

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF EQUALITY IN LONG-TERM LESBIAN
RELATIONSHIPS**

by

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Abstract

This study explores how 30 long-term lesbian couples, who have lived together 15 or more years, conceptualize and practice equality within their partnerships. Verbal pictures of each couple provide a sense of who they are, how they met, and what is important to them. Dialogue about the egalitarian nature of their relationships and how they practice equality permeates this analysis. These couples practice an interdependent power based on a high degree of mutuality and joint responsibility for the relationship. They share many common values, particularly the value of equality. By comparing and contrasting the personally constructed equalities of these couples, the socially constructed meanings of equality become visible. Equality is not something they see themselves striving to achieve; instead, equality is a result of how they practice money and power.

Acknowledgments

This dissertation incorporates the values, emotional energy, insights, traumas, joys, and hard work of many. This quest started two years ago, when Dr. Carol Bailey invited me to brainstorm over lunch what I would be passionate about studying if I felt no limits. Anxiously I answered, "Long-term lesbian relationships; but since we both know that is impossible, let me think." Little did I know that for Carol there are few impossibilities. A recipient of numerous teaching awards, she directs the Virginia Tech writing program, and is a preferred mentor of many graduate students. From being a student in her outstanding course on qualitative research methods to working with her on a qualitative web site, I have continuously been challenged by Carol to stretch and grow. My initial brainstorming with Carol sparked a fire--a fire which she, as my major professor, knew how to watch, stoke, tend, contain and enjoy without allowing me to be consumed--that has taken me on an incredible research journey. Carol has guided me from the laying of kindling to the burning of logs, from writing a proposal to finishing a dissertation, a process that has posed the greatest challenge of my academic life. For Carol's investment of time, knowledge, ability, enthusiasm, and caring, I am ever grateful.

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I am very grateful to the sixty women who openly and honestly shared their lives making this study of our lifestyle possible. They are such brave, warm, caring, remarkable women who quickly moved from being strangers to being friends. I

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Throughout the dissertation process I have often remembered the clanging dissonance of my parents voices. My mother’s strong voice compelling me to create

the life I want with whomever I want, to be myself, to value education, and more importantly to make moral decisions based on my own reasoning, not society's customs. Her voice clashed for 53 years with my father's loud patriarchal voice that embraced "male privilege" as if it were the writing on Moses's clay tablets. I am grateful that they taught me to appreciate and not be discouraged, by the beauty of dissonance.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Popular images of close relationships bombard North Americans through movies, newspapers, television, magazines, books, talk radio, song lyrics, and the Internet. This barrage of images rarely depicts the diversity of couples found in our society or the complex challenges inherent in close relationships. Although popular images of lesbians forming relationships are becoming more prevalent, depictions of lesbians who have established and are sustaining long-term partnerships are noticeably absent.

Concurrent with the evolution of popular images of lesbian couples, scholars have been researching and developing the reality of lesbian couples. Lesbian partnerships and families remained largely invisible in North American society until the mid-1970s, when a few academic researchers began to focus their empirical studies on lesbian couples. In those 25 years, researchers have explored issues about lesbian couples such as desire for permanency; characteristics of satisfaction; changing role patterns; feelings of attachment, caring, and intimacy; balance and tactics of power; and sexuality.

While reading empirical studies about lesbian couples, whether I was reading about permanency, satisfaction, role patterns, attachment, power, or sexuality, I found equality strongly emphasized as an important dynamic. Researchers repeatedly stressed the egalitarian nature of lesbian relationships. As a sociology doctoral student, who has been in a lesbian partnership for 17 years, I began to wonder why researchers were placing such an emphasis on equality. As I talked with lesbian friends and colleagues, we had more questions about equality than answers. What does it mean when a couple declares they have an equal relationship? How do you measure equality in a close relationship? Is equality a belief system or an actual practice? Do lesbian couples practice equality in ways that are similar to or different from other lesbian couples? Do lesbian couples have to make conscious efforts to achieve and maintain equality; if so, how? After weeks of

reading and mulling over these questions, I was hooked; I wanted to see what answers I could find by doing a study of equality in lesbian relationships.

Preferring to approach any project systematically, my first task was to understand the language confusion about equality. Researchers conducting empirical studies of equality in close relationships, whether heterosexual, gay male, or lesbian, often interchange the terms equal, egalitarian, equity, and equitable. I did not find consistent meanings attached to these terms from one study to another or within the same study. In contrast, when reading about equality and equity in reference to economics or distributive justice both had a specific meaning.

Schwartz (1993) defines equality as “each person has equal status and is equally responsible for emotional, economic, and household duties” (p. 2), a definition of equality that is clearer than most. For this study I used a broader meaning of equality—“the same as.” I also used the term egalitarian as the adjectival form of equality or “believing in equality.” These definitions describe the meaning of equality as practiced by the participants. Equity in the literature usually meant an amount equivalent to an invested amount so I accepted that meaning and have only used equity in reference to money.

Rather than start with couples who were getting to know each other and trying to figure out how to live with each other, who might expect me to have answers rather than questions, I decided to study long-term lesbian relationships. Potentially, long-term couples could provide insight into how equality might contribute to relationship longevity. Long-term couples might also be able to describe what they do to improve equality in their relationships and how their practice of equality has changed over the years. Thus, the next puzzle to solve was, “How long does a couple have to be together to be considered long-term?”

Searching the literature for empirical studies on long-term lesbian relationships, I found three dissertations (Dorn, 1990; Littlefield, 1993; Reuman-Hemond, 1994), and one book, Staying Power: Long Term Lesbian Couples, based on Johnson’s (1990) dissertation research. Although equality was not the focus for any

of these studies, each researcher did decide the meaning of long-term; and they reported their findings about equality.

Having completed the first nationwide study on long-term lesbian relationships, Johnson's (1990) work serves as an anchor for succeeding studies. She studied lesbian couples who had been together ten years or longer. She said, "It was much easier to find couples who had been together ten to fourteen years than it was to find couples who had been together longer" (p. 32). Based on questionnaire information from 108 lesbian couples, Johnson selected 34 couples for in-depth interviewing (p. 23). She stated, "A feeling of equality is key in lesbian relationships" (p. 120). Johnson reported that many participants made the point that "a principal drawback of heterosexual relationships" is that "they're innately unequal" (p. 120). Although the couples' discussions of equality varied, "some themes emerged: equality has to do with power, decision-making, respect, recognition, and acknowledgement" (p. 122).

Interested in factors that contribute to successful long-term relationships, Dorn (1990) interviewed nine couples who had been in a lesbian partnership eight years or more. She found that the nine lesbian couples were as financially intertwined as heterosexual couples (p. 136). This finding contrasts with Schneider (1986) who found that lesbian couples were not as financially interwoven as heterosexuals. Also, unlike Lynch and Reilly (1985), who found that lesbian couples were highly egalitarian except in the area of sexual intimacy, Dorn found that couples indicated "equality in the area of sexual intimacy as well as all other areas" (p. 136).

Investigating themes that contribute to relationship longevity for lesbian couples, Littlefield (1993) interviewed 16 couples who had been in a lesbian partnership for at least 10 years. She found for all of the couples that equality played a part in their relationships (p. 68). Littlefield remarked on the fluid nature of equality for lesbian couples, stating that some of the couples described how their definition of equality had changed over the course of their relationship (p. 69).

Interested in relationship stability among long-term lesbian couples, Reuman-Hemond (1994) interviewed 12 lesbian couples who had been together at least 15 years and had not raised children together. Her findings about equity and fairness are informative:

Equity and fairness were often spontaneously mentioned as important values to the participants in these relationships, although not always achievable. Partners often took great pains to work toward fairness in the relationship, although fairness was defined in different ways. Equity and fairness issues most often came up with regard to finances, and how income and expenditures would be handled. . . . The presence of fairness and equity in the relationship gradually increased over time (p. 101).

These findings provided assurance that I was on the right track. Lesbian women were concerned about differences between their beliefs about equality and the practice of equality. They were working to achieve equality in their relationships; and longevity and equality appeared related.

Another study, which was published after I had begun interviewing in January of 1997, Mackey, O'Brien, and Mackey (1997) used 15 years as their beginning point for long-term relationships. Interested in the development of relationships among lesbian (and gay male) couples, Mackey et al., with advanced doctoral students as interviewers, studied 24 lesbian couples including 12 couples who were rearing children. They defined "equity as the sense of fairness that individuals experienced about their relationships as a whole" (p. 57). Their participants felt it was important for tasks and responsibilities to be allocated fairly before they could consider their relationships to be equitable. Mackey et al. asked their participants to explain how they balanced their role behavior differences (one being reserved and her partner being assertive) when negotiating household tasks, handling money, and several other aspects of living together (p. 57).

Researched knowledge about lesbian relationships is slowly advancing; however, the construct of equality has not been the central focus of study. Analyzing how 30 long-term lesbian couples conceptualize and practice equality serves a

twofold purpose. This study provides a greater understanding of how these couples live and create meaning in their daily lives. It also allows us to see equality in a way not seen before and to see the familiar differently (Nielsen, 1990, p. 20).

Theoretical Framework

In focusing on the practices of these couples, I have taken a “relationship perspective” (De Cecco & Shively, 1984). De Cecco and Shively list the advantages of moving beyond sexual identity to studying sexual relationships:

(a) The focus is shifted from isolated individuals to their mutual associations. (b) Social scientists could conceive of sexual relationships in other than biological terms or metaphors. (c) The shift would capitalize on the advantages of the psychoanalytic method (the exploration of personally constructed meanings) and symbolic interactionism (the identification of socially constructed meanings) while avoiding the pitfalls of relying on one of these approaches to the exclusion of the other. (d) The shift would allow investigators to view sexual relationships from the vantage point of a morality of individual choice rather than a traditional morality of externally imposed obligation (p. 1).

Listening and sharing with each of the 30 couples I interviewed about many dimensions of their lives provided an awareness of how they personally constructed equality, intimacy, and other attributes in their relationships. However, it was only by comparing and contrasting their personally constructed equalities that I began to perceive the socially constructed meanings of equality in their lesbian relationships.

Relationship perspectives are amenable to investigation from a variety of academic fields such as family, history, psychology, and medicine; however, this study is grounded in the sociological theory of symbolic interactionism. In contrast to taking a flattened view of equality in lesbian couples, like a child’s drawing that places everything in the foreground, symbolic interactionism offers the possibility of depth by studying layered meanings. For example, some couples may pool all of their financial resources, others may pool income but not investments, while others may keep everything separate; a symbolic interactionist struggles to comprehend what these different practices mean. What do the participants believe, feel, think,

and know about their practices? What does it mean that some couples begin by sharing all financial resources then discontinue the practice?

Prus (1996) suggests that a symbolic interactionist studies the ways people conduct their lives day-to-day, how they make sense of their life-situations (p. 10). Through conversational (symbolic) interaction, the participants and I explored how they relate to each other, how they relate to significant others in their lives, their work, their values, and their day-to-day experience of life as a lesbian couple. Together we explored the subjective meaning of their practices. Even Karl Marx (1970), though clearly not a symbolic interactionist, stressed the value of studying practice: "All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice" (p. 121).

According to Charon (1995), symbolic interactionism is a perspective that places primary value on subjective meaning and process (p. 228). A fundamental question driving this study was: Do these lesbian partners treat each other as equals? If so, how do they do it? I expected that some of the participants would affirm that their relationships were equal and be willing to share the process of how they achieve and maintain equality. Then, as a researcher, I would explore the subjective meanings of equality and the process of achieving it. What I found was that the participants had rarely discussed equality or taken any deliberate steps to make their relationships equal. The interviews, therefore, remained focused on the details of their day-to-day lives, on the practices of the women as couples.

The practices of lesbian couples do not float freely in society; they are constrained and transformed by particular social structures. Connell (1987) found that to understand gender one must study practice in light of the constraints imposed by society's main social structures: the division of labor, the structure of power, and the structure of cathexis or emotional attachment (pp. 91-117). In the process of analyzing the practices of equality in lesbian partnerships, I examined how characteristics of gendered social structures as delineated by Connell differentially affected lesbian couples.

The interactive effects of the structures of labor, power, and emotional attachment on the practice of equality inform this work. First, forbidden to legally marry and thereby obtain the types of financial security offered to heterosexual couples, lesbians are driven by the constraints of the social structure of marriage to remain financially independent of each other. If lesbian women were assured of the social security, retirement, and health benefits of their partners, their practice of financial independence might be transformed. Second, women have historically been subordinated to men on the global or macro-level of power. However, on a local or micro-level as in the home, work place, and other settings, women may contradict or transform the social structure of male hegemonic power (Connell, 1987, p. 111). Although influenced by their gendered experiences of power, do lesbians replicate the hegemonic practice of power in their relationships or do they transform it? If so, how? Third, in what ways does the connectedness of lesbian couples differ from the connectedness of other couples?

Overview of the Chapters

In these next seven chapters, I explore how 30 lesbian couples practice equality in their day-to-day lives. Chapter Two situates this study of equality in lesbian relationships within the broader field of equality studies. Chapter Three describes the qualitative process used in this study. Chapter Four contains a verbal snapshot briefly describing each of the couples. As you read about a particular couple's practice of economics, power, or shared values, you might want to refer to the snapshot in the same way you might use a picture to remind you of how someone looked. Therefore, throughout the study whenever a couple is mentioned their couple number is given in parentheses to allow easy reference to their snapshot. Chapter Five is about the financial realities of these lesbian couples. Chapter Six contains a description of how they practice power in their partnerships. Chapter Seven explores the shared value systems of the couples. Finally, in Chapter Eight, I summarize the results of the other chapters, but then extend the perceptions of the couples and the impact of their values by contrasting the experiences of their lesbian

lifestyle with their perceptions of a heterosexual lifestyle. I ended each interview with the question, “If you were to choose or return to a heterosexual lifestyle, what would you lose and what would you gain?” Perhaps their responses to this question will disturb another layer of the hegemonic gendered perspective of close relationships.

Homophobia, defined by Weinberg (1972) as “the revulsion toward homosexuals and often the desire to inflict punishment as retribution,” is a reality in this society ranging from innuendo to remorseless violence (p. 133). Therefore, I have taken great care to protect the participants in this research who have openly and honestly shared their lives with me and now with you, the reader. Each participant selected her own pseudonym for this study: some chose names they felt they should have been named, others chose humorous names, some were being ironic and others historical. Even in choosing their names each of the couples were careful to make sure their names worked well together. To further protect the confidentiality of the women without compromising the integrity of the study each participant was assigned a different occupation—equivalent in education, income, field, and status to their real occupation.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Context

Introduction

Compared to the vast research literature on marital quality and stability, there is a dearth of research studies on lesbian partnerships as reported in the leading journals of marriage and the family (Allen & Demo, 1995). Researchers are gradually filling the void with studies on lesbian partnerships. My contribution focuses on how lesbian couples conceptualize and practice equality in their partnerships, not on the broader sociological areas of lesbian partnerships such as relationship satisfaction, quality, or dissolution.

Empirical studies on how marital couples strive to achieve relationship equality are extensive. There are also studies comparing and contrasting relationship equality among married, cohabiting, lesbian, and gay male couples (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Kurdek, 1998). The objective in this chapter is to provide a synopsis of some recent observations, theory, and findings regarding relationship equality. My study is not a comparison of equality conceptualized or practiced by lesbian couples with that of married couples. However, reviewing the factors researchers describe as contributing to equality in marital couples “allows us to recognize and account for the dominant (and therefore taken for granted)” cultural context of any study (Wood & Duck, 1995, p. xiv).

Researchers indicate that many marital couples prefer egalitarian relationships, although they are difficult to achieve and maintain (Keith & Schafer, 1991; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Walsh, 1989). Yet, despite an ideological commitment to equality, few heterosexual couples achieve it (Balisure & Allen, 1995; Hochschild, 1989; Horst & Doherty, 1995; Knudson-Martin & Mahoney, 1998; Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998; Zvonkovic, Greaves, Schmeige, & Hall, 1996).

Research on Marital Equality

In studies on marital equality done by examining the dynamics of individual couples or across couples, gender becomes the focal point of analysis. Instead of

comparing their contributions to marriage with their male partner, studies have found that married women compare themselves with other married women, subsequently feeling more satisfied with their lives, while men compare themselves with other men (Hochschild, 1989; VanYperen & Buunk, 1991). Thompson (1991) argues that women would be more aware of marital injustice or inequality if they made “between-gender” rather than “within-gender” comparisons. She wrote:

Women who compare themselves to their husbands (“I do more than you do”) have a stronger sense of entitlement than do women who compare themselves to other women (“I am a superwoman”) or compare their husbands to other men (“My husband does more than most”) (p. 193).

Steil (1997) provides another example of how women’s thoughts must change in order for them to pursue equality: “women must believe they are entitled not to what other tired, employed mothers are entitled but to the same entitlements that their male partners take for granted” (p. 110). From these studies it seems that heterosexual women stockpile knowledge about other women whose situations are worse than theirs, then, they rely on that knowledge as a mental yardstick, when inequality within the marriage becomes problematic.

Research studies describing marital couples striving to maintain an egalitarian relationship stress the necessity of women having power and resources comparable to their husbands. Blaisure and Allen (1995) who studied ten feminist couples striving to achieve and maintain equality found that “The women began marriage with structural advantages (i.e., age, income, education, and status) not typically found in traditional marriages” (p. 8). They also found that “All of the women described the ability to financially care for themselves and their children and the willingness to divorce, if necessary” (p. 8). Focused on the practice of equality, Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) studied fifteen “postgender” couples, who they describe as educationally but not financially elite. Nine women had PhDs or Md's, four women had master’s degrees, one woman had a bachelor’s degree, and one woman had not finished college (p. 27). They propose that perhaps

couples need “material equality to offset the male privilege embedded in marriage as an institution” (p. 28). Although the women in Schwartz’s (1994) study of fifty-six “peer marriages” were not as structurally advantaged as the women in the previously mentioned studies, it is important to note that the husbands’ incomes were not high enough to support unemployed wives or render the wives’ salaries unnecessary.

Both mothers and women in families without children experience a correlation between earnings and power within their marriage. Steil (1997) found that equality in decision-making and sharing of household tasks for women without children depended on a woman’s earnings relative to her spouse’s and the perceived importance she placed on her career and work in comparison to her spouse’s (pp. 29-30). Also, the more a woman valued her work relative to her husband’s work, the more voice she had in decision-making and the less responsibility she had for household tasks (p. 30). Steil (1997) also found that no matter how important a woman perceived her work in comparison to her husband’s, she retained a disproportionate amount of child care responsibility (p. 30). Blaisure and Allen (1995) found a similar circumstance in that only two of their ten couples shared parenting while the children were babies. Therefore, women whose work is considered expendable—such as women who work part-time, or work to help the family, or for a specific purpose like braces for a child’s teeth—are not increasing their power or obtaining resources that would encourage equality in a marital relationship. Even when the evidence is clear that a family’s needs require a woman to work outside the home, society still views her as an ancillary partner to the financial well-being of the family and her work is considered optional (Webb-Watson, 1991, p. 53).

In a society where part-time work is readily available since it usually lacks benefits resulting in savings to employers, it is vital that women wanting egalitarian marriages understand the broader implications of limiting their earning power and future earning potential. Blumstein and Schwartz’s (1983) thoughts about part-time

work are revealing:

We believe that in this society, part-time work is not as respected as full-time work. It is often paid on a lower scale than comparable full-time work. Part-time employees are taken less seriously by management, and they may not be treated as real colleagues by their co-workers. Many times these people are viewed as not being serious about having a career. . . . In interviews we heard husbands with full-time jobs expressing a lack of respect for part-time work. They may give their wives some credit for their labor, but not much (p. 143).

In one sentence, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) explain what they found about the relationship between wage-work and power, “Wives with full-time jobs have more power in their marriages than wives who work part time” (p. 143). Yet, Ferree (1990) adds that beyond a woman’s full-time job determining her degree of power, a “gender perspective suggests that the actual control over the money and how it is used are important dimensions of power within the household” (p. 877).

From these studies it seems that marital equality remains contingent on rectifying the structural conditions of our gendered society that have served as the primary inhibitors to relationship equality. The fact that there are marital couples who achieve egalitarian marriages, however, shows that it is possible on a couple-by-couple basis to overcome gender inequality in contemporary society. Yet researchers caution that the inertia of our gendered society requires strong resistance. For example Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998), who studied 12 heterosexual couples struggling to achieve equality in their first year of marriage, stated that it is essential for couples seeking egalitarian marriages to confront gender and equality issues in a conscious way as a precondition for the possibility of equality (p. 81). Blaisure and Allen (1995) extend the necessity of consciously confronting gender and equality issues by suggesting five specific practices of “vigilance” (p. 5). The practices that they described with examples from the couples are: “(a) *critique of gender injustice*, (b) *public acts of equality*, (c) *support of wives’ activities*, (d) *reflective assessment*, and (e) *emotional involvement*” [italics in the original] (p. 5).

Definitions of relationship equality range from global and abstract to

measurable and concrete. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) define equality in terms of approximately equal earning power while concomitantly stressing a need to balance independence and dependence. Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1998) found that none of the 12 couples in their study fully met their criteria for equal marriages. “In our definition of an equal marriage, each spouse has roughly the same capacity to get the other to cooperate in order to allow the attainment of his/her goals, and both persons attend to and accommodate the other” (p. 82). In a previous study, Knudson-Martin and Mahoney (1996) defined equal relationships with a heavy emphasis on mutuality: “partners hold equal status; accommodation in the relationship is mutual; attention to the other in the relationship is mutual; and there is mutual well-being of partners” (p. 82). Describing the characteristics of a “peer couple,” Schwartz (1994) listed four characteristics: no more than “a 60-40 traditional split of household duties and child raising” (except during infancy); “equal influence over important and disputed decisions”; “equal control over the family economy and reasonably equal access to discretionary funds”; and “each person’s work was given equal weight in the couple’s life plans” (pp. 4-5).

Comparative Studies With an Emphasis on Equality

Studies that compare different types of couples in which equality is considered an important component broaden the context for my study. Blumstein and Schwartz’s (1983) classic study on money, work, and sex compares and contrasts over 12,000 questionnaires and 600 interviews from married, cohabiting, lesbian, and gay male couples. Noting how lesbian couples are similar to and different from other couples on issues of equality, particularly in reference to money and work, is instructive for this study. Insights about sexual similarities and differences are relevant to relationship equality; however, they are beyond the time constraints of this study.

Many of Blumstein and Schwartz’s (1983) findings are routinely cited, however, it is helpful to review some of their other commentary on lesbian relationships. They suggest there are “common lesbian demands: privacy,

independence, and absolute equality” which lesbians require of their relationships (p. 491). Blumstein and Schwartz suggest that lesbians want new values, such as:

No one should be made dependent by a partner whose income is greater; no one should do more “dirty work” than the other; male values are to be rejected. Female values, defined as good communication, expression of feelings, time spent with friends, and equality are to be exalted. Male values are to be avoided: excessive ambition in work, being emotionally closed, trying to be more powerful than one’s partner, and struggling for leadership rather than working things out through a group process (p. 493).

Having grown up with society’s “provider-role logic,” lesbians reject society’s emphasis on women being financially dependent on men (p. 60). Blumstein and Schwartz found that “Gay and lesbian couples believe that fairness dictates that both partners earn a living” (p. 127). They found that only under certain circumstances, such as a partner pursuing further education or changing jobs or careers, was it acceptable for one partner not to work. Sharing financial responsibilities appears to be a required element to establishing a comfortable power balance in the relationship.

In concluding their section on money, Blumstein and Schwartz suggest that “lesbians stress the importance of independence and self-sufficiency for themselves as well as for their partners” (p. 109). They declare “that lesbians hold up, as the ideal relationship, one where two strong women come together in totally equality” (p. 310). Since both women typically work to support themselves, they want their partners to be ambitious and committed to their work. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) summarized that lesbian partners reject “the comfortable supported position that women have been trained for in favor of being a full and equal partner in a relationship” (p. 329). Other researchers conclude that lesbian relationships are different from traditional heterosexual partnerships on issues of economic independence, personal autonomy, and responsibility for one’s own life (Lewis, 1979; Blumstein and Schwartz, 1983).

Three studies of lesbians and gay men have found that relationship

satisfaction is higher when couples perceive their relationships are egalitarian (Harry, 1984; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986; and Peplau, Padesky, & Hamilton, 1982). Peplau and Gordon (1983) found that emotional intimacy and equality are values strongly held among lesbians, even more so than is characteristic of gay males or of heterosexual relationships (p. 227). However, practicing equality is more difficult than idealizing and desiring it. Peplau and Cochran's 1980 study (as cited in Peplau & Cochran, 1990) found that lesbian and heterosexual women cared more than men about having egalitarian relationships. In response to a question about an ideal balance of power, 92% of gay men and 97% of lesbians said it should be "exactly equal." Only 59% of lesbians, 38% of gay men, 48% of heterosexual women, and 40% of heterosexual men, however, reported that their relationships were "exactly equal" (p. 339).

