flawed and unjust as it is ultimately the birth mother's decision to grant the adoption.

Further complicating the matter is the fact that second parent adoptions are not granted to lesbian couples in most parts of the United States. Maria Gil de Lamadrid, attorney for the National Center for Lesbian Rights in San Francisco (1993), explains, "Second parent adoptions are granted fairly routinely in heterosexual context as stepparent adoptions in families blended through marriage. In a lesbian context, however, where the mother's partner is not legally related to the mother (by marriage), nor is she biologically related to the children, the courts generally do not allow these adoptions" (203). According to Gil de Lamadrid, there are few locations in the United States where the biological mother is not required to relinquish all of her parental rights in order to proceed with a second parent adoption. By implication, most mothers must relinquish their rights in order for the second parent adoption to occur. Note: these legal distinctions vary widely by locale and are constantly shifting. Sometimes they operate informally. The process of determining parental rights can be stressful for lesbian couples after the birth of their child. As exemplified by Kathy, the birth mother has the decision-making power in this process. This is frightening for nonbiological mothers who may be unable to predict their partner's feelings and emotions after giving birth. Gil de Madrid explains that "Although donor insemination has now been available for some time, lawmakers have not kept up with the new developments and concerns facing lesbian mothers" (206). As increased numbers of lesbians decide to have children and join the lesbian baby boom[4] a demand for new legislation will continue to coincide. This lengthy and time-consuming process is crucial to solid formation of lesbian families.

In her article, "On a Creative Edge," counselor Toni Tortorilla professes

the amount of time and patience that it has taken her to understand her role as a nonbiological mother. She states,

> I still don't fit into the comfortable niches other parents (including lesbian moms) take for granted. But I live on a creative edge which celebrates a commitment born of love rather than biological imperative... It has taken me nearly eight years to validate my role in this way, though I have felt bonded [to my daughter] since conception. (1987: 174)

"The creative edge" Tortorilla describes needs more exploration. Interviewing nonbiological mothers reveals the challenges and obstacles that lesbian families face when struggling to conform to legal and societal systems which regulate families in terms of heterosexuality. Each of the women I interviewed were determined to develop lasting familial bonds with their partner and children. However, devoid of language and legal rights, themes of invisibility and nonrecognition emerge in their conversations and descriptions of family life. These feelings are usually unforeseen, laborious and threatening to express to both their immediate loved ones, extended family, and members of the gay, lesbian and heterosexual communities. As these nonbiological mothers continue on their tenacious journey through parenthood, their individual and familial identities can evolve through open dialogue and realistic—binding—negotiations.

[1]In the *Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook: Creating and Raising Our Families* April Martin specifically uses the term "alternative insemination" rather than "artificial insemination" because she believes it is a "less offensive and more realistically descriptive term" (1993: 10). Many lesbian mothers express Martin's sentiment. When discussing the process of becoming pregnant with one of the women I interview she exclaimed, "There is nothing artificial about it!" Other women I interviewed preferred the term "donor insemination," and others felt comfortable using "artificial." Although I agree with Martin, I use these terms interchangeably throughout my paper according to the situation I am discussing and which term was elicited at that time.

[2]I use the term biological mother to indicate the woman who physically carries the child, and the term nonbiological mother to refer to the mother who is equally committed to raising and supporting the child, but in most cases does so without legal recognition due to her lack of biological connection. Cheryl Muzio discusses the adversity with using the term nonbiological. She states, "to be identified as a non-biological mother is to be identified in and through a sense of lack" (1993: 226). Muzio's interpretation of language is an important one and needs to be more closely examined as we continue to research lesbian motherhood using "nonbiological" as a defining term. As Muzio explains, "The

linguistic constraints we encounter affect not only our public discourse but our private ones as well" (1993: 226). This becomes evident throughout my interviews with nonbiological mothers even though many of them felt comfortable labeling themselves as such. One mother referred to herself as the "nonbirth" mother instead. However, this also defines her by what she is not.

[3]A second parent adoption can only occur after the birth of the child. In the case of a known donor, the father's rights must be terminated before the nonbiological mother is granted equal legal rights to the child. In my study, Anne was the only participant who used a known donor. Kathy, Barbara, and Leah used an unknown donor from a local sperm bank.

[4]In *Families We Choose*, Kath Weston describes the lesbian baby boom as a movement beginning on the West Coast in the 1970s consisting of lesbians between the ages of 30 and 45 who began "bearing , adopting, coparenting, or otherwise incorporating children into their lives." According to Weston, "Most of these women were members of the relatively 'out' cohort who came of age at the height of the women's and gay movements" (1991: 165).

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Lois Fine

Hospital Visits and Border Crossings

In my own way I can make each of them laugh
By counting to three
But not really counting
Just promising to count
I start - 1- 2- ...
And their most earnest attempts at being straightfaced and somber
Crumple gleefully into snorty gales
They believe me when I say I'm going to do something

Both of them—the fourteen-year-old man boy
And the seven-year-old wise girl believe me when I say they are brother and sister

The two of them rehearsed and ready
Psyched as we cross the U.S. border
They believe me when I tell them the border guard might not completely understand about us
and the ways that we make family, that we may have to leave some of the big parts out
We will say I've known them all of their lives
I'm a very good friend of the family and our eyes twinkle at the truth

They believe me when I tell them that one of them is named after my grandmother
And the other after my father, a Jewish tradition of naming your children after the dead
The honour of namesake that they each carry

They believe me when I tell them that their uncles, my brothers were once both smaller than me and had all their hair even though that's really hard to believe

It's tempting sometimes to think of adoption
The piece of paper, the judge's decree
THESE ARE YOUR CHILDREN - THEY BELONG TO YOU
I would wave the signed, notarized and most legal of possessions at hospital staff, border guards, teachers
Sweep them all away in thousands of copies of iron-clad paper proof - these are my children!
The whole world would know

And then I think
Would I be any less able to make them laugh
I just have to start counting
1 - 2 - ... and they are wild with anticipation
Because I promised I could do it
And they have decided
They believe me

Jaime Grant

Anticipating Reilly

May 6. Found out that the baby is a boy last week. I'm all over the road with it. I could feel my little heart sink when the tech pointed out what looks like a budding penis, and yet it seemed so karmically predictable. I never get the easy thing, I just don't. I had hoped upon hope for a girl, whom I felt ready to deal with on whatever end of the gender and sexual orientation spectrums she found herself on. But a boy, ach! So much work to do—keeping his heart open, keeping my heart tied to him. Dealing with what it means to be a white boy growing up in D.C. (relentless, state-sanctioned violence perpetrated by white men in power, astronomical incarceration rates among Black men in the neighborhood), growing up anywhere in this country with the pluses of having a mom who can take care of him along with better than average food, shelter, etc.

Then the reality that I am going to be investing all of this extraordinary, loving, positive energy in a bio-boy when I've consciously chosen not to do this around intimates. This boy's mom is not only a dyke, she's a dyke who chose women for political reasons. Can't wait for that chat at bedside! I have to believe that the universe wants me to learn some incredible, wonderful lesson that I can't even fathom at this point. Because this is certainly not what I would have picked.

On the other hand, I have been having some wonderful moments anticipating Reilly. Telling others has been great. The gay men in my life are absolutely ecstatic. A number of my gal-pal beloveds are talking about how wonderful I'm going to be as a mom for a boy in this particular political/cultural moment. They seem absolutely genuine about this. I have been thinking a lot about Taylor, the child I most fell in love with of any child I ever knew (lost to a car accident at five and a half), and thinking what it might be like to raise a

boy like him. Could it be possible that the goddess would send me a Taylor-like spirit? In these moments, I drop my worries and my over-analyzing and feel really excited. I know I'm going to love this boy, and love him well.

What this will mean to him and to me is really beyond my understanding or projection at this point.

May 7. Watched a TV program last night about the trial of three high school boys who were caught having sex with a developmentally disabled woman functioning at the level of a 12-year-old. I dreaded the whole thing, and then the jury came back with a rape conviction. For half a second, I had this odd sense of relief and then the judge threw the verdict out. I started weeping, remembering all of the developmentally disabled women I worked with at the shelter who'd been raped—especially Lisa and Tony. I remember that we took Lisa's case through the preliminary hearing stage, but I can't remember the trial. I know that everyone I worked with from emergency room to trial lost their cases (about 12 women in three years), so I know Lisa lost too, but I guess I've totally repressed the trial. Tony, I remember, was just incapable of setting any kind of consistent sexual boundaries for herself. She'd been incested for about 15 years by her stepfather, who was very brutal. She'd have rages periodically, that kept all kinds of folks at a distance. But various and sundry men knew how to pick their spots to take what they wanted. It was totally exhausting and demoralizing trying to help her create some sense of consistent safety around her body and her sexuality. Then, of course, there was Rita. Raped at 40-plus years of age, assured by me that she would be okay, and then murdered the night after her rape in her apartment.

I shut off the stupid TV and had a long, wailing cry. I thought about what it means to bring a boy, who will be a man, into the world. How do I not hold all of this against him? How do I keep myself open to his wants and his needs when I have observed so many men plow past all of these women's most sacred boundaries to "get theirs'? I find myself in the territory of all of the straight women who I worked beside, who went home to their husbands and their sons, and just about split themselves into a million pieces trying to live with what they felt and knew. I chose to be a lesbian so that I wouldn't have to fight that particular battle, at that close a proximity, on a daily basis. And now, here I am. On the cusp of it, again.

I'm really tired today. Trying to pat Reilly, sweetly. Sifting all of this through.

June 10. Last Sunday, I was standing in line at a local coffee shop, packed with folks, the line interminably long and slow, when an old homeless woman started to faint in her seat by the window. A young woman with three kids in tow starts yelling "an old woman is fainting, call 911 !" and the hapless coffee crew responds like molasses. The woman yells, "she's throwing up, she's throwing up!" By now, I've eeked my way to the front of the line and the clerk is trying to get my order together. A wave of disgust comes over me—this old woman alone is so vulnerable, so without a net. Suddenly, the

lights start to dim, and I can feel myself start to pass out. I'm thinking, "Oh. No, I am NOT going to pass out in this fucking Starbucks." I realize it's my mother's voice in my head. Full of steel. Absolutely determined. I am NOT this vulnerable. I will NOT keel over among all these strangers while I'm carrying this baby. I lean against the railing at the counter, dip my head slightly—because I also don't want any of these people to know that I'm having a sympathetic reaction to this poor woman, whom I refuse to identify with around the fragile house of cards that is her life. It's not enough. I need to squat down and put my head between my legs. But no way, I won't. I stand there, give my money, take my change, and the darkness closes in on me. I'm realizing, finally, that I am not going to make it to the door with my coffee, juice and muffin, as planned. I need help. I turn to a woman in line with two daughters and say, "I'm having an hysterical reaction to this woman. I'm going to pass out, too." The woman looks at me blankly, like she can't put my logical, even-keeled description together with the information. The man next to me in line puts out his hand. I take it. He moves me over to the window, where there's a chair, and I sit down. I put my head between my legs and he retrieves my coffee and sundries. I sit there for two minutes and regain my bearings, breathe deeply. The ambulance arrives and goes over to the old woman, whom I have refused to look at. There is some discussion taking place, but my back is to them, I don't know what the deal is. Finally, I can tell that my head has cleared. I pick up my stuff and walk out, careful not to look in the direction of the crisis, get into my car, and drive myself home.

June 23. Rocky week. Last Wednesday, I started bleeding. Rusty, brown-colored blood in dribbles down my leg, but mostly just enough to get a stain when I wipe. So, I had an ultra-sound and everything checked out fine. Placenta's in place, no tears. My cervix is closed. Reilly is still doing his Olympic training in my womb. Active as hell. (I must say all that activity gave me pause.)

Friday, I'm still bleeding, so I go see the Doc, who sends me over to the hospital to "labor and delivery" to get on a monitor and see if I'm having contractions. I have just a pitiful walk over there by myself. Panicky. Cosmically "alone." My ex-lover Linda races down from a house she's framing in Bethesda. After a couple of hours it's clear that I'm not having contractions. I appear to have a bad bladder infection. Dr. B. gives me a scrip for some horrendous antibiotic and puts me on modified bed rest for the weekend.

What happens for me is this: I've been really, really ambivalent about having a boy for a couple of weeks. Just sad, sad, sad about not having a daughter and it being unlikely that I'll have more than one child. I'm thinking, even as I'm crying and going over to the hospital that maybe I'm not supposed to have this boy. Maybe we start all over again and I'll get a girl next time. And other voices rush up to meet me: What an ingrate! You're so lucky you can conceive, this may be your only chance to have a baby, *period.* A miscarriage would serve you right now, wouldn't it? How could you be sending this child signals—after all this—that he's unwanted? Maybe he can feel it and he's bailing out ! Who

needs an ambivalent, queer, single mom anyway? And on and on..

Now, I know I need to have the sadness around not having a daughter and what I imagine that loss means. But finding the room for this ambivalence is hard. I'm aware that I'm not as excited as I would be if I were having a girl, and were telling folks that I'm having a girl. When I see little girls with their moms, I feel like I'm experiencing a kind of death. Goddamn, I don't want to infect this child with all this stuff. He's barely a pound and I've got the weight of all my wounding on him already. I can only hope that allowing myself the space for this is going to bring me to a much better place once he arrives.

July 13. A little over 26 weeks today. Feeling good, after a second round of antibiotics—a much less harsh prescription than the first. Reilly is just active as can be. He moves around all day, and into the night. He's gotten big enough so that I can track his movements visually across my stomach. I've been trying to spend more conscious time with him lately—to rub cocoa butter on my tummy and talk to him. To give him my full concentration instead of just moving around with him as though I'm still on my own.

I took him to the Vietnam Memorial last week. I have been to the Memorial wall many times, but this was very different. Viewing the names this time, I imagined scores of mothers burying their young sons, and the terrible grief that such a perverse loss engenders. I eavesdropped on the conversations mothers were having with their young children as they filed past the thousands and thousands of names. One young girl asked her mother over and over, "So, everyone on this wall died? Every single one? None of them survived?" It reminded me how desperately children want to believe in a just world. Her mother explained that "not everyone" who went to the war died, but that all of the people whose names were on the wall were killed. This did not appear to comfort her daughter. One mother, who was bald-headed—I imagined a cancer survivor—explained to her son that "Daddy's number came up" on the draft but it was as the war was ending and he was very lucky not to have to go. The boy kept looking at the wall saying, "His number came up? His number came up?" Other parents didn't do much framing of the Memorial for their children. I saw little boys "playing" on the bodies of the nurses in the women's memorial as though they were bongo drums. Other young girls had a height measuring contest by aligning their bodies with the rows of names on the wall. I heard some parents finish the procession with comments like, "Okay, the Lincoln's next and then we'll go to the Washington."

So, I'm trying to stay "awake" through the pregnancy, to relate to Reilly more like the parents in the earlier part of that passage, without obsessing on him.

***

In terms of me, myself and I, my sexuality stuff appears to be shifting. I thought I'd get more seriously horny in this final trimester, but I seem to be getting less so. For the past couple of months, I have been lamenting the great waste of my gorgeous blooming body with me as my sole audience. But now,

I'm getting so big, my fantasy life has slowed to a serious ebb. Getting in bed with anyone right now would be hard to maneuver, and I don't feel as hot as I have in the past few months. In the second trimester, I had a regular flow of group sex fantasies, featuring butches, f2ms and bio-boys variously. I was a top in most of them, generally with a compliment of bottoms that I ordered around me (and around each other). In the past week or so, I've let myself move into bottom territory in these fantasies. For a while in month 5 and 6, I seriously thought of placing a kinky personal ad. But despite my horniness—and notwithstanding my therapist's observation that getting laid might do me some good—I just couldn't figure out a way to play out the kinds of fantasies I was interested in while keeping me and Reilly safe. So the sex horizon remains (seemingly) devoid of possibility.

September 16. Just finished Anne Lamott's Operating Instructions, a wild journal of her first year as a single mom with her son, Sam. Was struck by a number of things: first and foremost: the insanity of having a colicky baby. I was thrilled to learn after many harrowing passages that cutting out dairy and wheat changed this dramatically. In those first, intensely colicky weeks, Lamott moves between being besotted with love and barely able to control her homicidal rage. I felt really blessed that she was willing to share the depths of this.

I was also struck by what it means to be a heterosexual single mom—really so much more to carry around the absence of a father. She feels this as a failure of hers for Sam and worries about his impending sense of loss around this. I guess the queer model gives me more room not to worry—the absense of a father will not be construed as a loss in our family, and the presence of so many loving aunties, uncles and what not will certainly provide a tangible and vibrant family for Reilly.

And, I know my decision to have a known donor definitely assuages the "absent Dad" fears to a degree. I don't know how present D. will be, but it will be up to him to decide, for the most part. Whatever "losses" Reilly might have about his family configuration are more likely to be centered on the queerness of the whole endeavor and I think this will be a good process for him to go through, and get to the other side of. Since my biggest worry is that he's going to be a white boy of so much privilege, locating a sense of otherness in his family situation is going to be an important lesson—an ultimately humanizing one, I hope.

Lamott has a few intense and terrific passages about what incredible disappointments her male lovers have been (while her brother and many male pals come through in spades). As she rakes over their indifference, their willingness to take, take, take, she doesn't make any connection to this boy that she's raising in terms of thinking about masculinity, power and intimacy. Who does she think Sam will be??? This, of course, is where I go instantly when I think about Reilly: right to the insults and challenges that the queer and gender-transgressing men in my life have faced as well as the immense indifference and refusal to acknowledge power among the straight and traditionally gendered.

Will Reilly be a target of sexism or a perpetrator? What is there to hope for in that?

September 23. Every day feels like a bit of a milestone now. Last night I ate dinner too late and now I'm in heartburn hell. Didn't sleep well. Sluggish at work. Walking like a serious penguin, although I did manage about a third of my pre-pregnancy daily walk this morning, and it felt like a real accomplishment.

Reilly's sperm donor came by last night, ostensibly with veggies from our organic veggie coop, but really because he is just freaking out about the baby. I felt somewhat wary of him for the first time in all this. Partly, I think, because it seemed like he wanted me to take care of him in some way, and I don't want to get into the business of taking care of him, especially since he hasn't established anything that remotely resembles a care-giving relationship with me throughout the pregnancy. He has mostly just popped in and out and been somewhat distant from the whole process—which I've been very comfortable with given our conception of him as a donor and not a dad. I don't need him to take care of me. Accordingly, I don't want to be in a position of having to take care of him. This isn't a parenting partnership.

But the baby's almost here and he's wigging out in a daddy universe, that much is clear. I can certainly understand that, and I want to be affirming and caring with him, but clear. I think it's going to be really important in the beginning for me to be clear about how I'm defining the "donor"-Reilly relationship, and to work with D. as openly and directly as I can about where he's at and how it's going for him. He's scheduled a trip for November, which I am relieved and grateful for now, although it seemed odd to me when he put it together. Perhaps he's (unconsciously or consciously) trying to build in a little space given this not-dad configuration. I realize that I don't want to spend a ton of energy on this. That I want it to be simple. And it's probably going to be very complex and take time.

January 21, 1999. The boy is exactly three months old today, and I am back at work for the third consecutive day.

Last night, he grabbed a soft toy and pulled it to his chest for the first time. (Then immediately tried to cram it in his mouth—his mother's child.) I am thrilled to be a part of the miracle that he is every minute.

No way to catch up on the three-plus month gap in the record here. A kind of supportive amnesia has already set in around the most traumatic parts—a really hard labor that ended in his arrival in respiratory distress and a one-week trip to neonatal intensive care. Leg paralysis (on me) that stayed almost a week in the wake of delivering a nearly ten pound baby (9lbs 12ozs). His distress over the ICU separation that left him unable to breast feed and biting me for weeks. A smoke inhalation scare at home during his first week. A yeast infection in his mouth/my breasts at Thanksgiving. Now a sinus something-or-other (into its fourth week) that makes it hard for him to breathe, waking him up every hour and half.

What I find myself in most of the time is just sheer awe. He is gorgeous. A big, active Gerber boy with blue eyes and a beatific smile. He's fat, fat, fat, with overstuffed sausages for arms and legs. He's long too, and very good-natured—especially considering the various challenges he's already faced. He adores me. He adores the world. There is nothing I'd rather do than this.

My sister Stephanie's presence the first several weeks saved us. I can't imagine what kind of distress we'd both be in if she hadn't been there—holding, walking, consoling, loving him up every minute, and then doing every possible job imaginable around the house, and finally reassuring me that I could do this. At two different points, I asked her if she thought I should give him up for adoption— "he is so perfect and I am so flawed." It was an astonishing place to get to in myself—and no one was more surprised than Steph to have to give me reassurance on that level.

Now, I will do anything short of murder to keep him, keep us together, to make a path for him that is safe and sure. He is an inexplicable gift, and I am working hard every day to be present for him, with him—despite sleep deprivation and whatever other nagging stresses. This is my life now, and I am one lucky dyke to have it thus.

Noreen Shanahan

A Curve of Velvet

Shadows in colour dance
silhouettes silently mouth
the shape of things to come.

This pink-dipped child
leapfrogs inside the heat
of her mother's strolling shape.

Darkness shielded
in a curve of velvet.

Shadows ink to frame a life
no substance no odour
visibility absent.

She drags these playmates
out with her
splash across pavement
the street a companioned nursery.

Sometimes she trips
over what cannot be seen
then leaps high still grinning.

Effervescent always present
shadows.

This child favours the rainbow.

Rachel Epstein

Our Kids in the Hall
Lesbian Families Negotiate the Public School System

My daughter has two mothers. Shortly before she started kindergarden we tried to prepare her for the fact that having two moms could make her the brunt of jokes or teasing. The possibility was beyond the scope of her imagination. To her it was not fathomable that anybody would do or say anything to deny the reality of her family. She is in Grade Two now and, although her experiences to date have consisted of daycare teachers who did not know how to answer questions from other kids about her family, a classmate telling her it was weird that she has two moms, and some awkward moments on Father's Day, we are anticipating, as an older, more experienced daughter of lesbians puts it, "it gets worse in the grades."

The bulk of this article explores some of the issues facing lesbian families (parents and children) in the Toronto public school system. It has grown from eight years of research on lesbian parenting and many conversations with lesbian parents about the public school system as a source of fear, anxiety and disempowerment. The quotes are selected from 20 interviews conducted between 1992 and 1997.[1] The article is organized around three theoretical assumptions: (a) that schools not only *reproduce* dominant cultural norms such as homophobia, sexism and heterosexism, but are important sites for the *production* of sexual and other identities; (b) that understandings of the meanings and practices that make up broader student cultures around issues of sexuality and family are crucial to developing pedagogical and administrative practices that effectively challenge dominant norms; and (c) that the experiences of lesbian parents and their children are not monolithic, but intersect with other complex and contradictory issues of knowledge, power and identity. In a postscript at the end, I raise some methodological questions about the uses and limitations of "realist" research, as represented by the first part of the article,

and about the possibilities contained in research perspectives that allow space for "not-knowing."[9]

Schools as cultural producers

> In effect schools operate as important public spaces in which young people learn about and construct their sexualities and come face to face with the different value society places on heterosexual as opposed to gay and lesbian identities...heterosexualities are put in place, and maintained through complex social relationships which serve to marginalize and subordinate specific social groups (lesbians and gays, girls and women, black and minority groups, disabled people). (Redman, 1994:141-43)

The privileging of heterosexuality and heterosexual family structures manifests itself in a multitude of blatant and subtle ways in daily school life:

- The erasure of anything but depictions of heterosexual family life in curriculum materials.
- Lack of acknowledgment of the nonbiological lesbian parent, or other parental figures, in school forms, for inclusion in parent-teacher interviews, and as potential participants in school activities and outings.
- Lack of visibility of other than heterosexual teachers and administrators.
- Lack of support from the school for children and their parents going through a "coming out" process.
- Denial of the reality of children's family structures.

In Grade One, which seemed to be the big time when everybody learned the straight version of the facts of life, there was a lot of telling her that she had the facts wrong and that she must have had a dad that died, that we weren't telling her the truth, and that kind of stuff. She would come storming home from school and say "Kathy says you lied to me."

- Rejection by friends and/or the parents of friends

I picked Tanya up one day visiting her friend and she was sobbing, just sobbing. It came out that her friend had called her "faggot," had said we weren't normal. From then on Tanya didn't want to have anything to do with her.

The marginalization of lesbian families is not always experienced as blatant or aggressive homophobia. Often it is experienced as a sense of dis-

comfort in teachers and administrators, a feeling that cognitively they want to deal appropriately with the issue, but are being confronted with challenges to their own deeply-held ideas and values about sexuality and family.