Focused only on dual-career families, research indicates that approximately one third of heterosexual and most lesbian and gay partners establish what they and objective others consider an egalitarian relationship (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990; Gilbert, 1985). Gilbert (1993) outlines three core assumptions essential to viewing dual-career families as egalitarian:

Assumption 1. Equality exists between the partners economically, which in turn implies for heterosexual couples an economic equality between women and men.

Assumption 2. There is a compatibility of occupational and family systems, that is, of work and family.

Assumption 3. Partners' self-concepts allow for the establishment of a relationship characterized by role-sharing and mutuality and by an interdependency free of the constraints of gender. Particularly crucial to the relationships between women and men are the related assumptions that neither partner would expect women to accommodate to an assumed male superiority or expect men to have authority over women (p. 7).

Gilbert goes on to discuss the unequal ratio of male to female earnings, the need for more occupational and familial compatibility, and a greater need for role-sharing

and mutuality. She suggests that steps toward egalitarian relationships are being taken; however, heterosexual couples have significant gender gaps to close. Once the constraints of gender are removed from a heterosexual partnership, Gilbert's Assumption 3 implies that role-sharing, mutuality, and interdependency are easier to achieve. Gilbert argues that in some dual-career couples, Assumption 3 is not realized because social institutions overpower private principles of equality. Gilbert does not state that the institution of marriage itself may overpower a couple's best intentions of equality.

Studies of relationship quality, satisfaction, and equality are moving beyond the limitations of cross-sectional data collection. The previously referenced Risman and Johnson-Sumerford (1998) study, conducted by a team of eight researchers over a four-year period, is a qualitative study of equality in postgender marriages (p. 26). Similarly, in a quantitative, longitudinal study encompassing five years of annual assessments, Kurdek (1998) compared 236 married, 66 gay cohabiting, and 51 lesbian cohabiting couples to assess if "married couples differed from those of gay couples or lesbian couples on five dimensions of relationship quality (intimacy, autonomy, equality, constructive problem solving, and barriers to leaving)" (p. 553). He found that "relative to marital partners, lesbian partners reported more intimacy, more autonomy, more equality, fewer barriers to leaving, and more frequent relationship dissolution" (p. 553). Although lesbian partners reflected more frequent relationship dissolution, "84% of the lesbian couples remained together over the 5 years of study" (p. 565). The length of cohabitation for the gay males in the study was 10.88 years and 7.12 years for lesbian cohabitants (p. 556). Kurdek (1998) tentatively concluded that self-appraisals of equality are a core dimension of relationship quality (pp. 565-566).

The consequences of a gender-structured society guilty of promoting gender roles--variously defined as sex differences, gender constraints, masculinity, and femininity--have made relationship equality difficult to achieve and maintain for marital couples. The couples who are succeeding in achieving and maintaining

equality exhibit several common traits: a feminist commitment to equality; similar earning power and/or shared power over family resources; a hypervigilance to even minor deviations from equality; and shared decision-making, household work, and parenting except during infancy. Additionally, the women who participated in these studies are consistently structurally advantaged in terms of income, education, and status. Although the purpose of this research is not to compare lesbian relationship equality to that of married couples, it is important to note, as Harding (1991) did, that groups learn about themselves by encountering those that differ.

CHAPTER THREE

The Research Process

Introduction

Research requires a series of compromises and tradeoffs; therefore, good research design requires an explanation of the process followed in completing this study. I started this research with several goals in mind. After describing each goal, I describe the strategies used to optimize the chances of reaching those goals.

The first goal of this study is to understand what equality means to lesbian couples. I wanted to know how they conceptualize and practice equality in their daily lives as couples. Although time and labor intensive, the most sensitive data collection strategy was to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews. Restricting the sample to thirty couples—which generated enough material that it took almost two years to process—means the generalizations of this study are limited to couples similar to the ones in the sample. Verbal snapshots and some demographic information about the couples provide an indication of what segment of the lesbian population this study reflects.

Second, throughout this study I have remained consciously aware of the need for validity. Validity as defined by Neuman (1994) is “the confidence placed in a researcher’s analysis and data as accurately representing the social world in the field” (p. 357). I have tried to increase the validity of this study in three ways. First, in this chapter on methods I provide a detailed description of how I conducted my research, including disclosure of my actions, assumptions, and procedures. Second, I have remained in contact with the participants in this study. During the draft writing process that I began within the first month of starting my research, I had some participants read sections or chapters to provide feedback on my perceptions and the accuracy of my understanding. I mailed a final draft to each couple and asked for their detailed comments (See Appendix E: Letter to Participants). These comments have been carefully considered and I have included a summary of them as a postscript to this study. Third, I have endeavored to follow the suggestions of Van

Maanen (1988) who explained that the intention of a researcher “is not to tell readers what to think of an experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end and thus draw them immediately into the story to work out its problems and puzzles as they unfold” (p. 103).

The third goal was to focus on couples, not individuals. In the unit of analysis section of this chapter, I explain reasons I decided to interview only couples. One partner leaving the room to attend to a child, answer the phone, or for another reason compromised the goal of focusing on the couple. When one partner was gone, the other partner would continue the interview. I handled this situation in two ways—either I summarized the conversation when the partner returned or after the participant finished her thought, I redirected the conversation to a topic less relevant to the study until the other partner returned.

Fourth, I did not want to use a heterosexual template to understand lesbian equality; I wanted to use their perspective. Therefore, I continuously and reflexively attended to the meaning and ramifications of studying a lesbian population by trying to learn how lesbians “do gender” (West and Zimmerman, 1987) in contrast with society’s gender asymmetry. I used the personal and grounded experience of participants’ self-reported beliefs and practices. The trade-off has been the time and energy invested in detailed, copious note-taking followed by systematic processing of the data.

Fifth, since women are often the objects of research studies, I wanted to use a feminist research practice that would empower them. Therefore, I followed an ethic of commitment and egalitarianism. I have been open and honest about myself and my partnership. I consider the participants co-equals in discussing mutually relevant biographical and critical issues. I have kept participants informed of the progress of the work. I invited their comments on the final draft, and used their contributions to clarify any confusion.

Participant Selection

Thirty self-declared lesbian couples who had been in a partnership fifteen

years or more participated in this study. The criteria for participants in five recent qualitative studies of lesbian couples parallel the criteria I used in this study. Johnson (1990) used three criteria in her qualitative study of long-term lesbian relationships: “The women considered themselves a couple; They had been a couple for ten years or more; They were sexual with each other at some time in their relationship” (p. 25). Dorn (1990) delimited her qualitative study participants to: “. . . two women who live together in a committed, intimate state and who define each other as a primary partner” (p. 1). In Park’s (1994) qualitative study of lesbian relationships, she defines her criteria of inclusion as: “two lesbian women, living together in the same home, for at least one year, and identifying themselves as a couple” (p. 68). Littlefield’s (1993) criterion for her qualitative sample “. . . was the self-defined concept of the participants to have been in a committed [lesbian] relationship existing ten years or more” (p. 36). Reuman-Hemond’s (1994) qualitative study criteria was “. . . 12 lesbian couples who had been together a minimum of fifteen years and who had not raised children jointly” (p. 45). All of the couples in this study had been living together for at least fifteen years at the time of the interview, although I had not specified living together as a criterion for participation in the study.

The couples identified for this study came from several distinct referral chains. I combined my “insider’s knowledge” (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984) of the lesbian population with advertisements in lesbian newsletters, particular resources on the Internet, contacts at a lesbian retreat, and word-of-mouth to reach a diverse lesbian population. While the study readily demonstrates a snowball sampling method, three important research issues arose as a result of my inviting self-referrals via the Internet. Concerned about obtaining a sample of 30 couples of 15 or more years, I initially failed to set realistic geographical boundaries. After realizing I could obtain a diversified sample without incurring more expense and air travel, I limited the study to couples from the east coast with one exception. Many of the couples who were interested in participating, but whom I excluded due to distance, volunteered

to participate in future research studies. Second, normally using a snowball sample reduces the heterogeneity of a study in that participants tend to refer people similar to themselves. However, self-referrals via the Internet are likely to increase a sample's heterogeneity if we acknowledge the financial privilege of computer access. In this particular study, geographical location was not as important as locating couples who met the emerging theoretical groupings. Third, only five of the couples did not have personal computers with on-line services; yet, only the nine couples who referred themselves saw any of the postings about the study.

Between January and November of 1997, sixty-eight lesbian couples either contacted me directly or were referred to me for contact by a research participant or friend. Five of the initial contacts (all Internet self-referrals) decided not to participate in the study; two couples made no further contact after their original inquiry and receipt of more information about the study; two couples withdrew after discovering that their partners preferred not to participate; and a final couple refused because even the option of having an interview in their home was interpreted as threatening. Two couples from very different areas of the country dropped out of the study a few days before their scheduled interview. One couple withdrew because a partner had become seriously ill. The second couple, feeling their relationship was already heavily stressed, decided that an interview might be too difficult. Since couples responded from literally across the United States, Canada, and even one delightful couple in Australia, geographical distance and self-funding quickly became two major factors that necessitated limiting the study to couples on the east coast (with one exception), a decision that omitted 31 potential couples.

Permission to conduct the study was granted by my doctoral committee and the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Appendix A: Informed Consent Form). Each of the couples actively participated in an hour and one-half to a three-hour audio-taped interview.

Interview Process

I interviewed each of the couples together, not separately, since the unit of analysis for the study was the dyad or relationship, not individuals. Building on Safilios-Rothschild's (1969) understanding of the wife's marriage as different from the husband's, Bernard (1972) suggests that in discussing marriage a researcher needs to specify if they are talking about "his" or "her" marriage. She states, "There is by now a very considerable body of well-authenticated research to show that there really are two marriages in every marital union, and that they do not always coincide" (p. 4). Since this study takes an interactional framework, the focus is the union, neither hers nor hers separately.

In a heavily cited article on the conceptual and methodological issues of using the dyad as the unit of analysis, Thompson and Walker (1982) stated, "People have values, opinions, and needs; while relationships have properties such as norms, rules, and power" (891). This study focuses on equality: a property of the couple's interdependent relationship. Focusing on the dyad or their relationship was not automatic, even when interviewing the women together; at times I found myself focusing on them as individuals rather than as a couple.

Although Thompson and Walker assess the dyad as the unit of analysis in quantitative family research, many of their insights apply to qualitative family research studies as well. Their emphasis on maintaining a dyadic focus throughout the research process was very helpful. For example, after transcribing the first interview, I realized that I had focused far too much time on trying to learn how each of their families of origin had shaped their expectations of equality in their partnership. Subsequently each interview was less focused on individual history and more on the partnership itself.

Although it was difficult to avoid focusing on the couple as separate individuals, "a true dyadic model is based on the understanding that two people in a relationship are not separate monads interacting with each other; they each define the other" (Nichols, 1984, p. 519). For example, one woman's willingness to

consistently spend more time nurturing their infant while her partner does more chores is a mutually defining process. Hearing this pattern of behavior described by them was an interactional process, quite different from having one woman reporting her experience and her perception of her partner's experience.

Semi-Structured Interviews

This study explored the meanings attached by the women to several of their experiences in the partnership, with particular emphasis on equality. All of the interviews started with the question of how they met. This question was placed first because Johnson (1990) in her study of long-term lesbian couples suggested this question created a rapport with the couple (pp. 41-42). Couples seem to enjoy talking about the excitement and circumstances surrounding how they first met. Most couples seemed to visibly relax after explaining how they fell in love. Although there are similarities, each story is a unique experience of how people choose to define how and when relationships begin. One of the women in the first couple interviewed laughed at the question and said, "I knew it would be the first question, I just knew it."

Based on my reading of the lesbian literature and several discussions with lesbian couples prior to entering the field, I wrote a semi-structured interview guide to facilitate the interaction with each couple. Appendix B is a copy of the original interview guide. Appendix C, shows the revisions to the interview guide, reflecting numerous changes that resulted from allowing the participants to shape the research. After the initial greeting with each couple, I explained that we were collaborators or co-participants in the research process. Taking a feminist research perspective, I stated that expertise about equality in lesbian partnerships would be coming from their experience.

Each couple signed their informed consent and then completed a one-page Background Data Sheet (Appendix D). I explained how I would use the interview guide to create a common organizing structure for the research; however, participants expanded on ideas, explored tangents, asked questions or refused to

answer questions that seemed uncomfortable or unclear. I asked each couple at the end of the interview to suggest any questions that needed to be added or deleted. I did incorporate several of their suggestions in subsequent revisions of the interview guide.

The Data

Since Chapter Four provides a partnership snapshot describing each of the couples in the study, in this section I have examined only the quantitative data supplied by the participants on their individual Background Data Sheets. Early in the interview process I was surprised to find long-term couples who became couples in high school and college. I was equally surprised to find long-term couples currently raising children. A third group, consisting of couples with one or both women previously married, was the group I expected to find. In selecting the last fifteen couples to interview, I tried to balance the three groups within the constraints of time and geographical distance. Therefore, to explore the differences and similarities among the women, I refer to these couples as: Group A, Child-Free Coupled Women Who Have Not Been Married; Group B, Couples In Which One Or Both Women Have Been Married And Are Not Raising Children; and Group C, Couples In Which One Or Both Women Have Been Married And Are Raising Children. Tables used to visualize the data follow these groupings. For example, Table 2a is the table for Age, Age Coupled, Years Together and Religious Preference for Group A.

Table 1a.
Financial Information for Couples in Group A

Couple #	Pseudonym	Education	Income	Combined Income	^Assigned Occupation
1	Dell	Ph.D.	\$60-69,999	\$100,000 - 119,998	*Corporate Engineer
	Martha	M.S.	40-49,999		*Hospital Administrator
2	Morgan	Ph.D.	40-49,999	80,000 - 99,998	**Commercial Artist P/T
	Elaine	B.S.+	40-49,999		*Director of Marketing
3	Daphne	M.S.	20-29,999	40,000 - 59,998	*Speech Pathologist
	Florence	M.S.	20-29,999		*Speech Pathologist
4	Lisa	Ph.D.	50-59,999	110,000 - 129,998	*Chemistry, Endow. Chair
	Lynn	Ph.D.	60-69,999		*Full Prof. Psychology
5	Diane	B.A.	<12,500	<62,500 - 72,499	**Director of Marketing P/T
	Gertie	M.S.	50-59,999		*Physical Therapist
6	Carmen	B.S.	30-39,999	<42,500 - 52,499	*Soil Scientist
	Carson	M.S.	<12,500		+Reading Specialist
7	Mary	B.S.N.	60-69,999	110,000 - 129,999+	**Owner, Home Health Serv.
	Elma	M.A.+	50-59,999		+Athletic Coach/Trainer
8	Gina	H.S.	70-79,999	120,000 - 139,998	*Regional Mortgage Adm.
	Jennifer	2 yrs. col.	50-59,999		*Real Estate, Data Analyst
9	Missie	H.S.	30-39,999	42,500 - 58,899	*District Grocery Manager
	Abbie	1 yr. col.	12,500-19,999		**Bookkeeper
10	Irene	M.S.	20-29,999	40,000 - 59,988	**Computer Consultant
	Sas	M.S.	20-29,999		2 yr. Med Student
11	Spin	D.V.M.	80,000+	110,000 - 119,999+	**Veterinarian
	Marteen	B.S.+	30-39,999		*Juvenile Probation Officer
12	Katie	D.O.	50-59,999	120,000 - 139,998	*Physician
	Anna	M.P.A.+	70-79,999		*Policy Analyst
			X = \$39,021.74 - \$52,726.27	X = \$75,625.00 - \$96,665.83	
			Mdn. = \$40,000.00 - \$54,999.00	Mdn. = \$71,250.00 - \$109,998.00	

^ Education, field, salary, status are comparable

* Full-time

** Self-employed full-time, unless marked P/T

+ Retired

++ Disabled

Table 1b.
 Financial Information for Couples in Group B

#	Pseudonym	Education	Income	Combined Income	^Assigned Occupation
13	Eva Courtney	A.A. Ph.D.	\$40-49,999 70-79,999	\$110,000 - 129,998	**Sales & Marketing *Performance Analyst
14	Sierra Casey	B.S. A.A.	20-29,999 40-49,999	60,000 - 79,998	**Contractor Assistant District Adm.
15	Reva Poncho	3 yrs.col. H.S.	40-49,999 20-29,999	60,000 - 79,998	*Computer Service Tech. *Construction Crew Leader
16	Taylor Una	B.S. B.S.	20-29,999 30-39,999	50,000 - 69,998	**Publishing/Marketing ++Video Production
17	Opie Polly	H.S. M.S.	<12,500 50-59,999	<62,500 - 72,499	+Owner, Day Care Center *H.S. Math Teacher
18	Betsy Maggie	H.S. H.S.+	20-29,999 60-69,999	80,000 - 99,998	*Non-Denominational Min. *Information Specialist
19	Norton Trixie	3 yrs.col. M.ED.	<12,500 30-39,999	<42,5000 - 52,499	Physician's Assistant P/T *Rehabilitation Counselor
20	Liz Sally	M.S.W. H.S.	50-59,999 12,500-19,999	62,500-79,998	*Family Service Agency Adm. +Retail Sales
21	Sadie Jackie	H.S.+ H.S.+	20-29,999 20-29,999	40,000 - 59,998	**Real Estate Management **Real Estate Management
22	Rebecca Lopez	H.S. B.A.	40-49,999 40-49,999	80,000 - 99,998	*Police Officer *Parole Officer
23	Teresa Chris	A.S. Ph.D.	12,500-19,999 40-49,999	52,500 - 69,998	+Tax Accountant +Forensic Psychologist
			X = \$31,818.00 - \$43,499.00	X = \$3,636.00 - \$81,362.00	
			Mdn. = \$30,000.00 - \$44,999.00	Mdn. = \$60,000.00 - \$79,998.00	

- ^ Education, field and salary are comparable
- * Full-time
- ** Self-employed full-time, unless marked P/T
- + Retired
- ++ Disabled

Table 1c.
Financial Information for Couples in Group C

Pseudonym	Education	Income	Combined Income	^Assigned Occupation
24 Lou Ann	2 yrs. col. H.S.	\$40-49,999 \$40-49,999	80,000 - 99,998	+Purchasing Telcom. *Exec. Sec. State Police
25 Jenny Lucy	H.S. H.S.	\$20-29,999 \$20-29,999	40,000 - 59,998	**Owner, Cleaning Service *Jewelry Designer
26 Brenda Jean	M.D. Ph.D.	\$70-79,999 \$60-69,999	130,000 - 149,998	**Ophthalmologist **Neuropsychologist
27 Meg Kay	Ph.D. B.S.	\$60-69,999 \$60-69,999	120,000 - 139,998	*Assoc. Prof. Political Sc. *Insurance Administrator
28 June Wilma	M.S. M.S.W.	\$50-59,999 \$30-39,999	80,000 - 99,998	*Physical Therapist Adm. *Rehabilitation Specialist
29 Andra Elizabeth	M.S. Ph.D.	\$30-39,999 \$20-29,999	50,000 - 69,998	*H.S. French Teacher **Consulting Psychologist
30 Babs Rae	H.S. B.S.	\$20-29,999 \$20-29,999	40,000 - 59,998	*Hotel & Food Ser. Manager *Inventory Control Supv.
	X = \$35,714.00 - \$48,570.00 Mdn. = \$30,000.00 - \$44,999.00		X = \$77,143.00 - \$97,141.00 Mdn. = \$80,000.00 - \$99,998.00	

- ^ Education, field and salary are comparable
- * Full-time
- ** Self-employed full-time, unless marked P/T
- + Retired
- ++ Disabled

Table 2a
Age, Age Coupled, Years Together, and Religious Preference
for Group A

Couple #	Pseudonym	Age	Age Coupled	Years Together	Religious Preference
1	Dell	49	23	26	Catholic
	Martha	49	23		Catholic
2	Morgan	34	19	15	None
	Elaine	31	16		None
3	Daphne	38	18	20	Baptist
	Florence	40	20		Baptist
4	Lisa	40	22	18	Episcopalian
	Lynn	44	26		None
5	Diane	35	20	15	None
	Gertie	36	21		None
6	Carmen	45	20	25	Christian
	Carson	45	20		Christian
7	Mary	55	25	30	Evangelical Covenant
	Elma	64	34		Christian
8	Gina	43	23	20	None
	Jennifer	43	23		Catholic
9	Missie	40	21	19	Spiritualist
	Abbie	48	29		Spiritualist
10	Irene	40	23	17	Protestant
	Sas	41	24		None
11	Spin	44	24	19	None
	Marteen	56	36		Spiritual
12	Katie	45	25	20	None
	Anna	44	24		Jewish
		X = 44	X = 23	X = 20	
		Mdn.= 44	Mdn.= 23	Mdn.= 20	

Table 2b
 Age, Age Coupled, Years Together, and Religious Preference
 for Group B

Couple #	Pseudonym	Age	Age Coupled	Years Together	Religious Preference
13	Eva	48	30	18	None
	Courtney	46	28		Eckankar
14	Casey	44	29	15	Catholic
	Sierra	44	29		Methodist
15	Reva	42	25	17	Baptist
	Poncho	44	27		Catholic
16	Taylor	38	23	15	Anglican
	Una	37	22		Jewish
17	Opie	52	37	15	Christian
	Polly	54	40		Christian
18	Maggie	54	29	25	Presbyterian
	Betsy	58	33		Protestant
19	Norton	54	29	25	None
	Trixie	57	32		Catholic
20	Liz	45	25	20	Post-Christian Feminist
	Sally	65	45		Church Alumni Group
21	Jackie	56	32	24	Christian
	Sadie	60	36		Christian
22	Lopez	40	25	15	None
	Rebecca	47	32		Unitarian
23	Teresa	66	43	23	Catholic
	Chris	66	43		Protestant
		X = 51	X = 32	X = 19	
		Mdn.=50	Mdn.=30	Mdn.=18	

Table 2c.

Age, Age Coupled, Years Together, and Religious Preferencefor Group C

Couple #	Pseudonym	Age	Age Coupled	Years Together	Religious Preference
24	Lou	61	32	29	Catholic
	Ann	53	24		Catholic
25	Jenny	46	31	15	Spiritual
	Lucy	35	20		Unity
26	Brenda	54	39	15	Eckankar
	Jean	47	32		None
27	Kay	51	36	15	Quaker
	Meg	42	27		None
28	June	37	20	17	None
	Wilma	37	20		None
29	Andra	41	26	20	Quaker
	Elizabeth	52	37		Quaker
30	Babs	43	23	20	None
	Rae	41	21		None
		X = 46	X = 28	X = 19	
		Mdn.= 45	Mdn.= 27	Mdn.=17	

The analysis of these couples reveals that each group has unique details within it. Group A consists of twelve (40%) couples who have not married or given birth or adopted children; however, three of these couples are considering having or adopting children. Nine of the twelve became a couple before either woman turned 25 years of age. The other three couples, in Group A, had one woman under 25 years of age with a partner 8 to 12 years older. I divided Group B, consisting of eleven (37%) couples where one or both of the women have been married, into 3 subgroups: one woman in the couple married for a short period of time without conceiving children, one woman in the couple married and conceived children, and both women married and conceived children. All of the children of these women are now adults or college students living away from home. Group C consists of seven (23%) couples currently raising children.

The educational level of this sample (Tables 1a, b, c) shows a highly educated sample in which 27 women (45%) hold graduate degrees. Studies of lesbian women consistently show higher educational levels than average populations (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Lynch & Reilly, 1985/86). What is more telling about this sample is that 19 women or 32% have less than an associate's degree, indicating more sample diversity, which is a direct result of the Internet self-referrals. Comparing the educational levels of Groups A, B, and C would indicate that women who continued their education without marrying and having children earned seven out of the 12 doctoral degrees; however, the sample size is too small to support any conclusions.

Exploring the occupational status of the women (Tables 1a, b, c) using categories defined by the U. S. Census Bureau, I found 37 (62%) of the women in Managerial and Professional Specialties. Another 14 (23%) are in Technical Sales and Administrative Support. Forty-seven (78%) of the women are employed full-time with 13 (22%) of those women self-employed.

Money is one of the key components of this study, therefore, I have provided several reference points. Income ranges are reported for both individuals and

couples (Tables 1a, b, c). At the bottom of the respective columns are the mean and median for the individuals and couples in each group. The individual mean range for the income of all 60 women is \$35,550.85 to \$48,391.86. The combined mean range for all 60 women is \$71,583.33 to \$91,961.20. The median range for all 60 women is \$30,000.00 to \$49,999.00, while the combined median range is \$62,500.00 to \$79,998.00. Group A earns the highest individual income according to the mean and the more reliable median. Both Group A and Group C earn more income individually and combined than the women in Group B. However, part of the reason the women in Group B earn less income than the women in Group A and C is because they are older and some are retired.