> *Nobody's calling me a dyke or a lezzie or anything like that, it's all undercurrent, it's all quite insidious and hidden and covered.*

> *We're talking about a very nice public school with very devoted teachers who like their work...They were trying very hard to do the right thing and they were very uncomfortable. Their body language and tone of voice were saying. "I WISH YOU WEREN'T DOING THIS. THIS MAKES ME VERY UNCOMFORTABLE."*

Common in Toronto schools is a reluctance to acknowledge the systemic nature of the exclusion of lesbian and gay families, and a notion that efforts made in areas of anti-bias education have dealt with the "problem," at least at the level of teachers and administrators.

Lesbian families sometimes sense that they are being viewed through a lens that foregrounds their lesbianism, and that sees the ideas, actions and parenting practices of individual lesbian parents as representative of *all* lesbian parents. A lesbian mom coaching a girl's softball team feels watched and pressured to "be really the best coach they'd ever had" so that "no one can say you're a perverted lesbian trying to seduce children." A lesbian couple that has split up feels exposed and,

> *that somehow we've failed in this experiment of lesbians having babies.... There was a huge pressure having the kids and then being* the *biggest role model throughout the school, and then when you split up it's not just like a heterosexual couple splitting up, it's like, you know, "you see what happens to these lesbian families, they can't provide stability."*

Particularly salient are issues around gender role behaviours. Lesbians raising boys are frequently confronted with others' concerns about the "lack of male role models." When there is a difficulty or problem with a student, the issue of male role models is sometimes raised to foreground lesbianism as the possible source of the problem.

> *It was Grade 4 and I don't think this teacher knew how to relate to boys, so she wasn't very creative in terms of how she dealt with a "behaviour problem." So Karl was in the office a lot. At one point she thought that perhaps he was acting out because he didn't have male role models.*

Response from lesbian mothers to the "lack of male role model" argument is varied. Some point out the large numbers of children who have unknown, absent (physically or psychically), or abusive fathers. A 1981 study (Kirkpatrick,

Smith and Roy), comparing lesbian mothers to heterosexual single mothers, found the lesbians to be more concerned with providing opportunities for their children to develop ongoing relationships with men. The study also indicated that lesbian mothers had more adult male family friends and included male relatives more often in their children's activities than did heterosexual mothers.

> *There's people who believe that a kid has to have a man in their life. I believe it's great for a kid to have good men in their life. There's few children in this world who can say that's true for them. My kids are some of those few.*

A more complex argument points out the problematic assumption that mothers and fathers, simply due to biological gender, provide their children with essentially different experiences. Important to consider are the potentially positive aspects of separating "masculine" and "feminine" behaviour from biological gender, particularly given the nature of dominant forms of masculinity.

> *Max regards my friend Cynthia as his best male role model. If you think of role modeling in terms of behaviours and attitudes, then Cynthia is indeed quite a lovely role model in that she's vigorous and protective and powerful and tender, and likes things like trucks.... To detach certain kinds of behaviours that are seen as "masculine" from what you've got between your legs, allows for far more openness and range in deciding how you are going to grow up into a human being.*

Each time the child of a lesbian exhibits behaviour outside of what are considered "normal" gender roles, there is the potential for lesbianism to be focused on as the source of the "problem." A good example is the story of Karl, the son of lesbians, who decided to wear a dress and barrettes to daycare. The next day the supervisor of the daycare called having had a big reaction and complaints from parents, including some who were concerned about transmission of the HIV virus! While the supervisor was not as upset as the parents, she was sympathetic and expressed concern for Karl, that his peers would tease him and that he would get hurt. Karl's parents paraphrase her comments as: "You already are lesbians and now you're doing this. This is going to be extra hard on your kid."

Karl's parents, on the other hand, felt that even though there was a possibility that he might get teased, it was more important that he learn to make his own choices based on the reactions he might receive, and they did not want to be the bearers of the message, "boys don't wear dresses."

As a result of the incident the daycare held a workshop on sexuality where a high level of general discomfort with issues of sexuality and reproduction became apparent. A teacher expressed her discomfort with Karl's level of knowledge about women's periods and reproductive processes. One of Karl's

mothers says:

> *...because what "normal" is for most children is they don't have that information at the age of four, so the fact that Karl had that information and could articulate it meant that it was 'abnormal' and it being "abnormal" was probably related to us being lesbians. So somewhere lesbian gets attached to the problem. Even if it's not verbally stated, that was clearly the undercurrent.*

The impact of incidents like this one can be pressure on lesbian parents to encourage their children to conform, generally, and specifically in terms of gender roles. One parent describes the tension and inner conflict she experiences:

> *We're clearly not aiming to fit in and we have this joint role of influencing our children with the message, "Be who you are." There is such pressure on us, as dykes, as weirdos, as outsiders, and you know that anything that goes wrong with these children, somebody's going to blame it on your sexuality and how you're bringing them up. So that puts pressure on you to bring them up as perfectly fitting-in children. And you have to stop all the time and say "no, no, no, no, no." And we're into pretty wild and raunchy sex and leather outfits and all this stuff and how do you go into the world and balance all this? For a while I think I decided "Okay, I'm going to give up that sex stuff, I'm going to become a nice safe academician, couldn't I just get a Ph.D. and I'd be a famous smarty cakes, right" And then I go "no, no, this is the devil talking, you're about to make a really sick deal here, so put back on that leather jacket, get out to that dance, you know and let the kids see all of that." ... I want them to do well academically, that's their survival... but they've got to be them in that, and wear whatever they want to wear, talk whatever way they want to talk, and be sure of who they are inside themselves. That's probably one of the hardest struggles.*

Parents deal with this pressure to conform in different ways, and often with mixed feelings and ambivalence, as illustrated by the following quote from another parent of a boy who wanted to wear dresses:

> *Bill went through a dresses phase. And I did not let him wear his dress to daycare. I just decided there was already enough stuff around people looking at us and looking at him as the son of lesbian mothers. I thought "he doesn't need to be exposed to people's reactions that he is not going to think for a moment are coming." But I felt guilty and I feel like something got lost there. I sent him a message and maybe if he'd had the blatant message that we could have talked about, maybe it would have been better.*

This tension between conformity and resistance can also mediate parent interactions with school staff. Lesbian parents are often fearful of the negative impact their lesbianism might have on their children's experiences, and, conscious of the tendency for their behaviour to be seen as 'lesbian behaviour,' sometimes hesitate to make waves.

> *I find with her teacher, for example, I become this little kid. I won't speak up, which is quite shocking. Neither of us do. Whereas I know other parents who don't get as worried about things like this.... I think it has a lot to do with lesbianism, I think definitely. Because I think it would be easy to discount what we have to say because we're lesbians.*

However, many lesbian parents, including the woman quoted above, do often find themselves in a position to intervene on behalf of their children, but find it a complicated process that requires negotiation with their children and awareness of the cultures their children inhabit at school.

Student cultures

The production of gender and sexual identities in schools take place within the context of student cultures, cultures which differ according to one's positioning in various relations of power, i.e. class, race, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, etc. The student cultures inhabited by boys and girls are, as one mother puts it, "like two different worlds." While I am not equipped to fully discuss the implications for lesbian families of gendered student cultures, I can make a few observations.

Perhaps because homophobia is less integral to girls' culture than to boys', girls, particularly those who exhibit 'normal' girl behaviour, seem to experience less direct, brutal forms of homophobia, and certainly less concern from school staff about the lack of men in their lives. Valerie Walkerdine (1986) analyses the ways that, even though they on average perform better at school than boys, girls are often presented as "'passive', 'hardworking', 'helpful', and 'rule following', characteristics seen as antithetical to the 'active, enquiring' nature of childhood (more often exhibited by boys), but compatible with the requirements necessary to join the caring (female) professions" (71-72). Interestingly, one lesbian mother describes her daughter in terms similar to Walkerdine's, and links her daughter's desire to please and to 'fit in' with the receiving of less attention, negative or positive:

> *Tanya is fine in whatever setting she's in, and I think the sexism in all that is that she kind of gets lost in the shuffle. She's perceived as a great student because she's always on top of her school work, she's quiet, she's cooperative, she's very studious and she really likes to please people. She's all of the things little girls are supposed to be.*

Tanya's other mother says:

> *Karl gets it (homophobic harassment) more than Tanya does. Partly she's younger, partly she's a girl, so the social scene for her is very different.*

For Tanya most of the reaction to her lesbian family has come in the form of teasing from friends. Twice she has had friends abruptly reject her because of their parents' reaction to lesbianism. As a result she does not make a lot of new friends, and carefully chooses those she does. Clearly more work is needed on the ways that homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality impact girls at school, and, specifically, the daughters of lesbians.

In the process of schooling, boys learn different lessons than girls with regards to gender and sexual identity, the most important being—heterosexuality is 'normal,' and 'macho' is the most acceptable form of masculinity. To maintain this sense of 'normal' masculinity, boys learn to distance from, render invisible and subordinate other, less 'manly' forms of masculinity, and their association with the feminine. Homophobia, then, is used as a tool to police gender and sexual boundaries, to subordinate behaviour and attitudes not appropriate to 'real' men (or boys).

One lesbian mother describes the combination of factors leading to her son Max's harassment on the playground, including name-calling and physical violence:

> *The playground was a nightmare for him, an absolute nightmare. He dreaded recess, he dreaded the end of school. They were times when he was in danger. First, he's not at all macho, and never was. His gender identity, I'm proud to say, was not rigid in any way. Piece number two is he was identified in first grade as having a learning disability. And for quite a long time he had to wear a patch over one eye.*

She goes on to describe her own commitment to non-violent conflict resolution and her attempt to encourage her son to adopt these methods in the school yard. Eventually he came home in tears, saying "Mom, I have to start hitting back." He did, and the violence decreased.

Max deviated from cultural norms of masculinity in several ways—his gender identity was flexible; he was, at least temporarily, physically and learning disabled; and he did not fight back with a tough or macho style. His mother wonders, "how it would have been had he already been a kid who took care of himself in a way that worked, who had that kind of street wise toughness. He might have got away with the lesbian stuff quite readily, I don't know."

This then, is the context within which boys of lesbians in urban centres live—a student culture that another mother describes as "tough, competitive, you're always working out who's going to trick you, and you know, little gangs form."

In this context, it is a complicated judgment call for parents as to when and how to intervene on behalf of their children, when, in some cases, intervention can make things worse. Also involved in decisions regarding interventions is the belief, echoed by many lesbian parents, that their children need control over the "coming out process" in the school environment.

> *I think as adults we can only have the vaguest idea of what life is really like at school. I think a lot of the time we think it's better than it really is. I think we need to listen to our kids and ask our kids and consult our kids, because it's their lives.*

Parents express sadness about their inability to protect their children from pain, while also talking with pride about the resources and survival strategies their children develop.

> *How do you allow your kid to learn how to live in the world and not be ashamed of who they are, but also negotiate safety all the time around being kids from a lesbian family, from a family that's split up ... all these things, money-wise, class-wise.... I spent a lot of time crying about the fact that I can't protect them all the time and the fact that I can't run into the school everytime there's a problem in the schoolyard. They're going to have to negotiate some of these things themselves.*

> *It's actually quite fascinating to watch how they will figure out what to do. Karl was once asked, "Which one is your mom?" He told the kid, "Well, I came out of her body." He wasn't denying his relationship to Barb (nonbiological mother) and he told the truth. I thought "That's pretty brilliant." It teaches you a lot about how kids cope with oppression.*

The children of lesbians develop a wide range of innovative ways of negotiating their own and their parents' identities through an intricate web of social norms and expectations. Choices regarding "coming out" and the strategies used to manage other children's reactions to their parents' lesbianism are diverse, and vary contextually and at different ages and grade levels. It seems that as one gets older issues get more complex and there is a perceived need for greater caution. Decisions to come out to friends are often based on careful gauging of potential reactions and safety levels. For example, safety is gauged by noting a friend's reaction to a book about lesbian moms, or by noticing who uses the term "faggot" in the schoolyard. One child of lesbians does not have close friendships at school and reserves these for other children of lesbians; another develops friendships with kids who in some way challenge traditional gender roles, more "androgynous types." One boy asks his mother to remove lesbian content from their shared living space so he will feel more comfortable bringing friends over; another makes friends with tough kids as a way of

ensuring his own safety; another, expressing fear of teenage boys, asks to go to an alternative school where he hopes to find more like-minded kids and less macho behaviour; and another begins to refer to his "moms" as "parents," to avoid direct confrontation with the issue.

Lesbian parents *and* their children reiterate again and again the difference that the presence of other children of lesbians *and* openly lesbian or gay teachers makes to their experience at school.

However, the identities and experiences of the children of lesbians are multi-faceted. The presence of other lesbian families, while clearly important, is not a guarantee that the school environment will meet the needs of a population, who aside from their membership in a lesbian family, are differently located in relation to a multitude of other social identities.

Complex identities

The coming out discourse that emphasizes the need and desirability of coming out to family and friends, has been critiqued for failing to recognize the risks, particularly for gays and lesbians of colour, of losing important involvement and connections to communities of families and friends. The discourse of 'coming out' is seen to isolate and privilege the gay or lesbian aspect of one's identity, while not recognizing the impact of multiple and intersecting identities. The experience of coming out to family and friends can differ vastly depending on one's location vis a vis race, class, age, religion, able-bodiedness, etc.

The children of lesbians have complex identities and there is a danger of defining identity in terms of a single component and offering simplified solutions to problems that are embedded in complex social relations. For example, for Max, the boy mentioned earlier who suffered much playground abuse, his identity as the son of a lesbian was just a small part of a matrix of factors (gender performance, learning disability, physical disability, mother who advocates nonviolence) that influenced his experience. His mother wonders how things would have been different had not all these factors been present and, in fact, he now reports that much of the harassment against him ended when he got contact lenses! A perspective that sees him only as the child of a lesbian, misses significant aspects of his experience.

Similarly, Karl, the son of a lesbian couple, has not told his friends at school about his family structure, and has recently been reluctant to bring friends home. His parents and sister, however, attribute this to the fact that his best friend's parents are both professionals and have a lot of money, and that Karl does not feel his house is up to the standards of his friend's.

While Karl, who is white, has chosen to attend an alternative school where lesbian families are (somewhat) more easily accepted, his sister Tanya, who is "mixed-race," has stayed in a regular public school where she has more access to friendships with children of colour, something that is increasingly important to her identity.

Important to keep in mind, too, is the fact that the experience of lesbian parents and their children in the schools is not uniformly negative or unproductive. Lesbian parents also describe the ideas, attitudes and skills their children develop, related to the challenges they face as the children of lesbians. These include: skills in negotiating difficult situations; sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of oppression; understanding of complex political issues; knowledge and understanding of gender issues:

> *...awareness that there are choices, possibilities, that there is a range of behaviour other than the strictly culturally defined one. It means he is growing into his sexuality with a much more open field to play in, and I think that's wonderful.*

> *...he has a nose for bullshit and hypocrisy and for not doing stuff because you're afraid of what people will think about it, that I think is unusually acute, and I love that.*

Conclusion

School administrators, teachers and policy makers who want to seriously address the needs of lesbian families must first become familiar with the ways that schools actively produce hierarchically ordered gender identities, sexualities and family structures. Effective pedagogical and administrative practices will address the power dynamics involved in the marginalization of lesbian families, and will attempt to take the burden of responsibility for transforming these dynamics off the shoulders of lesbian families. One small example is a teacher who, at a parent-teacher interview, took the risk of asking "Is your partner a man or a woman?" In this way, she opened a space for lesbian existence.

In Ontario, 1999, attempts to shift school structures to accomodate the needs of lesbian families take place in the context of large-scale budget cuts and a hitherto unseen dismantling of the education system. In the face of the resurgence of conservative "family values," and a lack of anything resembling government commitment to social justice, lesbian families, and others marginalized in the school system, face an uphill battle. The struggle is inevitable, however, as increasing numbers of lesbians choose to make children part of their families. Parent night will never be the same.

Postscript

This work on lesbian families in schools grew out of eight years of researching various aspects of lesbian parenting. My research interests followed my life: when I was pregnant I produced an information kit on alternative insemination; when I had a baby and toddler I explored the division of labour and "roles" in lesbian parenting couples; when someone close to me was denied access to her nonbiological child, I interviewed nonbiological parents, and

when my kid hit school age, I began to look at what was happening in schools. Thus my research came, not from a place of knowing, but from a place of not knowing, not being sure what my daughter would experience at school, how I could prepare her, where we should send her to school, how much could we/ should we intervene?

Yet, with the publication of an expanded version of this paper in a local, left-wing journal about schools (Epstein, 1998), I came to be seen as someone who knows about lesbian families in schools, and I begin to enact the part. I accept the invitations to sit on panels where I present the "truth" about what is happening. I make suggestions about the kinds of thinking and actions people might want to take around these issues. I answer people's questions with authority. Thrust into the position of knower, I am left with less room not to know, less room for my own questions and uncertainties to exist and propel me, and less room for new approaches to the whole question. Suddenly I see this happening all around me. We live in a world of experts, whose interpolation into that role gets in the way of opportunities to create from a place of not-knowing. I begin to think of my realist tale as something that has plugged up what should be flowing. Like a dam in a river, the realist tale creates energy, produces order, and does useful work. But the dam is not innocent, it blocks the "natural" flow of the river, it impacts on the environment, and it creates dependencies in people. Soon more dams are needed to create more energy and more order, to create the illusion of control. Dams breed more dams, and realist stories breed realist stories in order to maintain the illusion of unified subjects and mastery of a knowable world.

But dams do useful things, and so does this article. It is an attempt to stay close to the things lesbian parents said about their experiences in schools, and to make visible and bring to a larger audience's awareness the concerns and experiences of lesbian parents. Given the significance of visibility/invisibility for lesbians generally, and lesbian parents particularly, the article makes visible a group of people and experiences not typically, in fact rarely, foregrounded in mainstream culture. The article stems from my excitement about its contents, and is my attempt to do justice to people's stories by ordering them in a way that makes sense, that communicates some of the subtleties and nuance of their experiences and that fits conventional formats enough to be publishable. Lesbian parents who have read the article have responded positively: that it "captures what it's really like," "is both theoretical and accessible," "gets at some of the complexities." They are often delighted that someone has put something down on paper about a largely undocumented experience, and they frequently request copies for friends and for use in schools and daycares. I have used the article in workshops with teachers, including at my own daughter's school, and at other presentations and speaking engagements. The article provides a framework for political direction and concrete demands around which to organize. Yet the story I tell is just one of many that could be told.

An inquiring tale

Last summer, in the context of a graduate course, I used the same data on which I had based the original article (which I refer to as the "realist tale"), to experiment with the writing of what I called an "inquiring tale." It was my attempt to carry out research from a place of not-knowing, of uncertainty, from a place that troubles what can be known and the validity of the "real." My inquiring tale looks very different from the original. The text is a collage, an ensemble of juxtapositions of its various parts—my narrative in the middle of the page, quotes from lesbian parents running down the sides and sometimes invading the middle column, a theoretical piece, a set of 'discussion questions' and a poem excerpt at the end. The pieces do not fit together neatly. One does not totally explain the other and they do not make a neat package of "sense." These unconventional textual practices were my attempt to make visible the constructed nature of the framework, to surprise and/or shock the reader out of stereotypes and common assumptions, to make apparent my own questions and lack of knowing, to produce a thinking reader and to resist a smooth sail through a nice story.

The inquiring tale begins by recounting a conversation I had with a young South Asian woman. We were talking about children and schooling and I spoke about a recent decision to move our daughter from the neighbourhood school to a nearby alternative public school, where we anticipated her experiencing less homophobia. The woman I spoke to was clear that "she doesn't believe in protecting her kid from these things." She experienced a lot of racism at school in England, and it was through these experiences that she learned what she knows about oppression and survival, and she does not regret it. She seemed clear in her view that children should not be protected, while expressing some doubt about exactly how she would handle specifics when they arose. The perspective she offered was not new to me, but that evening it had a strong impact. I remembered another conversation, a few years earlier, with a black lesbian mother who described the racism her daughter had endured at schoo' She also spoke about the good things she had learned as a result. "The more st they deal with the better," were her words.

Recalling these conversations led me to think in a different way about ti. approaches lesbian parents take to their children's school experiences and tc consider a framework that "poses as a problem what has been offered as a solution" (Lather, 1994: 118) by problematizing the tensions between protecting one's children on the one hand, and preparing them for the dangers of life on the other. Perhaps these tensions are illustrated by the two stories described earlier of lesbian mothers figuring out how to respond to their son's desire to wear dresses to daycare. This line of thought led me back to Valerie Walkerdine and Helen Lucey's 1989 book, *Democracy in the Kitchen,* in which they use transcripts of interactions between four-year-old-girls and their mothers to develop theory about middle- and working-class mothering practices. In their analysis, middle-class mothers are more likely to convey the illusion to their

children that the world is safe, and that it can be known and mastered, and to raise children for whom the belief that they are empowered, autonomous and free is part of the mechanism of their regulation. Working-class mothers, on the other hand, are more likely to prepare their children for survival in a world where relations of power and conflict are visible.

My aim here is not to give a detailed synopsis of Walkerdine and Lucey's arguments, nor to fully develop this tension between protection and preparation, but to point out the instability of data interpretation. My original article offers one interpretation of the data. An exploration of the tensions between protecting/preparing our children, and of the meanings of "protection" to different parents and different children would offer other interpretations and different conclusions.

Having spent much of my academic life to date unable to find an embodied place from which to write, writing this 'inquiring tale' was an exhilarating experience. Allowing my not-knowing the space to live seemed to enlarge possibilities, and I lived and breathed this writing in a way I had previously associated only with creative writing.

Of course, there are dangers associated with this kind of data interpretation and writing—the danger that data can become clay for artists' hands, disconnected from the meanings it has to those who are its source; or that creative presentation and interesting textual performance can substitute for rigorous thinking. Figuring a way into the portrayal and performance of complexity can take a lot of time and space. The realist tale seems to lend itself more easily to summarizing and categorizing a lot of data. It can draw cohesive conclusions which allow readers to walk away as if they too are now knowers and can choose to adopt the stance and the praxis stemming from the author's interpretations. I wonder, though, if tales of not-knowing were generally allowed more space, whether we might generate some insights and strategies that would poke us out of the tried and true. How can we do research on lesbian mothering that both makes space for and acknowledges the knowing that stems from the experiences and voices of a previously invisible group, and leaves space for our not-knowing to live and breathe?

Thank you to Patti Lather for an exhilarating shift in perspective.

[1]These 20 interviews were conducted in the context of three different research projects. In each case the women I interviewed were asked how they identified in terms of class, race and ethnicity. Their identifications are as follows: working class–nine, middle class–eleven; English, Scottish or "WASP"–ten, Jewish–four, assimilated Francophone–two; French-Canadian–one, African-Canadian–one, South Asian/Black–one, African/English/French/Portuguese Jew–one. They ranged in age from 29 to 55 years old. I located women to interview through personal networks and with the aasistance of a Toronto-based support group for lesbian mothers.

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Lois M. Berry

Sex Education

My mother, Bernie, confided to me recently about a vow she made as a young mother not to perpetuate the lack of parental communication she experienced as a child—especially about sex. While it may have been Bernie's goal to be more open and honest about the facts of life, that's not how I remember our discussions. I began having periods when I was ten, about the same time John Glenn made his solo orbits around the earth. I knew more about the American space program than about what was happening to my body. To give my mother credit, I don't think she expected the situation to arise for a couple more years, she was blind-sided and unprepared. While she reassured me that I wasn't dying she didn't offer much more information. "Here's the drawer where the sanitary napkins are kept," Mom whispered as she pointed to the bottom of the linen closet. I tried to distinguish shapes in the blackness of the cubby hole. "Where? I don't see anything?" "In back, Honey. Underneath the towels and behind the boxes of Band-Aids. And here's a belt to hold the pads in place." I stood next to her, staring at a thin circle of elastic with metal clips fore and aft. This was unlike any belt I'd seen before. Belts were for strapping on holsters when I played cowboys with the neighborhood kids. The strip of elastic she held looked more like the beginnings of a sling shot. "This is yucky, Mom." The belt and pad were in place. "I hate this, and my belly hurts." "I know, Dear, but women have to go through this every month so we can have babies." What I retained from this conversation, aside from the knowledge that I had years of yuckiness ahead, was that now I could become a mother. I worried constantly about pregnancy and venereal disease, which I'd read about in *Readers' Digest*. I had no idea what VD was, only that it had to do with sex, and it was undermining American Youth. I also had no idea how a woman got pregnant, but assumed sex was involved with that too. Since I'd begun holding hands with

my fifth-grade boyfriend in the dark basement classroom when we watched films, I was worried, afraid that hand-holding was the link to VD and pregnancy. Mom could have saved me hours of turmoil if she'd mentioned a few specifics about reproduction and the role that men have.