Tables 2a, b, and c compare the ages of the sample. The overall mean age of the study is 47 and the median is 45 with a standard deviation of 9. Perhaps the most ironic statistic is that Group A, the youngest group in the sample, have the longest number of years together with a mean and median of 20. These years are slightly above Group B with a mean of 19 and a median of 18. Group C with only seven couples has a mean of 19 and a median of 17. The mean age when all 60 women became a couple is 27 with a median of 25. The women in Group A have a mean and median age for coupling of 23. Since several of the women in Group B were married before choosing a lesbian lifestyle, they have the highest coupling mean of the sample—a mean of 32 and a median of 30. The women in Group C were also older when they became a couple, with a mean of 28 and a median of 27.

Seventeen of the women in this sample expressed no religious preference, nine said they were Catholic, followed by seven Christian, and four Spiritual. The fourteen other religious preferences had three or less selections (Tables 2a, b, c).

The Setting

Since most of the couples involved in the study had access to e-mail either directly or through a friend, numerous e-mails were exchanged about the study before I contacted them by phone for an interview. In two different states a single couple voluntarily acted as an organizer of other long-term couples willing to

participate in the study. The two couples who volunteered to be organizers were extremely helpful.

The first organizing couple that contacted me, as a result of a posting on the Internet, said they would be glad to find other couples that met the study criteria since they had been active in their large lesbian community for 15 years. In addition to themselves, they found six other couples--including two minority couples--through local resources that significantly helped to increase the diversity of the sample. For these seven interviews, I flew to a major southwestern city, rented a car, checked into a motel, and made contact with my organizing couple. They took me out to dinner, gave me a detailed schedule of the interviews they had arranged over the next six days, supplied maps, gave me a cellular phone to use and treated me as a guest for the week.

The second organizing couple, in an eastern seaboard state, also committed themselves to finding other couples meeting the research criteria. They contacted four couples including a minority couple, sending me all the information needed to arrange interviews with these women. After I interviewed three of the couples, the organizing couple invited those three couples and my partner and me to join them for dinner at a historic hotel. The fourth couple was two hours away and regretted being unable to come to the dinner. We had an enjoyable time with all of them teasing me about the interview process.

When I called each couple to arrange a time and place for the interview, I asked them to suggest an interview place that was private, comfortable, and convenient for them. Most of the interviews were in the couple's primary residence with four exceptions. One couple with small children preferred to be interviewed in one member of the couple's office without their two-year-old. Another couple, also with small children, preferred that I interview them on the weekend at their lake house with their children. A third couple without children, from the major southwestern city referred to above, met with me in an informal conference room of the motel where I stayed. A fourth exception was a couple conducting business in

a major city where I was interviewing couples. They invited me to interview them in their hotel suite rather than wait until I would be in their area at a later time. Although interviewing in home environments provided more insight into a couple than interviewing in offices and motel rooms, it was important to allow each of the couples to determine the location most comfortable for them.

Data Analysis

All information collected during the interview with each couple was treated as data: Background Data Sheets, transcripts from the tape-recorded in-depth interviews, field notes, and newspaper articles about three couples which they provided. I began data analysis using qualitative software after the first five interviews by searching for commonalities and differences among the couples. During the process of coding and analyzing the data I paid careful attention to preserving the context and meaning. Seeking to understand the meaning of words like equality, egalitarianism, and equity as interpreted and practiced by the couples was one way of organizing and making sense of the data during the early months of the study. Methods for coding and analyzing the data were adapted from several sources (Charmaz, 1983; Glaser, & Strauss, 1967; Mason, 1996; Neuman, 1994; Strauss, 1987; Rubin, & Rubin, 1995; Taylor, & Bogdan, 1984).

After carefully reading and rereading data from the first five interviews, an initial list of themes emerged. I then cross-checked the themes to eliminate overlap. Themes or concepts also emerged from asking critical questions of the data (Neuman, 1994). My thoughts began to be absorbed with questions such as: What does gender mean in a lesbian relationship? Is equality possible in a relationship where the income differences are significant? What does it mean that these five couples have not talked about equality in their relationship? Although it was early in the research process, this initial coding offered a preliminary way to organize the vast amount of rapidly accumulating data. QRS NUD*IST, the qualitative software program used for this research, offered optimal coding, recoding, deleting, and moving of data.

Using the initial coding themes, I used QRS NUD*IST to create an index tree allowing a hierarchical arrangement of themes. Each transcript and set of field notes (called cases) were loaded into QRS NUD*IST directly from the Macintosh version WordPerfect 3.5. With the data loaded as a document each piece of text was then coded. Coding of a theme such as “interdependency” could be explained by an attached Memo. The material for each theme could be printed as a report. If necessary the data could be recoded into a different theme or merged with other material. During this project QSR NUD*IST 3 was upgraded to QSR NUD*IST 4, an improvement that allowed even more management and organization of the data, such as immediate access to data coded at a node, the ability to easily add and delete coding, the ability to examine all coding for a selection, new document selection features, new ways of storing and exploring categories, and new ways of changing the index system.

Each new set of data became a new document to be coded and analyzed, forcing a revision of the coding system. Changing conceptual awareness and perspective eventually led to five major revisions of the coding system. “Grounded theory” (Glaser, & Strauss, 1967) heavily emphasizes process; therefore, the themes or categories were woven together into a “processual analysis” (Charmaz, 1983).

Focused coding helps the researcher to outline a framework that preserves the complexities of everyday life. By showing relationships between categories in ways that explain the issues and events studied, focused coding helps to provide the groundwork for developing explanations and predictions (Charmaz, 1983, p. 118).

After five coding revisions, I was finally able to weave the repeated themes into an analysis. This work was not a linear process. Each successive coding revision reflected my evolving understanding of the meaning of equality. The revising process compares to the experience of learning to use a 35-mm camera with different lenses before autofocus permitted point-and-shoot. The second coding of the data produced a standard 50-mm analysis of partnership equality based on combining similar themes into clearer categories. The third coding process involved using a

wide-angle analysis of equality by examining the possible structural advantages (i.e., age, income, education, and status) and how they related to equality. A fourth analysis began with a telephoto focus on each of the couples separately, to understand how each couple practiced economic self-sufficiency, power, and shared values within their family. Then as I gradually pulled the lens back, to combine how each of the couples practiced economic self-sufficiency, power, and shared values within their families, a new wide-angle perspective emerged.

Reflexivity

Qualitative research encourages an ongoing experience of processing data in an inductive manner, followed by an awareness of underlying patterns of meaning that are then re-evaluated with the data from the next interview. Gradually that circular process leads to an understanding of the participant's perspective. Neimeyer and Resnikoff (1982) summarize the value of the circular inductive process when they state, "What distinguishes qualitative methods is their commitment to comprehending subjectivity" (p. 76). One way of containing subjectivity is to address the perspective of the researcher.

Research results are reported as the co-evolution of researcher and participants' perspectives of each others' ideas and interpretations; therefore, a qualitative study necessitates an awareness of the impact of each on the other. Kvale (1983) stated that "the reciprocal influence of interviewer and interviewee on both the cognitive as well as the emotional level is . . . not primarily a source of error but a strong point of the qualitative research interview" (p. 178). Although the in-depth interview process produces rich data, a qualitative researcher runs the risk of analyzing the data with significant distortions. It is important to identify and examine researcher biases and their potential influence throughout the study. Potential biases include the researcher's own background and values, as well as assumptions about the sample and expected findings.

In this research three methods were used to minimize researcher biases. First, I maintained a process journal throughout the research which includes notes written

before and after each interview, during the data analysis process, and during the dissertation writing process. Notes in this process journal addressed my own cognitive and emotional reactions to ideas, assumptions, biases, and hunches juxtaposed with an evaluation of their possible influence on data collection, analysis, and the writing process. Second, I openly shared with each of the participant couples all pertinent background information about myself, my partnership, and the research process. Third, during the week the final dissertation draft was delivered to my dissertation committee, each couple received a copy of the draft in the mail for comments and feedback. The postscript to this study was written to reflect the comments made by the participants on the final draft of the text; it serves as a final check on the accuracy of the data and as a source of additional information.

To increase your perspective as a reader, I offer you a silhouette of myself as a researcher. My perspective is that of a white, middle-class, North American female. Professionally I am an educator, a licensed clinical social worker, and a sociologist. In my private clinical practice, I have worked with individual lesbians, as well as lesbian couples and families; however, the participants in this study have never been my clients. I knew only one of these couples prior to this study, a couple that agreed to be first--helping me realize that I needed to focus more on the couple rather than the individual. During the year I was interviewing participants, I briefly saw in clinical practice a 19-year lesbian couple who were dissolving their partnership. On three occasions, I specifically obtained supervision to minimize the impact of the dissolution of that relationship on this study and vice versa. Ironically, they were the only lesbian couple I have ever seen in practice who had been together more than five years.

Even though a plethora of researchers have acknowledged the egalitarian nature of lesbian relationships, I did not think the contributing factors of equality had been explored fully. My partner of 17 years and I could not recall ever discussing equality; yet we felt we had an egalitarian relationship. In addition, I wondered if I

would find thirty long-term lesbian couples who would participate in this study.

I have noted in the text where it seemed that my experience as a clinician, my lesbian partnership experience, or other perceptions might have affected the study. I have tried to take the “empathic neutrality” stance described by Patton (1990), which consists of taking an empathic stance toward the participants and a more neutral stance toward the findings. Krieger (1985), who has written extensively on her experience as a lesbian sociologist doing participant observation, reflected on her involvement in the research process when she had difficulty analyzing her in-depth interviews; I have consciously tried to do the same.

Ethical Considerations

Taking an ethical position on how one acts and feels toward others, in relationships of shifting intimacy and varying power asymmetry requires intense awareness of the differences between mutually-chosen relationships and researcher-imposed ones. Interviewing informed and consenting participants in a private setting for a limited segment of time constitutes a preliminary condition for ethical research. As previously described, I had the participants determine where the interview would be held and we agreed upon the times. On occasion we exceeded the time allowed but I tried to make sure that was a mutually agreeable decision.

In providing confidentiality for the lesbian couples in this research, I followed the suggestions of Blumer (1982), as quoted by Maurice Punch: “Identities, locations of individuals and places are concealed in published results, data collected are held in anonymized form, and all data kept securely confidential” (p. 92). Lesbians, as a population and as individuals and couples, must be protected from harm. About midway through this research study I bought a new computer with greater short and long term memory. Unfortunately when I upgraded to a new operating system, I lost my hard drive without a back-up. After a few agonizing days, I recovered 98% of the hard drive. I relate this experience not to reveal my inadequacies, but to stress the complexities of confidentiality. Although tempted to use a data retrieval service

to reduce the loss, I had clearly established in my mind that before I could do that I would have to have the consent of all the participants in the study. At that point I was not sure that somewhere on the hard drive I did not have a list relating pseudonyms to real first names and elsewhere on the computer a list of addresses. The responsibility to protect confidentiality is a serious one.

Having someone else transcribe tapes increases a researcher's responsibility to ensure the trustworthiness of that person. However, given the demanding, time-consuming, and confidential process of transcription, it is a necessary step. Although data was transcribed from the beginning with pseudonyms in place of actual names, tapes, transcripts, and transcription equipment had to be securely stored. Tapes were played and replayed and discussed between myself and the transcriber to ensure accuracy. If the transcriber happened to know a couple in the study, which was true of two couples, I did the transcription. Fortunately I had one primary transcriber who, being a therapist, understood the meaning of confidentiality and responsibility.

Although not as serious as the above considerations, I experienced another ethical situation. Enjoying and celebrating the creative lives of the participants, I found it a moral dilemma to arbitrarily assign occupations. I wanted the participants to like the assigned occupations, agreeing they were similar in education, income, field, and status to their real occupations. Knowing that the significance of their education, the salary they earn, the extent of their work experience, and their occupational status are important to each participant, in future research I plan to have the participant choose her comparable occupation.

CHAPTER FOUR

Partnership Snapshots

Introduction

This chapter provides snapshots or verbal pictures of each of the 30 couples, close-up views of these women and the circumstances in their partnerships that contribute to their uniqueness. These snapshots show differences and similarities among couples. This chapter provides a sense of who these couples are, how they met, and what is important to them.

Dell & Martha (Group A, Couple 1)

Dell completed college in three years and immediately started graduate school. Without taking even a summer semester off, she finished everything except her dissertation by age 24. At the time Martha and Dell became a couple, Martha was earning a comfortable wage and Dell was finishing her doctoral course work. In the spring of 1971, Dell and Martha fell in love. With this new relationship, Dell decided to take time away from her doctoral program to teach in a small college before starting her dissertation. Dell's parents approved of her lesbian relationship. Her parents secured and furnished a house for them across from the college where Dell would be teaching. After teaching for three years, Dell returned to campus to finish her Ph.D. at age 27. Dell's parents felt both women should have extensive professional training to provide a comfortable lifestyle for themselves while enjoying meaningful work. Dell's parents encouraged Martha to advance her education, insisting on paying for it since they considered her their second daughter. Martha received a postmaster's degree in health care and now is a hospital administrator.

Although once envisioning a future as a college professor, Dell has been in the corporate world since earning her doctoral degree. She is an activist who advocated and helped win domestic partnership benefits for employees in her Fortune 500 company. Martha has held various positions in the medical field. She has been recognized statewide for her performance as a health care administrator.

Dell and Martha have been together 26 years. As a long-term couple, they have served as role models for many lesbian couples.

Elaine & Morgan (Group A, Couple 2)

Elaine, a ninth grader, arrived late to her first high school band class. The only vacant chair was for the first flautist who happened to be Morgan, an eleventh grader. Elaine, embarrassed about being late, sheepishly sat in Morgan's seat. Elaine expected someone to reprimand her after class. Morgan laughingly told her she did not like the pressure of first-chair and would gladly give it to her. This is how they met.

Through the activities of band they became best friends. The summer before Morgan went away to college they became lovers. Morgan's parents, who were professional musicians comfortable in the world of theater, easily understood their daughter's preference for a lesbian lifestyle. After three years of being in a relationship with Elaine, Morgan finally admitted to herself that they were in a lesbian relationship. Morgan said that she had a harder time accepting her lesbianism than did her parents. Elaine's mother was totally against her lesbian relationship with Morgan. During Morgan's second week of college, Elaine's mother threatened her with a court order if she ever contacted her daughter again. Elaine had known at age 12 that she was lesbian despite her parents' desperate attempts to change her mind. Elaine's mother took her to a series of psychiatrists. After Elaine told the fourth psychiatrist at age 16 she enjoyed being a lesbian, the psychiatrist suggested to Elaine's mother that Elaine was not the one with the problem. Suddenly Elaine's mother stopped insisting on her seeing a psychiatrist.

Morgan and Elaine both excelled in school despite the separation and the constant harassment of Elaine's mother. The summer after Elaine graduated from high school she moved 450 miles from home to join Morgan at college as a student. Morgan finished her undergraduate degree, which required five years of education. She won a full scholarship to an internationally acclaimed art institute. While perfecting her fine arts talent, Morgan attended her state university where she

earned a doctorate in commercial art. Meanwhile Elaine finished her undergraduate education and most of the course work for her master's degree. These women paid for their educations without parental financial support.

Morgan is both a free-lance artist and a professor of commercial art at the art institute she attended. Offered more than one endowed chair position in well-recognized universities, Morgan prefers to train students who compete internationally to study at the institute. Her faculty position requires and encourages her own creative work. Elaine is a director of marketing for a medical corporation. She does not see this position as her final career choice; yet it has provided excellent challenges and opportunities for growth. They have been together 15 years. At ages 31 and 34, Elaine and Morgan are the youngest couple in the study.

Florence & Daphne (Group A, Couple 3)

When Florence was in tenth grade and Daphne was in ninth, they met and became good friends. Daphne agreed to teach Florence to play tennis, if Florence would teach her to play basketball. In high school both dated males, attended their proms and maintained appearances to avoid ostracism in school. When Florence was a first year college student and Daphne a senior in high school, they became romantically involved.

Although honors graduates in high school and college, both women had trouble finding employment as teachers when they returned to their hometown; therefore, they took turns working and supporting each other while they obtained their master's degrees and training as speech therapists. Before they went back to school, they encountered family responsibilities. Florence's father died in 1980, a year after she finished college. Florence inherited the family home with the stipulation that she would take care of the house and her mother. She gave up her position as a high school coach and returned to their small hometown with Daphne. Living with Florence's mother was extremely difficult and almost destroyed their relationship. Florence's mother was Primitive Baptist and condemned their lifestyle. They lived with Florence's mother for two years before

she remarried and moved.

Daphne's parents accepted Florence as another daughter. Florence feels close to and emotionally supported by them. One of Daphne's two brothers was gay and died of AIDS five years ago. Her parents have worked hard to educate their small rural town about the realities of AIDS. Daphne is trying to be the birth mother for this couple. They have taken a financial break from the expensive process of alternative insemination. They have been a couple for 20 years.

Lisa & Lynn (Group A, Couple 4)

Lynn graduated from a woman's college where she had been heavily involved in team sports. Still returning for women's basketball games, she met Lisa who was the star of the basketball team. After a year of being friends, they became lovers. Lisa was at the end of her junior year of college. Immediately out of college Lisa took a position in a chemical research lab where she remained through her master's and doctoral degrees. Lynn at age 23 continued to work and save money for graduate school. Four years after she finished her master's degree, while working on her doctorate, she started teaching at a college in the same city as Lisa. They would then have more than a "holiday and weekend" relationship.

Lisa's parents, who were totally disapproving of her living a lesbian lifestyle, were paying for her professional education. Therefore, Lisa and Lynn had apartments across the street from each other for six more years. They described that period in their lives this way:

Lisa: In a lot of ways I think both of us feel in retrospect that period of separation is largely what has kept us together this long. Because we became real individuals with some degree of comfort in being those individuals before we put our lives together, physically, you know, in a home.

Lynn: Plus, at that point, I had a whole household of stuff and Lisa had a whole household of stuff and I was starting a brand new high pressure job. She was working on her doctorate. It was too hard to try to combine it all and find another place. So we literally had apartments across the street from each other. And we basically spent every night together. My place or her place. But, her family was still not even

acknowledging me at that point. I was pretty much a non-entity. I was dealing with the accidental death of my mother. My dad was also really sick but he had not died then. I had an eight year old sister I was trying to help raise. It was just too much going on.

Lisa and Lynn have been a couple for 20 years. Lynn is a full professor in experimental psychology, having written five textbooks in her field. At age 44, she openly states, "I have accomplished every single thing professionally that I can do. That I've ever wanted to do." Lisa holds an endowed chair in a well-known private college. As an associate professor and director of the chemistry research lab, her designated responsibility is to train undergraduate women in science. Lisa freely admits that she is a workaholic when it comes to her research lab. Together they have devised several ways to limit Lisa's obsessive commitment to research.

Diane & Gertie (Group A, Couple 5)

Diane and Gertie met in college. Gertie was the president of the campus residence hall community and Diane was the public relations chairperson for the organization. They chose to tell their parents about their relationship from the beginning. Diane was quite surprised at her parents' hostile reaction, especially considering that her mother is a psychologist.

Diane: An odd thing about me, both my parents are homosexual. Their reaction to me when I came out was quite hostile, a channeling of their unresolved issues. We separated for several years because of my mother's abusive venting and now we are reunited and quite peaceful with one another. My mother announced to me recently that she no longer thinks of her homosexuality as the disease she had fought all her life. Her comfort level extended to me when her internal war called a truce.

Gertie's parents were also disappointed in her, but kept their reaction more underground. They supported her professional education as a physical therapist. Gertie is a regional clinical specialist in physical therapy with a master's degree. Diane has a bachelor's degree in marketing and is employed part-time as a marketing director. Diane, the activist of the couple, is involved in politics. She assists the Lesbian/Gay Alliance by lobbying at the state capital, participating in street

rallies, and organizing citywide rallies. Gertie and Diane both feel that Diane's activism is a couple's effort. Along with their active careers, they each plan to have one child.

Carmen & Carson (Group A, Couple 6)

From the first day of class in tenth-grade English, Carmen and Carson were best friends. After graduating from high school Carson went away to a private woman's college while Carmen stayed at home attending a community college. Although Carmen and Carson were best friends, not lovers, they missed each other intensely. Carmen's parents agreed to buy her a car if she stayed home for her first two years of college. Carmen then transferred to a public university close to Carson's school. After four years they became lovers and stayed together on the weekends.

During the second semester of her senior year of college, Carmen decided to drop out and move into an apartment in the same small town as Carson. Carson was having difficulty coping with the pressure of school; she was often suicidal, delusional and hallucinating. With Carmen's support, Carson graduated from college. After college they returned to their hometown to work for a couple of years. Carson wanted to pursue her master's degree as a reading specialist. Carmen agreed to move with Carson to another state and to support her emotionally during her graduate education. Two years later Carson finished her master's degree and found a public school position 500 miles from home.

After relocating, Carmen was ready to finish her undergraduate degree. She worked full-time and took courses toward her degree. Although Carson enjoyed working as a childhood reading specialist, the politics of the position were highly stressful. Carson's mental health rapidly declined during her second year of work; she was hospitalized and diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic. Carson was unable to return to work. Carmen finished her degree as a soil scientist.

Carson's mother, with whom she was very close, died the following year. Carmen decided to seek a position close to their hometown so Carson could be near her father and brothers. Fortunately she found a challenging professional position

close to home. Carmen and Carson have been together as a couple 25 years. The commitment and love of this couple are beyond description. Not only were they willing to share the intimacies of their partnership, they wanted readers to know that mental illness did not prevent this lesbian partnership from being long-term.

Mary & Elma (Group A, Couple 7)

Hoping to secure a teaching position in geography Elma, untrained in athletics, reluctantly agreed to coach women's sports at the high school. Mary was a senior in high school when she met Elma. Elma was a highly focused, task-oriented, no-nonsense person with whom Mary fell in love. Knowing that Elma would never consider being romantically involved with a student, Mary decided to go to college halfway across the continent.

During and after her five-year degree program in health care, Mary had a five-year lesbian relationship with her dorm counselor. Even though she loved her, she knew she was still in love with Elma. "I'd come home and see Elma all the time." Mary's relationship with her dorm counselor ended because of their fundamentalist Christian beliefs condemning their lesbian relationship. Mary struggled with her relationship loss, her own strong religious background, and her lesbianism.

Mary: I had a really great psychiatrist, who even back in 1966 didn't try to change me. He said, "what you need to do is learn that this is the way you are. And you know, learn to adjust and not fight." So, okay. I came home and I told Elma. So she knew I was gay. It was like, "oh, all right."

Mary: Then in '67 Elma asked me to go around the country with her. Because I'd gone on a camping trip to Alaska and I knew about camping. And she didn't. And she got the grant and wanted to know if I wanted to go around the country. I thought, "oh, lord, I can't do this. I'm going to make her a lesbian."

Mary: We had a really bad automobile accident, in Idaho. A half ton pickup truck totaled our car. We weren't hurt, but this lady took us in her house and put us in a double bed. And I could see Elma going, "I think I'll sleep in the living room." At night I woke up and the bed was shaking. Whole, like this. She was in shock from the accident. Because it was really bad. And Elma said, "hold me." And I put my arms

around her. And she opened her eyes and said, “what the hell do you think you're doing?”

Elma: I had been asleep, apparently.

Mary: And I said, “well, you asked me to hold you so I am.” And so that's our anniversary, August 8, 1967.

At the time of the interview, Elma had retired after 35 years from a highly successful career as an athletic coach. Mary owns and administers her own home health service. Elma and Mary have been partners for 30 years.

Gina & Jennifer (Group A, Couple 8)

This couple obtained financial independence without degrees. Gina and Jennifer have been together 20 years. They became best friends in high school. Gina was sent away to a private school her senior year, so they wrote every day. After graduating from high school Gina moved into Jennifer's basement bedroom. Both women started working and saving their money. Jennifer worked in an accounting position and often held a second job. Gina started working as a bank teller and taking every training program offered.

In approximately one and a half years they accumulated enough money to buy their first home. Four years later they purchased a larger, more comfortable home. Eight years later they bought their third home. They are now in their fourth home worth at least \$300,000. These two self-educated women have methodically planned, saved and invested from their first paycheck. Gina after 20 years with the same company is a regional mortgage administrator. Jennifer, with two years of college, is a real estate data analyst.

Abbie & Missie (Group A, Couple 9)

Missie and Abbie started working in high school and, although college degrees would be helpful, work remains their first priority. Missie discovered in high school that working at a kennel was more exciting than her school work. She also discovered that the kennel bookkeeper, Abbie, was more fun than her high school peers. Abbie, eight years Missie's senior, was not sure they could create a

successful lesbian relationship. She also knew if they did not leave their families and rural southern town, it would be impossible. After Missie graduated from high school, they took a vacation and decided to settle in a previously unseen midwestern megalopolis.

Missie took a position as a butcher's assistant. For 17 years she has been the district manager for a chain of grocery stores: she thrives on the challenge of never knowing the demands of her next work day. Abbie worked as an accountant for several major corporations before she decided that her college courses and work experience had made her saleable. She began to free-lance and within two years had enough clients to operate a business from their home. Although her salary is one-third of Missie's, it is adequate since they pool their money. Eventually Missie knows Abbie will earn a liveable wage. Missie and Abbie have been a couple for 19 years.