With this dearth of information, I can only speculate that my parents assumed we would learn about sex on the streets or from friends—the same way they did. Of course, they were right. My college dorm floor in the early '70s was a den of sexual experimentation. Or so I learned second-hand from adventurous coeds who delighted in sharing explicit,graphic details of their encounters. Dora, a sophomore with a single room, pushed her twin beds together and covered them with a homey, hand-made quilt. Here she enjoyed a variety of men throughout the semester. After many of the encounters she would hold seminars with naive young women like me who gathered on that bed and listened with envy. As the semester progressed, I often had one-on-one tutoring sessions with Dora who relished giving me back rubs as she recounted her conquests. The tingles Dora's hands produced while lingering at the base of my spine, then venturing slowly down my legs made me rejoice that I was her special pupil. One semester with Dora was worth my college tuition.

The next summer, I had my second sex discussion with Mom. I was hungover after a party, she was concerned. The conversation was brief "Lois, getting drunk can get you pregnant." As I pondered her theory and compared it with Dora's, I began to wonder if I had been adopted like my cousins.

As my stepson, Lucas, approaches adolescence sex has become a regular topic at the dinner table. Like many parents today, my partner Cathy and I try to be more open with our son about sex. It's inevitable really, given the topics in the headlines. Last summer when the GOP released the titillating Starr Report, we began to regret encouraging an interest in current affairs. Lucas now has a theoretical understanding of fellatio that Dora would have applauded. In addition to the Starr Report, we've also been confronted with a newspaper story about the death of an attorney in the region. The initial reports said that foul play was not an issue, however, the exact cause of death was mysteriously omitted for weeks. The puzzle was resolved when the coroner announced that the man had asphyxiated himself—during some kind of solo sex act. One evening as we ate pizza, Lucas asked the obvious question. "Mom, what's sexual asphyxiation?" Since we're '90s parents, we're not afraid of sex. We tried to be forthright. "Well, Lukie," I began, "some people like to tie themselves up. Or have someone else tie them up. I'm not exactly sure how that works, but somehow they cut off their oxygen supply and.... Well, what does happen then, Cath?" Cathy offered a vague description of plastic bags, leather and testicles, but Lucas was still confused. "You know, Luke," I made another effort, "all I know about this is what I saw on NYPD Blue last season. Maybe we can catch that show in reruns." "But I never get to watch NYPD Blue. You guys don't think I'm old enough." "Yeah, but you'll be 12 soon, we'll make an exception." Lucas shrugged dismissively, and I picked at a pepperoni, certain that we dealt with

this situation better than my mother would have. As lesbian parents, Cathy and I have another dimension of sex education that straight parents aren't usually confronted with. When Lucas was seven, he and Cathy were driving home from the country when Luke asked where he came from. Another time Cathy might have just said, "Buffalo, New York, Dear," but she suspected that his real question was about sex, so she described his conception by self-insemination, a technique many lesbians use to become mothers.

She told him that a good friend of hers had donated sperm, and she had inserted it into herself with a slender, glass pipette, like those used in laboratories. Lucas had always been told that he'd come from her belly, but now she was more explicit telling where babies grow and how he was birthed. Not believing he was ready for the details about masturbation, she hedged about how her friend provided the sperm and simply said that he just shook his penis around. Lucas seemed content with this explanation, and it wasn't until they were a few blocks from home that Cathy remembered a detail she'd forgotten. "Oh, Lucas. There's another way to make babies too," she began, explaining the old-fashioned, heterosexual method. Before she could finish, Lucas had his hands over his ears. "Nooo. I don't want to hear any more," he pleaded. I don't blame him. I think pipettes are easier to deal with than penises, too.

Last year we bought a book for Lucas entitled, *It's Perfectly Normal.* It's a gentle, honest discussion of many aspects of sexuality, sexual activity, and reproduction. Luke refuses to keep the book in his room. He's glanced through it, but doesn't want to talk about it. I think he'd rather hear the details from his friends. Last week, when he mentioned that a friend had brought a condom to school, Cathy asked if he had any questions or wanted to read the sex book again. "Oh, no!" he objected. "I'll just ask Miguel. He knows all about sex. He's an eighth-grader."

Even though we've tried to be more open about sex, I'm beginning to acknowledge what every kid of every generation knows—it's embarrassing to think that your parents know about it too. Lucas is horrified when buxom women slither sensuously in "Victoria's Secrets" 0 TV commercials. He glances at us to see if we're watching too. I think he wants us to leave the room. Even though it has been more than 35 years since Mom and I dug around in that closet uncovering the Kotex box, and a geriatric John Glenn has even made a return trip to space, I find that I still get nervous watching mature-themed television shows with my mother. Bernie is 80 now and doesn't see or hear well so the TV was blasting as she sat on the couch this past summer with Cathy and me watching an episode of the TV sit-com, *Mad About You.* In the show, the exhausted new parents were trying to resurrect their sex life. It was very explicit. As we watched, I leaned as far away from Mom as I could, and I refused to look at her during dozens of risqué jokes. I could sense Cathy hyperventilating next to me, as nervous as I was. I desperately wanted to change channels. I would have too, except my mother sat there during the entire show chuckling or laughing out loud. I was appalled. When did she learn about sex?

Joanna Radbord

Lesbian Mothers and the Law of Custody, Access, and Child Support

At least one-third of lesbians are mothers.[1] Whether lesbians raise children from previous heterosexual relationships, or have babies as lesbian mothers, the law currently fails to support lesbian families. This paper discusses the law in Canada,[2] particularly in the Province of Ontario, with respect to custody and access for lesbian mothers, and touches briefly on the child support rights and obligations of lesbian parents.

1. Custody and access

The term "custody" refers to the rights and responsibilities of a parent in relation to a child, including the right to make decisions about the child. A custodial parent usually has primary care and control of a child. "Access" refers to the right to spend time with a child, and the right to make inquiries and be given information as to the health, education and welfare of the child. In Canada, all provinces allow custody and access claims by parents, grandparents, step-parents and same-sex spouses. Most statutes say that custody claims may be made by "any parent or other person," at least where the claimant has "shown a settled intention to treat the child as a family member." In Ontario, "a court may grant custody or access to one or more persons."[3] As in all matters related to children, "the best interests of the child" are the paramount consideration. However, a relationship by blood between the child and the applicant is one statutory criteria used in determining the child's best interests in custody and access proceedings.[4]

(a) Custody and access on breakdown of a heterosexual relationship

Traditionally, most custody or access claims by lesbians have arisen after

the breakdown of a heterosexual relationship. In early decisions, courts viewed "homosexuality" as a problem or negative factor, although not a complete bar to custody. As a result, many lesbians felt forced to remain closeted, "voluntarily" surrendering custody in favour of more generous access rights.[5]

Whatever success lesbians have achieved at the Supreme Court of Canada in pursuing abstract equality rights, lower courts sometimes participate in and reflect the systemic homophobia of our society. I have heard a judge remark about a lesbian parent, "I have no problem with her as a mother, but with her life" and "she chose this lifestyle and she can live with the consequences." In that case, the judge ordered the stay-at-home mother to leave the matrimonial home, the children to be primarily resident with the father, and the mother's limited access time with the children to be held outside the presence of her girlfriend. In other cases, however, judges take a child-centered perspective and progressively advance substantive equality rights.[6] One judge was surprised by my eagerness to present sociological and psychological evidence on behalf of a transsexual client. This judge accepted immediately that gender identity was completely irrelevant to the best interests of the child and looked instead at my client's excellent parenting.[7]

Judges have frequently distinguished between "good" and "bad" lesbian mothers on the basis of whether the mother is closeted and "discreet."[8] "Bad" lesbian mothers are those who are open about their sexual orientation and who participate in the gay and lesbian community. Arnup and Boyd conclude that openly lesbian mothers "are almost certain to lose custody of their children to their ex-husbands."[9] Of course, any demands of "discretion" require lesbian parents to deny their full personhood and punish lesbians for participating in cultural and political life. The approach is discriminatory and contrary to the best interests of the child.[10]

There are many examples of judges demanding "discretion" from lesbian and gay parents. In *Case* v. *Case*,[11] a lesbian mother sought custody of her ten year old daughter and four year old son. The judge determined that the mother exaggerated allegations of bad conduct by the father, finding that the mother was just "slightly hurt" when the father "pushed the mother around," and the father was not abusive but only "soundly spanked the son." Another problem was that the mother slept in the same bed as her female partner and the partner had not been called as a witness at trial. Justice MacPherson stated that Ms. Case's "way of life is irregular" and "... I greatly fear that if these children are raised by the mother they will be too much in contact with people of abnormal tastes and proclivities."[12] She was denied custody.

The Alberta Provincial Court granted custody to a lesbian mother in *K.* v. *K*[13] on the basis that her relationship was "discreet" and her sexuality would not be "flaunted." Her sexuality was described as no more of a bar to custody than the father's drug use. In *D.* v. *D.*, the trial judge regarded the father's "abnormal" sexual orientation as a "problem which may damage the children's psychological, moral, intellectual or physical well-being, and their orderly development

and adaptation to society."[14] However, the father was awarded custody on the basis that he was bisexual, discreet, not an exhibitionist, he did not flaunt his sexual orientation, had married couples as visitors to the home, was not a "missionary" or militant, and was not a member of any gay club. Similarly, in *B.* v. *B.*, the Court was willing to grant custody to a lesbian mother because "any possible ill effects" were minimized because the mother was not "militant," "did not flaunt her homosexuality," and did not seem "biased" about her child's sexual orientation but rather seemed to assume that the daughter would be heterosexual.[15]

In Ontario, the leading case of *Bezaire* v. *Bezaire*, provides that "homosexuality of a parent is irrelevant, unless it affects the best interests of the child."[16] This approach still implies that gay or lesbian sexual orientation can be a negative factor.[17] Furthermore, the Ontario Court of Appeal did not criticize the discriminatory restrictions imposed by the lower court.[18] The trial judge had initially decided that the mother should retain custody, having had *de facto* custody of the children for four years. However, the judge barred "any open, declared and avowed lesbian or homosexual relationship." No other person was permitted to reside with Ms. Bezaire without the approval of the court. The father applied for custody after the mother moved in to an apartment with another woman. The trial judge reversed his decision, finding "psychological instability" on the part of Ms. Bezaire. The Ontario Court of Appeal dismissed her appeal. Apparently, the mother then removed the children and disappeared.[19]

A better approach would recognize that children of a gay or lesbian parent are likely to encounter homophobia regardless of which parent has custody. Therefore, the appropriate question should be which parent is better suited to assist the child in dealing with issues of sexuality, including sexual orientation discrimination, in a constructive and supportive manner.[20] A lesbian mother may then be advantaged in being able to help a child to cope with the inevitable realities of intolerance.

Today, many lesbians do obtain custody of their children. Still, lesbians have yet to achieve substantive equality in custody and access determinations as a result of heterosexism and homophobia. Lesbian mothers continue to be denied custody and be granted limited access to their children. The "best interests" test, while appearing to be neutral, is not necessarily applied in a manner that recognizes the requirements of equality.[22] The best interests test must be infused with substantive equality principles to promote justice for lesbians and to ensure the welfare of children.

(b) Custody of children of a same-sex relationship

In a claim for custody or access involving the breakdown of a lesbian relationship, the court could order custody or access in favour of either partner, even though only one spouse is the biological or adoptive parent. Although the court may be tempted to privilege the parent with a blood or

legal relationship, any such presumption threatens the guiding principle of child custody: the paramount concern must be the best interests of the child. The best approach is to carefully consider the individual circumstances and needs of the child. Biological connection should not be privileged over daily caregiving and love.[23]

In Canada, a court would be required to consider a range of factors, including the bond between the child and each parent, each mother's parenting abilities, and the biological connection between parent and child.[24] A recent Ontario case involved a non-biological lesbian parent who was seeking sole custody and a declaration that she was a mother of the child.[25] The couple planned for the child's birth together and shared in all aspects of his life. The child called the birth mother "mama" and had her last name. After the parties separated, the non-biological mother moved out and had access to the child. The birth mother was offered a job in Vancouver and wished to move there with her son. Justice Benotto held that, although the non-biological mother was very involved in the child's care, the birth mother was the primary caregiver. It was in the child's best interest to be with the birth mother, and to maintain regular contact with the mother's former partner. Joint custody was impossible given the conflict between the parties. The non-biological mother's claim for sole custody was therefore denied.

There is an unreported Ontario decision in which interim sole custody was awarded to a non-biological co-mother, "L". *Re L. and S*[26] involved two children, one adopted legally by "L" and the other conceived by artificial insemination by her partner during their relationship. On consent, the Court ordered that "L" retain sole custody of the adopted child, joint legal custody of the other child, and that the children would be primarily resident with "L". The Court relied on the *Children's Law Reform Act*, which states that the parties to an application for custody and access in respect of a child shall include a person who has demonstrated a settled intention to treat the child as a child of his or her family.

Known sperm donors may also bring successful claims for custody and access, despite any agreement with the donor to the contrary.[27] Donor contracts, purporting to limit rights and obligations of parentage, are likely unenforceable,[28] and the reality is that donors can and do change their minds, particularly after seeing that first adorable grin of a cute and cuddly baby. Regardless of the parties' original intentions, a sperm donor, particularly one who has a relationship with the child and who has been providing financial support, will very likely be seen as the child's father and will be equally entitled to claim custody. Lesbians who wish to prevent any future claims by a sperm donor should use clinic services for sperm.[29]

(c) Joint custody and adoption to create parental rights

Several Ontario Judges have given same-sex parents joint custody where the couple has decided to co-parent the biological children of one of the

spouses and both wish to have rights and obligations as parents.[30]A joint custody order gives non-biological parents a right of access to information from schools and doctors, and the power to give instructions to institutions. Because there is no restriction on who may be granted custody of children, joint custody orders are available to any group of persons who are co-parenting a child. All four parents might be granted custody in co-parenting situations involving a gay male biological father and his partner, and a lesbian birth mother and her partner.

In *Re K.*[31] Justice Nevins amended the definition of "spouse" to include same-sex spouses for the purposes of second parent and stranger adoption. The case involved non-biological mothers who wished to adopt the children born to lesbian partners so that each spouse had status as her child's mother. Second parent adoptions provide the most certainty and equality to same sex parents on breakdown of relationships.

In cases of stranger adoption, only one spouse in a same-sex relationship will be entitled to legally adopt a child, except in British Columbia and Ontario.[32]A constitutional challenge on the basis of sexual orientation discrimination would be required to access joint adoption. On the breakdown of a same-sex relationship in which one spouse has adopted a child, there may be a strong presumption in favour of the sole adoptive parent. In an American decision, a non-adoptive mother, who had been the primary caregiver for the first seven months after the adoption placement, was held to have no right to even commence an action for custody, visitation, and enforcement of a separation agreement providing for access, despite the court ordinarily allowing persons who stand in place of a parent to bring claims for custody.[33]

Absent a joint custody or second parent adoption order, a non-biological same-sex parent has no power to pick up children from school, take them to the doctor or travel with them. An easy answer to this problem is a letter of authorization or permission from the biological parent. However, this does not provide the best mechanism for long-term legal security for the family.

2. Getting or paying child support

Child support is a contribution to the financial maintenance of a child paid to the custodial parent by the non-custodial parent, usually strictly in accordance with the payor's annual income. British Columbia is the only jurisdiction to expressly include lesbian co-parents in its support legislation. In that province, "parent" includes the stepparent of a child if the stepparent contributed to the support and maintenance of the child for at least one year, and a stepparent includes a person who lived with a parent of the child in a marriage-like relationship for a period of at least two years. Such a marriage-like relationship may be between persons of the same gender.[34]

In Ontario, New Brunswick, Manitoba, P.E.I., Saskatchewan, and Newfoundland, the definition of "parent" includes those who have shown "a settled intention" to treat a child as a child of his or her family[35] or who stand *in loco*

parentis (in place of a parent) to a child.[36] A lesbian who cohabits for a length of time with a spouse and children will therefore likely be considered to have a "settled intention" to parent which is sufficient to create child support obligations. In *M.(D.E.)* v. *S.(H.J.)*,[37] a Saskatchewan court ordered a lesbian to pay child support of $150 per child, for two children that the couple had reared for five years, notwithstanding the fact that her partner refused to claim support from the children's biological father. *Buist* v. *Greaves*[38] is another case in which a non-biological lesbian parent was ordered to pay child support of $450 per month plus half of access costs.

In those jurisdictions in which only biological or adoptive parents are recognized in child support legislation, this could be challenged as adverse effects discrimination against lesbians and gay men, contrary to the *Charter*. Another option would be to argue "promissory estoppel." An Australian lesbian mother successfully relied on this doctrine to obtain child support from her former partner. The former partner had promised to support the birth mother and child. The birth mother reasonably relied on the assurance to her economic detriment, so the former partner was obliged, on the basis of promissory estoppel, to comply with her promise.

3. Conclusion

With its decision in *M.* v. *H*[39] in May, the Supreme Court of Canada has given meaning to the *Charter's* promise of equality for lesbians.[40] The Court held that the wholesale exclusion of same-sex couples from the justice of family law was discriminatory and could not be upheld as reasonable limit of the equality guarantee in a free and democratic society. In an eight-to-one decision, the Court struck down the definition of spouse under section 29 of the *Family Law Act*. The spousal support provisions will have to be re-written before the Court's November 20, 1999 deadline. The Legislature has also been invited to consider all definitions of "spouse" which exclude lesbians and gays to allow comprehensive change, rather than piecemeal court reform.

Although the decision applies strictly only to Ontario's legislation, at the time of writing, legislatures across Canada are reviewing their statutes to ensure equal recognition of same-sex spouses and opposite-sex unmarried cohabitants.[41] The next months will likely be marked by significant family law reform, hopefully across Canada. The law is clear that legislatures should now be providing equal treatment of all unmarried couples. This means it is likely that the law will soon, at least on its face, provide equal rights and obligations for lesbian families, and that can only be in the best interests of children.

More information about the case and its possible impact on family law is available on the McMillan Binch website at http://www.mcbinch.com. The author wishes to thank Maretta Miranda, Ida Morra-Caruso and Martha McCarthy. Martha and the author co-wrote "Family Law for Same Sex Couples: Chart(er)ing the Course" (1998) Canadian Journal of Family Law *15 (101), which served as a starting point*

for this article and provides more comprehensive treatment of a whole range of issues facing same-sex couples.

[1]Affidavit of Dr. Rosemary Barnes, sworn August 12, 1994, *"Expert Opinion from Dr. Rosemary Barnes Prepared Re: M.* v. *H. August 12, 1994,"* S.C.C. Case on Appeal, Tab 18, pp. 128-129; K. Arnup, "'We Are Family': Lesbian Mothers In Canada" (1991) 20:3/4 *RFR/DRF* 101-107; F.W. Bozett, ed., *Gay and Lesbian Parents,* (Westport: Praeger , 1987); S. Slater, *The Lesbian Family Life Cycle* (New York: The Free Press, 1995) at 89-118; C. O'Brien and L. Weir, "Lesbians and Gay Men Inside and Outside Families" in N. Mandell and A. Duffy, eds. *Canadian Families: Diversity, Conflict and Change* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1995) 127-130.

[2]This article includes occasional references to U.S. law. American readers should note that Canada is considerably more advanced in recognizing lesbian and gay equality rights. Practical suggestions for American family law lawyers are provided in M. McCarthy and J. Radbord, "Unmarried Couples: Equality and Equity in Canada" forthcoming in *Family Law 2000* (Aspen Publishing).

[3]*Children's Law Reform Act,* R.S.O. 1990, s. 28 (1).

[4]*Ibid.* s. 24 (2)(g).

[5]K. Arnup, *supra* note 1; K. Arnup and S. Boyd, "Familial Disputes? Sperm Donors, Lesbian Mothers and Legal Parenthood" in D. Herman and C. Stychin, eds., *Legal Inversions: Lesbians, Gay Men and the Politics of Law* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995) at 83; S. Gavigan, "A Parent(ly) Knot: Can Heather Have Two Mommies?" in Herman and Stychin, eds. *Legal Inversions: Lesbians, Gay Men and the Politics of Law* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995); K. A. Lahey, *Are We 'Persons' Yet? Law and Sexuality in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999) (forthcoming).

[6]For a discussion of Canada's substantive equality jurisprudence, please see M. McCarthy and J. Radbord "Foundations for 15(1): Equality Rights in Canada" forthcoming in the *Michigan Journal of Gender and the Law.*

[7]Evidence on same-sex parenting which might be helpful to judges includes: *Gay and Lesbian Parents,* F.W. Bozett, ed. (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1987); *Homosexuality: Research Implications For Public Policy,* J.C. Gonsiorek and J.D. Weinrich, eds. (Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1991); C.J. Patterson, "Children of Lesbian And Gay Parents" (1992) 63 *Child Development* 1025-1042; S. Golombok and F. Tasker, "Children in Lesbian and Gay Families: Theories and Evidence" in *Lesbians Raising Sons,* Jess Wells (ed.) (Los Angeles: Alyson Books, 1997) 158; R. Green, J.B. Mandel, M.E. Hotvedt, J. Gray, and L. Smith, "Lesbian Mothers and their Children: A Comparison with Solo Parent Heterosexual Mothers and their Children" (1986) 15 *Archives of Sexual Behaviour* 167-184; C.J. Patterson, "Children of the Lesbian Baby Boom: Behavioural Adjustment, Self Concepts and Sex Role Identity" in *Lesbian and Gay Psychology: Theory Research and Clinical Applica-*

tions, B. Greene and G.M. Herek (eds.) (Newbury Park, California: Sage) 156-175. Lawyers might also provide judges with the Ontario case of *Re K* (1995), 15 R.F.L. (4th) 129 (Ont. Ct. Prov. Div.). It summarizes an array of expert evidence and provides answers to the common homophobic stereotypes about same-sex parenting.

[8]S. Gavigan, *supra* note 5; K. Arnup and S. Boyd, *supra* note 5; K. Arnup, *supra* note 1. See discussion *infra*.

[9]K. Arnup and S. Boyd, *ibid.*

[10]The American Psychological Association reports that, by being open with their children about their relationships and by living with their same-sex partners, gay and lesbian parents assist their children to become well-adjusted adults. American Psychological Association, *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: A Resource for Psychologists* (District of Columbia, 1995).

[11] (1974), 18 R.F.L. 132 (Sask. Q.B.).

[12]*Ibid.* at 138.

[13](1975), 23 R.F.L. 58 (Alta. Prov. Ct.).

[14](1978), 3 R.F.L. (2d) 327 (Ont. Co. Ct.).

[15](1980), 16 R.F.L. (2d) 7 (Ont. Prov. Ct.).

[16](1980), 20 R.F.L. (3d) 358 (Ont. C.A.).

[17]The Ontario Court, Provincial Division, adopted a more desirable approach in *Steers* v. *Monk* [1992] O.J. No. 2701 (Prov. Ct.) (Q.L.). Justice Wolder stated that the mother's lesbian "relationship should be seen in the same light as if she were living in a heterosexual relationship with another [sic] male person, which could also either be positive or negative, depending on the particular facts surrounding the relationship and the outward conduct of the parties."

[18]The case was decided prior to the introduction of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and the equality protections received by lesbians and gays in cases like *Egan v. Canada* [1995] 2 S.C.R 513. See also a Quebec case which found that such a restriction would be unconstitutional under the Quebec *Charter*: *J. v. R.* (1982), 27 R.F.L. (2d) 380 (Que. S.C.).

[19]J. McLeod, Annotation to *Bezaire, supra* note 16 citing *London Free Press* (Jan. 17, 1981).

[20]Susan Boyd, "Lesbian (and Gay) Custody Claims: What Difference does Difference Make?" (1998) 15 Can. J. Fam. L. 131.

[21]*B.* v. *B.*, *supra* note 15; *Droit de la Famille - 14*, File no. 750-12-002454-82, 22 décembre 1982 (C.S.Q.); *Daller* v. *Daller* (1988), 18 R.F.L. (3d) 53, 22 R.F.L. (3d) 96 (Ont. C.A.); *Steers* v. *Monk, supra* note 17; *N.* v. *N.*, [1992] B.C. J. No. 1507 (Q.L.).

[22]In determining the best interests of a child, it may be relevant to consider whether a parent will be able to provide a permanent and stable family unit. The fact that same-sex couples are denied the right to marry cannot be used against the lesbian or gay parent. Discrimination must not be used to justify continuing discrimination.

[23]As the U.S. Supreme Court has observed in *Lehr* v. *Robertson*, 463 U.S. 248

at 260, 103 S.Ct. 2985 at 2992, 77 L. Ed.2d 614 at 626, (1983): "Parental rights do not spring full-blown from the biological connection between parent and child. They require relationships more enduring." (citing Caban, 441 U.S. at 397, 99 S.Ct. at 1770, 60 L. ED.2d at 297) (Stewart, J., dissenting) and further in 463 U.S. at 261, 103 S.Ct. at 2993, 77 L. ED.2d at 626: "the importance of the familial relationship, to the individuals involved and to the society, stems from the emotional attachments that derive from the intimacy of daily association... as well as from the fact of blood relationship." It is important to note that months of carrying a child to term and giving birth create an initial relationship between the biological mother and child that should be recognized at law. This would be particularly important in a contest between a sperm donor and a birth mother, for instance. However, the status of birth mother is important because of the caregiving bond of reproductive labour, rather than biological connection.