Irene & Sas (Group A, Couple 10)

Irene and Sas met as officers in the Air Force. Sas, studying to be an Air Force chaplain, was on educational assignment at Irene's base. Irene was in training for a special assignment in Germany; however, she refused her military assignment on moral grounds when she discovered that it involved nuclear weapons. Several months later, she was out of the military. Sas did not leave the military until a few years later when her ordination was revoked. She forced the governing body of her religious denomination to deal honestly with the fact that she was in a lesbian relationship. When the church revoked her ordination, she requested discharge from the service. Both women earned master's degrees in divinity, and both pursued an additional master's degree.

Four years ago, Sas decided she wanted to be a physician. While operating her own proofreading business, she took all the necessary science courses to prepare herself for med school. Sas at 40 years of age is now seeking her medical degree. She explained that she was good at many things and had difficulty deciding what she wanted to do. She is now a second-year med student carrying 23 credit hours,

borrowing heavily, and working to meet her half of the household expenses. Irene, as an adjunct faculty member, teaches computer science at a university and works as a corporate computer troubleshooter. Irene has not eliminated the possibility of pursuing a doctoral degree. They also are interested in Sas having a child within the next year.

Spin & Marteen (Group A, Couple 11)

With a college degree Spin immediately pursued a master's degree, beginning in speech pathology and finishing in counselor education. At age 24, she realized she might be lesbian when she became involved with Marteen, who was 36. Marteen had been in a few lesbian relationships prior to Spin. Her openness and active involvement in the lesbian community took adjustment for Spin.

Marteen entered the convent after high school. Eight years later she left the convent with only the work experience of teaching in a Catholic elementary school. While in the convent she had earned 88 college credits. Continuing to teach in an elementary school, Marteen was unable to support herself. She moved back home. Religion had been her life; suddenly she had to build a life. In her late 20's Marteen began dating women and having relationships. She realized that if she were going to adequately support herself she had to finish her undergraduate degree. "From the time I finished high school until I finally got my undergraduate degree, it was about 19 years."

Four years into their relationship they decided together that Spin should pursue vet school. Given the competitive nature of veterinary school admission, Spin and Marteen had to move across the United States for her to attend school. Marteen supported them with her retirement savings for a few months while they found jobs and got settled. Spin worked her way through vet school, borrowing only what was necessary and focusing on school. When Marteen was asked if she sacrificed her career for Spin, she immediately said, "No, I was ready, ready to go and it just happened. It all started happening at the same time. It worked out beautifully."

Spin and Marteen have been a couple 20 years. Spin has had a thriving veterinary practice for over ten years. Marteen was asked why she continued to work when Spin could support both of them. They responded this way:

Marteen: I also think work is part of your identity. There is a good feeling I get from the work, doing what I do. And I like that.

Spin: It would drive me crazy if she got all her identity from me. I couldn't do it.

Betty: But you're a [veterinarian], you could support her.

Spin: That's not the issue.

Marteen: I like working!

Spin earns over \$80,000, while Marteen earns over \$30,000 a year. Spin explained they were fortunate, given the cost of her education remained in the double digits while many medical students have triple-digit debt that will take a lifetime to pay. Spin and Marteen have been a couple 20 years.

Katie & Anna (Group A, Couple 12)

Katie and Anna met in Naples, Italy, both studying Italian. Anna was working on her master's degree in foreign languages in Paris. Required to study languages in their native country, she decided to study Italian in Naples. Katie, waiting to be accepted into medical school, was studying medicine in Italy. In the same Italian language class, they became good friends. Katie was engaged at the time, although she was not sure about marriage. Anna was in a relationship with a female professor in France. As their friendship grew, they realized they had many interests and values in common. Approximately a year later, they became a couple while traveling in France.

As a couple they worked together in military security ten years before Katie went to med school. Anna helped support Katie through school. After Katie became a physician, she helped Anna earn a second master's degree. Anna has worked on her doctoral degree part-time but still remains undecided about direction. Anna has

continued to work in military security, but she is exploring other work opportunities. Katie is a research physician for a national health corporation. They have been a lesbian couple for 20 years.

Courtney & Eva (Group B, Couple 13)

Courtney at age 15 began a committed lesbian relationship, and it lasted for thirteen years. During that time, Courtney earned a master's degree and certification as a specialist in behavioral psychology. Her partner decided to be involved with a man, so the relationship ended.

Courtney, although she knew she was a lesbian from age five, dated and married a male. Courtney had a strong spiritual connection with her husband, but their relationship lacked sexual passion. Courtney ended the marriage in less than a year when her former partner reappeared in her life. Courtney and her former partner connected on many levels, yet she knew that they were not good for each other. She painfully chose not to recommit to that relationship; yet she was grateful to be out of her marriage.

While pursuing her doctorate, Courtney had a brief, intense relationship with a woman that ended about the time she met Eva. Courtney and Eva met at a woman's support group. Eva had dated several men and lived briefly with a man. In her late 20's, Eva had a five-year relationship with a woman. After her lesbian relationship ended, she dated two other women before meeting Courtney. Eva and Courtney dated about five months before deciding to commit to a permanent partnership.

Courtney's doctoral degree in behavioral psychology prepared her to be a college professor; however, she found academia stifling. Together, Courtney and Eva created their own company, which led training seminars and workshops for businesses. After several years of being self-employed, Courtney had an opportunity to join a Fortune 500 corporation as a senior performance analyst obtaining benefits that included domestic partnership benefits. Eva has continued to service many of Courtney's training contracts, while creating a retail company of her own. They

have been a couple for 17 years.

Casey & Sierra (Group B, Couple 14)

Casey was involved with a woman in high school, but during her first year of college she fell in love with a male student who was dying of leukemia. She married him, and they lived together less than six months before he died. Casey reflected, “He taught me a lot of things. I really believe that I wouldn’t be the person that I am today if I hadn’t had all that nurturing from him years ago.”

With an associate’s degree in secretarial science, Casey worked as an agency secretary for five years. She was taking evening courses toward her bachelor’s degree when her state agency opened a career advancement track designed to quickly move women into administrative positions. Casey has been with the same agency twenty-five years and she is now the assistant district administrator.

With a bachelor’s degree in early childhood education, Sierra moved to Australia and taught school. For the two years she was in Australia she dated an Egyptian man. When Sierra returned to the States in the late seventies, “teachers were a dime a dozen.” Therefore, she did substitute work and other jobs for four years. Sierra decided to work in a grocery store and get a second degree in computer science.

The grocery store where Sierra worked happened to be the one where Casey shopped. Casey and Sierra had lived on the same dorm floor in college but they did not know each other very well. At the time Casey owned a house with her former girlfriend and was dating someone else. Casey wanted to date Sierra; however, Sierra told Casey that both the women and the house had to go before she would make a commitment. Three years later when Casey had sold her house and completely ended both relationships, Casey moved into Sierra’s apartment.

They scrimped and saved every penny; a year later they bought twelve acres of land and the following year they bought a three-story log cabin kit. When the tractor trailer arrived with the logs, the men, seeing they were women, told them as drivers they were not allowed to unload the truck. Casey and Sierra told the men to

take a nap; unloading the truck would not be a problem. Twenty-five of their women friends unloaded the truck in four hours, stacking the logs in the correct order for assembly. The delivery men were dumbfounded! They couldn't believe women could unload and stack a house in a day, much less do it by lunch time and prepare lunch for everyone.

It took Casey and Sierra six months to complete the basement; they moved into the basement and finished the house six months later. The only help the women required was with the plumbing and electricity, a task which Casey's father and both women's brothers gladly provided. Sierra discovered through building the house that she had a natural talent for building and construction. Although she finished her associate's degree in computer science, she is now a self-employed contractor.

In the fifteen years this couple has been together, they worked to build and pay for their own home. Casey said, "If she ever moves from this house it will be in a pine box."

Reva & Poncho (Group B, Couple 15)

Poncho and Reva's life histories play an important role in understanding this partnership. Poncho was the oldest of eight Mexican children living in Northern Mexico. When she was ten years old her mother placed her forty-day-old sister, Mary, in her arms telling her, "She is your baby, you raise her." Poncho's father had left them, her mother was working, so Poncho and her grandmother had to take care of the children. Poncho took Mary to school with her every day; the teachers helped her take care of Mary. When Poncho was twelve she told her mother that "she liked girls and that she didn't like boys." Her mother became hysterical and told her she would grow out of it. When Poncho was seventeen, since she still preferred girls, her mother arranged for her to live with her aunt in the United States.

Poncho was delighted to be in the States; however, leaving Mary was very traumatic for her and for Mary. Poncho worked as a waitress until she found a job in the meat packing business. One day Poncho's aunt explained that her mother's

expectation was that she would become “straight.” Poncho explained to her aunt, “You just can’t do that. How can you change the inside of me? You can change the outside, the way I dress, the way I walk, but you can’t change the inside of what I feel.” Poncho stayed with her aunt about a year and a half until her aunt forbade her to study English. Poncho at age 19 found a tiny apartment in a poor section of town, determined to make an American life for herself.

She dated several women, many of whom treated her as a slave. Poncho was intimidated because she was an illegal alien. One evening Poncho and her lover were in a gay bar talking with a gay male couple. One of the men told Poncho he would marry her to make her an American citizen. The four of them, quite drunk, drove to another state; she and the man married with their lovers as witnesses. Poncho’s girlfriend, who wanted control over Poncho, threatened to leave her if she became an American citizen. Poncho did not file her papers. Reva was helping Poncho prepare for citizenship at the time of my interview.

Reva is the middle child in an upper-middle-class family. Her father was the vice president of a large construction company for over forty years. Reva had her first lesbian experience at a private women’s college. When Reva’s girlfriend ended the relationship after their junior year, Reva was devastated. She started working for an electronics company making silicon wafers during summer vacation. Although she had started out thinking it would be a temporary job, she decided not to return to school.

Poncho and Reva met at the electronics company where they both were working. They became good friends. After two years of working with Poncho, Reva had an opportunity to go to work for a Fortune 500 company as a service technician. When Reva left her first job, she lost touch with Poncho. One evening two years later, Reva went to a gay bar with some friends and Poncho was there. They started talking and renewed their friendship. Reva realized that she was strongly attracted to Poncho and they started dating. Poncho said, “I knew it was fate. I let her slip through my fingers the first time, but never again.” Poncho said, “She would have

to find work before they could be together.” Reva was living with her parents; her parents warmly invited Poncho to live with them. Within two months of both women working, they were able to move into their own apartment.

Reva’s family has always helped people. When Reva and her brother were small, her parents took in an adolescent foster child. They helped cousins, people at church, anyone in need. Reva’s father hired Poncho and discovered that she worked as hard as any man on his crew. He taught Poncho many trades, from concrete to operating heavy machinery. Poncho now works as a construction crew leader; she is the only woman in a company employing over four hundred men.

After living together for a year, Reva’s parents suggested that Reva and Poncho live in their lake house. Reva’s father built the lake house when Reva was a small child. It is a custom designed, two-story glass house on the point of a large lake.

With all the rooms in this house, Reva and Poncho decided to ask Mary, Poncho’s sister, to live with them. Mary stayed with them eleven years. Eight years after Mary moved in, she became pregnant but didn’t want to marry the baby’s father. Reva went to Lamaze with Mary. Mary named the child after Poncho and Reva. When her child was three, Mary started dating the baby’s father and married him. Mary and her husband bought a house from Reva’s mother up the hill from Reva and Poncho. The child is now eight and claims three moms and one dad. Mary has a second baby that they are helping to raise as well. Eventually Poncho brought two other sisters and their families to the States; they also have homes near them.

A few years after Reva’s father died, her mother decided to live with them. For Poncho this was normal: “Helping family is what life is about.” Reva loves the closeness and family loyalty. Reva and Poncho have been a couple for seventeen years; they have blended two entirely different cultures and social classes into one.

Taylor & Una (Group B, Couple 16)

Una is White Zimbabwean. Una married a friend of her brother’s to keep him from having to be permanently enlisted and fight in the war against terrorism. He

had known Una and her family since she was a little girl. When Una was 18, she married him and they moved to Israel. Their love was much more like that of brother and sister than that of husband and wife; so after a couple of years they obtained a friendly divorce. While still in Israel, Una dated a few women and had a brief relationship with a woman from Australia. When Una returned from Israel to Zimbabwe, she could not find work in her field which was computers. She went to South Africa to see about available jobs in computers before going overseas.

Taylor is White South African. She grew up in Cape Town with two professional parents who worked very hard. She was often alone after school and spent time with friends and their families. Her sister was older, married, and living in Johannesburg. While at the University, a month before her twenty-first birthday, her mother died unexpectedly. Taylor decided to spend time with her sister in Johannesburg. Taylor had been in a relationship with a lesbian teacher, followed by another brief relationship before she met Una. A mutual friend of Taylor's and Una's told them both they needed to meet.

In South Africa families often had large barbecues, enjoying the outdoors, cooking on the grill and open fires. Taylor invited Una to a barbecue; they sat around and talked. Having so much fun, they spent the night talking and teasing. Una told Taylor she was going to back-pack around Europe before going to the United States. Taylor was immediately interested and they started talking about making the trip. Over the next few months every time they were together they talked about their trip. "It started off as a basic friendship, then it grew into a whole mutual loving relationship for us." At the time this relationship began Taylor was 23 and Una 22. After a year of being friends and planning their trip, Una moved in with Taylor so they could save their resources for the trip. Taylor lived in a shack; in fact, the bathroom was bigger than any other room. Neither of them had previously been in a live-in relationship. Both women had a great time together. Una worked out a budget for their trip. As soon as they had enough money, they back-packed in Europe for nine months before entering the United States. "We were committed to

spending the next two, three, or four years traveling around the world.”

Unlike the families of many lesbians they have met in the States, their families were very supportive and accepting of their lifestyle.

Una: Our families on both sides were totally accepting of our lesbian lifestyle. We never had to hide it. We have always been open at work. Never had any form of harassment. Straight, gay, black, white we never had anybody who hasn't enjoyed being with us. Never had any negativity. We have no point of reference for a double life, like some people we know here in the States.

Taylor: This is me. This is my partner. Where I go, she goes. It feels very natural to be me and Una.

After being together for 14 years, Una was critically injured on an interstate highway when her small car was rammed by another car. She was traumatized with two closed-head injuries: one leaving the right side of her face paralyzed and the second leaving the left side of her body paralyzed. After being in the hospital six weeks, Una returned home with Taylor as her primary care-giver.

At first they had home health services. Professionals were often insensitive to their loving partnership. Fortunately Taylor had durable power of attorney and she was allowed to direct Una's medical care. The most insensitive treatment was by the attorneys involved in the case. Their relationship was attacked as deviant. When asked about the sexual discrimination, Una responded:

Una: I was interrogated and harassed. I felt like I was being raped over and over by the legal system because of my sexuality even though it was not relevant to the accident.

Taylor: Una has had to go through so many things, at times they ignored me entirely.

Una: It is the legal profession, it is the first time I have ever had such negative behavior displayed to me because of my sexuality, it is so foreign. All we have had prior to the accident was love and support.

Una's large family helped tremendously. Taylor's family was supportive from South Africa. They managed with the help of family and friends. The gay and

lesbian community supported them by raising money for medical expenses and volunteering time and services.

Una has been in rehabilitation therapy daily since being released from the hospital. She sees her work every day as rehabilitation. Una has made remarkable progress.

Una has been in the video business for ten years. Although she was doing editing more than filming at the time of the accident, she has not been able to work or contribute financially since the accident. Taylor is a graphic artist who has been self-employed for four years. Having ten years experience in the printing business, Taylor feels very comfortable with every facet of the advertising business. Having a home-office arrangement has been especially beneficial in having flexible time to transport and assist Una. They have been together for 15 years.

Opie & Polly (Group B, Couple 17)

Opie met Polly while soliciting funds from local businesses for her favorite charity. One of the businesses Opie visited belonged to Polly. Although Polly was a high school math teacher, she had recently opened a bookstore, using her inheritance from her mother. As a result of this meeting, Opie and Polly became good friends.

Polly, in the seventeenth year of her first marriage, had two girls ages nine and twelve. Her husband was a high school geography teacher.

Opie, in the seventeenth year of her first marriage, had lived all over the world with her career military husband; they had just moved into the area. Opie was a mother and homemaker, and her husband was often gone. They had three boys, fourteen, eight, and almost five. She also had a sixteen-year-old foster daughter living with them.

After being friends for a year, Opie and Polly became lovers. Polly rented and furnished a tiny apartment where they had time to be together when other responsibilities permitted. Ten months later, they decided to tell their husbands they wanted to live together. Polly related:

One night we had a lengthy discussion. We never yelled, or screamed. We just talked and talked. He said, "I think we really need to be separate for a while. One of us really ought to move out." And so when Jim said one of us really ought to move out, I called in sick at school the next day. I called Opie on the phone. Said "I'm moving permanently to France [her small apartment]," what I called it, and she said, "I'm coming too."

Opie stated that her husband agreed to the move because he thought it was a phase that she would get over. They took turns, with their husbands, having the children on weekends. After a year of makeshift living, Polly and Opie rented a large house with rooms for the children. The house was within easy walking distance of Polly's husband's house. Polly's oldest daughter stayed with her father, seeing her mother every day at school, dropping by in the afternoon and visiting on the weekends. Opie's oldest son had a hard time accepting the changes but gradually adjusted. Opie's sixteen-year-old foster daughter stayed with Opie's husband until she graduated from high school.

Two years after they started living together in the house, Opie filed for divorce. At the time of their divorce, Opie's husband still thought her lesbianism was just a phase. Four years after Opie's divorce, Polly filed for divorce. Both Opie and Polly talked about how guilty they felt for breaking up their families; divorce meant the final act of giving up on their marriages, which was harder than leaving them. Since Polly's oldest daughter technically stayed with her father, Polly and her husband each supported one child so there was no child support involved. Polly gave her ex-husband their eighteen-room house.

Opie, with a high school education and a passion for nurturing and raising children, decided to establish a day-care center next door to their house. Polly taught school and helped out with the children. For the last fifteen years they have shared their money, their families, and their lives.

Betsy & Maggie (Group B, Couple 18)

Betsy and Maggie have been partners for 25 years. Betsy works with the poor and homeless; she has been involved in a non-denominational ministry for twenty

years. Maggie, in a civil service track, is an engineering information specialist for the military. In her 24 years of service with the military, she has worked her way up through the ranks to unit manager. They met 30 years ago through their church-sponsored book club. At the time they met, Betsy was very unhappily married with two children, seven and nine years old. Maggie also was married and had two children, one almost two and the other about four months old.

Maggie at age twenty married a man she met in the military. She did not feel that she was really in love with him; he was just available. They had separated for three months when she was 25 but his pressure to get back together, coupled with her loneliness, forced her to try again. Then she had two children 18 months apart. Maggie was never in love with her husband, so after the children were born she completely lost interest in the marriage.

To get away from home Betsy married at age 20; her parents were both alcoholics. In high school her mother pressured her to quit school and go to work. Instead Betsy finished high school while working a full time job. Shortly after high school she married a sailor. She knew at the time she wasn't in love. Two years into the marriage she had a son, then two years later a daughter. Moving constantly with her husband's military career allowed her to avoid letting anyone get too close emotionally.

While they were building a friendship Maggie announced to Betsy that she was lesbian. Betsy reminisced, "Big deal. Who cares? I had met so many strange people in my life, it made no difference." Gradually Maggie developed feelings for Betsy, "because Betsy had a lot of honesty and integrity." Maggie separated from her husband. Betsy helped with Maggie's children and taught her how to find a job, work, and stay employed. Betsy laughingly said, "This same woman has now been working for the military 24 years."

Betsy stayed in her shell of a marriage. She stayed long enough to get pregnant again even though she wanted to spend her life with Maggie. She was afraid of losing her children, so she had a relationship with Maggie and stayed in the

marriage until her third child was eight years old. Then she told her husband she was moving out. By this time her oldest son was gone; she had her daughter and youngest son. Her husband kept the children except every other weekend, on all holidays, and every summer. He met a woman and moved up north; she insisted that he get a divorce.

Betsy and Maggie bought the house from him. They put both houses up for sale; Maggie's sold and Betsy's did not, so they took the money and renovated Betsy's house. They blended Betsy's two children and Maggie's two; by this time Maggie's youngest was 14. They thoroughly enjoy being a family, but it was difficult to merge the children; it took lots of work. Now the children are grown and married with grandchildren.

Betsy and Maggie have assisted each other and others throughout their relationship. Maggie is very supportive and participates actively in Betsy's ministry, serving on the agency board, and on occasion taking AIDS patients and other homeless people into their home temporarily.

Norton & Trixie (Group B, Couple 19)

Trixie and Norton have been together 25 years; both were previously married to college professors at the same small college. Trixie was married nine years and Norton ten years. They met while bowling together on the faculty wives' bowling league. They became good friends and eventually lovers.

When they told their husbands they were going to live together, their husbands both dismissed it as a passing thing. Trixie felt her husband had strong homosexual tendencies himself; but he seemed to have a harder time accepting her relationship than Norton's husband did. Trixie's husband reluctantly moved out and Norton with her children moved in. Norton said that her husband was just hurt; he could not understand how she could possibly choose a woman over him.

Norton: And they pretty much kept in touch with the kids. My ex-husband would come out and get the kids every weekend faithfully. And her ex-husband didn't do that so faithfully, but he was around. He kind of supported them. The children stayed in touch with him rather than he with them.

Norton had two girls and Trixie had a boy and a girl. When they got together, the children were three, five, seven, and nine. The oldest daughters of both women had a major disagreement in high school that they never resolved. The younger children became best friends and have remained so.

Shortly after they got together, they moved with the children to a college town about 50 miles away so Trixie could earn a master's degree in education. She was hoping to teach health or physical education. Norton took care of the children. After Trixie finished school they moved back to the town where their husbands were still teaching so the children would have a relationship with their respective fathers. As a family they lived together in a small rural community, a community that did not accept their lifestyle; they were often openly shunned and ridiculed.

No one would hire Trixie into a full-time position. She stated, "They were literally afraid of the influence of my being a lesbian." Financially it was a difficult struggle; her parents helped some, she substituted as a teacher, and she worked in temporary positions. Norton's husband paid child support and they had the house.

Trixie has had a full-time professional position for the past ten years. Norton with three years of college has been working part-time as a doctor's assistant for many years. She stated that she enjoys the work but the pay is meager. Over the 25 years, they raised their children together and struggled to support them; but the responsibility was shared.

Liz & Sally (Group B, Couple 20)

Liz was a Methodist minister at a church where Sally's children attended. The children went home and told Sally, "Mom, you've got to meet this new minister. She wears flannel shirts and bobby socks and moccasins. Just like you." Sally started attending church and gradually they became friends. Liz would spend time with Sally and the children. They would talk and talk, getting closer emotionally. At the same time Liz was having a long-distance telephone relationship with a man that she later discovered was gay. Even though she loved Sally, he was her soul mate. She knew after spending a week with him that they could only be friends.

Ten months after becoming friends, Sally and Liz became lovers and committed themselves to a lifetime relationship. Sally at age 46 had been out of her marriage about five years when she met Liz. Sally had four children: a daughter married, a son living alone and working, and two children still at home, a 17-year-old son and a 14-year-old daughter. Liz was 26 years old.

After being married 18 years, Sally with her four children had left her husband the first time he hit her. With only a high school education, Sally worked in factories and various jobs until she started working for the state in retail sales. Although it was a hard, physically demanding job, she worked for the state until she retired.

During Sally's 17-year-old son's first semester in college he told them he was gay. They admitted to him they were in a lesbian relationship. He had known for some time the reality of their relationship; he had from the beginning explained their relationship to his three siblings.

Liz left the ministry after they became partners. Having a master's degree in counseling, she became a counselor at a family service agency where she is currently an administrator. Sally being retired and Liz working a demanding job have presented new challenges for this 20-year couple.

Jackie & Sadie (Group B, Couple 21)

After graduating from high school in the 1950s, Jackie enlisted in the Air Force. The Air Force frequently interrogated her about her sexual preference but they were never able to establish that she was a lesbian. After three years in the military she took the business training she had acquired and accepted an honorable discharge. For several years she worked in business administration. Wanting at age 36 to be self-employed, Jackie became a real estate agent. She went to work for Sadie who owned a real estate agency. Sadie with her husband and Jackie with her lesbian partner became good friends, playing cards and socializing together.

While finishing high school Sadie at sixteen married her boyfriend, a drummer who had his own band. Shortly after they married he also joined the

Coast Guard. "It was difficult living with him at sea most of the time; but out of the service it was impossible." She had two children, a boy and a girl, in five years. She miscarried a child between her son and daughter "due to her husband's unnecessary roughness." After five years her husband left the Coast Guard; she divorced him. Sadie married again. Her second husband was 22 years older than herself. He adopted the children and they had a good time together for eight years until he died of cancer. These good times included playing cards and socializing with Jackie and her lesbian partner.