[24]In the U.S., some courts deny standing to non-biological mothers, stating that a non-biological lesbian co-parent is not a parent but a "biological stranger." Co-parent mothers are often restricted to extremely limited visitation. In New York, however, a trial court granted full custody to a lesbian non-biological mother. The couple had agreed that one mother would be inseminated and the other would be the primary caregiver. The judge determined that the non-biological mother was the six year old girl's "psychological" parent and that granting custody to her was in the child's best interest. The biological mother was awarded visitation. *Briggs* v. *Newingham,* Lesbian and Gay Law Notes (Lesbian and Gay Law Assoc. Of Greater N.Y., N.Y.) (Summer 1992) at 54.

[25]*Buist* v. *Greaves*, [1997] O.J. No. 2646 (Gen. Div.) (QL).

[26]File No.195/89 (Ont. Prov. Div.) *per* Pedlar J.

[27]Newfoundland, Québec and the Yukon are possible exceptions. The provisions of the *Children's Law Act*, R.S.N. 1990, c. C-13, s. 12(1)(6) and the *Children's Act*, R.S.Y. 1986, c. 22, s. 13(1)(6) are identical. They state that a man whose semen is used to "artificially inseminate" a woman is not the father unless he is married to or living with the mother. There is no clear definition of "artificial insemination" so it is unclear whether "artificially inseminated" includes self-insemination. Given this uncertainty, there is a danger that the statutes may be interpreted in a manner so as to allow sperm donors to assert parental rights. In *Jhordan C.* v. *Mary K.*, 179 Cal. App. 3d 386, 224 Cal. Rptr. 530 (1986, 1st Dist.), the Court held that parties who proceeded with alternative insemination in a manner not contemplated by the terms of a similar statute could not receive its protections. The sperm donor could obtain parental status.

Québec's Civil Code provides that participation in the parental project of another person by way of a contribution of genetic material to medically assisted procreation does not allow the creation of any bond of filiation between the contributor and the child born of that procreation. A person who, after consenting to medically assisted procreation, does not acknowledge the child,

is responsible to the child and mother of the child born of medically assisted procreation. Procreation or gestation agreements on behalf of another person are void. See Art. 538-542 C.C.Q.

[28]Parents can never bargain away support or access rights. See *e.g. Willick* v. *Willick*, [1994] 3 S.C.R. 670; *Hansford* v. *Hansford* (1973), 9 R.F.L. 233; *Baumann* v. *Clatworthy* (1991), 35 R.F.L. (3d) 200 (Ont. Gen. Div.): "child support is the right of the child, and a parent cannot bargain away the child's right." *Richardson* v. *Richardson*, [1987] 1 S.C.R. 857 at 869, 38 D.L.R. (4th) 669: "Child maintenance, like access, is the right of the child." *Young* v. *Young*, [1993] 4 S.C.R. 3 at 60: "...the right to access and the circumstances in which it takes place must be perceived from the vantage point of the child."

[29]Although some Canadian clinics and doctors have a written or unwritten policy that prevents them from assisting single or lesbian women to conceive, this is clearly discriminatory. The refusal to provide insemination services to lesbians has been successfully challenged under B.C. human rights legislation. See, *Benson* v. *Korn*, [1995] C.H.R.R. D/319 (4 August 1995) (B.C. Council of Human Rights). See also discussion of a case reaching the same result in Australian jurisprudence, A. Stuhmcke, "Lesbian Access to *In Vitro* Fertilization" (1997) 7 Australasian Gay and Lesbian Law Journal 15 at 30, citing Australian news reports, and *Pearce* v. *South Australian Health Commission* (1996), 66 S.A.S.R. 486, which reached the same conclusion in favour of a single woman.

[30]To the best of my knowledge, none of these cases are reported.

[31]*Re K.* (1995), 23 O.R. (3d) 679 (Prov. Div..)

[32]*Adoption Act*, R.S.B.C. 1995, c. 48, s. 29.

[33]*In re Z.J.H.*, 471 N.W. 2d 202 (Wisc. 1991) at 204.

[34]*Family Relations Act*, R.S.B.C. 1996, c. 128, as am. by *Family Relations Amendment Act*, 1997 (proclaimed February 4, 1998);, s. 1(2)(b).

[35]*Family Law Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. F. 3, s. 1(1); *Family Services Act*, S.N.B. 1980, c. F-2.2, s.113, s.1; *Family Law Reform Act*, R.S.P.E.I. 1988, c. F-3, s. 1(a); *The Family Law Act*, S.N. 1988, c. 60, s. 37(1), s. 2(d); *Family Maintenance Act*, S.S. 1997, c. F-6.2, s. 2.

[36]*Family Maintenance Act*, R.S.M. 1987, c. F20, s. 36(4);

[37](1996), 25 R.F.L. (4th) 264 (Sask. Q.B.)

[38]*Buist* v. *Greaves*, *supra* note 25.

[39]*M.* v. *H.* (1996), 132 D.L.R. (4th) 538 (Ont. Ct. Gen. Div.) (Epstein J.); aff'd (1996), 142 D.L.R. (4th) 1 (C. A.) (Finlayson J.A. dissenting); aff'd (1999), 171 D.L.R. (4th) 577 (Gonthier J. dissenting) (S.C.C.).

[40]In *Egan* v. *Canada*, *supra* note 18, the Supreme Court of Canada held that gays and lesbians are a historically disadvantaged group requiring the equality protections of the *Charter*.

[41]See, *The National Post* (May 21, 1999) A-2. At the federal level, it has been reported that the government plans to introduce omnibus legislation redefining spouse to include same-sex couples in every federal enactment that uses an

opposite-sex requirement. See, Lori Kittelberg and Mike Scandiffio, "Top Liberals discuss omnibus bill" *The Hill Times* (May 30, 1999). The Québec National Assembly unanimously approved such an omnibus Bill on June 10, 1999. See, Bill 32, *An Act to amend various legislative provisions concerning de facto spouses,* 1st session, 36th Legislature of Québec, 1999. Note that Quebec provides limited rights and responsibilities to unmarried couples.

Noreen Shanahan

Childhood in Shadow

Shadows lurch, searchlights flicker
over many thousands of dawns
wobbly leapfrogging memories.

Set the timer, pierce the past
return to find myself a woman
brewed tea now ice.

Children's toes step into gifted lives
plastic spades turn richer earth
colours, textures, sift through easy fingers
and time spills lazy.

Shadows twist
measures, rhythms, tones of truth
know lives
fade in, fade out
of lullabies.

This sun dips, shudders on the little water
disturbs nothing in their play
a drawing of simple brilliance.

I squint, now, recognize pleasure.

Shari Kendall and Keller Magenau

"He's Calling her Da Da!"

A Sociolinguistic Analysis of the "Lesbianism as Disease" Metaphor in Child Custody Cases

In 1993 Sharon Bottoms, a lesbian, lost custody of her two-year-old son to her mother. In 1995 Mary Ward, also a lesbian, lost custody of her 11-year-old daughter to her ex-husband—a man who had been convicted of killing his first wife over a custody issue in their divorce. In the judicial ruling in each case, the mother's homosexuality was given as the main reason for the decision. These women are not alone. Only eight states in the U.S. protect gay men and lesbian women against losing their parental rights on the grounds that their homosexuality renders them "unfit parents" ("In Custody Battle: Lesbian v. Killer," 1996).

In this paper, we present one of the discursive mechanisms that the plaintiffs[1] (the parties seeking custody) use in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* and *Ward* v. *Ward*[2] to build their cases against the lesbian mothers.[3] We demonstrate, first, that the plaintiffs discursively construct lesbianism as a contagious disease that is harmful to children; and, second, that the judges are able to use the coherent structure the disease model provides to justify their rulings in favor of the plaintiffs. Furthermore, we demonstrate that the disease model is generated by a hegemonic ideology (Gramsci, 1971) of gender in which gender is assumed to be essential and polarized.[4]

The defense (or party fighting to retain custody) counters the hegemonic ideologies of gender put forward by the plaintiff, but the expression of these non-dominant beliefs are highly controlled by institutional agents (e.g. judges and attorneys) in these custody cases. In legal proceedings, legal professionals possess the authority to determine who can speak and when, what types of contributions are allowable, and which are ratified (Atkinson and Drew, 1979; Drew, 1992; Magenau, 1997; Matoesian, 1993; Philips, 1984). Thus, the discourse used in these cases maintains hegemonic ideologies of gender

operating within the law, and reproduces the social inequality of lesbian women and gay men in the U.S.

In the next section, we describe the metaphorical process through which the "lesbianism as (contagious) disease" model is built, and the relation of this process to the critical approach we take in the analysis of the discourse in the hearings. We then describe the ideology of gender that generates the disease model, and the component beliefs that constitute the model. Finally, we demonstrate how the plaintiffs discursively construct lesbianism as a disease, and how the judges' rulings stem from this construct.

Metaphor in a critical approach to discourse

A critical analysis of discourse illuminates the relationships among ideology, power, and language. Fairclough explains that a critical analysis "make[s] visible... connections between properties of texts and social processes and relations (ideologies, power relations) which are generally not obvious to people who produce and interpret those texts, and whose effectiveness depends upon this opacity" (1995: 97). This paper takes a critical approach to discourse by identifying links between a contagious disease metaphor, hegemonic ideologies of gender, and the social inequality of lesbian women.

"Lesbianism as disease" is a metaphor in which "one highly structured and clearly delineated concept" (disease) is used to structure—and, therefore, to understand—another (lesbianism) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 61). People understand the more familiar concept, disease, as a structured whole, comprised of dimensions that emerge from their experiences. The more familiar "source" domain (disease) defines a less familiar "target" domain (lesbianism) by imposing its "internal structure" on it—its components and the relations between them—through metaphorical entailment (Lakoff, 1991; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 91). For example, a fact or belief about contagious disease (i.e. what we are referring to as a component of "disease"), such as "people who are exposed to a contagious disease may contract the disease," produces the metaphorical entailment, "people who are exposed to lesbianism may 'contract' lesbianism, i.e. become lesbians." (We refer to the component illustrated by this example as "exposure.")

In the hearings, metaphorical entailments of the "lesbianism as disease" model are powerful discursive tools in the plaintiffs' cases against the lesbian mothers. The plaintiffs use entailments to highlight, downplay, and hide aspects of the lesbian mothers' and children's experiences; and, simultaneously, the entailments create an interpretive framework, or narrative of sorts, which the judges then use to "understand what the highlighted experiences have to do with each other" (150).

Thus, metaphorical entailments contextualize various pieces of information about the lesbian couples and their children within a cohesive framework, connecting these pieces of information in ways that support ideological claims. However, the similarities between lesbianism and disease are *created*

by the metaphorical entailments; they do not necessarily "exist independently of the metaphor" (147-8). In the next section, we describe the ideology of gender that makes it possible to metaphorically define lesbianism as a "disease."

Gender ideologies

In the hearings, the "lesbianism as disease" model that the plaintiffs—and, ultimately, the judges—use against the lesbian mothers is generated by a *polarized essentialist* ideology of gender. The defense counters this ideology to some extent by drawing on a social constructivist conceptualization of gender. Ideologies are the "abstract basis of the socially shared belief systems of groups" (van Dijk, 1995: 244). They are (re)produced through social action (including forms of talk) by group members. A description of the differences between the ideologies of gender will elucidate the connection between the polarized essentialist ideology and the disease model.

The polarized essentialist and social constructivist ideologies of gender are differentiated by assumptions about the relations among the body (biological

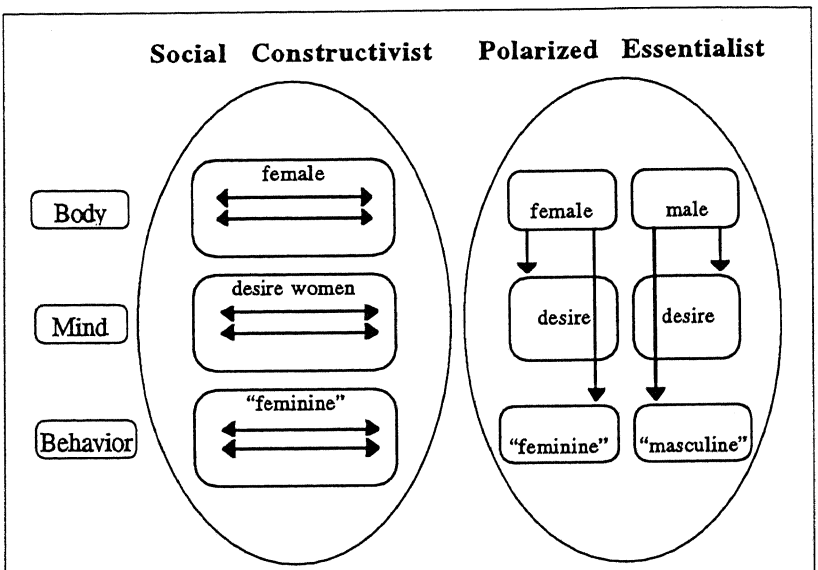

Figure 1: Gender Ideologies

sex), the mind (sexual desire or sexual orientation), and behavior (those deemed to be gender-related). See Figure 1.[5] Consequently, the ideologies conceptualize lesbianism in ways that are relevant to the court proceedings.

First, the polarized essentialist ideology assumes that the body, sexual desire, and behavior are polarized into two mutually exclusive categories.[6] The

body is classified as either male or female; sexual desire is for women *or* men; and behavior is exclusively feminine or masculine. The social constructivist model, in contrast, posits that each category varies along a continuum, making multiple combinations possible among (and within) categories.[7] Lesbianism is one of these possibilities. As Foucault (1978) describes, sexual desire is a biohistorical phenomenon that varies culturally and historically.

The second assumption of the polarized essentialist ideology is *essentialism*, the belief that the sex of the body determines sexual desire and gender-related behavior. In contrast, a social constructivist model does not posit a deterministic link between these categories; instead, the model predicts that there are multiple femininities and masculinities, which do not exist outside of social practices, including linguistic practices (e.g. Bing and Bergvall, 1996; Bucholtz and Hall, 1995; Cameron, 1997; Johnson, 1997; Livia and Hall, 1997; Meinhof and Johnson, 1997; Tannen, 1994; Wodak, 1997).[8]

Within a social constructivist model, sexual orientation is a non-issue in assessing parental fitness. Accordingly, the defense draws on this model as it argues for the mothers' rights to retain custody of their children. In contrast, within a polarized essentialist ideology, lesbians diverge from the "norm," and are thus viewed as gender "gone wrong." Bem explains that essentialism and gender polarization circumscribe two mutually exclusive scripts for women and men and, consequently, define "any person or behavior that deviates from these scripts as problematic—as unnatural or immoral from a religious perspective or as biologically anomalous or psychologically pathological from a scientific perspective" (1993: 81). As a result, the polarized essentialist ideology generates lesbianism as "disease"—in mind (psychology), body (biology), and spirit (religion). Thus, the model provides a powerful discursive tool for the plaintiffs and judges to use against the lesbian mothers in the custody hearings.

Components of "lesbianism as a disease"

The "lesbianism as disease" model is discursively constituted in the hearings by six components. The components that are mapped onto lesbianism are: 1) indications: the contagious lesbian disease is characterized by pervasive sexuality and gender deviance; 2) Contamination/contagion: the lesbian household is contaminated by contagious lesbian women; 3) exposure: the child's health is threatened by exposure to this contamination; 4) symptoms: the child exhibits recognizable symptoms as a result of exposure; 5) quarantine: the child will be socially ostracized to avoid exposing others; and 6) treatment: the child will require medical treatment in the form of psychological counseling.

A portion of discourse from the judicial ruling in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* poignantly illustrates the components of the disease model. The judge employs the coherent structure provided by the model to justify his ruling in favor of the plaintiff. (Italics have been added to the judge's ruling to highlight the most crucial realizations of each component.)[9]

Table 1

Components of the Disease Model in Portions of a Judicial Ruling

Components	*Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* Judicial Ruling
Contagious disease:	"The mother, Sharon Bottoms, has openly admitted in this court that she is living in an *active* homosexual relationship."
Indication—sexuality:	"She admitted she is sharing a *bedroom* and a *bed* with another, her *female lover,* whom she identified by name as April Wade...."
Exposure:	"She readily admits her behavior in *open* affection shown to April Wade *in front of the child.* Examples given were kissing, patting, all of this *in the presence of the child.*"
Symptom (of child):	"She further admits consenting that *the child referred to April Wade, her lover,* as to quote the words, *'Da Da....'*"
Quarantine:	"In *Roe* v. *Roe* ... it says '... the conditions under which this child must live ... impose an intolerable burden upon her by reason of *social condemnation* attached to that which will *inevitably afflict* her *relationship* with her *peers* and with the *community* at large.' "
Disease:	"[T]here is other evidence of the child being *affected* or *afflicted....*"
Contagious person:	"[I]t is the order of the Court that the custody will be with the grandmother, Kay Bottoms.... There will be no visitation ... *in the presence of April Wade....*

Each of the components of the disease model, with the exception of "treatment," is present in the judge's ruling. (Although one could certainly argue that the judge provides "treatment" by granting custody to the grandparent.) In the following section, we demonstrate how the plaintiff discursively constructs the components of the disease model, making it a resource for the judge's ruling. We will refer again to portions of this ruling in our analysis. Note that we focus on the ruling in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* for illustrative purposes only. Though we do not include many portions from the ruling in *Ward* v. *Ward*, the judge draws similarly on the disease model in that ruling as well.

The Discursive construction of "lesbianism as a sisease"

In both hearings, the plaintiffs focus on the lesbian couples' sexual activity and, thereby, discursively construct sexual activity as a defining characteristic, or indication, of the contagious "lesbian disease." One way they accomplish this is by reducing the lesbian relationship to sexual activity alone. In *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms*, the plaintiff's attorney asks the mother (the defendant) to give her definition of a lesbian relationship. The terms of her definition are broad enough to include an array of activities, but the attorney reshapes her definition through a series of constraining questions, compelling her to define the relationship as sexual:

> (1a)Attorney: Now, for the record would you tell me your definition of a *lesbian relationship*. What does it mean?
>
> Mother: It means two people of the same sex are *together.*
>
> Attorney: In what way are they together?
>
> Mother: In a *relationship.*
>
> Attorney: Now, you say a "relationship," does that entail *sex?*
> Mother: Yes.
>
> Attorney: *Hugging* and *kissing*?
>
> Mother: Yes.
>
> Attorney: *Sleeping in the same bed?*
> Mother: Yes.

The mother's use of the term "relationship" in her definition evokes a multifaceted partnership that, like a heterosexual relationship, includes an array of activities associated with maintaining a household and raising a child.

However, the attorney's institutional role allows him to control the direction of the discourse and, thus, to transform the witness's definition to a list of sexual activities.

When the attorney has achieved his desired (sexual) definition of a "lesbian relationship," his institutional—and thus discursive—power allows him to shift the focus by asking another question, ending any possibility of negotiating a broader definition of a lesbian relationship:

> (1b) Attorney: Now then, you're not at all ashamed of that relationship, is that correct?

The attorney's shift in focus suggests that the list of sexual activities is, itself, an accurate and complete definition. His question addresses only whether she is "ashamed" of the relationship or not, thus presupposing that the definition of "that relationship" which he has brought about is settled. The presupposition is accomplished through the use of the deictic term, "that," which refers back to the definition that he (in actuality) created, and the discourse marker, "then," which conveys that they jointly created the definition. According to Brown and Levinson, "then" is generally used to mark a conclusion "carried out cooperatively"; however, as in the attorney's question, it can also give the impression of cooperative action "by pointing to a fake prior agreement" in a situation in which there is none (1987: 114-5). The discourse rules of the courtroom require the mother to provide an answer to the question as it is given, compelling her to comply without contesting the presupposition. Consequently, the definition of lesbianism as sexual activity alone stands uncontested.

The judicial ruling in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* reflects the focus on sexual activity. The judge describes the lesbian relationship in sexual terms alone: the mother is "sharing a bedroom and a bed with another, her female lover."

The second component of the disease model, contamination/contagion, captures the belief that lesbianism is a *contagious* disease. In both hearings, the plaintiff discursively conveys the belief that the children are threatened by exposure to contagious lesbian women and their contaminated homes. For example, in *Ward* v. *Ward*, the father, who is the plaintiff seeking custody of his daughter, expresses concern over the home "environment" his daughter is being raised in:

> (2a) Father: I think that's the most important thing that [the child] be in a good, *clean environment* and I don't think the environment she's in is a *healthy* one. A big, beautiful home with a pool and a hot tub and all, that's fine. That's nice, but I just don't see it where it's a *good environment.*

The father contrasts the "clean environment" the child *should* be raised in

with a description of the environment the child is currently being raised in, which he claims is not "a healthy one." The juxtaposition of "clean" with "healthy" evokes a discourse of contamination in which "clean" means "free of disease" rather than, for example, "free of dirt." The father, thus, suggests that the lesbian home is "unclean" and "unhealthy"; that is, contaminated.

In this hearing, *Ward* v. *Ward*, the judge justifies his ruling by drawing on the belief that the lesbian household is contaminated:

> (2b) Judge: [T]his child should be given the opportunity and the option to live in a non-lesbian world or atmosphere to decide if that's what she wants—that's the life she wants to pursue when she reaches adulthood.

The judge assumes that the only way the child will be "given" the "option" to pursue a heterosexual relationship is to remove her from the "lesbian atmosphere." As if merely living with lesbians as a child results in "becoming" a lesbian as an adult.

Likewise, in the judicial ruling in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* the judge assumes that both the lesbian household and the lesbian couple are contaminated.

> (2c) Judge: There will be no visitation ... *in the presence of April Wade* ... Nor will there be any *in Sharon Bottoms' home* as long as she has this condition existing.

The threat of exposure is so strong that the mother, Sharon, must locate a place to stay in order to have overnight visitations with her son. The child's mother, April, is not only denied visitation rights with her son, but cannot even be in the presence of the child.

The third component of the disease model, "exposure," is the threat that the child will be exposed to same-sex sexual activity, including the physical expression of affection. For example, the plaintiff's attorney in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* conveys that any display of physical affection is hazardous to the child through his choice of the words *openly* and *hide* when he questions the mother (the defendant):

> (3a) Attorney: You and April hug and kiss *openly*. You don't *hide* it at all, is that correct?

The attorney's word choice in this question implies that physical affection between the same-sex couple *should* be hidden. The question is understood in this way, in part, because it is asked by the plaintiff's attorney within the context of building a case against the mother. Therefore, it also compels her to reveal unfavorable information in her own defense (Magenau, 1997).

The judge in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* takes up the attorney's wording (in

example 3a) when he justifies his ruling in favor of the plaintiff (3b):

> (3b) Judge: [The defendant] readily admits her behavior in *open* affection shown to April Wade in front of the child. Examples given were kissing, patting, all of this in the presence of the child.

The judge expresses concern about the defendant showing "open" affection "in front of the child." The judge's disapproval is conveyed by his use of the word "admits," since one does not, generally, have to "admit" to doing something positive.

In both hearings, the plaintiff suggests that the children already exhibit some symptoms as a result of exposure to lesbianism, and these symptoms tend to be gender-related. From a legal perspective the SYMPTOM component is crucial for the plaintiff's case because it serves to demonstrate that the behavior which allegedly renders the parent unfit has an adverse impact on the child. In example (4a), from *Ward* v. *Ward*, the plaintiff's attorney uses the question and answer sequence to discursively construct a nexus between living with lesbian parents and an "effect" on the child. He phrases his question to set up the plaintiff's answer as a symptom caused by the "lesbian relationships" the child's been "subjected to":

> (4a) Attorney: Okay. Have you seen anything in her behavior that would indicate a *problem* with the *lesbian relationships* that she's been *subjected to?*

The father, who is the plaintiff, replies:

> (4b) Father: Well, [the child] just turned eleven and she don't want to wear *perfume,* she'd rather wear *Brut,* and *that's not normal* for a child.

With this statement, the plaintiff claims that the child's preference for cologne is a result, or symptom, of living with lesbian parents; that her preference is deviant ("that's not normal"); and, specifically, that it is *gender* deviant since the name "perfume" generally refers to scents marketed to women, whereas "Brut" is marketed to men.

In *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms,* the grandmother seeking custody suggests that her two-year-old grandson exhibits a gender-related symptom that will eventually become a more serious symptom. She fears that he will be confused about gender in the future if raised by lesbian parents because, she claims, they are raising the child to call his mother, April, "Da Da":

> (4c) Grandmother: [The child's] being raised calling her "Da Da"... How is he going to know?

Attorney: How is he going to know what, ma'am?

Grandmother: That a female is not a "Da Da." That a "Da Da" is a male?

As extreme as the grandmother's fear may seem, the judge cites it as one of the bases of his ruling, even though the child's mother testified earlier that she and her partner discouraged the child from using the term:

(4d) Judge: [The mother] further admits consenting that the child referred to April Wade, her lover, as to quote the words "Da Da."

Thus, the judge uses the beginning utterances of a two-year-old as one of the bases of his ruling, revealing a lack of knowledge about the development of language as well as how easily the plaintiff is able to elicit fears about gender.

The fifth component of the disease model, "quarantine," refers to the argument in the hearings that the children will be socially ostracized if raised by lesbian parents. For example, the father (the plaintiff) in *Ward* v. *Ward* states that the parents of other children will not allow them to play at his daughter's home:

(5a) Father: Well, I just don't think it's fair to her because I don't think- people that ain't gay, okay, are not going to let their children go over and play with her knowing she's in a house that's got four women living together in a situation.

The father fears that the child will be shut away without any playmates, like a leper quarantined in a leper colony.

Subsequently, in the same trial, the mother is asked to "acknowledge" the quarantine problem. She suggests that it is not a problem because no one knows that she is a lesbian. The plaintiff's attorney exploits this response, suggesting that children will then enter a contaminated and dangerous environment unwittingly.

(5b) Attorney: Would you acknowledge that as Mr. Ward [the plaintiff] said, the knowledge in the community of the gay and lesbian relationship in that household impacts on her having friends come over and spend the night?

Mother: No one in the community knows of this....
[some lines omitted]

Attorney: So if a child was to come over and visit, they would come not knowing about what they would be coming into, then?

The attorney's response subtly suggests, in effect, that the lesbian couple has the civic responsibility to inform the community as they would to any present "danger," the equivalent of hanging a quarantine notice on the door. Because the attorney has the power to control the focus of the discourse, the assumption that children will suffer—both the child involved in the custody dispute and any prospective playmates—remains uncontested.

In the judicial ruling in *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms*, the judge draws on the "quarantine" component of the disease model when he cites a legal precedent:

> (5d) Judge: In *Roe* v. *Roe*... it says "... the conditions under which this child must live ... impose an intolerable burden upon her by reason of social condemnation attached to that which will inevitably afflict her relationship with her peers and with the community at large."

By citing social prejudice as a basis for his decision, the judge ignores the expert testimony of a developmental psychologist who testifies that children raised by lesbian or gay parents are no different from children raised by heterosexual parents in terms of their social relations with peers or adults.

Finally, the court participants assume the child will need "treatment" as a result of exposure to lesbianism. This component is realized in the hearings as the need for psychiatric counseling. For example, in *Ward* v. *Ward*, the father (the plaintiff) states that his daughter will need therapy whether he gains custody or not:

> (6) Father: She's going to need therapy. I think she should have therapy. I think—She's eleven years old, and I don't see where she's equipped to handle it.

The assertion that counseling is necessary presumes that the mother's relationship could either psychologically damage the child or at least be psychologically challenging for her. In her expert testimony, the developmental psychologist notes that many children must deal with some difference, whether ethnic heritage, religious or otherwise; but that coming to terms with difference does not entail psychological challenge. In the plaintiff's case, it is an ideological choice to treat lesbianism as an a priori challenge, but to leave unproblematic other ways that families differ from the "norm." For example, the fact that the father in *Ward* v. *Ward* was convicted of killing his first wife does not give rise to the assumption that the child will need psychological counseling to come to terms with this "difference."

Conclusion

The metaphorical elements in these hearings are not random or incidental language choices. The judicial decisions in both the *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms* and *Ward* v. *Ward* custody hearings are built on the structure provided by the disease

metaphor. These decisions are legally-binding and, because the law is constituted in precedent, the impact of these decisions is exponential.

We have demonstrated, first, that the plaintiffs discursively construct lesbianism as a contagious disease that is harmful to children and, second, that the judges exploit the disease model to justify their rulings in favor of the plaintiffs. Lakoff and Johnson explain that metaphors are discursively powerful because they "sanction actions, justify inferences, and help us set goals" (1980:142). Furthermore, we demonstrated that the disease model is produced by (and reproduces) a hegemonic ideology of gender. Our analysis demonstrates that the discourse in lesbian child custody cases promotes a heterosexual, nuclear family structure and traditional gender roles. Thus, the legal proceedings sustain and enforce hegemonic gender ideologies, advancing the belief that families that diverge from the "norm" are a threat to society.

Since the time of the 1993 hearing examined in this paper, Sharon Bottoms and April Wade appealed their case again, and the ruling in this 1993 hearing was overturned—only to have the Virginia State Supreme Court overturn that appellate ruling. A fourth appeal resulted in the grandmother's custody being upheld once again. Sharon and April finally dropped their fight for primary custody, but continue to fight for April to have visitation rights with their son.

Mary Ward appealed the custody ruling in this 1995 hearing, but the decision was upheld. In September, 1996, she appealed to the Florida Supreme Court. In January of 1997, while waiting to hear whether they would consider her case, Mary Ward died of a stress-related heart attack.

[1]We use "plaintiff" to refer to the person seeking custody, his or her attorney, and the case presented by the attorney. Likewise for the "defense," as those seeking to retain custody.

[2]We selected these two-high profile cases for analysis because they are legally and socially significant. *Ward* v. *Ward* was the first case in the state of Florida to deal with a homosexual parent's rights being challenged on the basis of sexual orientation. *Bottoms* v. *Bottoms*, though not the first case in Virginia to deal with a homosexual parent's rights, was the first nationally that involved a "non-natural parent" challenging the parental right of a biological parent.

[3]This paper is part of a project in which we examine the role of the discourse of the family courts in maintenance of a hegemonic ideology of gender and reproduction of inequality of lesbian women and gay men in the U.S. Other themes of analysis in this project include: a) discursive construction of an archetype of family to portray lesbian parents and their children as non-family; b) institutional discourse practices and the silencing of alternative discourses; and c) exploiting professional and legal principles in the justification of conservative judicial rulings.

[4]As part of his framework, *Critical Discourse Analysis*, Fairclough defines

hegemony as "leadership as well as domination across the economic, political, cultural and ideological domains of a society" by an "economically defined class" through "concessions" or "ideological means, to win their consent" (1995: 76). He points out that hegemony is a focus of "struggle around points of greatest instability between classes and blocs" which occurs "on a broad front," including "the institutions of civil society (education, trade unions, family)...." Connell applies the concept to masculinities and patriarchy.

[5]Figure 1 is based on Kendall (1999).

[6]Our assumptions of "gender polarization" and "essentialism" are based on Bem's "lenses of gender" by these same names.

[7]For a discussion of biological sex as a social construction, see Butler, 1990; Bem, 1993; Nicholson, 1994; and, in relation to language, Bing and Bergvall, 1996.

[8]These are the most recent theoretical discussions about the relationship between language and gender in which the researchers explicitly advocate a social approach.

[9]The analysis is based on the court reporters' transcripts of these hearings. Our examples are exact reproductions from these transcripts.

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Susan Driver

"My Mother Liked to Fuck"
Reading Joan Nestle's Queer Desire For Maternal Desire

Joan Nestle's (1987) writings enact reflexive and performative occasions of femme lesbian subjectivity which not not shirk their alliance with maternal genealogies. They offer moments of daughterly insight, memory, love and fascination defying binaries of hetero/lesbian, sexual/maternal identifications and desires that continue to pervade dominant knowledges and popular cultures. Although Nestle is not a lesbian mother she goes far toward opening up dialogues challenging normative boundaries between lesbians, mothers, and lovers such that mutually exclusive oppositions give way to ethical impulses for connections and mutual recognitions. By remembering and rewriting her relation to her mother for signs of desire, for glimpses of taboos, transgressive passions and defiant pleasures, Nestle propels rethinking about the erotic complexities and historical specificities of maternal sexuality. Such a process of reading and writing does not fixate on an idealizing image, a nostalgic fantasy or a normalizing category, but attends to the contextual surround of embodied maternal experiences and the layered actions and relations they constitute. What is offered is not a narrative that seeks to valorize a specific version of maternal desire, but an invitation to engage with the words, silences and actions of a mother's life as a responsive and open-ended conversation. Nestle's desire for her mother's desire does not aim at ensuring the coherence of maternal sexual identity, be it lesbian or straight, nor does it seek a maternal origin to secure the foundations of her own lesbian femmeness, rather, it seeks out subversive interactions through which mothers and daughters exchange the imaginative and political force of each other desires.

Nestle's texts retrace her mother's life and writings for signs of a subjugated history of maternal sexuality beyond the purview of middle-class nuclear family ideologies. From her position as a working-class Jewish lesbian, coming out in

New York City during the 1950s, Joan Nestle explores how her life is marked by her mother's class, cultural and erotic marginality and agency. Insisting that her cultural bearings are located within the recent past and present of her urban landscape, Nestle writes:

> I am of the people who have no mythologies, no goddesses powerful and hidden, to call on. I am of the people who have no memories of other hidden lands beneath their feet other than the cement slabs of city streets.... I do not know the name of my grandmother, so I am forced to go deep, diving through my own accumulated years to seize upon newly ancient fragments. (1987:13)

Nestle's recollection of fragments of her mother's life is driven by her "desire to give back to working women their own history" not as a static truth or representation but as a process of dialogue across subjective and generational differences that configure histories of resistance.

Restricted Country combines autobiographical, historical, erotic and fictional stories through which Nestle narrates her desiring lesbian self. What I want to focus on are the ways she signifies, analyses and connects herself through her mother Regina's life as a process of reading and writing. Regina's posthumous gift to her daughter are her writings - "she left me only a sheaf of writings, scrawled letters and poems written on the back of yellow ledger sheets" - which become incorporated into Joan Nestle's project of inscribing their voices and histories together as distinct yet intertwined. The essay "Two Women: Regina Nestle, 1910-1978, and Her Daughter, Joan," sketches shared desires and identifications, as well as conflicts and contradictions between a heterosexual mother and a lesbian daughter. Nestle enacts her respect for her mother by directly quoting large pieces of her mother's written texts, providing discursive space for her mother's words and stories. At the same time Nestle openly acknowledges her investments as a lesbian daughter attempting to read, look and listen to her mother through the subjective inclinations of her own memory and desires, interpreting her mother as an intriguing and complex subject of sexuality. Nestle writes: "I watched it all, and her belief in a woman's undeniable right to enjoy sex, to actively seek it, became a part of me" (1987: 121). Against the grain of negative moralistic judgments directed at her mother's erotic audacity, Nestle writes retrospectively of Regina's legacy of sexual power and courage to defy normative prescriptions. She reads her mother as a figure of sexual transgression and resistance against the familial and gender ideologies of her time (Martindale, 1997: 88). [1] Reclaiming her knowledge and admiration of her mother's undomesticated desires as a locus of her own resistance to dominant sexual codes, Nestle establishes an open-ended exchange between the differential terms of sexual subversiveness adopted by her mother and herself. Entitling an essay "My Mother Liked To Fuck," Nestle displays an unabashed recognition of Regina's physical desires, using it to launch a critical questioning of her maternal influences and the personal and

political actions they inspire: "What do I do with this legacy—a mother who wills me her views on fucking, her despair, her outrage?" (Nestle, 1987: 91). A question she answers by learning productive lessons from her mother's life and writing which she passes on to others a basis for collective meanings which challenge the pathologizing assumptions of institutional knowledges:

> Why have I had to write about my mother's life, Regina's life? The rules she broke, the knowledge she had of her difference, the things she told me that mothers were not supposed to tell their daughters - as if she knew I needed this to survive in my life of sexual difference - all this is one reason. And I want to give her a final gift, one she wanted desperately, that her writing move beyond the bed and the chair. Finally, I want to take back something that was denied me by the medical and psychological world that told me Lesbianism was sickness, that my feelings about my mother were distorted, infantile, mannish. (Nestle, 1987: 79)

Writing becomes an activity of transmission and translation between mother, daughter and readers. Joan Nestle seeks to publish and circulate her mother's stories as a "final gift," relaying and expanding upon the values and meanings of her mother's life against the coercive silence and privatization that marked her mother's "restricted country."

The quotes lifted from her mother's notes and diaries narrate events from various points of her life including memories of her youth which reveal a strong and impatient sexual awareness: "*I recognized that I was someone, someone to be reckoned with. I sensed the sexual order of life. I wanted to be quickly and passionately involved.*" Regina recounts complex experiences of sexual adventure, rape, loss, and a tenacity to continue to embrace her sexuality against adversity. She discusses her marriage and motherhood as a part of her life which does not resolve or placate her unruly desires, revealing her attempts and failures to accommodate normative familial expectations. While she is pregnant with Joan her husband unexpectedly dies, leaving Regina to raise two children on her own, a turn of events in her life which forces her to renegotiate her identities and desires. Regina writes about the ways this changed her relation to family, sexuality and work, and she develops a critical reading of her social position and an analysis of the power relations in which she is embedded. In Regina's words:

> *The desertion by the families brought to me the realization that all were frightened people. I got along, and the coin of life was money. I accepted their law and rejected them. I picked up the challenge. The people I had contact with were mostly my own tribe, Jews and I saw them battling the world to make it.* (Nestle, 1987: 80)

Locating herself within the context such battles, she speaks lucidly about

how she orients herself as a working woman in the garment industry —*"season after season, I was part of the cycle, saw the struggle, became part of it, dipped in to the excitement of money, power, physical attraction, adornment, flattery, sensuality"* (Nestle, 1987: 81). Regina remarks upon *"a hell of a lot of grit"* within her social world, confronting the problems and limits of her working and sexual life without backing down or withdrawing herself from the fray. It is Regina's perseverance and shrewd interpretation of her own experiences that becomes the locus of Joan Nestle's tribute, refusing to gloss over the difficulties of her mother's circumstances.

Nestle describes her relations with her mother as dynamic social and imaginative events which defy normative and teleological assumptions, staying close to the flux of lived historical and affective experiences. An important aspect of Nestle's experiences as a child is her mother's sexual presence as a force of transference. Nestle recounts her mother's seductive qualities as a woman interested in pursuing desires beyond her children in ways that provide a fluid space of fantasy and attraction:

> The Bronx, 1948: My mother, strong and beautiful, stands in front of the foyer mirror, straightening the veil of a dark smart hat, in a checkered dress, perfumed. I sit on the floor, looking up, knowing already in my little girl's head that this is a woman who is glorying not in being a mother and also knowing that she is preparing for love-making.

What is remarkable about such passages is not only Nestle's appreciation of the complexities of her mother's sensuality, but also her enjoyment of it as a transitional space facilitating her own bodily pleasures and erotic self-consciousness. In contrast to dominant ideologies of the era in which she grew up which emphasize the destructive potentials of maternal separation which become reiterated in Regina's self-castigations—"I was a mother, a sick mother ... not the right outlook for a mother" (Nestle, 1987: 91).

Joan Nestle elaborates alternative stories of emotional and imaginative connections forged through the open articulations of her mother's desires. But while she highlights her positive impressions of her mother's sexuality, Nestle does not idealize the emotional and social toll of the circumstances of her choices. The material pressure and psychic pain of sustaining desires in the face of social disapproval complicates Nestle's reading of her mother:

> My mother's legacy to me was the story of her desire. She has left sexual trails for me, private messages, how she saw her breasts, how her body swelled with want. She has also left the record of her anger, her fury at herself and others for forgetting the connection between generosity and lust ... My mother accepted the fact that desire had made her homeless. (Nestle, 1987: 87-88)

The stakes of Regina's refusal to conform to conjugal monogamous standards of sexuality are very high, and are shown to be inextricable from her ongoing struggles to find stable employment, overcome poverty and care for the material needs of her children.

Nestle vividly portrays her relation to her mother as a working woman whose sexuality is interwoven into her daily struggles to support her family. Evoking the movements and signifiers connoting her mother's independent working and sexual life Nestle recalls "the remembered click of her work heels in the hallway telling me she was returning, and my happiness at that sound, must stand against eternity" (Nestle, 1987: 14). Nestle calls attention to the ways her mother's working life as clerk, and her erotic involvements outside the home are a continual source of intrigue and fascination. Regina's challenge to the domestic feminine ideals of her time are embodied in the ways she simultaneously negotiates her economic survival and her sexual desire. Not only does she have sex with her bosses and "turned tricks to pay her rent," out of necessity and strategic use of her sexual power, but she does not hide her enjoyment and pleasure of these relations. For undertaking such blatant transgressions of maternal norms, Regina becomes repudiated by "respectable" Jewish wives and mothers who had previously accepted her as one of them while she was married, and Nestle is very sensitive to the ways her mother is exiled from middle-class Jewish communities writing that "we were Jewish, but we were different" (Nestle, 1987: 33). But because Regina boldly accepts her differences along with the risks and losses she suffers from them, she is not portrayed as a passive victim of exclusion but as actively refusing to sacrifice her desire for the sake of conformity. Nestle does not abstract her mother's sexuality from the contradictory social relations of her experiences as a poor Jewish single mother, but reads them with understanding and respect. While recognizing the ways her mother was exploited and sometimes abused by the men she was involved with, Joan interprets Regina as an agent of her desire and knowledge. She calls attention to the ways her mother worked to fulfill her economic autonomy, sexual pleasures, and maternal responsibilities at the expense of social recognition and belonging: "While she was scorned as a social equal, she was feared as a woman who knew too much. My mother's life was marked by knowledge women were not supposed to have" (Nestle, 1987: 85). Nestle's writings accord her mother status as an active self without denying the difficulties and limitations of her life as a woman struggling against social relations of inequality and moral hierarchies.

Nestle affirms her love of her mother's independence as a working, sexual woman but she also analyzes the pressures that accrue with her attempts to live in defiance of patriarchal familial norms, revealing the painful psychic and material effects of Regina's attempts to challenge the ideological authority of marital propriety and maternal goodness. While Nestle honors her mother's sexual rebelliousness, she also reveals the high degree of economic instability and social conflict experienced by Regina in a society that values and rewards

accommodation to sexual domestication. Nestle admits that under such conditions her mother's desires at times became a threat to her:

> I wanted to flee this women whose passions overflowed, making whatever security we had achieved so impermanent. Her sexual longings, her uncontrollable gambling her continuous need for money to stave off the eviction notices, the loans come due, the liens on her salary, seemed to endanger my life. (Nestle, 1987: 79)

Nestle indicates her ambivalence toward her mother's excesses, she both admired and feared them, recognizing in retrospect that the institutional powers of heterosexuality and class delimit her mother's choices and their effects on her children. Because she is able to historicize and reflect upon the social predicaments of her mother's actions, she avoids psychologizing her need for separation. Describing the social conditions exacerbating her conflicts with her mother, Nestle is able to explore the tensions and differences played out on both sides as a struggle that does not end in rejection but rather a mutual declaration of their respective needs lived outside the confines of rigid mother-daughter identities and responsibilities:

> "I am not a mother," she would say. "I am Regina, a woman." Always that would be her cry, and when she came to me for the mother I did not have, or because her lovers brutalized her, or when she lost a job, I wanted to cry, "But Mother, I am not a daughter, just a woman. Please leave me alone." (Nestle, 1987: 95)

Written as a discordant yet loving exchange between mother and daughter with both claiming desires for autonomy as women without implying disconnection, Nestle's narratives offer alternatives to identitarian and polarized ways of thinking. Undermining conventional plots in which rebellious daughters seek to break ties with their clinging mothers as the only trajectory for achieving sexual independence, Nestle depicts mobile intersubjective relations including dissension, support and acceptance of differences: "We faced each other as two women for whom sex was important, and after initial skirmishes, she accepted my world of adventure as I did hers" (Nestle, 1987: 121).

Even while she is critical of the unequal terms of her mother's relations with men, her writings testify to how much she learns from her mother's willful embodiments of sexual desires and pleasures. Nestle continues to care for and dialogue with her mother as she narrates her own identity as a lesbian. Disrupting unified and reproductive models of a unified gender identity passed from mother to daughter, Nestle shows how her identifications with Regina do not follow a predictable course, but constitute points of convergence and points of departure through which Nestle defines her lesbian specificity. The heterogeneous ways in which gender and sexuality are played out between mother and

daughter allows for incongruities between them without suggesting sharp divisions. Nestle allies her self with her mother as women who cross moral boundaries—"mother and daughter were each pursuing illicit loves" (Nestle, 1987: 89)—without assimilating their desires or overlooking the diverse social contexts of their experiences. Regina's heterosexuality and Joan's lesbian sexuality are approached as historically signifying acts of resistance which need to be interpreted in relation to the dominant cultural codes, material conditions and political possibilities surrounding them. Whereas her mother's sexual transgressions lack the support and care of community relations, revealed in her ongoing isolation and loneliness, Nestle's sexual narratives are embedded in multiple social and political communities of sexually marginalized "queers." Nestle's personal and political consciousness of herself as a sexual subject is elaborated through the collective discourses of resistance constituting her femme lesbian self along with others. Unlike her mother, Nestle is able to articulate the meanings and values of her sexuality collectively as part of local cultural practices as well as broader political movements. Even when her lesbian desire becomes muted or hidden when she passes as a straight woman in her involvements in civil rights and socialist activism, her reflexivity as a sexual self remains an important dimension of her political consciousness. The significance of her sexuality is imbricated in all of Nestle's political engagements, becoming transformed by them in ways that enable her to move beyond, without sublating or denying, the singularities of her bodily experiences. But while such politically complex inscriptions of her sexual self contrast sharply with the individualizing predicaments of her mother's sexual resistance, Joan Nestle remains interested in forging personal and historical links with Regina's struggles as an undomesticated sexual woman. This marks a very important basis for dialogue between mother and daughter which avoids imposing judgments while opening up critical thinking about the historical and political conditions of sexual change and community. She writes that "now it is time to stop judging and begin asking questions, to begin listening. Listening not only to words which may be the wrong ones for the 1980s, but also to gestures, sadnesses in the eyes, gleams of victories, movements of hands, stories told with self-dismissal yet stubbornness" (Nestle, 1987: 108).

Following her attentive readings of her mother's sexuality in the details of her body, clothes, voice, silences and gestures, Nestle shows how she comes to understand her own lesbian sexuality through a similar process of signifying desire. Writing about her experiences of butch-femme lesbian cultures, she claims that "we used our bodies, our actions, our costumes, the close proximity of our lives to tell our stories" (Nestle, 1987: 68). Against lesbian-feminist revisionism which judges butch-femme sexuality according to an abstract concept of gender duality and sexual power, several essays in *Restricted Country* reclaim the "complex sexual and emotional exchanges" (Nestle, 1987: 103) of Nestle's femme interactions with butch lesbians. Continuous with her respect for the subjective nuances of her mother's sexuality against forces of moral

repudiation, she refuses to rely on moralistic hierarchies of feminist evaluation, focusing on readings which decipher the class and cultural inflections of erotic performativity:

> Because I quickly got the message in my first lesbian feminist CR group that such topics as butch-femme relationships and the use of dildoes were lower class, I was force to understand that sexual style is a rich mixture of class, history and personal integrity. My butch-femme sensibility also incorporated the wisdom of freaks. (Nestle, 1987: 108)

Nestle complicates butch-femme relations by reading them as intimate and collective languages of sexual resistance such that "all these gestures were a style of self-presentation that made erotic competence a political statement in the 1950s" (Nestle, 1987: 104). Providing semiotically, socially and psychically intricate analysis of erotic relations between women negotiating their desires at a time of violent state regulations of sexual minorities, Nestle calls attention to the inventiveness of de/recodifying desires within butch-femme lesbian cultures. Enacting a close and personal readings of collectively shared languages, Nestle constructs narratives of her lesbian self, while at the same time conversing and aligning herself with others. In Kathleen Martindale's words:

> In producing an analysis of the processes by which a lesbian subjectivity can be deciphered, Nestle also writes a history of her own formation and reformation as a lesbian subject. Not coincidentally, following that path helps her not only to reconnect dykes and whores but to find yet another way of linking herself with her mother and of honoring their disreputable and heroic ways of surviving as working-women and lesbians. (Martindale, 1997: 99)

By rewriting histories of resistance as socially refracted processes of sexual stylization which allow for contradictory subject positions, giving rise to multiple inscriptions and readings, Nestle is able to align the practices of working women like her mother with those of lesbians and prostitutes without obscuring their historical and subjective differences. Kathleen Martindale suggests that "in writing a chapter on the joint history of lesbian's and prostitutes, Nestle works the contradictions between oppression and resistance, rather than attempting to marginalize the indiscreet" (1997: 99). Nestle's writings attempt to "honor both histories—that of the woman whore and the woman queer" (Nestle, 1987: 158). As such her writings insist upon contextual readings of sexuality that allows for considerations of the ways queer sexualities overlap with women's histories of sexual regulation without collapsing or prioritizing one over the other. She problematizes feminist orthodoxies with-

out forgoing the tools of a feminist analysis capable of thinking through gender as a permeable site of identification and power. This enables her to juxtapose diverse histories of sexuality within and between subjects without relying on binary categories. Nestle listens her heterosexual mother's stories of feminine seduction alongside those of butch lesbians recounting their rebellious erotic masculinities without regarding them as antithetical. She writes that "as we strive to uncover matriarchial myths, we must also keep in our minds the big-daddy tanks of our jails into which Lesbians who looked like men were thrown" (Nestle, 1987: 118). Challenging narrow maternal feminist frameworks by attending to intersecting and conflictual sexual histories, Nestle articulates spaces in-between feminist and queer theories and politics, positioning herself historically and subjectively in ways that challenge mutually exclusive notions of identity. She asks "is it turning forty that makes me see layers of identities? I see the queer fifties, the Lesbian sixties, the feminist seventies, and it becomes clear to me that memory is something that goes beyond sequential incidents" (Nestle, 1987: 119).