Jackie worked for Sadie from March until October when Sadie's husband died. Jackie and her friends went away for a holiday weekend to celebrate Halloween. When Jackie returned, she learned that Sadie had dated a woman. Jackie informed Sadie that if she was interested in women, Jackie was the one for her. Quickly, Jackie ended her uncommitted partnership. During the next nine months, Sadie and Jackie had a house built for themselves and moved in with Sadie's children who were ten and twelve years old. The children already had a close relationship with Jackie, who was at the house frequently playing cards and teasing with them.

When Fred, Sadie's son, was 18 years old he was killed in a tractor accident in the apple orchard behind their house. Fred and another young man were trimming trees and removing broken limbs. When the brakes failed on the tractor, Fred told his friend to jump off. Knowing the tractor would cross a busy highway possibly killing many people, Fred turned the tractor into a ditch, which killed him instantly.

Jackie could not help Sadie during this tragedy. Jackie and Fred had been buddies from the time he was ten years old. Sadie was devastated, but she had acquired some coping ability from earlier losses. Jackie stopped functioning. At the time Sadie had a large agency with 125 real estate employees working for her; but nothing, work or anything else, seemed to matter. All the employees knew and loved Fred. Jackie said,

It affected everyone. Sadie did not have the strength to take her company through that dark period of loss. She was stronger than I was; I wasn't much help. Sadie's 16-year-old daughter ran away, we didn't

know how to help her deal with all this. Ultimately the real estate company closed.

After Fred's premature death, their value systems changed drastically: work was no longer the primary focus of their lives. Both became real estate appraisers, occasionally selling real estate. With their prior assets and investments they have established a home-based appraisal business.

Examining only earned income creates a distorted picture of a couple's financial position. In the case of Jackie and Sadie that is simply not true. They have a large lovely home with an in-ground pool and every amenity possible. They own and maintain a summer camp. At 56 and 60 they could retire and be very comfortable. Both enjoy earning money, but not to the extent of running a real estate agency seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day. They have flexible jobs that pay well in proportion to the time invested.

Rebecca & Lopez (Group B, Couple 22)

Describing Lopez and Rebecca is difficult. It feels like trying to capture the energy of a stampede in a snapshot: impossible. They met while working together in law enforcement. Rebecca has been a police officer for 24 years; although petite and delicate, her presence is so powerful she commands respect without a word. Lopez has worked as a parole officer for the past 13 years.

Rebecca married at age 18, had two children, and divorced at 24. After her divorce, Rebecca and her children lived with her widowed mother several years until she met Lopez. Rebecca stated,

As an African-American from a close-knit family, as long as I lived with my mom, worked, and took care of my children, everything was fine. When we decided we were going to be together, it really blew my family away. I mean, like, everybody just went crazy. Of course I moved out immediately. We lived in motels for a couple of weeks until we got an apartment.

Rebecca's daughter was 16 years old and her son was 13 years old at the time she met Lopez. Her mother told her she could never have the children. Rebecca responded with,

“Great! Take them. Absolutely, take them! You don’t want them with a white queer. Take them.” Of course that lasted for a few months when they would act out or whatever, going through their own adolescent stuff. And bit by bit we ended up with them.

Rebecca’s family stayed furious with her over this lifestyle choice. Lopez at the time had been in a three year, highly dysfunctional relationship. Getting out of her relationship was almost as difficult as Rebecca leaving her mom. Lopez had been taking care of a mentally-ill artist from an upper-class family. Her former partner’s family was outraged that Lopez would leave their precious daughter. Therefore, being cut off from family and friends, they learned to rely on each other and to be best friends.

Lopez had no previous exposure to children, especially a 16-year-old female who resented her and her lifestyle. Rebecca’s daughter was still harboring resentment toward her mother for leaving her father; so she couldn’t begin to accept Lopez. On the other hand, Rebecca’s son became Lopez’s buddy and they still have a good relationship.

Rebecca will be 47 years old when she retires in the spring of 1998 after 25 years of service on the police force. She feels she has plenty of time to finish her college degree and add a second career if she chooses; “it was just very important to have a retirement cushion.”

Teresa & Chris (Group B, Couple 23)

Chris had been a minister’s wife for 20 years before divorcing him. She freely admitted that over the course of her marriage she had numerous affairs with women, affairs which her husband always justified as friendships. Working as a master’s level social worker, Chris had helped her husband earn two master’s degrees. Then late in her marriage she went back to school and worked on her doctoral degree. At the time she met Teresa she was working on her dissertation. “I graduated the same day my son got his bachelor’s degree. I got a Ph.D.”

When I asked Chris, how she knew she was lesbian, after living in the heterosexual world for 20 years, she responded,

I knew I was a lesbian when I was ten years old. I didn't know the word, but I knew. I've always known.

Betty: But why did you marry?

Chris: In 1947, what did people do? They married, and had kids. And that's what I did. Because that's what you were supposed to do. And in all honesty, I don't think I even considered any other alternative, because I wasn't really aware there was one. Not really. I mean, I had grown up in a world that certainly didn't include lesbianism. I don't think my mother even knew where babies came from. Let alone would she have known anything about any other lifestyles. So anything I knew was from overhearing dirty cracks, dirty words, and that kind of thing.

Betty: What about in college?

Chris: That's when I had my first lesbian affair. With my roommate. But that didn't mean I was anything other than going to get married and have babies. It's the truth. It was what I knew I wanted with her. I thought "Aha! The bells are starting to ring. Now, this is the way it should be." But it didn't deter me from "you shall get married. And you shall have a husband and a home and a picket fence and two kids." Which I did.

Betty: Were you in love with this guy? I mean

Chris: No. I cared for him. I cared for him right up until he died. I think that even Teresa knows that. Even after we were divorced; we'd been divorced for twenty years when he died and I still cared for him.

This dialogue was not uncommon among the women who had married. Most of them expressed a desire to have children, which meant getting married. Chris said she would not have even considered marriage if having and raising children with a lesbian partner had been an option.

Chris met Teresa and two days later Teresa moved in. In this case, the joke about lesbians renting the U-haul on the second date was true; however, unlike the joke they have been a couple for 23 years. Teresa had been in several lesbian relationships lasting from two to ten years before she met Chris. Both stated that when they met, they just intuitively knew the relationship would work.

Chris worked as a forensic psychologist and college professor. Teresa worked as a bookkeeper. After they were together a few years, Chris persuaded Teresa to take two years off from work and earn an associate's degree in accounting. They are both retired at 66 years of age. Teresa works part-time earning less than \$12,500 a year. Chris earns over \$40,000 a year as a part-time consultant.

Like Jackie and Sadie, this is another couple whose income does not begin to reflect their assets and investments. Unless researchers ask questions about financial worth, the financial picture based on income is highly misleading.

Lou & Ann (Group C, Couple 24)

Ann was the substitute on Lou's bowling team. After bowling they took their children to Lou's house and talked. Ann married at 20 and had two sons in five years. She describes her marriage at the time she became friends with Lou:

I wasn't allowed to have friends in my marriage. I was very unhappy in my marriage. Very unhappy. And we [Lou & Ann] got to know one another. He had a lot of restrictions on me. I didn't feel really, I really felt bad about myself. I wasn't allowed to wear make-up, I was told what to eat, what to drink. A lot of pressure. And very afraid of him. He was a child beater. And it wasn't that he would beat me, except when I would get between him and my oldest child. My son was only two years old. I mean, this had gone on from the very beginning. I didn't know my ex-husband was like this when I was going with him. So I was afraid of him.

Ann had been friends with Lou a year and a half when Ann's husband beat her and took the boys. She became hysterical and called Lou. Together they found him and got the boys, who were two years of age and an infant. Ann had tried to leave her husband before by going to her parents, but they had encouraged her to remain with him for the boy's sake. This time with Lou's help, Ann was determined to get a divorce. Ordered by the court to pay child support, Ann's husband made one child support payment and disappeared.

Lou said she was in an empty marriage. With four children to support, divorcing her husband was not easy. Lou had three girls and one boy; her oldest child, a daughter, was nine years old at the time of the divorce. Lou's husband was a

gambler, so divorcing him meant paying off his creditors. After the divorce he paid four or five child support payments and moved out of state.

When both divorces were final, Ann and her two boys moved in with Lou and her four children. Combining the children meant having four children under five years of age. Although Ann would have worked, staying home with the children for eight years was more economical and better for the children. Together they put all six children through Catholic school. Finally, when the youngest child went to school, Ann went to work for the State Police where she has been for the last 18 years. Until Ann started working, Lou worked two full-time jobs. Lou retired from a large telecommunications company after 33 years.

Three years into the relationship, when Ann stayed home with the children while Lou worked two full-time jobs, Lou saw a newspaper article about a wealthy family adopting a non-relative. Through one of her jobs, Lou had excellent benefits; however, Ann and the boys had none. With the involvement of several attorneys, two judges, and protective services, Lou legally adopted Ann and the two boys. Insurance and benefits were not the only advantages of the adoption. Now if Ann's husband ever took the boys, which he had threatened to do on several occasions, it would be considered a federal kidnapping offense. Adopting all three of them also provided protection in case something happened to Ann; Lou would be able to raise the boys on her own.

Ann's son at age 16 was sexually intimate with a girl who became pregnant. She wanted the baby. Ann and Lou tried to be very supportive of her. Ann's son was in the Army stationed overseas. The girl did not know how to take care of a baby; so eventually Ann, as the grandmother, adopted the baby. After five years of being free to travel, to participate in a women's motorcycle group, and to enjoy themselves, the needs of a child again came first. Ann and Lou have been a couple for 29 years.

Jenny & Lucy (Group B, Couple 25)

Jenny had married the high school football hero at 19 years of age. She had her son at 20 and a daughter at 23. She was trapped in a physically, sexually,

emotionally abusive marriage for 12 years. Her husband's mother lived across the yard from them. Her mother-in-law insisted that her son was great and any problems were her fault. Jenny had to work to make ends meet; otherwise, she did not think she would have survived.

Jenny had worked six years in an automotive shop as the assistant shop manager, rebuilding alternators, starters, and generators when Lucy was hired. In the process of training Lucy, they became friends. Lucy and her gay male husband were in the process of trying to prove they were heterosexual, but it wasn't working. After a year of eating lunch together every day Jenny and Lucy realized they had talked and shared more in that hour than either had in their entire marriage. Jenny decided to leave her husband, which meant risking him killing her, and moved in with Lucy and her husband. Within a month Jenny rented an apartment and tried to get her children.

Jenny's abusive husband fought and won custody of their two children. Having her children every other weekend and sharing holidays was extremely difficult. I asked her how old the children were when she left the marriage:

A boy age 11 and a girl age eight. I wanted them to come with me. It was the biggest heartache of my life. We were waiting until we could get a place with at least two bedrooms or more and my ex-husband absolutely refused to let me have the children. He told me he would kill me. He tried to kill Lucy when we would go out to pick up the kids. We would have them every two weeks on the weekend. He took me to court several times, trying to prove me unfit, so I would never see them again. He convinced the judge to make her leave at night when they came over. So, she would have to go out and sleep in the car.

Having been raised in a foster home, Lucy had her own issues with Jenny losing custody of her children. Jenny finally decided it was better for the children that she leave an abusive marriage than have them grow up thinking that abuse was acceptable. Jenny's father had abused her mother from the time she was a small child, and she wanted the cycle to stop. Jenny's husband remarried quickly, making it even more difficult for her to compete in the custody hearings.

Nine years into their relationship, Lucy had the opportunity to raise her

nephews, who were six and eight years old. Jenny did not think twice about agreeing to co-parent them. Lucy's drug-addicted brother, who had custody of his boys, committed suicide. The mother of the boys also committed suicide from a drug overdose. The boys would have been placed in foster care; but Lucy did not want to risk the possibility that they might be abused and neglected as she had been in foster homes. She obtained custody.

They have had the boys in counseling for four years. At 12 and 14 years of age the boys are doing well in school, sports, and other activities. Lucy and Jenny have been open and honest with the boys about their lesbian relationship from the beginning. Their oldest son had led a debate at school recently for gay rights and his team won.

Jenny has her own residential and commercial cleaning service which allows her the flexibility of schedule needed for the boys. Her daughter and she have become much closer. As her daughter gets older she understands more about her mother's life and why she made the decisions she made. Lucy has been working 14 years for a jewelry company. In this job she designs wedding bands from the gold bar to finished sets. Lucy was an art major in high school; therefore, designing jewelry has allowed her to focus her talents.

Jenny and Lucy, a couple for fifteen years, knew that raising children in a loving environment was very important. Although their decision to raise these children placed severe demands on their time and money, leaving any child in an abusive situation was unacceptable to them.

Brenda & Jean (Group C, Couple 26)

Brenda, age 39, and Jean, age 33, were finishing their professional educations when they met. Jean was finishing her doctorate in neuropsychology while Brenda was finishing her medical training in ophthalmology.

Jean and Brenda had dated both men and women prior to their relationship. Jean married at age 22. She divorced at age 25, subsequently going back and forth between men and women until she was 31. Jean had a strong sense of herself which

quickly became a power struggle with the strong men she dated. She “gentled-out” easier-going men, in other words they stopped being interesting.

Both Jean and Brenda have a strong sense of self, which although potentially fiery, creates a balance between them. Their dialogue expresses it clearly:

Jean: We were very, very different politically. I mean, the differences were she was a very conservative Republican. I was a very liberal Democrat. She was very Christian at that time and I was not.

Brenda: I was not a practicing Christian, because I hadn't been in a church in 20 years.

Jean: She was very Southern. I was very Californian. I was very liberal arts. So you know, most of the places I came from, I was a strong feminist. She was, had, zippo concept of what that was.

Brenda: And no interest.

Jean: So, the way, the meeting ground that we had, was that we were both starting careers. We had similar values in terms of how one lives. I mean, we lived in a house well together. We both like the house kept up in a certain way. We both like decorating a house. It was important to us to make a home. We both had careers, but

Brenda: That was about it.

Jean: That was about it.

Brenda: We fought for five years and finally after five years, we wore each other out. We just rolled over . . . I don't want to fight any more. We still fight . . . (laughter). Thinking back on it, it is an absolute miracle.

Betty: That you made it.

Brenda: It is.

Betty: So we know who has changed. (Laughter)

Brenda: I can tell you though . . . yeah I can tell you though, that the thing, a therapist actually said this to us one time. The reason I believe that we have come this far, is because there is a power struggle, this power balance, that doesn't get too far off either way. Our pendulum of power doesn't swing very far from side to side. And there is this

tension right in there. And I am attracted to powerful women too. And she is attracted to powerful women. And we, that is a big piece. I think. That keeps us where we are. That we cannot roll over each other. She can't roll over me. I can't roll over her. And it is good. It's very good.

Jean: But Brenda is much less conservative. She is much more tuned into, I mean we are able to talk now, easily, after all these years, about more psychological, sociological kinds of issues. I mean you have done lots and lots of reading. I mean she has sort of educated herself in that area in the way that she never had an opportunity to do. So we have much more common ground. And the feminist stuff is more

Betty: Yeah, cause you actually couldn't have gone her way.

Jean: I could not. I could not have gone the other way.

In her late 30's Jean wanted to have children; while considering alternative insemination, they learned about a child being available for private adoption. At 39 and 44 they adopted an infant girl from Peru. When their daughter Wendy was about five years old, Brenda and Jean decided to go to the Philippines to adopt another infant girl.

As a couple they are openly lesbian. When Wendy was in a Presbyterian preschool, Brenda and Jean made it clear that Wendy had two moms. Wendy talked with me about having two moms. Being "out" is important so they can raise their children to feel proud of themselves; they do not want them growing up having to keep family secrets. When the kids at school tease her, she tells them all families are different. She and her sister have two lesbian moms and they are both adopted.

Meg & Kay (Group C, Couple 27)

After nine years of a miserable marriage, Meg, age 28, decided to leave with her three-year-old daughter Kym to make a life for them. She had been taking courses part-time at the university for several years and now she was within a year of graduation. Kay, age 37, a tenured associate professor of political science, had been divorced for a year from a six-year marriage when she met Meg. They would meet at the university where Kay taught and Meg took classes. In the late afternoon, over a glass of beer they discussed their miserable years of marriage.

After two months of hanging out together Meg, “feeling bold,” invited Kay for dinner at her tiny apartment. Kay’s reply was, “Oh, what the hell, I don’t have anything else to do. Why not?” That July evening is the anniversary of their relationship.

After a few months, Kym and Meg moved in with Kay. They decided that Meg needed to finish school; so Kay agreed to be a major care-giver for Kym. Meg went to school full-time and worked part-time. Two years into the relationship, Kay was still looking for a nice guy that would match her written criteria. Meg was not overly concerned since she matched Kay’s criteria item for item except she was a woman. Kay adored Kym but she had a strong desire to have a child herself. After Meg graduated and started working full-time, Kay realized she was indeed in love with and planning to stay with Meg.

Together they became serious about Kay having a child. Kay, 40 years old and in excellent health, went to a fertility specialist. After four miscarriages, Kay tried one more time. At 43 she had her precious, healthy son, Jimmy. Kay had always been very athletic, so being pregnant and having a child according to her was not difficult. Unfortunately Jimmy didn’t sleep through the night until he was two years old; those first two years were exhausting for them. They described the two children as “delightful.”

Under the influence of their close friends, Brenda and Jean (Couple 26 described above), they decided to adopt an Asian infant girl. Therefore, when Kym was 16 and Jimmy was six they adopted Beth. Beth, at two years of age, is still not sleeping through the night. Meg and Kay’s lives revolve around children and work.

Meg, with a major in accounting, is an administrator for a major insurance company. Kay loves being an associate professor.

June & Wilma (Group C, Couple 28)

June and Wilma have been together since they were in college. Although they knew each other in elementary school, they became friends in high school and lovers in college. They graduated from the same college but were only together as a

couple the second semester of their senior year.

After college they moved to a new area of the country for June to get her master's degree. At the time June was still dependent on her parents financially. Wilma had been financially independent since she was age 18; so finances were initially a source of stress for them. Eventually June finished her graduate degree in physical therapy. Wilma earned her master's degree in social work; so before deciding to have children both women earned professional degrees.

Nine years into their relationship they carefully planned to have one child. Twin boys were the result. Wilma works at a hospital three days a week for 12-hour shifts, which provides the flexibility to care for their children. Note their comments about how the children have changed their work lives:

Wilma: And now, really, our biggest priority is caring for our children. Which is not directly correlated either with money or time. And so then things change and their values just immediately For example, we'll have friends who'll say they want more, nicer things. And they're getting more, nicer things. We know that we're not going to be able to do that because we have this cost of the kids. And so then you could kind of let go of making money, in some ways. I mean, in some ways it makes us want more, but in other ways we realize

June: Yeah, and just reality. I can't work like I used to. There was a job that opened up at my work and I knew that it would probably pay me ten or fifteen thousand dollars more a year, which would really help us. But I wouldn't get to be at home. And I wouldn't see the boys. And so I remember, "now why was it that I had kids? So that I could tuck them in at night?" And so all of a sudden there is this whole other, this great big thing. And it just changes everything. My job used to be the thing in my life. And now it's like this mandatory thing that I have to do to earn money so I can have my life.

One example of their financial commitment to their children is that they have the boys in a very expensive private school. Their attitude is "whatever it takes to give them all the opportunities children deserve."

Andra & Elizabeth (Group B, Couple 29)

In the early 1970's during the cresting of the human potential movement, Andra and Elizabeth met when placed together on a team of four to create a

weekend workshop on the topic of “love.” Elizabeth, age 35, was a doctoral student in psychology participating in the Awareness series for credit. Andra, age 21, a junior, was a resident assistant in her dorm participating in the workshop series with her dorm director. They discovered many similarities and interests but Elizabeth felt uneasy about the eleven-year age difference.

That summer, Elizabeth was sharing a house near the college with a woman and her child. She started taking the child to the pool for swimming lessons, only to find Andra in charge of the pool. Elizabeth was going to Oregon with her friends second semester; but, first semester she and Andra packed every spare moment with fun and frolic.

Andra had dated a guy seriously but when he started pressuring her for marriage she just could not make the commitment. She had spent her senior year of high school in Argentina where she had dated men but she felt a stronger connection to women.

Elizabeth considered herself asexual until she was 25, when she had her first relationship with a woman. Her partner was extremely homophobic and out of guilt ended the relationship after five years. Elizabeth’s second relationship was with a woman who had children; when this relationship ended, again after five years, she was devastated. Determined to make sure her relationship with Andra was strong, Elizabeth went to Oregon as planned.

She and Andra talked every day. Andra was impressed that Elizabeth did not drop her plans and stay home the rest of the summer. At the end of the summer they met at Provincetown for a great week as a couple.

Andra and Elizabeth rented a charming old house with two other lesbian women for the next two school years. Their second summer together they hitchhiked around Europe for 13 weeks. Everything seemed to fall into place for them; life together was easy. Elizabeth drew a deep breath through year five but realized they were doing fine. During year seven of their relationship they stopped communicating; they realized later they had not allowed conflict to surface. Andra

had an affair, so Elizabeth ended the relationship. Andra decided to pursue her master's degree in sports psychology in Arizona. Elizabeth then had an affair and moved in with another woman.

Having minimal contact during that year, they were confronted with the fact they had bought tickets for the Olympics together a year in advance, spending over \$500 each. They met at the Olympics in Los Angeles and had a great time. They both wanted, and decided, to try again. With counseling they learned to ask for what they wanted or needed in the relationship rather than just smoothing things over with, "Oh, it's okay, I can get by." This time they knew their relationship would last.

During the first six years of their relationship, they had discussed having children. Elizabeth was 39 years old; they had to do something. Together they both seriously pursued alternative insemination, then learned about a baby being placed for adoption. They met their son when he was ten hours old; Mark is now eleven years old.

When Mark was five years old and in pre-kindergarten, they adopted another infant, Monica. She is an intense, independent six-year-old, much in contrast to her easygoing big brother. Elizabeth is self-employed as a psychological consultant, so she designs her schedule around the children's needs. Sports psychology consumed too much of Andra's time; therefore, she is using her undergraduate major as a high school French teacher. Her responsibilities for the children occur more in the afternoons and evenings, when Elizabeth is working.

Babs & Rae (Group C, Couple 30)

Babs and Rae met 20 years ago in the military while stationed in Germany. At the time Rae was 20 years old and Babs almost 23. Although Rae had a higher rank than Babs, it was Babs' job to train Rae for her new assignment. They spent every day together and then went out with friends in the evening. Fortunately, the military command was having problems housing so many soldiers; so, when Babs and Rae offered to pay their own expenses to live off post, they were encouraged to share the expenses.

Babs had been in relationships and aware of her attraction to women from age 16. Rae had taken a women's studies class in college in 1972 where guest speakers talked about their lives as lesbian women. That college course allowed her to consider a lesbian relationship. When she met Babs she knew she had fallen in love with her. They described their relationship:

Betty: When you first got together, did you think your relationship would last 15 years or more?

Babs: No.

Rae: I did.

Babs: NO.

Betty: Okay. Why is that?

Babs: My longest relationship was a year and a half and I was gone. I would get very bored. Rae always surprises me. When I think I have her pegged, it's something new. And she always keeps me on my toes. All the other relationships got really boring. Same mundane thing day after day after day. There were no surprises. I mean, even after 20 years she still surprises me. That's why I'm here. I can't imagine being with anybody else. She's my life partner. Somebody I'm growing old with.

Betty: And you thought it would last, didn't you?

Rae: Yeah, when I make a commitment I make a commitment. When we first, when we started talking about moving in together, after the [military] and all that, sure, it's going to be the rest of my life.

Rae is in the process of retraining for a new career. Her undergraduate degree is in hotel management and food science; but she is more interested in being a CPA. She works flex-time, which can be anywhere from 24 to 40 hours a week. Babs is an inventory control supervisor; she is responsible for a \$50-million inventory. She has the equivalent of an associate's degree in computer electronics. The corporation where Rae works has domestic partnership benefits. Twelve years into their relationship another lesbian couple in their community decided to have a child. So Babs and Rae started talking about it.

Rae: Why shouldn't I have a child? And I mean, you know we talked about it an awful lot. And we would be good parents and we could give a lot to a child and a child could give a lot back to us. We decided to go for it.

Betty: How did you decide to have the child?

Rae: Babs didn't want to. And she has more

Babs: The family history on my side is not good. No. I don't even know if I could have children. But I looked up the genetics about family history and said, "your family's a lot healthier than mine. Bring the kid up with good genes." My parents gave me bad genes. Arthritis, diabetes and cancer runs in our family. Heart disease. This woman who never had a headache in her life, please. Go ahead!

Betty: And how did you decide to just have one?

Babs: You know, it was like, we thought There was a period there we thought about it, then it was like we're so blessed just to have her. And I don't want, we'd like to give her a little brother, except she'd want a sister, a brother or sister, but we don't want to take away from her. You know, give her everything that she wants. You know, a good education. A nice home, whatever. And spend a lot of time with her. She's definitely enough.