By reading maternal desires in relation to queer identities and affiliations in ways that attend to histories of injustice alongside intimate joys of sexual indiscretions, Nestle challenges oppositional abstractions that have come to mark maternalist and pro-sex discourses. Memory is enacted in Nestle's text as an embodied changing process that refuses illusions of romantic union with the maternal body while embracing intersubjective differences and tensions as a basis for dialogue. Her writings unravel perceptions and fantasies mediated by daily poverty, police brutality, and sexual compromises, giving rise to an erotic memory that is lived and written in the flesh of a femme lesbian daughter caught between powers of sexism, anti-semitism, homophobia and classism. Nestle articulates a memory of resistance, of an embodied struggle to reinscribe the complexies of a mother's life that evokes and implicates a daughter's sexual curiosities, and propels a political will to transform her erotic relations with others without forgetting her mother's story in the process.

[1]Kathleen Martindale writes that "In the 1990s, critics and theorists speak a lot less frequently of resistance and more of transgression and subversion. This code-switching marks a discursive and political shift from socialist to anarchist language, frames of reference, and hoped-for outcomes of aesthetic activism. Nestle, a writer who straddles the divide, joyfully transgresses and subverts but always in the interests of producing resistance" (1997: 88).

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Kim Chase

Cesarean Section

In 1960
one C-section meant
all the rest by C-section
And a long, red snarl of a scar
up a soft, fleshy stomach.

That's where you were born,
she told us
when we lay in our underwear
in the smothering heat of summer.

We notice the hair under her arms.
We remembered those times later
when she said,
Don't start shaving now, girls.
You'll be a slave to the razor
the rest of your lives.

In 1990
one C-section meant
a menu of options
And tucked discreetly beneath
the bikini line,
A thin, prim smile of a scar
Smug
as if we deserved to not be
cut up the middle
like our mothers.

Connie Monson

"If I Can do Without a Husband"

Lesbian Maternity and H.D.'s Asphodel

It is in the course of this regulatory cultivation of life that the category of sex is established. Naturalized as heterosexual, it is designed to regulate and secure the reproduction of life. Having a true sex with a biological destiny and natural heterosexuality thus becomes essential to the aim of power, now understood as the disciplinary reproduction of life. (Butler, 1996: 60)

One of the functions of the emergent field of queer theory has been to interrogate the inscription and practice of heteronormativity, a term referring variously to the policing of gender boundaries, the production of sexual identities, the regulation and naturalization of sexuality as the prerogative of male/female couples, the relegation of other sexual groupings (or singularities) to the abject, and even the forcible maintenance of the nuclear family. Marriage, for example, stands in the service of this normative pressure, functioning as a "voluntary" contract that individuals make in order to secure full privileges within the social realm. Yet even in the late twentieth-century, marriage is neither a necessary nor a sufficient guarantee for heteronormativity. Rather, reproduction serves, at least in public discourse, as both the excuse for and "proof" of heterosexual compliance. Thus, as rumors circulate about a subject's presumptive sexuality, the rejoinder might be "But s/he has children." Thus, one hears as a rationale for homophobic anti-adoption laws: "The child deserves to have a father *and* a mother."

This reproductive politics has constituted a contested ground in the U.S. at least since the last century, when first wave feminists, recognizing the way in which childbearing and rearing had special impact on the lives of women, made freedom from compulsory motherhood a key feature of their agenda. Despite advances in birth control and ostensible changes in attitudes, however, the figure of motherhood continues to guard the bastions of orthopedic hetero-

sexuality. For example, while the legal right of women to abort a fetus (or of young women to gain access to birth control and reproductive information) continues under fire, reinforcing the "responsibility" of heterosexual women to bear children, the right of lesbians and bisexual women to parent even their own or their partner's children remains unsecured. Motherhood, then, while theoretically available to all women, seemingly reinscribes a cultural dilemma: lesbian or mother, but not both.

Of course, as Ellen Lewin (1993) and others have documented, lesbianism and motherhood are not exclusive of each another, currently or historically. The writer H.D., herself a mother who had significant lesbian relationships, focuses closely on the matters of childbearing and sexuality in her proto-novel *Asphodel* (c. 1922). Many critics would like to see the book's inclusion of pregnancy and childbearing as a valorization of female creative power, a "writing beyond the ending," to use Rachel Blau DuPlessis's (1986) term, that makes pregnancy a metonym for bringing forth cultural production. Arguably, though, the picture of maternity that emerges from the text is actually a critique of this view of gender function, and a point of resistance against biological determinism.

Certainly some critics, such as Susan Stanford Friedman, have read protagonist Hermione's pregnancies, with some subtlety, as disruptive of cultural expectations of motherhood. For example, she sees Hermione birthing a self along with the more literal baby: "The birth of the baby births the mother as well, not only because the child gives her a new identity, but also because she is pregnant with herself. The baby mothers the self that is healed in the act of procreation" (1990: 189). Friedman believes an early scene between Vane and Hermione to be an avatar of the Lacanian mirror stage, which in this case mobilizes the whole process of maternity. Hermione sees her own image in the mirror: "yourself opposite smiling with eyes uptilted, smiling at something that had crept out of Mrs. Darrington, small, not very good, looking at you in a glass, tall, very tall" (H.D., 1992: 142). Friedman writes: "But instead of identifying with her image in the Lacanian sense, Hermione recognizes "'Mrs. Darrington's as the false imago, as the socially constructed self out of which the woman who will be the mother steps" (1990: 187).

At another point, Friedman glosses the narrative's representation of pregnancy as an instance of the Semiotic erupting into the Symbolic, "not only inscribing the daughter's longing for the maternal body, but also representing the mother speaking....The conventions of dominant discourse provide no language in which to speak as pregnant subject" (1990: 187). Finally, she claims explicitly that "[t]he procreative politics of *Asphodel* is *not* a valorization of motherhood, but rather the basis for a pacifist critique of the patriarchal order" (Friedman, 1990: 189, my emphasis), which poses birth against death against the backdrop of the First World War.

Similarly, DuPlessis, in her work on H.D., argues that a link between creation and procreation is salutary for feminist readings:

> Contemporary critical writing on the female *Künstlerroman* agrees that women's growth into the creative act, as depicted by women, is tied emotionally and materially with issues of the maternal, with procreativity, and with identification with women ranging from resistance to merging. Susan Gubar has proposed that the "centrality of childbearing" in women's "artist novels" ruptures a controlling historical either/or choice for women of either creation or procreation; she suggests that with this merging of creativity and procreativity "feminist modernists struggled against the conservative consequences of asserting a natural and distinct sphere." (1986: 42)

But because motherhood functions culturally as the warrant of heterosexuality, readings such as these that valorize the maternal as a "creative force" are not innocent of heteronormative ideology, even as they attempt to struggle against it. Nor is *Asphodel,* situated in the England of 75 years ago, innocent of similar tendencies. Yet the images the novel actually uses to represent pregnancy are far from being stable or uniformly positive. Instead, they fall into three main categories: images of invasion and takeover, of monstrosity, and of religious visitation.

In the first category, the fetus is figured as an alien, holding Hermione captive: "this being that had trapped her" (H.D., 1992: 158), while Hermione herself is made inanimate, a mere vessel:

> Painted case that had been so hieratically perfect for its receiving became (like the very larva of the future butterfly) now a jelly of vague unrest, of vague forebodings. Painted case so lovely and so calm and so inviolate if only you could stay a painted case, if only all the artificial glamour and hieratic spiritual fervour could be maintained. Did Madonna hold her own against this glue in nothingness, this inchoate mass that you become once you take—full hands for the taking? (H.D., 1992: 156)

Then to the claim that procreativity presages or even fosters creativity, the narrative answers that pregnancy imposes limitations on intellectual activity:

> almost a year and her mind glued down, broken, and held back like a wild bird caught in bird-lime. The state she had been in was a deadly crucifixion. Not one torture (though God that had been enough) but months and months when her flaming mind beat up and she found she was caught, her mind not taking her as usual like a wild bird but her mind-wings beating, beating, and her feet caught, her feet caught, glued like a wild bird in bird-lime. (H.D., 1992: 113)

This pregnancy, while inarguably symbolic, also remains materially and

historically resonant in the terms of the text: "She was caught and the recurrent symptoms made her realize that she was not so neatly a painted box, a neat coffin for its keeping," seemingly participating in the maintenance of the same socially-gendered choice of maternity over posterity: "Women can't speak, and clever women don't have children. So, if a clever woman does speak, she must be mad. She is mad. She wouldn't have had a baby if she hadn't been" (H.D., 1992: 113). Friedman's (1990) suggestion that only the Semiotic can voice a pregnant subjectivity may tend to intensify this sort of already-present marginalization, as well as reinscribing the assumption that maternity is somehow a precultural reality, prelingual and infantilizing.

Rather, H.D.'s imagery *defamiliarizes* the culture-laden terrain of motherhood by refusing sentimentality. In opposition to naturalized visions of serene mothers fostering cuddly miniature humans, "[Hermione] was being disorganized as the parchment-like plain substance of the germ that holds the butterfly becomes fluid, inchoate, as the very tight bud of her germination became inchoate, frog-shaped small greedy domineering monster" (H.D., 1992: 158). The "germinating bud" is elsewhere referred to in other non-human ways, as a colt, a dragon, a butterfly, as a "little le Fay," but it does not seem to be a child. In fact, one of the most interesting illustrations of this point is that, even after birth, Phoebe Fayne retains the ungendered pronoun. In English, a human is almost never an "it." Unarticulated pronomial gender—calling the baby it—simultaneously dehumanizes and propels the baby away from a lineage of Victorian sentimentality *and* draws attention to the issue of interpellation through en-gendering, how core such a fiction is to the concept of what counts as human.

Unlike the images of invasion and grotesquerie surrounding Hermione's pregnancy, then, tropes of religious visitation would seem to be positive ones. Yet the ur-story governing Hermione's revelations is that of Mary and Jesus, a story long used to cordon off gender boundaries within the Church. The place of women is to emulate Mary, to bear children, while the place of men is to imitate Christ. Quite early in the novel, however, this discrepancy becomes contested, when Hermione muses: "I always think the most awful thing in the world to be would be to be the mother of God" (H.D., 1992: 13). During this scene, the projected pain of childbirth becomes conjoined with that of Christ on the cross, just as, in the bird-lime passage above, pregnancy is seen as a crucifixion, and Hermione appropriates the right to occupy either gender position or both.

Initially, Hermione's reliance on mystical signs and visions seems to shore up the romantic convention of a relationship "meant" to happen. In contrast to romantic expectation, however, the narrative of her relationship with Vane, the father of her child, juxtaposes the diction of angels and insects, constructing a scene that evokes both religious offering and a queen bee devouring her mate: "The cigarette was the incense and the wine was the wine and the body opposite her the sacrifice. She could eat that body, devour it, it was gold, it was honey-

comb and the wine was good and she was quite happy, had never been so happy" (H.D., 1992: 143). The implication in either case is that Vane, far from the romantic hero, serves merely the purpose of impregnation, and can then be cast aside.

Later, on the other hand, Hermione's imagination of gods, lowering white bulls, and annunciation angels works to disavow *any* connection of Vane with her pregnancy—"What has Vane to do with it?" (H.D., 1992: 152)—suggesting as well a disavowal of sex with men—"Must she go back to men, men, men?" (H.D., 1992: 162). Instead, "God had swept across her clean white body" (H.D., 1992: 155) a gesture that Friedman (1990) calls parthenogenic, and which imaginatively moves reproduction out of the arena of the heterosexual. For even though the Judeo-Christian god has traditionally been figured as a man, a father, he also calls forth the myth of a recovered whole, or as the narrator says, "God was the answer and the question. God was the lover and the beloved. God was the union of God with God" (H.D., 1992: 154). Indeed, Hermione is rewritten as a lover, not of men, but of the sea and sea-things, amorphously or polymorphously perverse: "Do they know the ecstasy of the senses when a phosphorescent eel or some globe shaped sea-monster turns and makes a cone of light in the shadowy tank of the aquarium?" (H.D., 1992: 147).

These redactions and reinhabitations of old narratives may profitably be seen as a negotiation with heteronormative stories of procreation, which make legible, even in resistance, the coercive economy of what Wittig would call the "straight mind." At the same time, they serve to highlight what constitutes the body, what constitutes the sexual, in what is otherwise a highly oblique discourse. This is the "problem" with a concept of post-gender sexuality, since that which calls the body into being is seemingly allied with the same force that genders it. Judith Butler has described the body as a material effect inscribed within a field of intelligibility produced and governed by power. As her essay on the lesbian phallus suggests:

> the very contours of the body, the delimitations of anatomy, are in part the consequence of an externalized identification. That identificatory process is itself motivated by a transfigurative wish. And that wishfulness proper to all morphogenesis is itself prepared and structured by a culturally complex signifying chain that not only constitutes sexuality, but establishes sexuality as a site where bodies and anatomies are perpetually reconstituted (1993: 90)

Yet to understand that the construction and intersection of gender, sex, and sexuality take place under coercion is not the same as believing them to be determined. Butler uses the trope of the lesbian phallus as a form of travelling theory, to show that "the signifier can come to signify *in excess* of its structurally mandated position; indeed, the signifier can be repeated in contexts and relations that come to *displace* the privileged status of that signifier" (1993: 90).

Clearly, identifying the phallus with lesbian interests troubles both the specificity of lesbian desire and the sexist/ heterosexist constraints of privileging a phallic signifier.

Contiguous with Butler's (1993) phallic lesbian might then be, for the purposes of discussion, the idea of the phallic mother. Obviously, the phallic mother "acquires" the phallus in a different way and, as it were, for a different audience, and certainly pregnancy is not in itself the generative condition for such acquisition. But setting aside for a moment Freud's understanding of how such a putative crisis occurs and how it gets resolved, the two figures (who may, to anticipate my argument, be inhabited by the same subject) have in common the potential to rupture the discursive content of sex (understood here as the cultural mandate toward differentiation), and their very commonality begins to dismantle the picket fence that so carefully separates the lesbian from the (presumptively heterosexual) mother. From another perspective, the relationship between mother and child by its nature jeopardizes the stability of corporeal projection and individuation. In other words, Hermione, as well as her child, is transformed into otherness by the experience of her pregnancy: "This is not what lizard-Hermione wanted. This is not what eel-Hermione, what alligator-Hermione, what sea-gull Hermione was after" (H.D., 1992: 158).

Curiously, however, the most-textualized body in the novel is neither Hermione's nor her baby's. Instead, it is Beryl de Rothfeldt, who becomes visible largely through repeated attention to her eyes and mouth:

> But blue eyes, evil eyes, were calling her out of that nebulous world into which she had so softly fallen, blue eyes were dragging her ashore as one drags the mercifully almost dead to land, blue eyes were working their horrible first aid and were calling, calling to something in Hermione that was lost.... Hermione was defenceless and blue eyes called her back to war. (H.D., 1992: 183)

and: "Eyes don't usually look out of faces like that. Small chin, small Eros chin, mouth more than a child-Eros, a mouth that was a youth Eros, perfect bow of a slightly too wide mouth but lips narrow, coral" (H.D., 1992: 185). The unavoidably eroticizing narrative gaze supports a reading of Beryl and Hermione as lovers, and yet even queerness becomes queered in this narrative. While the "real" baby takes shape as a monster or a puppy, Beryl is figured as "that girl" (perhaps also "that boy," by way of her identification with Eros) or "the child." The maternity that is not a maternity becomes displaced onto the beloved, who becomes the lover's child.

Even granted Butler's (1993) provocative thesis, though, can it really be said to have deconstructed the gendered, sexed position of motherhood? What is left standing, in the text under consideration, as a manifestation of the anxiety surrounding the surrender of such a position? When Hermione considers her

relationship to Darrington in the aftermath of a stillborn child, she worries that to refuse another pregnancy, or more specifically, sex with her husband, would be to "refus[e] her womanhood." This subtext runs through the novel, shoring up social thresholds: "Don't be too inappositely feminine. But I must be. I am having a small le Fay. This is evil and bad of someone, something to send this fantastically wealthy de Rothfeldt girl to me. If I can do without a husband ... if I can do without a lover ..." (H.D., 1992: 187). Motherhood is still constructed as the outer limit, the last stop of a positivist materialism, which can protect and maintain the hegemony of the gender system and its corollary heteronormativity.

For Foucault, in fact, it is precisely power's concern with the "production, maintenance, and regulation of life" that first institutes a regime of reproductive technologies in the eighteenth century—taking the form, that is, of compulsory heterosexuality (Butler, 1996: 60). As possibly the most contingent element in this practice, it is no accident therefore that the institution of motherhood produces/is produced by new regulatory modes in nineteenth-century Anglo-America, and that resistance, in the form of agitation for birth control for example, emerges at the same moment. A U.S. Supreme Court ruling of 1908 declared that since "healthy mothers are essential to vigorous offspring ... the physical well-being of woman becomes an object of public interest and care in order to preserve the strength and vigor of the race" (Simons, 1993: 191). But sexual technologies do change over time. The possibility of asexual reproduction must have seemed more than merely idle when *Asphodel* was written in 1922; beginning in 1899, Jacques Loeb had succeeded in reproducing frogs parthenogenetically and raising them to sexual maturity ("Loeb"), leading to speculation that the same technology could ultimately replace heterosexual intercourse for reproductive purposes.

Since the honeybee is one of a number of insects that can reproduce parthenogenetically outside of laboratory conditions, Hermione's imagination of bees, queens, pollen, and honey, together with her repeated assertion that Vane had nothing to do with her pregnancy, registers a wish in *Asphodel's* symbology: "She could eat that body, devour it, it was gold, it was honey-comb" (H.D., 1992: 143). The two conflicting stories, one in which Hermione conceives a baby via her relationship with Vane, and one in which he does not figure, occur synchronously, so that "[t]he utter uninventiveness of God showed here. Seed dropped into a painted coffin was the same seed, the same germination that had always been," but three lines above, "seeds brought to the light after thousands of thousands of years, sprouted, germinated, were sheer seeds of grain or barley, or of 'some other grain' showing after thousands of thousands of years the inventiveness of God" (H.D., 1992: 163). In one narrative, heteronormativity is upheld; in the other, it is imaginatively re-written.

One option for reading this "new" narrative is lesbian motherhood, where the sign for heteronormativity and the sign of the reproductive outlaw coexist

in mutual dissolution. Although Lillian Faderman claims that the figure of the lesbian mother did not really enter the public sphere until the 1980s, she admits that there have "always" been lesbian mothers (1991: 290). Indeed, Hermione presents Beryl with her child to take care of, apparently meaning to devise a family with two mothers. Yet much earlier in the novel, she goes to lengths to trouble the very idea of early twentieth-century lesbian identity, with its markers of Third Sex discourse and inversion, by telling Fayne:

> I don't want to be (as they say crudely) a boy. Nor do I want you so to be. I don't feel a girl. What is all this trash of Sappho? None of that seems real, to (in any way) matter. I see you. I feel you. My pulse runs swiftly. My brain reaches some height of delirium. Do people say it's indecent? Maybe it is. (H.D., 1992: 53)

Without reifying a lesbian *identity*, then, the text at the same time signifies a desire outside of or resistant to the economy of reproduction. Neither can gender be secured in this passage. The speaker does not want to be "a boy," nor does s/he feel "a girl."This sexuality constituted within a matrix of heteronormative power can only be read as "queer."

Having now perhaps sufficiently tangled the issues of gender, sex, sexuality, and maternity, I would like to return to the thread of readings that try to make motherhood a site for recuperative feminist production. Generic conventions and gender categories function in *Asphodel* to make legible, to *embody* local historical struggle. If for Butler the body is the somaticization of a psychic crisis, then a novel must be the somatic projection of its exigent textual unconscious. Likewise, it has become almost a commonplace in Foucauldian post-structuralist theory to eschew the too-neat solution, to suspect the workings of power actively concealing itself at the locus of its nonappearance. Certainly, as Jon Simons claims, maternal politics has been one way of producing female agency; he notes, for example, that women gained suffrage in England just after the First World War largely because they were construed as bringing "maternal" values to the public sphere (1993: 195). Still, the use of maternity as a metonym for creative energies restricts the kinds of creating that can be done to those who have at least metaphorical wombs. Luce Irigaray's analysis of phallogocentrism suggests the reasons such a trope might be counterproductive: in a masculinist system, the masculine signifier takes on the camouflage of the neutral, the universal; any attempt to reverse the process is doomed, both because the feminin(ist) has no way to signify intelligibly within the system, and because even if it did, the very insistence on its coherence in the face of radical internal difference would cause it to fail.

Moreover, then, as I have suggested above, using the metaphor of maternity to describe the cultural production of women is to some degree to reinscribe the elision of non-childbearing subjects, and to reconstitute "women" as subjected bodies. While not necessarily essentializing in and of itself, the

power of such a metaphor to order discourse is well-documented. Obviously I do not wish to argue that (writing about) having babies is reactionary or heteronormative. At the same time it is absolutely necessary to interrogate the way in which "maternity" gets deployed as a policing agent for gender or for sexual identification.

Donna Haraway (1991) has described the possibilities for radically reconfigured cyborg bodies where what is "natural" and what is "artificial" are no longer recoverable. As science continues to grapple with the collision of new reproductive technologies and old ideologies, the probability exists that the regime of sexuality described by Foucault has already begun to change focus, locating and structuring sexual subjectivities in, as has been suggested, narratives other than, or even opposed to, reproduction. *Asphodel* reinscribes, to no small extent, the mandate to reproduce, to engender, that Foucault would call the effects of power. At the same time, however, it attempts to render those effects legible, even permeable, where "inside and outside [are] the same." In its production of a queer/mother discourse, it puts into question, at the very least, the heteronormative features of reproduction.

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Noreen Shanahan

Nudging aside for poetry

Nudging aside for poetry
I flatten myself against his sleep
each night, my last words
Neruda's.

Tepid swells wash my child's dreams
odes slip a sketch of simple fancy
black and white socks woven on Andean air
or fitted with Yukon magic.

Wear them in, wear them out
gifts alive with yearning
holes at the heels
a playful, bobbing thread
we snatch at warmth together.

Now, closing the cover, I tip-toe away.
This child, nursed on poetry, slumbers
in the wakeful hum of giants.

Book Reviews

Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns

Sharon Abbey and Andrea O'Reilly, eds.
Toronto: Second Story Press, 1998

Reviewed by Brigitte Harris

The 18 chapters in this engaging, multi-authored book present diverse ways of investigating and making meaning of "mother," "mothering," and "motherhood." Qualitative methods—autobiographical, biographical, ethnographic, phenomenological, historical, case study, and participatory research—elicit women's stories. These stories demonstrate the complexity of women's experience and their meanings of mothering. Each chapter presents women's stories and a lucid discussion of the literature, providing a basis from which to question, criticize, support, refine, and rethink existing theories. Reading the book engaged me in an active reflective process.

The reflective process, both collaborative and individual, is illustrated throughout the book. For example, Andrea O'Reilly describes how her course leads students to "dismantle" the patriarchal mother-daughter estrangement narrative to build a new relational narrative. Elizabeth Diem engages in participatory research discussions with mothers of problematic adolescent daughters which allows them over time to "unravel" the disempowering myth of the perfect mother. Martha McMahon reflects on how the loss of her mother brought insight into her choice to not have children, questioning conceptions of motherhood by examining her subjectivity as a non-mother. Her use of "creatively reconstructed letters to a friend" is a particularly effective means of allowing the reader an "in" on her deliberative process. Rishma Dunlop questions patriarchal assumptions negating the embodied knowledge of female experience and demonstrates the power of writing, especially poetry, to capture and examine women's lived experience.

A particular strength of this book is in the insiders', outsiders', and marginalized voices it presents. Motherhood issues are examined from the perspectives of mothers: academics, teachers, and foster mothers. Those who

are not mothers provide an outsider's perspective: adolescent and grown daughters, and the legal and medical establishments. Of particular interest are chapters dealing with those whose stories have not been, or are not often, told. A lesbian mother reflects on her daughter's coming to terms with her "different" family. A researcher describes the dynamic between mothers and daughters in families with a disabled parent. A filmmaker reclaims her historical roots by telling the stories of black mothers in their Nova Scotia communities. Another researcher recounts black women's experiences of motherhood to counter the pathologizing of these families in the "male" literature. A white mother reflects on the role of family narratives in her black daughter's identity formation. All of these voices demonstrate the richness and diversity in the experience of those mothering and those mothered.