Tolstoy wrote, in the often quoted opening of Anna Karenina, "All happy families are alike, but each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Perhaps after this rapid series of snapshots all thirty couples in this study look alike. In spite of the adversity experienced by some of these women, we are left finally with an impression of reflective contentment and even optimism. For the reader of this dissertation, perhaps the thirty stories have grown blurry and are threatening to collapse, like Tolstoy's unsingular happy family, into one big story—a story of false starts, self-discovery, struggle for acceptance, finding one's life partner, and the subsequent creation of a family with student loans, mortgages, even children. Underlying all of it, however, love and commitment co-exist with respect and independence. These sixty women are at a point in their lives where reflection is a fluid process and they share a pride in maintaining their relationships. They have a

conviction that their lives are worthy of celebrating and their stories worthy of telling.

CHAPTER FIVE

Money Practices

Introduction

Chapter Four, Partnership Snapshots, provided glimpses of the women involved in the study. The socio-demographic data of the sample do not fully explain the extent of equality in these relationships. Examining demographic data to determine equality rests on a definition of equality based on sameness. Tables 1a, b, and c outline the Background Data Sheets for income, education and occupation. Each of the three groups is on a separate chart. Table 1a, Financial Information for Couples in Group A shows three out of twelve couples reporting the same income. Table 2b, Financial Information for Couples in Group B, shows two out of eleven couples with equal incomes. Table 2c, Financial Information for Couples in Group C, shows four out of seven couples as having the same income. Therefore, nine out of the thirty couples have equal incomes. Of these nine couples four have approximately the same level of education. Yet only two couples have the same level of income, education, and occupation. Based on sameness of income, education, and occupational level, these tables reveal that these lesbian partnerships are not equal.

Without evidence of income, education, and occupational sameness creating equality, it is important to explore other financial principles characterizing lesbian partnerships that may affect relationship equality. Schwartz (1994) in her book on how love between heterosexual equals works states, "The linchpin of marital inequality is the provider role--or, to be precise, the provider complex, a combination of roles that give the man the responsibility for financially supporting the family's life-style . . ." (p. 111). She suggested that marital equality will not be achieved as long as there is a provider role. Schwartz meticulously explains how relying on a single, most often male, provider establishes a fundamental basis of inequality regarding money, power, housework, child care, and intimacy.

Numerous researchers have also emphasized a high correlation between a primary

provider role and inequality in marital relationships (Haas, 1982; Lorber, 1994; Okin, 1989; Potuchek, 1992, 1997; and Stacey, 1990). Therefore, the beliefs and practices of lesbian couples who reject a provider role merit careful consideration.

Economic Self-Sufficiency

Before examining the beliefs and practices of lesbian couples regarding money in their partnerships, a historical context is required. It has not always been possible for women to earn a self-supporting wage (Faderman, 1991, p. 306). Lesbian partnerships, without family-of-origin and male support, would have been impossible without the century-long struggle of women for important educational, economic, legal, social, and political rights. The idea of attributing the success of feminism over a time-span, rather than by years or waves, highlights both the major accomplishments and the invisible daily progress of women as noted by Rupp and Taylor (1990). The lesbian contribution to women's independence has been an invisible but essential contribution. It is not because of a powerful father or husband that these lesbian women are successful, but because of their earned education, work, and ambition.

Although income, education, and occupational levels are often unequal in lesbian partnerships, each woman strives to remain economically independent. Hall and Gregory (1991) conducted in-depth, separate interviews with nine lesbian couples in the San Francisco Bay Area to understand how lesbian couples balanced love and work in their relationships. Although the partnerships averaged only six years, the women in their study were between 35 and 50 which is similar to the age range in this study. Also comparable to the women in this study, their salaries ranged from \$12,500 to \$120,000, and most of the women had postgraduate degrees. Hall and Gregory stated:

To call self-sufficiency a value of lesbians understates the deep psychological commitment most of the women felt to their financial independence. The prospect of any lapse in this independence was unthinkable and usually frightening to many of them. Most said they would be willing to take care of their partners, but could never allow themselves to be taken care of. When one partner earned significantly

more than the other, as was the case for half the couples, adjustments were necessary (p. 123).

Lesbians know they must work to provide their own livelihood. Variations in the educational levels and subsequent occupations of the women in this sample are directly relevant to the timing of their awareness of being a lesbian. Group A, couples 1-13, at least one and often both women identified themselves as lesbians before age 25. Each one remembered details of plans they had made to make sure they could financially provide for themselves. Therefore, except for Marteen (Couple 11), each of these 24 women consciously rejected the female socialization process described by Polatnick (1983):

Not only during the period of childrearing do women become economically or professionally disadvantaged vis-à-vis men; most women's lives have already been constructed in anticipation of that period. 'Helpful advice' from family, friends, and guidance counselors, and discriminatory practices in schools and in the job market steer women toward jobs and interests compatible with a future in childrearing (p. 28).

In Group A, only couples 8 and 9 either did not pursue or complete an undergraduate degree. Yet their partnership snapshots illustrate that both couples 8 and 9 understood the necessity of financially providing for themselves. They determined during high school that the companies they went to work for had to offer "stability, education, and promotions." Five women who ended their formal education with a bachelor's degree selected fields of study directly related to high levels of employability. Fifteen of the 24 women earned graduate degrees that prepared them for professional specialties. Marteen, who entered the convent immediately after high school, believed she had a planned and secure future. Therefore, when it became necessary for her to leave the community after eight years, she felt doubly betrayed with the loss of her religious community and the reality that she was not prepared to be financially independent. She was forced to make supporting herself a top priority.

Florence (Couple 3) suggested that coupled lesbian women look more like

single women who have never married.

They have to work in order to have insurance, retirement, and other benefits. If Daphne was killed in an accident, I would be my sole provider; I would not receive her social security even though we have been partners for twenty years.

Florence was temporarily unemployed when she was fired from an administrative position she had held for eleven years. She was accused by an employee of trying to recruit her into a lesbian lifestyle. Florence loaned the employee a book which the employee had asked to borrow. Florence fought the dismissal in court and lost. Depending on Daphne, her partner, during that time was traumatic. Both women are speech pathologists; therefore, finding another professional position in their small town was difficult. Florence was willing to drive three hours a day if necessary to be employed in her profession. Although they have pooled their money for twenty years and everything is jointly owned, according to Florence, “not working, even temporarily, is not an option.”

The idea of work not being optional is explained further by Lopez (Couple 22). Although economically secure in her long-term relationship with Rebecca, Lopez contrasts herself with married parole officers:

I am in a totally different situation than married female parole officers. If I get myself so upset that I say, “I can’t do this job one day longer. I just can’t do this job, it’s too stressful, it’s too much.” I’d better think long and hard about that. Before I do that. Because I gotta support myself. It’s not like I can ring up someone for some money. I don’t have family to do that with.

Some of the women in Group B, couples 13 - 23, who married before embracing a lesbian lifestyle, faced major hurdles in having the means to support themselves. During their interviews, they discussed their frustrations in obtaining further education and finding well-paid occupations that allowed for growth. Schwartz (1994) found that married women “did not pick a job or make choices thinking that their salary or a salary they could earn would determine their [the couple’s] life-style” (p. 113). She also noted that married women who consider their

earnings essential to the family economy do not blame themselves or hold themselves accountable if the family does not prosper. She stated, “They do not think of themselves as the provider or even coprovider; they think of themselves as a supportive team member” (p. 123). In lesbian relationships not only do women maintain individual economic sufficiency, they also hold themselves economically responsible for their partnership.

From their partnership snapshots we learned that Opie (Couple 17), Betsy (Couple 18), Maggie (Couple 18), Norton (Couple 19), and Sally (Couple 20) with only a high school education had to quickly figure out how they were going to support themselves after they ended their marriages. Both Courtney (Couple 13) and Chris (Couple 23) decided that having a doctoral degree in a professional specialty would provide a comfortable lifestyle. Although Trixie (Couple 19) had a bachelor’s degree she knew that if she were going to support herself and her two children, and help a partner without a college degree and with two children, she needed a master’s degree; so they made her earning that degree a top priority. Liz (Couple 20) knew that as a lesbian she might have to leave the ministry but that having a master’s degree in a professional field made the transition easier. A quick comparison of Table 2a and Table 2b shows the differences in levels of education and income when marriage precedes the awareness that as a lesbian one must be self-supportive.

Women who married under unusual circumstances also prepared themselves to become providers, knowing they would be supporting themselves eventually. Casey (Couple 14), Poncho (Couple 15), and Una (Couple 16) did not enter marriage with any expectations that their husbands would support them. These women entered marriage knowing it would be a brief experience. All three of them expected to be self-supporting until retirement. I described in Una’s partnership snapshot how not being able to support herself has greatly compounded the tragedy of her accident. Una, struggling with paralysis from her car accident, holds herself highly accountable for both their limited income and Taylor’s need to work more hours. When I asked Una about not being financially independent she

responded:

It has not been an easy situation because I have always earned money. It has always been a 50-50 [relationship]. I go through periods where I feel Taylor is having to work so hard to accommodate both of us. It is very frustrating that I am not able to do so many of the things around the house. We are very blessed with the family we have. My mom helps us with the food and the cooking. Friends in the community come and clean our house and do the yard. Or volunteers will come and take us places to relieve the pressure on Taylor and me. It is a very hard thing for us to deal with.

Women in Group C, couples 24 - 30, who have chosen parenthood, extended the concept of providing for themselves to providing for their children. Although prepared to independently provide for themselves and the children, if necessary, they have jointly provided for the children in case of tragedy. Couples 26 and 29 were in the process of completing their educations when they met. They finished their educations and were together five years before deciding to have children.

Four of the women, Lou (Couple 24), Ann (Couple 24), Jenny (Couple 25), and Meg (Couple 27), married and had children assuming their husbands would be the providers and their working would only supplement his income. When Meg realized she had to get out of her marriage, she worked and attended school part-time working toward a bachelor's degree. However, only Meg, with comprehensive child care and the emotional and financial support of her partner, has been able to complete an undergraduate degree.

With only a high school education and two children within the first five years of marriage, neither Ann nor Jenny was able to prepare herself educationally or vocationally to become economically self-sufficient. Jenny, who legally lost custody of her children, as described in her partnership snapshot, has supported herself and feels sure that she would have been able to support her children if she had been allowed to do so.

Lou, who married only because of family pressure, began supporting herself immediately after graduating from high school. Lou described her husband as lacking the commitment required to support a wife and four children; therefore, the

only time she did not work during her marriage was during maternal leave. Not unlike Gina (Couple 8), Jennifer (Couple 8), and Missie (Couple 9) in Group A, Lou realized the importance of working for a major company with excellent benefits. Already established with a major corporation, Lou had the earning capacity to provide for a family. Ann and Lou divorced their husbands, combined their children, and, without child-support, raised their six children together.

When married women leave a marriage and become involved in a lesbian relationship, the ideals about specific behaviors and personal attributes of sex, which Chafetz (1988) called “gender norms,” no longer apply. The underlying assumption of both women is they will remain economically self-sufficient. There are no gendered expectations that one will be the provider and the other will be financially dependent. Even couples intending to have and parent children do not consider a traditional split of provider and mother/homemaker. Although only 9 of the 30 couples earn equal incomes and several of the couples could live on the salary of one provider, they have only done so for time-limited specific reasons as explained below.

For the first nine years of her partnership, Lou (Couple 24) supported Ann and their six children. They decided on that arrangement only after realizing the cost of day care was more than Ann’s earnings. Although always open for renegotiation, Ann wanted to be the mother/homemaker until all of the children were in school. One of the partners in couples 5, 6, 19, 23, 27, and 28 temporarily carried more financial and other responsibility while her partner furthered her education. Couples 1, 2, 3, 10, 11, and 12 took turns helping each other earn degrees. One of the partners in couples 7, 9, 13, 14, 17, and 25 offered whatever support was required to help her partner become self-employed. Wilma (Couple 28) stayed home with the twins for one year, a difficult experience in terms of being dependent on June, but a rewarding experience in terms of the boys. Sections of my interview with June and Wilma illustrate the struggle of one lesbian woman being dependent on her partner.

Wilma: The provider role. Well, I mean it's interesting. I didn't work for about a year when we moved to Arkansas. I got to stay home with the boys. And oh god, did that drive me insane. I could not believe that I was living off of her money. I am like, not comfortable in this place. You know, it makes me really vulnerable. I don't believe in it. I don't believe you can be equal. I mean, it all looks good on paper, but the bottom line is, I don't feel equal. And I don't feel safe here and this is crazy! And then I was like, on the other hand . . . "I'm at home, I don't have to work. June would never do anything to hurt me. Be real." And I was able to let that go. Long term? It would be harder, I guess, I don't know.

Betty: How did you make the decision? To stay home?

June: Part of it was simple, I had gotten a job. And she hadn't.

Wilma: Yeah, but I wanted to. And June would . . . They'd just turned three. I stayed home and worked part time for the next year and a half.

June: And saved us . . . there's always a sizable day care cost and early on in the boys' lives, it was almost a toss-up as to whether it was really worth it for Wilma's salary.

Wilma: It was great. And so in that way, once you have that trust established, you know, for me, then I could let it go. And the truth is, hey, I make less money, so it makes sense for me to be the one not working. But the truth is, June had no interest in staying at home with the boys whatsoever. Occasionally I'd say, "gosh June, I'm feeling really guilty, you know. Are you sure you don't want me to go out there and get that job?" And she's like, "Honey, no. If you want to be at home, that's fine." It works for us. It makes sense for the family, that's fine. And she would never want to and I probably wouldn't have been as comfortable with her not working. I would have said, "get out."

The other six women currently parenting children (Couples 28, 29, 30) were never married and had prepared themselves educationally and occupationally to be self-sufficient. Brenda (Couple 26) also never anticipated marriage and likewise prepared herself for self-sufficiency; her partner, Jean, married in college, divorced two years later and continued preparing herself professionally. In general, the women in Group C closely resemble the women in Group A, unless they married directly out of high school.

Although lesbian women financially provide for children or others unable to provide for themselves, the idea of providing for adults who can provide for themselves is an atypical response that would require strong justification. Any deviation from a position of self-sufficiency breaks what Hall and Gregory (1991) refer to as a “dependency taboo” (p. 127). Although these lesbians are willing to help or fully support their partner financially when necessary, they never picture themselves as being financially dependent. Given strong statements about financial independence, the reader may wonder why so many of these couples combine their incomes and resources. With 23 out of the 30 couples pooling their money it is essential to explore how these couples manage their money.

Distributive Justice

Analyzing equality in lesbian partnerships invites an exploration into how the women in this study understand and practice norms of distributive justice. Distributive justice is based on “the fairness of the distribution of the conditions and goods that affect individual well-being” (Deutsch, 1985, p. 1). Although distributive justice has been analyzed based on other disbursement values (see Sampson, 1975; Reis, 1984; Deutsch, 1985), this discussion focuses on the three most common theories of distributive justice: equity, equality, and need. In this chapter, I discuss each of the value-ideals of distributive justice followed by a consideration of how these women have practiced distributive justice.

Equity Theory

The equity norm (Adams, 1965; Homans, 1961; Lerner, 1980; Walster, Walster & Berscheid, 1978) insists that a person receives allocations in a relationship in proportion to the magnitude of their contributions. Therefore, according to the equity norm if one of the women, Dell (Couple 1), contributes her earned income of \$60,000 to their joint account while her partner, Martha, contributes her earned income of \$40,000, then, Dell is entitled to a greater proportion of allocations in their relationship. Proponents of equity theory suggest that if Dell does not receive more allocations than Martha she is being treated inequitably.

Concerned about distributive injustice in a relationship, Homans (1961) suggests that if a person, Dell, gets less than her contribution, she will be deprived or victimized, leading to some degree of anger, and will express hostility to the one, Martha, who caused the injustice. He also suggests the person who benefitted, Martha, will feel some degree of guilt and increase what she gives to Dell. The equity principle of distributive justice based on proportion of contribution is easily understood in terms of dollars but infinitely more difficult when the input is qualitative, as in housework or childcare, rather than quantitative.

Adams consistently substituted the term inequity for distributive injustice “to emphasize equity theory’s focus on exchange relations” (Deutsch, 1985, p. 11). Blending cognitive dissonance theory with equity theory, Adams argued the presence of inequity creates a tension proportional to the level of the inequity, motivating the person to eliminate or reduce the tension. Adams offered four ways of reducing inequity:

- (1) action to alter the value of any of the four items in the equity formula (own outcome, own input, other’s outcome, or other’s input);
- (2) distorting one’s perceptions so as to alter the perceived value of any of the four items in the equity formula;
- (3) leaving the field by quitting the relationship . . .
- (4) changing the object of one’s comparison so that one compares oneself with someone whose ratio of outcome to input is more similar to one’s own than is the case for the inequitable comparison (Deutsch, 1985, p. 13).

Adams’ ways of reducing inequity imply that these measures occur within each actor’s mind rather than being resolved through the couple’s interaction. He does not place value on the couple's skills of negotiation and bargaining. Deutsch (1985) declared the omission of interactional processes in exchange relationships a serious weakness in equity theory (p. 25). In his second way of reducing inequity, Adams claimed that a person might distort their perceived value. Dell could decide the extra \$20,000 she contributes comes from her employment in a male-dominated

field; therefore, she deserves no more reward value than the amount contributed by Martha, whose wages are depressed from working in a female-dominated profession. Likewise, Martha might use Adams' fourth method to justify her lesser contribution by thinking that her \$40,000 is fair because it is greater than other women in her field.

Walster, Walster, and Berscheid (1978) offered four interlocking propositions as a summary of equity theory:

Proposition I: Individuals will try to maximize their outcomes (where outcomes equal rewards minus costs).

Proposition II: Groups can maximize collective reward by evolving accepted systems for "equitably" apportioning rewards and costs among members. Thus, members will evolve such systems of equity and will attempt to induce members to accept and adhere to these systems.

Proposition III: When individuals find themselves participating in inequitable relationships, they become distressed. The more inequitable the relationship, the more distress individuals feel.

Proposition IV: Individuals who discover they are in an inequitable relationship attempt to eliminate their distress by restoring equity. The greater the inequity that exists, the more distress they feel, and the harder they try to restore equity (Deutsch, 1985, p. 15).

According to Deutsch the first two propositions mean that people are intrinsically asocial but rational, creating "a society with enforceable rules of equity, which curb the expression of their selfish tendencies in order to maximize the collective good" (p. 16). Although Walster et al. describe how individuals resolve inequity in a slightly different manner than Adams suggested, the implication is that inequity must be resolved to maintain productive relationships.

Analyzing the couples in this study using the propositions of equity theory provokes several questions. Why would a couple like Dell and Martha (Couple 1) pool or combine their incomes? Equity would easily be achieved by splitting their expenses 50-50, then banking the remaining disproportionate amounts in their own accounts. Dell and Martha are not anomalies in this study; in fact, 23 out of the 30

couples pool their incomes (see Table 2a, 2b, 2c). Only six of the 23 couples pooling their incomes earn approximately the same incomes. Thus, according to equity theory, 17 of these couples are struggling to achieve equity when other financial arrangements would resolve their equity concerns.

Group A - Pooling Couples

One might expect from an equity perspective that Group A, the married-free, child-free women would be the least likely couples to pool their incomes. Their financial situations are not being complicated with alimony, child support, or the expenses of raising children. Yet, ten out of the twelve couples in Group A pool their incomes. They consider their money “our money.” Couples 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 started pooling their money at the beginning of their partnership when they started living together. During their interviews, each of the couples was very careful to describe any exceptions to pooling and the timing of when they actually started pooling. Dell (Couple 1) described a retirement annuity from one year of teaching which is not pooled simply because she has not changed the beneficiary; however, through her estate planning it would belong to Martha anyway. Florence and Daphne (Couple 3), who went to college together, waited until they established a household before pooling their money. Diane and Gertie (Couple 5) explained that “combining their incomes into one checking account with both names on the checks is one way of being out.” They consider “everything community property,” and they claimed that “this is a true partnership.”

Carson and Carmen (Couple 6) maintain separate checking accounts although they both view the practice as a mere technicality. As described in their partnership snapshot, Carson (Couple 6) has not been able to work since about the fifth year of their twenty-five-year partnership. Carmen supported both of them for approximately four years until Carson was able to qualify for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and food stamps. When Carson qualified for assistance they were forced to separate their finances. When I asked Carmen if she resented supporting Carson during their four years without benefits, Carmen remarked that it was much

easier to work and support them than be the one experiencing the hell of mental illness. When her father died, Carson inherited money, which helped them considerably. I asked Carson if she ever felt as if this inherited money was hers exclusively.

Carson: No. I was more than willing to share.

Carmen: We bought things and put a large down-payment on the house. I knew exactly how much money I could afford to borrow and pay on every month. Her SSI pays half the mortgage payment. Plus, they give her a set amount for utilities and things like that. So she's paying half the utilities and half the rent. And then she gets food stamps. So it works out great.

For Spin and Marteen (Couple 11), who started pooling money at the beginning of their relationship, finances became more complicated with Spin's veterinary practice.

Spin: It's not that simple anymore. In the very beginning, once we made the decision to live together, we were together, not separate trying to divide out a buck here and a buck there. She was much more interested in making sure things were paid and keeping the checkbook.

Marteen: That's why she has a secretary for her practice.

Spin: So she takes care of it. And she does a good job at it. And she has done it ever since we've been together. We pay our bills first. Right before you came she was up there paying the bills. My secretary is my other budget keeper. She knows my whole life. If she were not the kind of person she was, she could really take advantage of me but she doesn't. She knows exactly where our money goes, takes care of the office, writes the checks, I sign them and we talk about it. I ask if I can have this. The office doesn't make a lot of profit. It goes out, I put it right back in.

Marteen: She pays her secretary well.

Spin: I don't have a big practice. I make a lot of money; but I'm paying a lot of [vet school] debts.

Betty: So how do you determine what goes into your personal accounts?

Marteen: We have a set amount. When I get paid I write a check out of that to the community account. Then we each have our own money out of whatever is left over. The secretary writes Spin a check. So I pay the household expenses out of that.

Betty: So how do you know what proportion is your money and her money?

Spin: We decided based on what she can afford and what I can afford. So I pay more proportionately.

Marteen: You know that it's real interesting. When I was making more money than she was, there was never a problem. When it started getting more even, there was never a problem. And when she started making a lot more money, it hasn't been a problem. It seems in our relationship, "if you need any money and I have it, it's yours." It just goes back and forth. It's our money. It's in my account only for convenience sake.

Spin: Just because I make more money doesn't make me a better person than she is or a more powerful person.

Spin and Marteen (Couple 11) essentially reverse the equity principles. Since Spin's income at this point in their relationship is much greater than Marteen's, she contributes more to the household expenses. However, Spin does not expect more reward in return for her disproportionate contribution.

Although Katie (Couple 12) has finished her medical degree, she earns less as a research physician than Anna. So Anna repeats the pattern of expecting and paying more because she earns more of the couple's income. This segment of their dialogue explains their thoughts about pooling and paying for a medical school education.

Anna: We've had joint accounts almost from the beginning. When we first got together we kept things separate. We'd write down, and we'd split everything. But after we bought our first house, we opened joint accounts and both put money into that.

Betty: You pool your resources?

Anna: Yes, all our money now is pooled.

Katie: It is pretty much intertwined. We each have separate checking

accounts that we've maintained ever since first starting working for the government. But for the most part, all our long-term investment type things are all joint.

Anna: I may actually pay for more things because I make more money. I know that was an issue for Katie when she was in med school, although I don't think I ever brought it up.

Katie: You didn't ever bring it up. You were always really super about that. It was an issue for me because I didn't feel like I was contributing my half.

Anna: Because we always had before, we both worked and we were the same pay grade and so we did everything the same. She just felt real bad that she wasn't able to contribute, but also because the money was going out for school. Med school is not cheap. But you know, I didn't look at it like I was doing her a favor or anything. I mean this was just, this was normal. If we were married or something it would be, I mean, you pool your money and you, okay, I'm quote, unquote, putting her through school, but she would do the same for me if I wanted to do that.

Group A - Non-Pooling Couples

In Group A there are two couples who do not pool their incomes. Lisa and Lynn, both professors, earn more than \$60,000 and \$50,000 respectively. Lisa and Lynn have a proportional mortgage 65/35 payment based on their income; all other expenses are split 50-50. They maintain separate checking accounts and separate investments. Lisa, who has a substantial trust fund, recently purchased a house at the beach for them. Lisa explained, "Money has never been an issue for us." Lynn talked about how being frugal has helped her achieve a strong sense of financial security.

Mary and Elma (Couple 7) have been very supportive of each other financially without pooling their incomes. They have a house account called the "us account" from which they pay all the household expenses and everything they do together. They have always had a 50-50 arrangement except when Mary was establishing her business. During that time Elma carried more than her financial

share until Mary's business became profitable; however, now they are back in balance. Although they have minimal amounts of money in their separate checking accounts, all of their assets are jointly owned.

Group B - Pooling Couples

Ten out of the eleven couples in Group B pool their incomes. Couples 13, 15, 16, 17, 19, and 22 pooled their money from the beginning without any problems. For some of the women their prior relationships influenced their ideas about pooling. Casey's (Couple 14) previous relationships influenced her way of handling money.

Sierra: The money's pooled. We take turns, for a year at a time, paying all the bills.

Casey: It eliminates dependency one on the other. That way each party still has an awareness of what's going on out there. And what are the bills at the house and how you make decisions about purchasing this and that. I don't want any dependency, that happened in my past relationships.

Betsy and Maggie (Couple 18) struggled for several years before Betsy would agree to pooling their money. Maggie, who earns more than \$60,000, always felt it was unfair to Betsy that they not pool their incomes. Betsy, who earns one-third of Maggie's income, strongly felt she would be using her. Maggie, who would definitely be in an inequitable situation, explains:

Maggie: Well, for a number of years, old hard head over there insisted that all the bills be split 50-50. So I became the wealthiest woman in the world with my savings.

Betty: Because you were making a lot more money.

Maggie: Yes. She did not want to combine.

Betsy: Then my ministry hit a financial bump in the road. For four or five months, I didn't get paid. And so after the second month, my savings was eaten up. I said, "Maggie, we need to look at a different way of doing this. Because I can't pull my weight." And so Maggie just figured up a budget and said, "this is how we'll do it." And we did. And then at the end of the five months, we are just doing so well with the arrangements we decided to keep it this way.

Maggie: We budget all the ordinary household expenses and an allowance for ourselves out of my pay. And then out of Betsy's we do major things, vacations, other common expenses. You know, like if the dog gets sick. You can't afford that out of your allowance.

Extenuating circumstances may dictate whether or not a couple pools their income. Sally and Liz (Couple 20) tried maintaining separate checking accounts in the beginning of their relationship, but they felt it was too complicated with the children. Sadie and Jackie (Couple 21) had the opposite experience of Sally and Liz. Because issues surrounding the children's Social Security made it too complicated, they decided not to pool their money until Sadie's children were grown.

Group B - One Non-Pooling Couple

Teresa and Chris (Couple 23) from Group B have had economic disparities similar to Lisa and Lynn (Couple 4). Chris has always earned more income than Teresa, but she has always been the one pushing to pool their money.

Betty: How do you manage money in this partnership?

Teresa: I'd say we try to be 50-50. I'm sometimes shorter than 50-50.

Chris: Never.

Teresa: No! That's one thing that I don't want, to take advantage of her. I never have. Never would.

Chris: Teresa has always insisted, and I think it's probably because of the 'take advantage' thing, that we keep our finances separate. And I've always said, this is stupid. Just pool them. I don't care. And it never works. She won't do it.

Teresa: My relationships throughout my life with other women, "this is yours, that's mine, keep your god damned hands off." And especially knowing that Chris has more money than I have, that's why I don't say "let's put it together." Because, no, that's hers. It's just, it may come from being independent.

Chris: The only thing, we really do share completely however, are the very large expenses. Like we both own this house.

Betty: Both bought this house?

Chris: Yeah. And we both own the house that her mother and stepfather live in, mutually together. Both. So we're, when it comes to the humongous things, we share. Yeah.

Teresa: It's the little things.

Chris: It's the little things like who's going to get the groceries? "Here, take 10 dollars." "I don't want 10 dollars, Teresa." Or "here's my half of this." "I don't want it."

Betty: If you were to inherit money, would it belong to one of you or both of you?

Teresa: Both of us.

Chris: Both of us.

Betty: Why is that so different?

Chris: Because it's given money, not money either one of us earned. I have inherited money. The issue has arisen. And it's ours.

Betty: And that's okay?

Teresa: That's okay.

Betty: Because it's not earned money.

Chris: Isn't it neat? I like it. It's like found money or something.

Betty: So you can give her inherited money but you can't give . . . so if you won the lottery, you could give it to her.

Chris: And she'd be happy to take it.

Group C - Pooling Couples

Three out of the seven couples currently raising children pool their money. Without the twins, June and Wilma (Couple 28) would fit in Group A, since they became a couple in college. They have always pooled their money.

Betty: Have you all pooled your money from the beginning?

June: Oh yeah. Because we couldn't help it. We didn't have enough money individually to open a checking account. We had to put it together.

Wilma: Today, I would never have a joint account with anyone, ever again. When I think about getting involved with someone else, it's so hard because the one person I've been involved with, I've known forever. A lot of trust issues weren't there. I knew her already, inside and out. We first pooled our money to survive. I would have done that with anybody. She took her \$200, I took my \$200 and we found a place to live for \$200. That was it. We got ten checks a month. And it was very practical at that time.

Before Andra and Elizabeth (Couple 29) had children they split everything 50-50.

Elizabeth: Once we got the kids, and bought the house, there wasn't any use to split it, I mean it was silly doing it that way. But I like keeping accounts better than she does. I do the bills; but we make the financial decisions together.

Andra: When we started with our son and the house, all the money went together. We both kept checking accounts of our own open. We both felt like we wanted to be able to buy what we wanted. I think the biggest thing was to be able to buy her a present that she didn't know about. So we each have these separate accounts still, which we keep up with, but they don't have much money in them anymore.

Meg and Kay (Couple 27) pooled their money from the beginning. Meg explained that even though Kay had trouble adjusting emotionally to their relationship she was clear financially.

Meg: When I moved in with Kay, she had a lot of equity in her house. So the first thing she did was change the deed of her house over to both of our names. Her attorney told her not to do it. And she said, "I want to anyway." And he said, "Well if you do this, I want you to sign a statement acknowledging that I advised you not to do it; it's a bad idea." She did it anyway.

Group C - Non-Pooling Couples

Four out of the seven couples with children do not pool their incomes even

though three of the four earn the same amount of money. Lou and Ann (Couple 24) keep their checking accounts separate even though their savings account and investments are joint. During the early years of their relationship, Lou worked two jobs, while Ann took care of the children and managed the money. Lou's retirement and social security, which is one-third the amount of money she normally earned, equals Ann's current salary. Both women have separate credit cards that they manage. Both names are on every account in case something happens to either of them. Both names are on the deed to the house which they own. They split the monthly expenses 50-50.

Jenny and Lucy (Couple 25) do not pool their income. Each one has certain bills to pay. Lucy owns their house so she makes the house payment. Jenny, in addition to building a business, has been consistently saving for retirement an amount equal to Lucy's house payment. They split most of the other expenses, including expenses for the boys. Lucy prefers this arrangement even though she is able to save very little money each month. She said, "After the ordeal of being married, I don't hand my paycheck to anybody." Jenny quickly followed with, "I like knowing that I can take care of myself and not depend on anybody else."

Brenda and Jean (Couple 26) have never pooled their money. With the combined responsibilities of two children, managing two medical practices, and maintaining a home in the city and a lake home, they find it easier to divide bills 50-50 and pay them. According to Brenda, "We purchase many things together; however, we don't ask each other before making purchases unless they are very large." Each is the beneficiary on everything the other owns. As they get older they see themselves pooling their money.

Directly opposite to Brenda and Jean, Babs and Rae (Couple 30) started their relationship pooling their money. Then Rae explained, "I wasn't comfortable with that, because I felt I wanted to feel freer in spending money. I didn't feel free to spend what we had without accounting to her for it." Together, they have a house account for all joint expenses and a college fund for their daughter, but they have

separate checking accounts and separate investments.

Equity Theory Fails to Explain Lesbian Couples

Analyzing these couples using equity theory has not worked. Rather than expect more reward value for the amount they input, they expect less. The equity term, proportion, means that a person receives allocations in a relationship in proportion to the amount of his or her contributions. To the women in the study, proportion has a different meaning. It means the more you have, the more you should contribute without gain.

Equality Theory

Following an equality norm of distributive justice means receiving equal allocations without considering the proportion of contributions (Deutsch, 1975; Sampson, 1975). Several researchers have suggested that people prefer the equality norm (Allison, McQueen, & Schaerfl, 1992; Harris & Joyce, 1980; Messick & Schell, 1992). Psychological researchers Mikula (1980) and Schwinger (1980) both demonstrated that some people advocate equality even when they could equitably justify taking a greater share. Mnookin and Ross (1995) suggested that an equality norm avoids the potential conflictual process of evaluating differences in contributions. According to Deutsch (1985) equality should be the preferred distributive norm when the goal is social harmony. He claims that equity undermines social relations by insisting that people do not have the same value (p. 41).

Applying the norm of equality to these couples is not a simple matter. First, I will consider the seven couples who do not pool their incomes. Three of the seven couples earn approximately the same incomes (Couples 24, 25, and 30). Lou and Ann (Couple 24) split the household expenses 50-50; therefore they have equal amounts left to manage. In the case of Jenny and Lucy (Couple 25), each one pays certain expenses and splits the expenses for the two boys, leaving them with close to the same amount for themselves. Babs and Rae (Couple 30) contribute equally and have equal small amounts left for their personal discretion. The other four non-pooling

couples do not earn the same amount of income. Mary and Elma (Couple 70) contribute 50-50 but have disproportionate amounts remaining. Lisa and Lynn (Couple 4) contribute disproportionately to their mortgage so that their discretionary amount is about equal. Brenda and Jean (Couple 26) and Teresa and Chris (Couple 23) contribute 50-50 to the expenses but have unequal discretionary amounts. Thus, out of these seven couples, four have approximately equal amounts of remaining income.

Although it would seem straightforward to apply the norm of equality to the 23 couples who pool their incomes, it is not. If, after they paid their expenses, they split the remaining amount 50-50, it would be easy to say they follow the norm of equality. Instead, after paying all of their expenses they negotiate how they will disburse the remaining amount. If they have separate checking accounts, and most do not, they maintain separate accounts to buy each other presents without the other knowing. All of their income and investments are joint property. The three couples who have children and who pool their incomes have minimal discretionary funds available after taking care of the children's needs. According to equality theory not only would the parents split the remaining income, it would be divided equally among all members of the family group. This, however, is not the practice of any of the families. None of the pooling couples divides discretionary dollars according to the equality norm.

Need Theory

Deutsch (1985), who made the claim that equality should be the norm if enjoyable social relations or social harmony is the goal, also stressed that when the goal in close relations is personal development and personal welfare then "need" should be the dominant principle of distributive justice (p. 42). In Deutsch's discussion of the ambiguities implied in the need principle, his examples of need tend to be more focused on urgent or extreme need. Clark and Chrisman (1994) after reviewing the confusing literature on resource allocation in intimate relationships concluded that most people believe the ideal norm for intimate relationships is

need-based (p. 67).

According to Clark, Mills, and Powell (1986), people who are in intimate relationships (family, friends, romantic partners) are in “communal relationships” in contrast to strangers, acquaintances, and business associates who form “exchange relationships” (p. 334). Clark and her colleagues demonstrated that in communal relationships “people are more responsive to one another’s needs”; “have been observed to help the other person more and be more responsive to the other’s sadness”; “show greater improvement in mood after having helped the other”; and “react more positively to the other’s expression of emotions than do members of exchange relationships” (Clark & Chrisman, 1994, p. 72). They summarized that “mutual responsibility for needs as they arise is the ideal for intimate relationships” (Clark & Chrisman, 1994, p. 75).

Hays (1985) adds further clarification to the idea of mutual responsibility. In his studies, he shows that costs do not negatively predict relationship success. He argues that rewards plus the costs of benefiting the other is a better predictor of relationship satisfaction. Clark and Chrisman (1994) declare that “the stronger a communal relationship, the greater the costs one will incur to meet the other’s needs without expecting specific repayment” (p. 79). However, when allocation according to need cannot be reciprocated by both partners, then the norm of need highlights the different levels of dependency which creates tension in the relationship (Mikula, 1980). Taylor and Una (Couple 16) are a clear example of Mikula’s point. They have always combined their incomes and operated under a need norm. Yet, since Una’s accident rendered her unable to generate income, she has felt dependent in a way previously unexperienced in their partnership. She tearfully stated that being dependent on Taylor and watching her work so hard to support them is very disturbing to her and unfair to Taylor. Some of the same dependent feeling arose for Katie (Couple 12) during her years in medical school with Anna paying their expenses; however, the difference was that Katie knew she would eventually restore the balance.

One way of evaluating how the 23 couples who pool their incomes operate on a norm of need is to examine how they make financial decisions. I specifically explored their decision-making processes. Other researchers may not be comfortable exploring financial expenditures based on need, but, as an experienced therapist, I felt I could sense resistance or anxiety and reframe the conversation quickly if necessary. Following a feminist research practice of establishing co-researcher relationships with participants provided a freedom to explore difficult areas (Oakley, 1981). I knew the couples would resist or stop the probing if the conversation became uncomfortable.

After mentioning common themes about financial decision-making, I have provided selections from the interviews. Most of the couples combining or pooling their incomes give each other freedom to make minor purchases without discussion. However, when it comes to major purchases, in most cases, these decisions are carefully made together.

Florence (Couple 3): If it's a major purchase or something like that, it's definitely done together. Now something minor . . . if I go out to the store here and I want something, I just take the checkbook and go get it. And vice versa. If she wants something, the same thing. I mean if it's something minor.

Liz (Couple 20): She figures out what bills need to be paid, when, and all that kind of stuff. She's been the money manager. I am the kind of person that if I have ten dollars in my pocket, I'll spend it and then get the credit card out. And she's much more disciplined about stuff like that. She does the bulk of the money management. Now if there are significant decisions, about spending larger amounts of money, we generally do those kinds of things together. Although there are often things of the household that something will happen while I'm at work and she'll just make the decision about whatever it is that needs to be done. I just don't invest much energy in that direction in terms of worrying about that stuff. I've come to really trust her sense about that.

After discussing what one partner may want even if it is something the other has no interest in, if the money is available, they encourage the person to buy what they want.

Courtney (Couple 13): There are things that Eva would rather spend money on, that would be high priority for her and they would be very different than what I would spend money on, that would be high priority. I think we recognize that in each other and it's like if Eva wants to spend money on something that I don't consider important. Well if we have it, go ahead fine; but we have more resources now than either one of us has ever had before, you know, we are not as constrained. It's not as though we have an allowance and it's not like we feel that either one of us needs a lot. We probably don't spend as much money now as we did before. We just don't need that much.

Eva: We talk about decisions to buy things or a decision to change something in our lives. . . whether it's Courtney wants to do something or I want to do something or together we want to consider something. We talk about all of it . . . but we are not overly big in processing . . . we process to the point that we need to but it may seem pretty impulsive to some people from the outside.

Wanting to know how couples arrived at consensus about financial decisions, I asked Spin and Marteen this hypothetical situation.

Betty: Let me give you a hypothetical situation. Have you ever had a time when Marteen goes out and spends \$200 taking a meditation workshop? And you don't endorse this meditation workshop. It's important, but you feel \$200 is a lot of money for meditation.

Spin: We had that experience, almost verbatim. She spends \$600 for meditation (laughing). I think \$600 for meditation is ok. Okay, this is her chosen field. This is important to her. This is for her growth. I can do no less than when I spent \$1,000 to learn how acupuncture works on canine arthritis. So fair is fair. You know, if the money is there I don't care how she spends it. If the money is in savings and we have to draw it out, we have to think about whether to do it or not to do it. How are we going to put it back--we have to talk about that. Once we talk about it, I have some anxiety at times about it--I'm not as close to the money situation as she is so I sometimes panic, get anxious, frustrated and angry about suddenly we are down x-amount of money. So I blow up, we talk about it and it gets better. So I have to make a decision about if I'm going to get more involved in the process than I am. I realized that's not where I am, so I shut up and deal with it. I trust it. If she wants to do it and the money is there or if I want to do it and the money is there, we do it. We've always had money. We've always had debt.

Another theme about financial decision-making is often one person considered a particular decision more important; if so, that person's preferences were given more consideration. Andra and Elizabeth describe how they decided about purchasing a new furnace:

Andra (Couple 29): I really kind of wanted to go with oil and keep oil and yet, no, I wanted to go with gas, and she wanted to keep oil. We kind of gather information from our own sources, or do our own research. Bring it to each other, like I heard this, this person told me this, and we kind of

Elizabeth: Yeah, it was much more important to her than it was to me.

Andra: We both bring information, and are pretty good at listening, then we sit with it. This needs to be done this month, but we don't feel good about the decision yet, so we are waiting until we come to a decision we both feel really good about. Not just one we can live with.

I have shown how these women practice distributive justice. Three couples who earn disproportionate amounts of income follow a modified equity principle by keeping everything separate and paying for joint responsibilities 50-50. Four couples practice an equality norm by contributing disproportionately, then, after the expenses are paid, splitting the remainder 50-50. While the majority (23) of the couples currently follow a norm of need, often this practice followed earlier attempts at equity or equality. Babs and Rae (Couple 30) are an example of a couple who changed from a need-based form of fairness back to a norm of equality.

CHAPTER SIX

The Practice of Power

Introduction

Lesbian women in their private lives do not have to accommodate the interests and desires of men; therefore, the practice of men's ascendancy over women--embedded in religious doctrine and practice, the images of mass media, the wage and occupational structure, and heterosexual family life--can cease at the lesbian door (Connell 1987, p. 184). The couples in this study have opened their private doors by discussing their practice of power relations. Power, defined "as the control of resources that provide the power-holder with the potential for exercising influence, that is, for altering the behavior of another" (Howard, Blumstein, and Schwartz, 1986, p. 102), does not seem to name the expression of power found in these relationships. Defining power as potential influence implies a balance of power or dominance structure for relationships; instead, the participants describe a power not focused on ascendancy.

Before exploring the possibility that lesbians in long-term partnerships practice a different paradigm of power, and what that might encompass, it is necessary to review and examine the primary sources of masculine power and privilege in marriage that might translate into a lesbian power structure of dominance. In Chapter Four, I showed how lesbian partnerships neutralize the financial elements of masculine power. First, both women maintain an economic self-sufficiency that would allow them to provide for themselves if the relationship ends. Second, these lesbian couples do not base decisions on one woman's career or work. Third, opportunities to improve one's education, change jobs or professions, or venture into self-employment are goals supported by both partners. Fourth, the distributive justice principle of need dictates financial decisions.

Two financially related, though unpaid, areas where masculine power and privilege could translate into lesbian partnerships are housework and child care. For the past twenty years research has shown that housework and child care are

disproportionately the responsibilities of women; so how do two women who are partners determine who does the unpaid work?

Housework

There are working lesbians who do not enjoy doing housework any more than many working wives. Several couples discussed how they have lowered their standards of housekeeping quality to reduce their amount of unpaid labor. Okin (1989) stated that “a husband’s income and job prestige are inversely related to his involvement in household chores, unless his wife is employed in a similarly high-paid and prestigious job” (p. 153). For these lesbian couples differences in income and status exist; however, there is no correlating evidence suggesting less involvement in the unpaid work. Notice in the following excerpts how couples talk about lowering their standards and accommodating their differences based on likes and dislikes rather than income and status.

Spin and Marteen (Couple 11)

Spin: When I started going with her, she used a clean towel every day. I said “you’re crazy, I’m not changing my towel every day and don’t you touch it.”

Marteen: So we had a lot of controversy about that.

Spin: She had to get scummier and I had to get cleaner. She does a lot of outside stuff and I do more of the inside things. She’s not very good at cooking; I’m better at it. And I hate washing dishes and she loves it.

Irene and Sas (Couple 10)

Irene: I do the dishes. She does the vacuuming. I would say most tasks are divided either by whoever wants to do it, does it, or whoever least hates it. Or whoever hates it the least, gets to do it. I do the big meals. She’ll do some of the everyday stuff, not often though when she’s in school. Last night I made bean soup. I’ll fix things where there’ll be lots of leftovers. So we trade off. We both cook.

Mary and Elma (Couple 7)

Betty: How do you manage household tasks?

Mary: Grudgingly.

Elma: We do them because they're there.

Mary: And I'm very thankful when Elma does things, and she's very thankful when I do things.

Betty: You split up the work or . . . ?

Elma: I would say so. It's not something we overtly talk about. But it was like, "how are we going to clean this house for the interview?" So because I had the time, I did it. Mary does the wash because she has to do some wash for work; so she grabs some stuff and does it. Lately she's done the meals more than I have. She likes to cook.

Mary: I enjoy cooking, when I can. But then we eat, sometimes, cheese and crackers.

Elma: It's like, we knew the garbage had to go to the dump today, so I took it there. I don't think we say, "okay, this is Mary's job, and this is Elma's job," you know. I do most of the outside work, because Mary doesn't have the time.

Mary: And I don't like it!

Eva and Courtney (Couple 13)

Betty: How do you manage the household tasks?

Eva: Whoever has time.

Courtney: It really is whoever has time. You like to do gardening kinds of things, so you'll choose to do that more than I choose it. However, if we have a project, I can really get into doing like major landscaping kinds of projects and we've done those. Yet, if it's cleaning the house or washing the dishes or cooking a meal, it's whoever has the time to do it. I enjoy taking a break to do things that are more physical because sitting in front of the computer and stuff like that gets to be real tiring.

Work and higher educational requirements often force decisions about household responsibilities to be based more on scheduling needs than personal preferences. Self-employment, especially in a home-office arrangement, often requires negotiations to make sure that household work responsibilities remain shared activities. When one partner is retired and the other is working, there is a

natural tendency for the one with more free time to do more of the unpaid work. Sally is retired and Liz has an administrative position.

Liz: I enjoy the cooking more.

Sally: She's more creative with the cooking.

Liz: But time-wise, I mean, often I will come home from work at five, five-thirty, and she will have thought about dinner and will be half-way through the preparation of it. So I will pitch in and help finish the meal. Like if we're doing stir-fry, then usually she'll say "you want to season the stir-fry?" But she's done all the prep work kind of thing. Then I will often take more responsibility for the clean-up of the dishes.

Sally: But sometimes she'll come home and I haven't fixed anything. One of us will say, "What do you want to eat?" The other often says, "Let's go out to eat." It's never, I never get any pressure from her one way or another. She doesn't care what I do or what I don't do.

Rarely did I find the sharing of housework a major issue for these couples. It is possible that in their earlier years as a couple controversies arose that have long been resolved. However, when I asked couples to describe conflicts they had early in their relationship over housework, the only battles remembered were about degrees of cleanliness. Irene (Couple 10) echoes the feelings expressed by most of the participants about sharing housework:

If there's ever a sense where one feels that "I'm doing more of something and she's not doing her share," or vice-versa, we say something. I guess it is always assumed that we would both feel like we were not being taken advantage of. That we were both giving and getting equally.

Most of the couples have consciously taken steps to reduce the amount of housework required for either of them. Ten (33%) of the couples hire weekly or biweekly household help. Many of the couples further reduce household responsibilities by eating out frequently, especially evenings, when neither one feels like cooking. However, this pattern varies depending on income, whether the couples live in an urban or rural area, scheduling conflicts, the quality of their

relationship, and other factors.

Child Care

Seven couples are currently raising children. Lou and Ann (Couple 24) are raising Ann's grandson whom Ann adopted when he was 18 months old. Jenny and Lucy (Couple 25) adopted Lucy's nephews when the boys were six and eight years old. Brenda and Jean (Couple 26) adopted an infant daughter and five years later they adopted a second infant daughter. Meg and Kay (Couple 27) started parenting together with Meg's three-year-old daughter, then Kay had a son by alternative insemination, and six years later they adopted an infant daughter. June and Wilma (Couple 28) have twin boys from June's alternative insemination. Andra and Elizabeth (Couple 29) adopted an infant son and five years later adopted an infant daughter. Babs and Rae (Couple 30) had a daughter by Rae's alternative insemination.

All seven couples center their lives around their shared children. Lou, who is retired, is the only parent not working full-time. The thirteen working parents arrange their schedules as much as possible to accommodate the children. For example, Elizabeth takes care of the morning routine with the children during the week before she goes to work. Andra brings the children home from school and takes care of them until Elizabeth gets home from work in the evening. Then together they take care of them until bedtime.

Brenda and Jean have had in-home child care during the week since the children were infants. Jean limits the amount of time she invests in her highly successful career so she can spend a few extra hours with their two-year-old. In the evening they devote their time and energy to the girls. On weekends they take the children to their lake home or they are involved in child-related activities. Brenda states the priority of caring for the children quite clearly:

All of our friends are very involved with our children. Another couple in this study are godmothers to our children. Two of our other good friends are sort of quasi-godmothers. They take care of the kids once every two weeks for us so we can go out. They are very involved and interested in our children. We have come to realize that we cannot be

friends with people who are not interested in children and not willing to be involved with children.

At the time of my interview with Meg and Kay, their two-year-old daughter, Beth, was still not sleeping through the night. It was obvious that both Meg and Kay were drained. They explained that working and taking care of the children took all of their time and energy. Their words explain the situation quite dramatically.

Betty: How do you manage household tasks?