The editors facilitate this reflection process in their organization of the chapters into four sections. The first section deals with issues of socialization and education, the second with maternal values and identities, the third with personal and historical narratives, and the last with public and state policy. As such the book flows from the social to personal to public themes, providing a conceptual map accessible to students.

The editors also provide helpful and specific suggestions to instructors for promoting reflection in course activities: through reflective journals, case studies, and thematic research projects. This section includes guidelines for assignments, evaluation, and how certain chapters can be used.

As I pointed out earlier, to read this book is to engage in an ongoing inner dialogue, comparing and contrasting one's own stories and rethinking one's theoretical understandings. The book is alive with the voices of mothers and daughters. It delineates issues in fresh and engaging ways and it models reflection. This book makes an engrossing read and an excellent course text.

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The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter

Nancy Abrams
Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999

Reviewed by Colette Morrow

According to the author, Nancy Abrams, *The Other Mother* is her attempt to make sense of the years that she was prohibited access to her young daughter,

Amelia, by a psychologically unstable ex-partner, Norma, after the couple's relationship ended in the early 1990s. Norma, the biological mother, is able to keep Amelia from Abrams through emotional manipulation and by exploiting legal conventions that do not recognize non-biological mothers' parental rights.

Abrams's task is challenging because much of her story defies comprehension. It is difficult to understand, for example, how Norma exerts so much influence over her partner that Abrams consents to parenthood despite Norma's mental illness, the couple's precarious finances, and Abrams's lifetime resistance to having children. However, Abrams's project is sustained by the introspective, confessional style that she adopts. The often inexplicable becomes intelligible as Abrams uses unhappy childhood memories to analyze her partnership with Norma and her mixed feelings about parenthood. The therapeutic tone developed in these reflections makes plausible Abrams's observation that "mistakes aren't mistakes while they're happening" and "that even a love that goes wrong may hold its own brand of healing" (21).

Nevertheless, some episodes in Abrams's tale defy such neat resolution. After Abrams rescues little Amelia from the psychiatric hospital where Norma has confined her while undergoing treatment there herself, Abrams hesitates to pursue custody of the girl. Abrams delays two months although she has bountiful evidence that Norma's instability has harmed Amelia and that Norma will not be able to reassume responsibility for the girl soon. She seeks temporary custody only because Norma checks herself out of the hospital prematurely and threatens to retrieve Amelia.

Certainly Abrams's assessment that as a non-biological lesbian mother she will engage in a long, expensive, and likely unsuccessful legal battle is accurate. But her conclusion, that surrendering Amelia to Norma is as motherly as pursuing custody, is unsatisfying. Briefly explaining her decision, Abrams seems to suggest that "not going on" is a *lesbian* performance of motherhood that disrupts heterosexist definitions of family. The basis for this claim is that she finally sees herself as Amelia's "real" mother only after she loses the child.

However, Abrams's argument is not convincing theoretically or in the book's terms. While a child's best interests often are served by dropping a custody dispute, Norma has put Amelia at risk for physical injury and has damaged the child emotionally. Here the introspection that earlier helped make sense of Abrams's dubious judgments now turns against her, for readers know that her typical approach to Norma employs passivity and appeasement. In the end, her decision not to seek custody perpetuates that pattern. If Abrams's analyses had been less solipsistic throughout, had presented Amelia's character more fully, and had included an in-depth exploration of her relationship with the girl, Abrams would be more persuasive. Instead, Abrams acquires a sense of "real" motherhood in relation to herself rather than Amelia, and this will strike many readers as counterintuitive.

The Lesbian Family Life Cycle

Suzanne Slater
Chicago: University of Illinois Press , 1999

Reviewed by Jeanne-Marie Zeck

Suzanne Slater author of *The Lesbian Family Life Cycle* is a therapist in private practice in Northampton, Massachusetts. She describes herself as "a WASP, middle-class, coupled lesbian therapist in her late thirties, living in a well-established lesbian community." Slater acknowledges that her identity both offers her an expertise in the subject of lesbian families and creates a limited perspective. One of the strengths of Slater's book is that she recognizes and calls attention to the limits of previous models of the human family as well as to her own. She calls for more studies to follow hers: studies that will emphasize diversity in race and ethnicity, class, religion, and families with children. Slater's study focuses on lesbian couples as families.

The author wisely divides her book into two sections. "Part One: Enduring Realities of Lesbian Family Life" offers the reader an excellent background which explains why the traditional paradigm of the heterosexual family fails to describe lesbian families: The heterosexual couple is the central focus of the traditional family unit with the man as the head of the household; the couple is "presumed to be part of a multigenerational family network"; bonds are created through blood and marriage; and heterosexual models are child-centered, assuming that the couple will produce offspring.

In Part One Slater also discusses the enormous and persistent stresses in the lives of lesbians including sexism, racism, and homophobia. The author then presents a series of creative rituals couples have developed to help them sustain and celebrate their unions. She offers examples of simple but meaningful rituals such as taking a walk together after dinner each night, spending Friday evenings at home alone, and both partners participating in their child's story time before bed. Many lesbians couples also make a point of celebrating a series of anniversaries: the day they met, their decision to live together, and the buying of their rings. These self-made rituals serve as substitutions for the socially generated rituals heterosexuals routinely enjoy: engagements, weddings, anniversaries, and so on.

Throughout her book, Slater offers vignettes of lesbian couples contemplating coming out, planning commitment ceremonies, and negotiating visits with biological families. Many of the scenarios vividly depict the isolation and lack of social support in a heterosexist world. Slater expertly presents evidence of profound exclusion when she lists the rights and privileges denied lesbian couples including laws against marriage, discrimination in employment and housing, loss of custody by lesbian mothers, and a lack of insurance coverage for

lesbian partners. Slater asserts, "Heterosexual families enjoy a well-mapped-out pathway for their life together, complete with reinforcements in moments of accomplishment and support in predictable times of family stress. Lesbian families struggle to survive without these fundamental supports . . ." Slater also acknowledges the difficulty such families experience due to a scarcity of written history and models of earlier lesbian families. Yet such families have existed from the BC era of Sappho's circle to nineteenth-century America's Boston marriages to today's lesbian families who struggle for recognition and acceptance.

Slater expertly articulates the need for models of lesbian families saying that such models will prevent partners from being perceived as deviant. The models will also bolster self-esteem and offer women a self-defined identity. "Lesbian family life cycle models can positively reframe efforts to thrive in the midst of this socially imposed isolation and finally credit couples for their creative—rather than pathological—response to externally imposed obstacles," Slater affirms. Particularly insightful is her assertion that lesbians' "typically vigilant attention to their relationships allows them both to inform models of lesbian family life and to contribute to this neglected focus within heterosexual family life cycle perspectives." Without a model of women's intimate lives together, a couple may misinterpret a natural transition as an event that foretells the end of their union. Understanding these transitions, couples "may be better able to maintain their confidence in the face of more challenging or seemingly frightening changes," Slater explains. Within Part One of her book, the author clearly defines the complexities involved in negotiating and sustaining a successful lesbian family life.

In Part Two of her study, Slater defines and examines the five stages of the lesbian family life cycle: "Formation of the Couple," "Ongoing Couplehood," "The Middle Years," "Generativity," and "Lesbian Couples over Sixty-Five." The author notes that "the first three stages contain a preparatory quality as the partners build and refine their relationship, encountering the fundamental strains within lesbian family life and considering the level of commitment they can realistically promise to each other." In her discussion of the first stage, Slater acknowledges the sense of "a wonderful and terrible risk" that marks many new intimate unions. She also exposes characteristics particular to lesbian relationships including a tendency to accelerate the establishment of a partnership.

While stage one describes the emotional and sexual excitement of the "disrupted lives" of the new couple, stage two, "Ongoing Couplehood," presents a transition to daily life. During this stage "the couple can create patterns of being together and can sculpt the beginning of ongoing connectedness." In spite of the continuation of the relationship, the women have not yet offered one another a guarantee of permanence. Stage three, "The Middle Years," is the period during which the couple commits to one another and begins to make long-range plans. A "central accomplishment of the middle-years stage" is the ability to welcome into the lesbian family new

members who "may play a central and permanent role in the partners' lives."

"The Generativity Stage" is marked by the partners' awareness of their mortality. Because lesbians must face so many social pressures and prejudices, they may experience emotional maturity early. This hard-won wisdom will help couples during the fourth stage which may also, Slater notes, be marked by a "special richness and contemplation."

Because women, on the average, live seven years longer than men, a female couple has a good chance of sharing a long life together into their later years. In her discussion of stage five, "Lesbian Couples over Sixty-five," Slater describes the accumulation of stresses commonly connected with being "female, lesbian, and elderly." In this section, the author discusses differences among and between various races regarding attitudes toward the aged. She notes that many cultures such as Asian Americans and Hispanics enjoy a strong appreciation and respect for the elderly while African Americans often express a great deal of gratitude and love especially toward elderly women.

Suzanne Slater's study, *The Lesbian Family Life Cycle,* is a well-researched, academically sound yet accessible book. Women's studies and sociology professors would do well to include this volume as required reading for their courses. It can also serve as an essential resource for family therapists. General readers would surely learn a great deal from this book.

Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Twentieth-Century Literature

Elizabeth Brown-Guillory, Ed.
Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995

Reviewed by Michelle L. Taylor

The publication of such novels as Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* (1989), and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), sparked an important movement among critics to interrogate the role of ethnicity in mother-daughter relationships. Foundational texts and articles such as *Double Stitch: Black Women Write About Mothers and Daughters* and "Born of a Stranger: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Storytelling in Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club*," are only a few of the texts that examine this relationship. *Women of Color: Mother-Daughter Relationships in 20th Century Literature* follows in this tradition, but makes an important departure by placing African-American mother-daughter relationships in conversation with other multi-racial mother-daughter relationships, including Native-

American, Mexican-American, Asian-American, African, Indian, and Australian Aboriginal. The result is an insightful and easy to read collection of essays that challenges readers to contemplate the complexities of being a mother and/or a daughter in a society marred by gender and racial discrimination. Importantly, the essays also focus on the novel as a vehicle for social change and as an expression of feminist cross-racial alliances.

The 12 essays in *Women of Color* share many important commonalities, including the emphasis on twentieth-century literature, the emotional and psychological condition of the mother, and the predominance of gender and racial discrimination. One of the most important themes in the collection is the struggle to overcome the societal silences imposed on women. Brown-Guillory notes: "The mothers and daughters always seem to be struggling to get beyond the silences. Sometimes the texts point to consequences of continued silence and sometimes to the joy of breaking silence and movement toward reconciliation and growth between mothers and daughters" (4).

As a whole, the collection will find an audience in readers interested in a range of cross-cultural novels and issues. The collection includes essays on Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* and *Storyteller*, all of which suggest the link between feminism, literature, and history. The wide variety of subjects is more than matched by the quality of the essays. Among the most interesting examinations of the complexities of diasporic motherhood is Radhika Mohanram's, "The Problems of Reading: Mother-Daughter Relationships and Indian Post-Coloniality" which addresses the devaluation of women in Indian culture by examining two Indian short stories by Mrinal Pande and Anjana Appachana. Julia De Foor Jay's "(Re)claiming the Race of the Mother: Cherríe Moraga's *Shadow of a Man, Giving Up the Ghost*, and *Heroes and Saints*" echoes Mohanram's emphasis on cultural oppression and female silence by gauging the complex relationship between a Chicana heritage, feminism, and lesbianism in selected works by Cherríe Moraga. Likewise, Lucille Fultz's "To Make Herself: Mother-Daughter Relationships in Toni Morrison's *Sula* and *Tar Baby*," considers the balance between the historical pressures placed on African American women and familial expectations.

Another important factor in the essays, and one of particular interest to ARM members, is the relationship between the novel and social activism. Among the most interesting are Kimberly Pollacks's "A Continuum of Pain: A Woman's Legacy in Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*" and Joyce Zonana's "I was cryin', all the people were cryin', my mother was cryin': Aboriginality and Maternity in Sally Morgan's *My Place*."

To her credit, Brown-Guillory has assembled a group of essays that will increase our understanding of the impact of race on the mother-daughter dyad. This text is an important contribution to the expanding field of the feminisms of women of color and will be a standard bearer for future texts that explore cross-racial and cross-cultural feminist alliances.

Feminism and Families: Critical Policies and Changing Practices

Meg Luxton, Ed.
Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1997

Reviewed by Gordana Eljdupovic-Guzina

This collection, edited by Meg Luxton, is the product of a 1993-94 York University Advanced Research Seminar on the relationship between feminism and families. Most of the eleven articles deal with family policies in the Canadian context. The overall thesis is that the many changes which the feminist movement has initiated have not been supported and sustained by specific family policies, thus providing space for neo-conservatism to strengthen its position.

The essays cover a wide range. Brenda Cossman highlights the limitations of the dichotomy between belonging and not belonging to a family; Katherine Side brings out the complexity of a 'family' by comparing it to friendship - a very important relationship in women's lives, yet often neglected in feminist studies. Highlighting the multiple meanings and readings of the 'family', Shelley A.M. Gavigan shows that "... the language of 'spousal benefits' and 'heterosexual privilege' misses the mark with respect to the social relationships that come under the rubric of 'family'" (117). She also asks whether lesbians and gay men in fact want to subscribe to an oppressive and exclusionary institution, as some feminists consider the family to be. On the other hand, Katherine Arnup spells out changes needed in the courts, legislatures, workplace benefits, collective agreements, etc. to provide recognition of lesbians' and gay men's families.

Analyzing interviews conducted with white heterosexual couples during the last trimester of the women's pregnancies and the first year of the couple's parenthood, Bonnie Fox brings out ways in which this period makes a heterosexual couple particularly susceptible to society's encouragement to resort to traditional roles. Heather Jon Maroney examines demographic data, and Frances Woolley, Judith Madill and Arndt Vermaeten look at data on child benefit reform in Canada. Both essays contextualize and examine the underlying assumptions of 'bare' statistics, showing how 'objective facts' reflect and perpetuate a particular ideology and risk 'squeezing' many lives into traditional, conservative categories.

Taken together, the articles in this book show how being considered a family is not just a matter of personal validation, but essential for individuals to obtain legal protection, rights (with the associated obligations) and benefits. Still, one question remains. Why, despite all our knowledge of current laws and forces shaping the family, is it so difficult to project social practices that would facilitate the coexistence of different modes of relationships? In part, this may

reflect an inherent tension in feminism, which aims both to address the specific embodied and embedded experiences of particular persons/groups, but also to respect and facilitate diversity. Perhaps Gavigan comes closest to offering an inclusive project by affirming that "... one's access or entitlement to social benefits...one's dignity and personal and economic security ...should not and need not depend upon being situated in or relegated to a familial relationship" (117). Paradoxically, getting beyond the concept of 'family' in decision-making could help 'families' - in all their diverse forms and modalities—to coexist.

This book tackles important issues of family politics and social practices both theoretically and through data analysis of "changing" practices. It should be of interest to scholars and students with different backgrounds and interests in feminism(s), family studies, policy making and family legislation.

Mothering: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Construction

Silvia Vegetti Finzi Trans. Kathrine Jason
New York: Guilford, 1994

Reviewed by Rosario Arias

Marianne Hirsch, a well-known literary critic, stated once that "any full study of mother-daughter relationships, in whatever field, is by definition both feminist and interdisciplinary" (179). This book offers an insight into the meaning of motherhood and mothering from an interdisciplinary approach, which is successfully achieved by combining history, anthropology, and mythology with psychoanalysis in the different sections of the book. Out of her experience as a psychotherapist and her extensive research, Vegetti Finzi has written this book, in Italian titled *Bambino della notte* (*The Child of the Night*), on the issue of motherhood, described and studied from a woman's perspective.

After a brief introductory section, the author focuses on the repressed women's unconscious, which can be discovered both in the infantile imaginary realm and in ancient rites and classical myths. Thus, the first chapter examines the process of defining one's sexuality in the clinical case of Anna, a girl of nine who has problems in allying herself with being female. Vegetti Finzi pays attention to Anna's unconscious, reflected in her dreams, paintings, and drawings, and, using Freudian theory, interprets Anna's ambiguous gender and sexual identification (which should have been resolved in the oedipal stage). But, in so doing, the author overlooks the preoedipal period, privileged in

recent accounts of psychoanalytic feminism, and particularly important in this case since the girl "has become fixated on her mother—a condition that is still visible in their gestures" (15).

The second chapter represents a move beyond the Freudian theory of the first chapter. Also drawing on another clinical case story (that of Paola), Vegetti Finzi explores the role played by culture in inhibiting the potential creativity of maternity, later internalized by the woman's unconscious. As a result of this, woman's creative power has been undermined and diminished in assigning her "a mutilated and passive representation of self in the objectified and neutralized terms of natural phenomena" (90). The author contends that ancient rites and classical myths (such as that of Demeter and Persephone, for example) provide a good many images of woman's creative power, what the author also calls "the child of the night", and illustrate how this has been silenced and repressed by male dominance for centuries.

The two last chapters focus on the effects such a male appropriation of pro-creativity has produced in women and the necessity of a new discourse about maternity. Although chapter three is less successful than the rest, it paves the way for the last chapter. In it, the author argues that images and metaphors of motherhood enhance the meaning of the maternal process outside biology. Accordingly, she names six powerful images of female creativity, as the basis of a possible ethical paradigm; among them are the image of the mother as earth, creativity as maternity, and vice versa. What I miss here is a specific reference to the work of Carol Gilligan or that of the feminist philosopher Sara Ruddick, especially in the section devoted to the care of children as morality (another image), to strengthen the author's argument. It seems clear that Vegetti Finzi's final contention of the possibilities of a more conscious ecological sensibility and a rejection of exploitation and domination somewhat coincides with Ruddick's "feminist maternal politics of peace" (244).

In short, *Mothering: Toward a New Psychoanalytic Construction* provides a fascinating history of women's development, inextricably linked to the creative power of motherhood, as well as stresses the need for a maternal discourse. At times exciting and moving, it is extremely useful to not only a specific audience interested in psychoanalysis and feminism, but also general readers who want to know more about mothering as a gendered activity and ideology.

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Bearing Meaning: The Language of Birth

Robbie Pfeufer Kahn
Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998

Reviewed by Deborah Whatley

It has only been approximately within the last twenty years that social history and feminist scholarship have begun to change the written record to include women as producers and reproducers, both of which influence historical processes. Robbie Pfeufer Kahn reminds us that, ironically, the Latin root for "text" is *texere*, meaning "woven thing," which is a productive process in which women have participated throughout recorded history. While texts belonging to the canon of Western tradition "attack," bifurcate and dismember the maternal body, as do medical protocols and practices, Kahn's text articulates what she calls "languages of birth," as she re-members the maternal body through its embodied experiences. Revisiting history from the rise of abstract thought in classical Greece to the present, Kahn weaves a tapestry that illustrates a woman's body as one that is "not a body that is not a man's."

Kahn's tapestry is woven from four main threads. With the first, she discusses attitudes toward birth in texts from Western tradition. The second connects culture to society by examining the relationship between this tradition, with its "relentlessly patriarchal character," and current birth protocols and practices in the United States. The third thread weaves counterstories with the dominant canonical texts of modern medicine. Kahn's fourth thread introduces her own experiences by sounding her personal narrative as a mother, former childbirth activist, and scholar, against other narratives. Embodying contributions of sociologists from the West as well as from other parts of the globe, her framework for understanding 'the sociological' includes conceptions of structure, and agency, as well as biological, social, and spiritual nature.

While Kahn is proficient in weaving the representations of others into her tapestry, she also offers her readers a concept of her own. Understanding the most problematic aspect of the maternal body as its tie to the child, she introduces the neologism maialogical, as a theoretical articulation of the mother-child dyad and the dialectical process of childbearing and building knowledge grounded in the body. This perspective argues for the unification of the biological, social, and spiritual natures; for a social structure that gives maximum freedom to agency and nature; for a culture of the justborn (which recognizes the unrepresented and unworded voices of the very young); and offers a framework by which to examine cultural products to see how texts represent the three natures and relations among agency, structure, and nature.

Rich in context and replete with references, Kahn's text can be read as a textbook, handbook, and personal memoir interwoven with cogent and dili-

gent sociological analysis. While she weaves personal narrative and self-reflexivity, she does so without self-indulgence. In her effort to rethink women and produce text, she is determined not to "reproduce the splits of Western descriptions of reality and not to replace one single-focused view with another" (36). To this end, or more aptly a beginning, she draws on social theory, psychoanalysis, feminist thought, ecological perspectives, and spiritual traditions. She is meticulous in her detail and description of terms and concepts, making the book accessible and relevant for both the academic and women's health activist reader, as well as anyone interested in maternity.

Men have been the prime movers of historical process, and creators of the master symbols of Western culture as compensatory for their alienation from natural processes such as birth and lactation. For Kahn, "a new language of birth means making the intact maternal body visible in words on paper and describing the knowledge derived from it" (6). Although abstract knowledge and language have been repositories of patriarchal power relations, Kahn did not take up the challenge of the language and progeny of knowledge as presumed masculine, even by feminists who fail to reflect on their use of the term"disseminate." Rather than a minor criticism of her text, this omission is further recognition of the need for such texts.

"What a Blessing She Had Chloroform": The Medical and Social Response to the Pain of Childbrith from 1800 to the Present

Donald Caton
New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999

Reviewed by Gina Camodeca

I recently threw a party where the conversation turned toward childbirth. Of the three women present, two (myself included) were pregnant. The husband of the third women began to brag about his wife's having given birth twenty years earlier without painkillers. His wife shushed him, while I and the other expectant mother squirmed. I'm a proponent of "natural childbirth"; the other soon-to-be mother praises epidurals and jokes that she wishes she could have one for her entire third trimester. We all sensed that the conversation might become political. Undeniably, the management of childbirth is a contentious issue with which not just individual women, but also their societies, are concerned.

In *What a Blessing She Had Chloroform*, Donald Caton, an obstetric anesthesiologist, suggests that childbirth management has been polemical

because historically the *meaning of pain* had traversed the *meaning of childbirth.* It's a compelling thesis, and his narrative of how anesthesia has impacted maternal care since the 19th century is engaging. In a readable approach to a technical subject, Caton follows the impact of anesthesia by narrating individual histories of early supporters and opponents of its use in normal labor, delving into their motivations and influence. Invariably, these figures make flawed medical assumptions, and often have terrible motives and methods. For instance, an early proponent of ether, Dr. James Young Simpson, claimed that the anesthetic was harmless while he did almost no medical research, and he published his "successes" in newspapers, causing a public cry for on-demand "innocuous" pain relief. What is most interesting about Simpson is that he was the first to take the medical matter of childbirth, as a political issue, to women themselves. Conversely, opponents of anesthetics often argued publicly that the pain of childbirth was indistinguishable from its meaning as punishment from God. While these arguments offend, they also encouraged women to consider that their labor was socially meaningful—women would go on to do so variously, in feminist and religious traditions.

Caton's text is also loaded with striking quotes from many major actors in the drama. For instance, Caton quotes William Tyler-Smith, an early opponent of anesthesia, which, he said, to a laboring woman " ... in her hour of trial only offer[s] a choice betwixt poison and pain." And Queen Victoria herself, one of the earliest known laboring women to receive chloroform, speaks the title of the book.

Finally, Caton believes in painlessness, and this bias tips the book's balance. He "discounts critics" of obstetric practice which favors using anesthetics, citing dubious reasons. For instance, Caton narrates the 1914 feminist "Twilight-Sleep" movement, which demanded widespread availability of a dangerous morphine-based anesthetic. His point is that women are often misguided in what they want, and therefore their more recent criticisms should be measured accordingly. Ultimately, however, his assertion that painlessness does not equal meaninglessness is well taken. For A.R.M. readers who want to weigh these issues in medical, personal, and political terms, this book is a sober and sobering resource.

Rock-a-by Baby: Feminism, Self-Help, and Postpartum Depression

Verta Taylor
New York: Routledge, 1996

Reviewed by Kathleen Sorensen

The aim of this work is to use the model of postpartum depression self-help

groups to understand contemporary social movements led by and for women. To do so with a feminist vision is central to this enterprise. Taylor asks if culturally defined imperatives influence an adversity that may affect as many as 80 percent of mothers. Framed against the background of her own experience with depression, the author uses survivor narratives in order to elucidate poignant aspects of her study.

Taylor wants us to look at the disparity between what we believe should be the feelings of new mothers and the actual feelings expressed by women suffering from postpartum depression. She then asks whether postpartum depression might be a mode of resistance against a societal norm, rather than a clinical illness. If so, why do women seek out medical solutions for what is a social problem, she asks. One of the claims that Taylor analyses is whether self-help groups are simply philosophical exercises, or whether they have the power to correct societal problems. Her mandate, she asserts, is to understand this movement against a feminist backdrop while suspending judgement on whether any individual organization meets any particular feminist standard.

The middle of this book links the personal politics of self-help with the collective action that springs from it. At this point we see the connection that Taylor makes between "talk shows" and postpartum depression self-help groups. In this two-fold composite, Taylor sees the 'talk-show' phenomenon as "encouraging viewers to challenge the gender status quo" (115) then it opens a discussion on previously taboo subjects thereby bringing them into the popular consciousness. She suggests that this combination of resistance and knowledge can act as an impetus to social change. Subsequently, she asks whether feminism can remain practicable within contemporary self-help movements for women. She indicates that the move to connect with others also aids in developing a fuller understanding of identity issues within the collective, which in turn acts as a consciousness-raising exercise. She finds that postpartum depression self-help groups both critique the status quo of motherhood, and denigrates any woman who does not emulate this model by declaring them ill. This leads us to her contention that support group movements tell us interesting and useful things about the intersection of gender and society.

Overall, this is an informative look at postpartum depression self-help groups. However, Taylor's lack of experience with both motherhood and postpartum depression are notable in their absence. She also acknowledges that this movement, is primarily concerned with and run by white, middle class women which creates its own problems as Taylor fumbles with the idea of non-traditional motherhood with only a rarified model with which to work. As a woman who suffered from postpartum depression I had hoped to find some new revelation in this volume, I did not. However, Taylor offers an engaging thesis and an informative look at an unfortunate occurrence in the lives of many women.

Breasts: The Women's Perspective on an American Obsession

Carolyn Latteier
New York and London: Harrington Park Press, 1998

Reviewed by Jean Feerick

Carolyn Latteier's study of what she terms the "public institution" (111) of the breast is an original and noteworthy addition to the growing library of books treating the cultural construction of beauty, breasts, and female bodies. Her approach is original and invigorating largely because she brings to bear on her topic a remarkable variety of tools and approaches. Combining academic research with social commentary, case history, and historical analysis, Latteier has constructed a style and a voice that make her book accessible to a wide audience while also demonstrating a vigor of analysis which prevents her from drawing quick and easy answers to the timeworn and complex issue of how and why the breast has become the cultural fetish we know it to be today. Not limiting herself as the title suggests to America's obsession with breasts today, Latteier actually travels far and wide for answers to her many and varied questions, revisiting ancient myths and cultures, non-western customs, and various historical moments in western culture in her attempt to show the contingency and variability of the breast's deployment in various times and places. At least part of her reason for doing so is to shock many out of the complacent assumption that the breast is invested with transcendent meanings simply inherited from yesteryear, most notably, perhaps, the assumption that it has always and forever been an erotic object.

Not so, argues Latteier, in discussions organized into chapters analyzing discrete topics such as breast implants, breastfeeding, teenage identity crises, male fetishism, and mother-child bonding, among others. In fact, much of her research aims to show just how alien our own equation of breasts with eroticism is when compared with other times and cultures, and to emphasize the cultural "fallout" that such an obsession produces for both men and women alike. Turning first to the painful transition compressed into the teenage years, she demonstrates how our shared cultural obsession scars many for life, often inhibiting the development of a mature sexuality later in life. While here her primary focus is teenage girls and their subjection to various forms of abuse, a later chapter takes up the "perverse" effects on male sexuality that this "institution" breeds, not least the objectification of women and the substitution of the breast for fuller emotional growth and satisfaction. Here she takes a bit far, in this reviewer's estimation, the notion that breast eroticization derives from less than ideal experiences of mother-child nurture, acting as a substitute or fetish for what is in many cases the premature termination of nurture at the

mother's breast. But she is savvy enough to combine such a view with the realization that widespread commodification of the breast also shares responsibility for producing these desires through its own habit of objectifying the female body—that this obsession is not so much an individual pathology as a cultural phenomenon. At times, however, the author seems to long to recover what she calls our "animal beauty" (56), a sort of "pre-cultural" body not so thoroughly infused with social meanings. She betrays, for instance, an uneasiness with the "artificiality" of silicone breasts, as opposed to what she documents as their many physical dangers, despite her knowledge that modern bodies have become veritable containers for prostheses such as fillings, contact lenses, and hair coloring. But elsewhere I think she rightly intuits that such a condition is impossible, that the body arrives to us always-already marked and limited by cultural doctrine.

While drawing on a range of professional schools to substantiate her many points including psychology, sociology, anthropology, and medicine—Latteier also preserves a healthy and critical distance from these discourses, interrogating the assumptions operating beneath their professed objectivity and foregrounding their own ideological investments. Particularly witty moments include her refusal of Freud's notion of the fetish as a response to penis envy or castration anxiety as a "patriarchal con job" (102); her analysis of the implicit sexism operating in the theories of evolution experts who argue that the uniqueness of human breasts derive from the trickery of "primal prostitutes" (139) trying to ensnare their mates into providing for them; and her analysis of how medical practitioners have helped to perpetuate this cultural obsession through their own efforts to expand the category of "disease" to include small but healthy breasts, and then have attempted to define as "neurotic" those women who, in seeking implants, try to redress what medicine and culture alike tells them are anatomical deficiencies.

Her narrative does not, unfortunately, capture in any depth the "women's perspective" on breasts as emblems of death and dying rather than lifegiving and nurturance, as is clearly the case for many women experiencing or expecting to experience the horrors of breast cancer. Perhaps a chapter treating this perspective and analyzing our cultural belatedness in responding to this crisis could have been included to demonstrate yet another harmful side effect of our eroticization of the breast. Additionally, although Latteier is admirable in trying to redefine womanhood so as to accommodate the competing demands of nurture and career growth, providing snapshots of women who have made both work, there is very little revisioning here of fatherhood, as if our author had ultimately come to accept the notion that men and women are "naturally" and "essentially" afforded different social and cultural roles by virtue of their differing biology. As Latteier insists elsewhere (71-72), the predicament our culture finds itself in by virtue of its obsession with breasts is ultimately a burden we all must share. Women need not and should not be expected to bear it alone.

Amy and Isabelle

Elizabeth Strout
New York: Random House, 1998

Reviewed by Renee Norman

This novel is about longing, desire and pain. It is about secrets and lies: how they distance us from our/selves and those we love. It is also about reconstruction in the face of rage, deep hurt, and the ravages of life. How we keep on going in spite of everything. And how everydayness is the mainstay of our lives. But mostly, this is a story about a mother and a daughter, a story that is often difficult and sad, yet filled with the hope that comes out of life lived and love which survives tempestuous forces.

Isabelle Goodridge is a single mother raising a daughter, Amy, now 16, in Shirley Falls, a small town which could be anywhere, vaguely set during the hippie/bellbottom era. (The reference to some minor characters' French Canadian background led me to wondering if the setting was supposed to be Canadian.)

The novel begins as we follow Isabelle to work at the mill where she is secretary to Avery Clark. It is one of the most humid, languid summers ever. Amy joins her mother, who has secured her a summer job. As the tension of the summer heat and relationships begin to simmer and boil, the story of why Amy looks with disgust over at her mother begins to unravel.

Flashing back to Amy's last few months of school, her awkwardness, loneliness and disconnection are sensitively portrayed in the halls and classrooms of a public high school. Amy's invisibility among the cliques rang so true, I couldn't help but reflect on my own similar high school experiences, as well as the current ordeals of my own teenage daughters.

Elizabeth Strout treats this subject with honesty and realism, as we learn how the vulnerable Amy falls in love with her Math teacher. This substitute teacher, so different from the older woman temporarily away on sick leave, makes all the students feel more alive with the difference in routine. But the attention he directs to Amy is subtle, clever, laden with suggestive undertones.

Amy's dull life for once seems to hold excitement and possibility and she is drawn to him.

As the story of her sexual awakening (and seduction) unfolds, her mother's story begins to heat up like the weather. The image of the stagnant river which runs through the town acts as a counterpoint to the drama which evolves between mother and daughter, adolescent and teacher. The discovery of Amy's relationship with the teacher lets loose a torrent of events and emotions, with a satisfying dénouement, making this novel a good old-fashioned read as well

as a forum for discussing some important issues:

- the invisibility of women
- the vulnerability of adolescent girls
- mother-daughter relations
- educational ethics
- reporting inappropriate teacher conduct
- the pleasures of sexuality
- the importance of openness and communication.

I handed the novel to my own 15-year-old daughter to read.WARNING: I'd rate this book 14A with PG as there are a couple of explicit sexual scenes and one mother-daughter episode which left me feeling way less guilty about my own transgressions.

Those who would like to see the novel's men (who cause great pain to women) punished will be disappointed. But the strength that the women develop in themselves and their friendships partly makes up for such injustice.

I'm betting this is a movie within a year. If so, it would be a refreshing change from the kill-the-mother-off genre of the latest string of mother movies.

Contributor Notes

Sharon M. Abbey is an assistant professor of Education at Brock University where she teaches courses in social studies and women's studies and is a founding member of the Centre on Collaborative Research. Previously, she spent 20 years as an elementary school teacher, curriculum consultant, and school principal. Currently, she is the president of the Canadian Association for Studies on Women in Education, the book review editor for *Teaching Education* and a member of the Board of Directors for the National Foundation for Eating Disorders. She is the co-editor of the recently published book, *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (1998) and *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (forthcoming, 2000).

Rosario Arias graduated with a B.A. Honours in English from the University of Malaga, Spain, where he later worked as a research assistant for two-and-a -half years. He is currently a teaching assistant at the University of Malaga where he is working towards a Ph.D. in English literature. His dissertation deals with the mother-daughter relationship in novels by English women writers such as Doris Lessing and Margaret Drabble, and in novels and stories written by Canadian women writers such as Margaret Atwood and Margaret Laurence in the light of psychoanalytic feminism. Other areas of interest include Renaissance drama and gender studies.

Wanda Thomas Bernard, M.S.W., Ph.D., R.S. W., is an assistant professor of social work at the Maritime School of Social Work at Dalhousie University. Her research interests are in the area of race, oppression, and empowerment. She teaches in direct practice and anti-oppressive social work.

Lois M. Berry is a fourth generation Wyoming native and a graduate of the University of Wyoming with a B.A. in History and American Studies. Employed at the University since 1974, she worked in the Geology Library and the Institute for Policy Research before joining the University of Wyoming Libraries Cataloguing Department in 1978. She has published several essays, memoirs and pieces of short fiction and is currently a member of a local writers's group, Writers' Ink. She served as treasurer of the United Gays and Lesbians of Wyoming and was honoured in November 1997 for a decade of service on the board of directors of that organization. She makes her home in Laramie with her partner and a 13-year-old stepson.

Gina Camodeca is an assistant professor in English at D'Youville College in Buffalo, New York. She is the director of the D'Youville College-Wide Writing Progam. She received her Ph.D. from SUNY University in Buffalo with a specialty in nineteenth and early twentieth-century literature, and literature and medicine.

Mielle Chandler is a graduate student in Social and Political Thought at York University, Toronto, Canada.

Kim Chase is a second-generation Franco-American, a French teacher and a mother of two boys. She has published poetry, articles, essays, and one short story. She is currently working on a collection of short stories entitled, *Pagan Baby Certificates.*

Dawn Comeau received her bachelor's degree from Simmons College in Boston, MA. Currently, she is a Masters candidate in Women's Studies at San Diego State University in California where she is writing her thesis about lesbian families. In addition, she has also researched homophobia in the health care system. While at San Diego State University, she has taught "Women and the Social Sciences" for the Department of Women's Studies.

Jennifer Conner is currently working towards her Master's Degree in the School for Women's Studies at York University in Toronto. Her research interests include gender, whiteness, race, and racism.

Andrea Doucet is assistant professor of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Carleton University. Her publications combine her interests in feminist theory, qualitative research, and caring. Her current research, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, explores the links between economic restructuring, fatherhood, and masculinities. She has three daughters, Vanessa (9), and Hannah and Lilly (5).

Susan Driver is a Ph.D. candidate in the Social and Political Thought Programme at York University in Toronto.

Susan Dundas is a child psychiatrist with a speciality in infant psychiatry. She currently holds the rank of lecturer at the University of Toronto and works in the field of early intervention at the Hincks/Dellcrest Centre. She has also done research in lesbian-parented families, affect regulation, and early intervention with children under five years old. She currently lives in Mississauga with her partner of 14 years and their two children.

Gordana Eljdupovic-Guzina is a mother, a doctoral candidate in psychology at Carleton University, Ottawa, and a sessional lecturer. Her dissertation, titled

"Mothering During Incarceration: Connecting the Past and the Present Experiences" deals with mothering issues women encounter during incarceration in relation to their "internal models of parenting" and growing-up experiences.

Rachel Epstein is a doctoral student in Education at York University and a practising mediator of community, organizational, and relationship conflicts. She has learned much about love (and conflict) through being a mother.

Jean Feerick is a graduate student in English at the Univeristyof Pennsylvania. She is working on a dissertation titled "Disorderly Bodies: Humoralism, Race, and the Construction of National Difference." Among the topics she treats is the historical constructions of breastfeeding which argue for its role in transmitting racial identity.

Lois Fine has stretched her left brain just about as far as it can go, and can't wait for the day when her right brain gets set free.

Jacqui Gabb is currently undertaking an ESRC-funded D.Phil. research project into lesbian families with children in Yorkshire, U.K. She was formerly a senior lecturer in media specializing in the areas of female spectatorship, lesbian, gay, and queer media. Previous academic publications include "Marginal Differences? An analysis of the Imagined Bodies of Del LaGrace" in *Journal of Gender Studies* (Vol. 7.3, November 1998); "Consuming the Garden: Locating a Feminine Narrative Within Popular Cultural Texts and Gendered Genres" in *The Media in Britain: Current Debates and Developments*, edited by J. Stokes and A. Reading (Macmillan, 1999).

Jaime Grant is currently living in Washington, D.C.

Fiona Green is the mother of a ten-year-old. She is finishing her dissertation "The Politics of Feminist Mothering: The Hidden Praxis of Feminist Pedagogy and Activism" for an Interdisciplinary Ph.D. (Education, Sociology and Women's Studies) from the University of Manitoba. She has been teaching in the Women' Studies Program at the Univeristy of Winnipeg for ten years.

Liz Herlich parents in Toronto, Ontario.

Shari Kendall is assistant research professor in the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown University. She is currently collaborating with Deborah Tannen to investigate the role of language and gender in meeting the challenge of integrating work and family. She has also studied the discursive creation of gay and lesbian identities in the media, and the interactional styles of lesbian couples.

Susan MacCallum-Whitcomb teaches American Literature at the University of New Brunswick (St. John). Her most recent work, *"This Giving Birth": Pregnancy and Childbirth in American Women's Writing*, a critical anthology co-edited with Julie Tharp will be published later in 1999. She is a grassroots feminist and the mother of two young children.

Keller Magenau is a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Linguistics at Georgetown University. She studied language and gender in the workplace, and in the U.S. courts. Her dissertation is a sociolinguistic study of how law is constructed by jurors within the regulated sphere of the criminal trial.

Dolana Mogadime's M.A. thesis entitled "A Daughter's Praise Poem For Her Mother: The Life History and Teaching Practices of South African/Canadian Educator Goodie Tshabalala Mogadime," examines the way her mother's roots in apartheid South Africa informed her mother's activism and teaching in multiracial Canadian schools as well as her pioneering work toward establishing Pietermaritzburg College in South Africa during the late 1980s. Taking a global perspective on Black feminist research and theoretical writings, her research addresses the experiences of Black female immigrant teachers as change agents in education systems. She is currently a doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto.

Connie Monson is a doctoral candidate in English at Emory University. Her research interests include transatlantic modernist writing, literacies outside of the academy, and queer theory.

Colette Morrow is an assistant professor of English and the Director of Women's Studies at Purdue University Calument in Hammond, Indiana. She is a member of the Lesbian and Women of Colour Caucuses of the National Women's Studies Association. Currently she is writing a book that examines the social functons that oral storytelling performs for LesBiGay families.

Renee Norman is a poet, writer, part-time teacher, and mother of three daughters, currently completing her doctorate at the University of B.C. Her autobiographical dissertation considers issues of mothering, writing, teaching and women's autobiographical writing. Her work has been published in various literary and academic journals. She gratefully acknowledges a Doctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Andrea O'Reilly is an assistant professor in the School of Women's Studies at York University where she teaches courses on Toni Morrison, motherhood, and on mothers and daughters. She has presented her research at numerous international conferences and she is the author of more than a dozen articles

and chapters on these topics. She is co-editor of *Redefining Motherhood: Changing Identities and Patterns* (Second Story Press, 1998) *Mothers and Daughters: Connection, Empowerment and Transformation* (Rowman and Littlefield, 1999) and the special 20th anniversary issue of *Canadian Woman Studies/les cahiers de la femme* (Summer/Fall 1998) on "Looking Back, Looking Forward: Mothers, Daughters and Feminism." She is the author of *Toni Morrison on Motherhood* (forthcoming, Ohio State Press) and she is currently editing *Mothers and Sons: Feminist Perspectives,* with Routledge Press. She is founding president of the Association for Research on Mothering (ARM).

Ruth Panofsky is an assistant professor in the Department of English at Ryerson Polytechnic University in Toronto, where she teaches Canadian literature. She is author of *Adele Wiseman: An Annotated Bibliography* (ECW Press, 1992). She is the editor of a special edition of *A Room of One's Own* on Adele Wiseman (1993), and co-editer of *Selected Letters of Margaret Laurence and Adele Wiseman* (University of Toronto Press, 1997). Ruth has been the recipient of a SSHRC Post-Doctoral Fellowship and a Canada Council Professional Writer's Grant. Her articles, reviews, and poetry have been published in both literary journals and major Canadian newspapers.

Christine Peets is a mother, writer, editor, and researcher who works at home in Eastem Ontario with the financial, and more importantly, the emotional support of her husband, her two teen-aged sons, and many friends. She is also a freelance writer, editor and researcher. Her work has appeared in *WOMAN* news magazine, *Farm and Country, Herizons,* and other independent magazines and journals.

Joanna Radbord is a lawyer with McMillan Binch, Toronto, who practices in the area of family law, gay and lesbian equality rights, and civil claims for sexual assault, domestic violence, and sexual harassment. She assisted in representing "M," a lesbian seeking the right to access Ontario's spousal support regime, at the Ontario Court of Appeal and Supreme Court of Canada. She has a B.A. in Philosophy and Women's Studies and a B.A. in Psychology. She graduated from Osgoode Law School in 1997, receiving the Prize in Commercial Law, Business Associations and Taxation Law, and the Prize in Taxation.

Gillian Ranson is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Calgary, where she teaches courses on gender relations and families. Her research explores the intersections of gender, paid employment and family life. She is also the mother of two children, who help make the study of motherhood particularly interesting.

Noreen Shanahan has a background in feminist journalism. Her poetry has been published in *CV2* as well as in *She's Gonna Be,* an anthology of women's

writing edited by Ann Decter.

Kathleen Sorensen is a single mother, by choice, who began her academic career as a "mature" student. She is currently a Master's candidate in philosophy at York University in Toronto. Her eclectic interests include Hume's philosophy of religion, contemporary practical ethics, and teaching science to children.

Christy Taylor is a mother and artist living in Toronto. She is an activist for mothers with post-partum depression and does extensive volunteer and comunity work with mothers. She established a self-help support group, a community garden, and facilitates life skills groups for mothers.

Michelle L. Taylor is a doctoral candidate at Rice University in Houston, Texas. Her research interests include nineteenth-century African-American women's writing and feminist theory. She is working on a dissertation entitled, "Emergent Identities: Domesticity and African-American Female Resistance in U.S. Literature, 1831-1903."

Alison Thomas's interest in mothering stems from various sources: research, teaching, and personal experience. As a feminist social scientist working in the area of gender relations and the social construction of gender, becoming a mother of boy/girl twins in 1990 provided an added dimension to her academic interests, and motivated her to explore the topic of feminist mothering, especially the mother-son relationship, on which she co-edited a special feature for the journal *Feminism and Psychology* in 1996. Later that year, she and her family emigrated from the UK to Canada, and since then she has been further developing her interest in work on mothers and mothering through her teaching in the Sociology Department at the University of Victoria.

Deborah Whatley is a doctoral candidate in sociology at York University, Toronto. Broadly focused, her work in feminist sociology is in the area of women and reproduction gone wrong—unachieved motherhood. Her finer focus is on the fetal and pregnant bodies, and pregnancy as "experiencing" rather than "expecting." While understanding feminism's long fight to control fertility, releasing women from the constraints of their biology and their socially-mandated role, she challenges feminism to engage in a discourse of reproduction gone wrong, and the inclusion of women for whom the protection of their fertility is their reproductive choice.

Jeanne-Marie Zeck, Ph.d. joined the faculty of MacMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois as an assistant professor in the fall of 1999. She teaches American, African American, and women's literature. One of her areas of greatest interest is the new movement of maternal domestic fiction written by authors who are, not coincidentally, mothers.

Call for Papers

"Mothers and Sons"

The guest editorial board is seeking submissions for the third journal of **The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM)** to be published in Spring/Summer, 2000. The journal will explore the subject of mothers and sons from a variety of perspectives. We welcome submissions from students, activists, scholars, policy makers, and artists who research in this area.We accept submissions that take a variety of forms, including academic papers, poetry, prose, and artwork. If you are interested in writing a book review, we have books in need of a review, or if you know of a recent publication that would be relevant, please contact Ruth Panofsky, our book review editor at **r2panofs@acs.ryerson.ca.**

Submission Guidelines: Book reviews are to be no more than two pages (500 words), articles should be 15 pages (3750 words), follow the MLA style, andon an IBM compatible disk. For more information, please contact us.

Submission must be received by January 1, 2000.

Contributors must be a member of ARM.

Send your submission to: Andrea O'Reilly, President of ARM.

726 Atkinson, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3

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Call for Papers

"Mothering in the African Diaspora"

The guest editorial board is seeking submissions for the fourth issue of the **Journal of The Association for Research on Mothering** (ARM) to be published in Fall/Winter, 2000. The journal will explore the subject "Mothering in the African Diaspora" from a variety of perspectives. We welcome submissions from students, activists, scholars, policy makers, and artists who research in this area. We accept submissions that take a variety of forms, including academic papers, poetry, prose and artwork. If you are interested in writing a book review, we have books in need of a review, or if you know of a recent publication that would be relevant, contact Ruth Panofsky, our book review editor at **r2panofs@acs.ryerson.ca**

Submission Guidelines: Book reviews are to be no more than two pages (500 words), articles should be 15 pages (3750 words), follow the MLA style, and on an IBM compatible disk. For more information, please contact us.

Submission must be received by June 1, 2000.

Contributors must be a member of ARM.

Send your submission to: Andrea O'Reilly, President of ARM.
726 Atkinson, York University, 4700 Keele St., Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
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To submit an abstract, one must be a member of ARM.

~~~· *Call for Papers* ~~~·

New book in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the publication of Adrienne Rich's
Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution

edited by Andrea O'Reilly,
published by Demeter Press
(a new feminist press specializing in
books about mothering/motherhood).

The year 2001 marks the 25th anniversary of the publication of Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born*. In celebration, Demeter Press will be publishing an edited volume that explores how this landmark and far-reaching book has shaped and influenced maternal scholarship over the last 25 years. In particular, the collection will examine how *Of Woman Born* informs our thinking on topics as diverse as pregnancy, childbirth, abortion, mother-daughter/mother-son relationships, mothering and motherhood as they are lived, researched and represented across cultures and time.

We welcome submissions from a variety of perspectives: literary, sociological, psychological, anthropological, and in a variety of formats: narrative inquiry, theory, literary analysis, etc. Chapters are to be 15-20 pages in length and in MLA format.

Please send a 250-word abstract and 50-word bio to the address below by **December 1, 1999.** Notification of acceptance will be mailed January 8, 2000. **Completed chapters must be received by May 1, 2000.** The volume will be published late fall, 2000.

Please direct all inquiries to:

Prof. Andrea O'Reilly
726 Atkinson College, York University
4700 Keele St.
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3
Tel.: (416) 736-2100 x 60366,
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Association for Research on Mothering

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The Association for Research on Mothering (ARM) is the first international feminist organization devoted specifically to the topic of mothering-motherhood. ARM is an association for scholars, writers, activists, professionals, agencies, policy makers, educators, parents, and artists. Our mandate is to provide a forum for the discussion and dissemination of feminist, academic, and community grassroots research, theory, and praxis on mothering-motherhood. We are committed, in both membership and research, to the inclusion of *all* mothers, First Nations, immigrant and refugee mothers, working-class mothers, lesbian mothers, mothers with disabilities, mothers of colours, and mothers from other marginalized communities. We welcome memberships to ARM and submissions to the *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering*, our biannual publication, from all individuals.

COVER ART RACHEL EPSTEIN
COVER DESIGN LUCIANA RICCIUTELLI