Meg: Everybody works really hard until we're totally exhausted and then we drop into bed exhausted and then we get up and work some more. We both do everything. We both, well, there are some things Kay does better than I do. And so she just naturally does those things. And there are some things I do, it just works out. Not like when I was married. I was supposed to do all the menial, girl things, while he sat and watched football and drank beer. With Kay you can bet, if I'm in the kitchen cooking, she is somewhere else doing something with the children or she's at the grocery store, or she's doing the laundry or she's fixing something.

Betty: So you don't divide . . . ?

Meg: There is kind of a natural division, not that we've ever discussed it.

Kay: Yeah, there is a division that's worked itself out, but the cooking got divided chiefly because of your schedule.

Meg: I get home earlier in the evening.

Kay: She goes to work earlier and comes home earlier, so she always cooks.

Meg: And I like to cook. It's not a problem to me. I like to cook, I also like to eat the things I cook.

Kay: We did house cleaning, well, I think in recent years that's more fallen on you than on me because of the children.

Meg: Before we had Jimmy, we did the house work equally. After Jimmy was born, Kay was more the primary care-giver. For each of our children one of us tried to be more primary. I naturally was with Kym.

Kay was with Jimmy because she wanted to be. And with Beth, I have been, both because Jimmy still needs so much of Kay and he's still young. We didn't want to have a big sibling rivalry thing happening. We wanted there to be a lot of continuity for Jimmy. So we consciously made that decision. But also because, I guess, I don't know. Why did we decide that I would be Beth's . . . ? I guess primarily because of Jimmy. I went to Thailand to get her. Because I was the one in the right age group to adopt from Thailand. Kay could not do it because she was over 45. So I had to be the one to adopt Beth officially. I had to be the one to travel to Thailand. By the time we came home from Thailand, Beth was very bonded to me already.

Kay: But housework-wise, since Beth, we came to the decision that we had to pay somebody to do our housework.

Meg and Kay's excerpt above demonstrates that women do not generally separate housework from child care. Notice that my question was about housework but the answer addresses both. Meg's comment that "If one of us is working, the other one is working. And if one of us is done, we're both done" is characteristic of how these seven couples practice parenting. When I asked if they gave each other breaks from child care for reasons other than work, all of them said they did. However, they quickly mentioned they enjoyed and preferred spending their free time with each other and at times had to force themselves to socialize with friends and do activities by themselves. Therefore, I did not find one of the partners enjoying more leisure time than the other. If men's hegemonic power and privilege are being reproduced in these partnerships, it is not detectable in their practice of housework or child care.

Power Reconstructed

Because lesbian couples function outside of men's hegemonic relations of power in their private lives, they are relatively free of gender constraints. Connell (1987) explains what it means to function outside of hegemonic relations of power: "The ability to impose a definition of the situation, to set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed, to formulate ideals and define morality, in short to assert hegemony . . ." (p. 107). Lesbian couples define for themselves their

responsibilities, their standards, and their practices. They alone set the terms in which events are understood and issues discussed. They formulate their own ideals and define morality. Therefore, it seems reasonable to expect a different practice of power.

The difficulty in understanding how lesbian couples practice power has been compounded by the limited number of research studies on power in lesbian couples and the awareness of the differences in short- and long-term relationships. In the preceding review of housework and child care, the couples' senses of responsibilities, standards, and practices were revealed. As parents they are both very child centered, organizing their lives around the needs of the children; however, except for Lou who is retired, they each maintain rigorous work lives. In the next section, I outline the characteristics of lesbian relationship power that are operant in these thirty couples.

Emotional Attunement

Women in lesbian partnerships tend to be responsive to the subjective, inner experience of their partner. They strive to maintain the capacity to share in and comprehend the momentary psychological state of their partner. This level of mutual empathy has often been pathologized as merger/fusion from a heterosexual model of development (Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Lindendbaum, 1985; Roth, 1985; Elise, 1986; Pearlman, 1989). Mencher (1990), interested in reframing the construct fusion from a state of pathological relationship structure to a pattern of intimacy based on lesbians' relational strengths, suggests that the pathologized term 'fusion' be changed to 'embeddedness.' Mencher stated that "Embeddedness as a description of healthy relational involvement acknowledges the normative developmental needs and intimacy patterns of women and revises the traditional standards of autonomy and separation which are so male-derived" (p. 9).

Another way of analyzing that closeness, whether it is labeled fusion or embeddedness, is to think of children playing on a seesaw. Children playing on a seesaw often move very close to the fulcrum and still enjoy playing; it is only if one

crosses the fulcrum to the other side that play stops. It seems that society's rules suggest that partners have more balance and stability staying on the ends of the seesaw. Yet without the weight of society's rules, lesbian women feel free to move close to the fulcrum, enjoying an in-air type of balance with only minute movements. Redefining pathological fusion as crossing the fulcrum and merging one into the other allows for a broader range of behavior to be non-pathologized. The level of empathic attunement in lesbian partnerships decreases the likelihood for any model of power requiring one partner to be non-emotionally responsive to her partner. Sas (Couple 10) describes a common experience for lesbian partners.

Every Saturday morning for years we would go to this bagel place up on Ninth Street and we'd have conversations. We'd sit there for hours and talk. The one thing that's so attractive about our relationship is that together we could figure things out. We've always been able to figure things out together. Neither of us have been so obsessed with any one course or direction or action or geographical location, that we would ignore what the other one wanted.

Many lesbian women are ideologically committed to equality, whether they identify themselves as feminists or not; therefore, they practice staying aware of each other's needs and wants intentionally, rather than striving for a position of dominance. All of the couples in the study commented repeatedly that they "talk things out," "work things through," and at times "agree to disagree." The process of negotiating differences and developing emotional attunement often involves years of work before it becomes a stable, comfortable, and reliable process. For example, most of the couples remember incidents of leaving during a discussion, being emotionally frustrated, refusing to talk, and wishing for the lack of intensity often available in heterosexual relationships.

Relationship Responsibility

Women in a long-term lesbian partnership strive to nurture and protect the relationship. In a lesbian partnership if the intimate connection between the partners ends there is no legal structure, like marriage, to create a barrier against the partnership's dissolution. Irene commenting about her relationship with Sas

(Couple 10) and Lisa commenting on her relationship with Lynn (Couple 4) show how they nurture and protect their relationships.

Irene: From the start we were both committed to making this relationship work, no matter what. Since both of us come from divorced families, neither of us felt divorce was something we wanted for ourselves or each other. We recognize that relationships take work and time. We are both willing to put that work and time into it.

Lisa: When I think about it, if you look back at the path that my life has taken, a vast majority of my decisions have been influenced by this relationship. Or, I made choices because of this relationship. I decided to go this way, because it was least disruptive to our relationship.

June and Wilma (Couple 28) started at the beginning of their relationship to have weekly meetings to discuss their relationship. Within the first few months of their relationship they made a rule: “We won’t talk about anything serious after 10:00 or 11:00 at night.” They have followed that rule for the past 15 years. They believe the rule allowed them to avoid saying many hurtful things that could have harmed the relationship. No other couple reported having weekly meetings to discuss their relationship, but others did report following particular rules or advice that helped them.

Florence: We have this rule, we don’t go to bed angry. And we try to make sure we never walk out on the other one. We may get angry but we don’t cuss each other. That doesn’t mean when we get in an argument, we don’t raise our voice, but we’re quite respectful of each other.

Una (Couple 16), raised in Zimbabwe, was taught as a little girl, “You never go to bed with angry eyes.”

If the problem is not resolved before sleeping, it grows out of all proportion and eventually you no longer remember what initially started the argument, but are still angry.

Interdependent Power

Two friends on a seesaw illustrate the interdependent power found in long-

term lesbian relationships. Interdependent, non-hierarchical power is a balanced power in which the participants on the seesaw accept the fluctuations knowing either of them can vary the speed. Each woman realizes that she can exert pressure causing her partner to ride with her, resist her, or attempt to vary the pace. Each woman remains centered in herself, choosing how she will respond. Frequently her response is so familiar to both of them, it feels effortless. Each woman, however, knows that although it would be extremely painful she could stop the seesaw and walk away retaining her own power—a power that is a matter of her energy and ability as exercised through the focus of her attention. This type of power is grounded in cooperation and mutuality, not in control. Jordan (1986) in “The Meaning of Mutuality” discusses the difference in patriarchal power and interdependent power without the labels.

If one is primarily concerned with the establishment of a position of dominance vis à vis another, that motive eliminates the possibility of a real interest in the subjective experience of the other. Rather, one's own interests are felt as uppermost. Manipulation of others to achieve ends that are unilaterally defined becomes the focus of the interaction. Whenever an individual's own needs become so primary that they obscure the perception of another's needs, mutual concern and empathy cannot exist. Furthermore, when the emphasis is on instrumentality or striving to maintain power, often through competition, self-disclosure decreases. Disconnection and inequality are basic to a power model, along with a prevailing sense of competing subjectivities. Models of mutuality depend on interaction, a capacity for empathy and reciprocally enhancing subjectivities. The two ways of approaching relationship really stand at odds with one another (pp. 10-11).

Practicing interdependent power in their lesbian partnerships promotes a high degree of mutuality. “In a mutual exchange one is both affecting the other and being affected by the other; one extends oneself out to the other and is also receptive to the impact of the other” (Jordan, 1986, p. 1). Jordan's description of mutuality parallels the operation of a seesaw. Lynn's (Couple 4) comment below provides an example of how she and Lisa practice interdependent power without hesitation.

When we moved here from the North, we both thought of it at the

same time. We pulled out a map. She would be teaching on the southwestern side of a town while I would be teaching on the northeastern side. We found a place half way between the two, and that's where we bought a house. No matter what, that's where we were going to live. We didn't even look at another place, didn't even think about it.

June and Wilma demonstrate how the interdependent seesaw process works in their decision-making process of having a child. Wilma for several years brought up the idea of them having a child. June would discuss the possibility and then let it drop. Sensing that June was not closed to the idea but simply not ready to make a decision, Wilma waited. During June's late twenties she felt she had developed the independence from her parents she needed and had created a secure, stable relationship with Wilma. June said she started to think seriously about having children when she could hear both of their biological clocks ticking. June then started telling Wilma she thought it would be good for them to have a child. Wilma, who had wanted kids forever, was delighted. As they began to consider the process from a practical medical standpoint, it made sense for June to be the birth mom. Wilma noted that if she had pushed the issue instead of allowing June the time she needed, it would have never worked. June would have insisted that Wilma have the child. Instead June became pregnant easily; and June, the granddaughter of a twin, had two healthy twin boys.

Unlike June and Wilma, who became partners in their late teens, Chris (Couple 23) had a twenty-year marriage and raised two children before meeting Teresa. Teresa had been in three lesbian relationships of more than five years when she met Chris. It is evident in the dialogue below that Chris and Teresa have definite ideas about how to prevent an imbalance of power.

Chris: Everything is shared. The playing field is level. You do what is required to be done, and it works best if you take turns. It works best if you share 50-50. That's what makes it work best. Without that it doesn't work so very well, because somebody will become resentful. If she tries to run me, I'm going to get stubborn and dig in my heels, and vice versa. Or if one of us tries to take more power than the other.

Betty: Chris has more education than you. Why is that not an inequality in the relationship?

Teresa: Because I've managed to stay independent. And I wouldn't allow it. I mean, inside I wouldn't allow it. For one of us to be more powerful than the other. Nor would I want to walk on her. Because I need somebody who's stronger for me. And where I'm strong in some things, she is stronger in other things.

Betty: What are some of the things that you are stronger at than she is?

Teresa: I'm more flexible.

Chris: She is also better at decision-making.

Teresa: And I think, I'm very pliable. I can go with the wind; but not to the point where I can be ruled. I mean, this relationship wouldn't have lasted two minutes if she had wanted to be more powerful just because she made more money and she had more education. Because like I said to you, I feel I'm the greatest. I feel I'm well worth anybody's love. Now I'm a very strong person; but I never think about power, or wielding any power.

Lesbians, having grown-up in a "gender-structured society" (Okin, 1989), are aware that as females they are expected to appear less powerful in relationships with males. When spouses "do gender" in marriages, they construct "appropriately gendered selves," reproducing men's power and privilege (West and Zimmerman, 1987). Not being concerned about having more education, earning more income, or having more occupational status than their partner are liberating experiences enjoyed in lesbian partnerships.

In the partnership snapshot of Brenda and Jean (Couple 26), we saw two powerful women who appreciate, support, and encourage each other's strengths. Brenda and Jean stressed how essential it is to a satisfying relationship that a partner be powerful in her sense of self and in her ability to openly express her opinions, feelings, needs, and wants in the partnership. Formerly married participants expressed genuine relief at not having to disguise and minimize their achievements, competencies, and abilities in their lesbian partnership. It often took several years of being in a lesbian partnership before couples realized that when they

“do gender” they practice interdependent power.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Shared Value Systems

Introduction

Several couples explained during the interview process that their shared value systems were essential to their relationship satisfaction and longevity. Although I noted the intensity of the couples' feelings about shared values, it was not until I read Hojjat's (1997) "Philosophy of Life as a Model of Relationship Satisfaction" that I understood why shared values were so important. Mahzad Hojjat wrote:

It is postulated that the satisfaction of partners in an intimate relationship is primarily related to the similarity in their basic beliefs and assumptions about the world around them, and also to the similarity of their beliefs about themselves relative to the world. These beliefs constitute what is called one's 'philosophy of life' (hereafter abbreviated as POL) (p. 103).

She suggests that each of us uses our personal, social, and cultural experiences to construct our own POL. Although early socialization shapes our POL with some premises that are resistant to change, Hojjat suggests that a person constantly revises their POL based on everyday experiences.

Hojjat argues convincingly that "the similarity between partners' POLs is the most important determinant of the partners' satisfaction with their relationship" (p. 112). However, it was her discussion of incompatible POLs that started me thinking about the importance of shared values and equality. She wrote:

It is possible for two people to live together for many years before discovering that they have significantly different points of view about life. There are many reasons for this. One possibility is that when partners began their relationship, their POLs were congruent with each other, but as they grew older, their POLs changed in different directions. This may be more typical in cases in which partners marry at an early age (e.g., high school sweethearts marrying in their early 20s), when their POLs still do not contain their adult experiences—that is, the POLs are not completely formed, or the partners are not mature enough to be knowledgeable about them. Second, sometimes significant events in one individual's life may change his or her POL

drastically, while the partner is not as much affected; or both partners are affected, but they change in different directions. This may occur in situations in which partners lose a child, or even when one partner experiences a midlife crisis, or growing older changes his or her outlook on life. Third, sometimes partners have different POLs to begin with, yet their attraction prevents them from realizing the degree to which they are different. Then a situation arises in which a particular conflict becomes salient in their relationship, their differences come to the fore (Hojjat, 1997, p. 113).

Hojjat's model seemed to fit each group of couples. Group A couples got together under age 25. They reported being similar in values from the beginning of their partnerships and have grown even closer in value systems. Group B couples, in which one (Couples 17, 18, and 19) or both women (Couples 20, 21, 22, and 23) had been married from five to twenty years, reported they had fewer values in common with their husbands as they grew older. Wives in Couples 17, 20, and 21 ended their marriages abruptly after major events changed their values. Women in Group C (Couples 24, 25, and 27) had marriages with highly incompatible value systems that lasted longer than they preferred, primarily because children were involved.

Pondering Hojjat's Model

Gradually I began to ask myself: "Is it possible that equality is so basic to lesbian couples' POL that naming or focusing on it in their long-term relationships happens rarely or at the most infrequently?" Even though I told all of the participants before the actual interview that my focus was on relationship equality, most answered during the interview that they could not remember discussing equality or having to work at making things equal. The responses of several couples amplify this idea. Notice the similarities in the responses of Andra and Elizabeth (Couple 29) and Gina and Jennifer (Couple 8) to my question about equality in their relationship.

Andra: I don't really feel like we talked about it.

Elizabeth: But I think it was a bottom line expectation.

Jennifer: Equality?

Betty: You know, being equal.

Gina: I don't know if it's anything we actually consciously talked about as much as we just understood it from the time we got into it. I mean, we never talked about it. However, one of the issues you brought up in reference to money is relevant. We have never, ever, no matter who made more money, never, ever looked at it as a thing of power. The fact that I'm bigger than she is, well she's smarter than I am. We've never looked at it as it makes her have more power. It has always been equal. I would say in my mind that if we had ever consciously realized that somebody had more power than the other, we'd probably have to talk about it.

I probed Lisa and Lynn (Couple 4) with a second question. Their response is similar to the other couples; yet, they are aware of how often their heterosexual colleagues talk about equality. I asked if they had ever actually talked about equality in their relationship.

Lisa: Not that I can ever remember.

Lynn: I don't think so.

Betty: So where does your sense of equality about the relationship come from?

Lynn: Because we don't have to talk about it. I have never felt like we weren't equal. I have always looked at my colleagues, friends, and thought, "oh, how pitiful. You have all the child care, he has all this. You have to discuss this." They're always negotiating, especially men and women. My friends at work who are straight are always talking about equality and what's fair. Bitching about it. And we don't have to do that, we don't do that. Do we, Lisa?

Lisa: The only thing at this point we even have to structure is the dogs. Making sure that somebody gets home in the afternoon to walk the dogs. We might ask "now when are you teaching, and what time are you going to leave?" That's really the only thing we need to check.

Brenda and Jean (Couple 26) add another layer of meaning to this idea. Jean was married for a brief time, in a traditional marriage, which strengthened her resolve not to be in an unequal situation ever again. I asked her if equality was something

she ever talked about in her relationship.

There were times when I would say, “I don’t want to be treated like a wife.” And Brenda would say, “I am not treating you like a wife.” She would be really shocked. I would have to think, “is this something I am misinterpreting because I am so sensitive to this? Or is it something she really is doing?” We haven’t had a conversation like that in years and years.

For each of these couples equality is a bottom-line expectation, not unlike how the POL in Hojjat’s model shapes relationship satisfaction. The more innate a particular value is to a couple, in Hojjat’s schema, the greater the likelihood it will be found at the Philosophy of Life or Philosophy of Relationships level (see Figure 1).

Philosophy of Life as a Model of Relationship Satisfaction

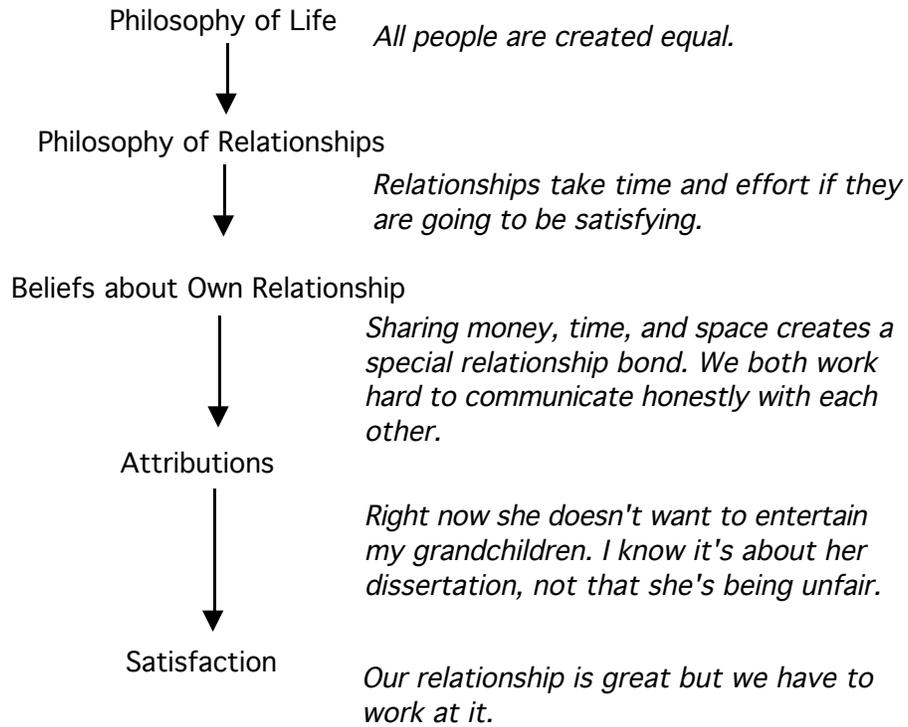


Figure 1. Hojjat's Model - In italics is my application of the model (p. 104).

Equality Practices

Examining segments of the couples' transcripts, I began to see the prevailing influence of equality in their everyday lives. It is in their daily practices of money, power, and intimacy, as well as other relationship qualities, that equality shows its underlying influence. Katie and Anna (Couple 12), in response to a question about the secret to long-term relationships, express the similarity in their values.

Anna: Communication is absolutely critical and I don't know that we always do the best in that area. Our backgrounds are similar so we have brought similar values to the relationship. We have been open with one another and we share many of the same ideas about things. Areas where we don't share the same perspective are not in the really important areas and we can agree to disagree. I mean it's not like we have to agree about every single thing. We do have separate interests. The one area where I feel badly is that I am not a science person; she tells me all this stuff and half of it goes over my head. I feel badly because she doesn't have anyone to talk with about this exciting stuff. And even though she finds my work extremely boring, she understands it; I can talk to her about it. Sometimes I bring stuff home from work and she helps me with it. But I just can't get in there and talk those drugs and those statistics are just not my thing.

Betty: Did you all talk openly about equality?

Katie: I don't know. We were friends to start with and we kind of started on the same footing.

Anna: I guess we've kind of had the same meaning of equality. It was never an issue. We never had to discuss it. I have been accused by other people of being bossy. But for the most part, I don't think either one of us has ever tried to dominate in any area. I mean like with driving. I really don't like to drive. So I prefer, and Katie likes to drive. So you know, that doesn't bother me in the least. The only thing, like when we're doing long trips, I feel guilty if we don't split the driving because I think it's only fair we each drive.

Katie and Anna began their relationship with similar values which included their expectations about equality although they do not recall ever discussing it.

In the following transcript segment, Rebecca and Lopez (Couple 22) are answering my question about how they show love to each other in this relationship.

Note that the word equality is not mentioned but its prevailing influence is apparent.

Lopez: I'm a very emotional person. I'm very affected by what's going on in the neighborhood, in the community, in the world. I just really get on some emotional roller coasters sometimes with what's going on around me. While Rebecca is very calm, cool, and collected most of the time. She's very understanding of that emotional part of me. She listens sometimes literally for hours, while I just talk to her. I tell her what I'm upset about, what I'm angry about, what I think is unfair and unjust. What goes on in the world can make me a wreck. She really takes the time to listen, reflect back, and help me through those crisis times. Sometimes I don't know how she puts up with it, but she does.

Rebecca: I think we're really very affectionate. But she had to teach me how, because I never had any experience being affectionate. I never did and it wasn't allowed, I had no choice. She is very affectionate, and she's taught me how to be that way. She also encourages me to be engaged in the community. We make each other stronger.

I did not include a question about shared values on my interview guide; however, Betsy and Maggie (Couple 18) stressed that the reason their relationship lasted 25 years was their commitment to making it work: "their common goals and values." While talking about her work, Betsy told me the following story.

Betsy: Maggie is very career oriented. She wanted to improve her civilian military rating from a GS 11 to a GS 12. She had seen the handwriting on the wall, that she wouldn't be a GS 12. Then she had an opportunity to go to Japan for three years, guaranteed a GS 12, and who knows beyond that. As she was going forward with the idea, I began to realize some things about my finding work in Japan. If I left this work for three years everything would change. This was a terrible time for us. Even though we had already had the call from Japan saying Maggie had the job, we decided not to go.

Maggie: Oh, the paper work was in, the confirmation came in. I mean I'd had eight phone interviews in the process of securing this position.

Betsy: And she gave it up.

Betty: Why did you do that?

Maggie: Our shared values and goals got us through this rough period.

Initially Betsy was very excited about the idea. She loves to travel. We have Korean friends who said, “oh, we’ll go every weekend and shop in Korea.” It all seemed wonderful and exciting. . . . Then Betsy began to talk about how difficult it would be; she might have a hard time finding employment in Japan. When she came back finding a new work might be difficult. Age might be a factor. I realized what she was saying might be true. This was not some wonderful career move for me. This was simply a promotion. A pay thing, a status thing. So there was substance to what she needed and what I was looking at was just extra stuff. So, of course, once we saw that, there was no fight between us. There was just a working out and looking at the issues. And when we saw what the issues were, the decisions were obvious.

Their decision-making process demonstrated that the needs of both partners were carefully considered.

Elaine and Morgan (Couple 2) are one of the few couples who said they had to work on maintaining equality in their relationship. Morgan is a nationally known artist with a Ph.D. Elaine has a challenging career but plans to pursue another degree and work in a different field when she feels the time is right. I asked if equality was something they talked about in their relationship.

Elaine: I think it is something that we have worked on. I don't think it is something that we sat down and said, “What do we need to do to be equal?” But equality is a value we both share.

Betty: What do you mean, you have worked on it?

Morgan: Well, I told Elaine early in our relationship, that I was worried that she was putting my work and subsequently me up on a pedestal. I always wanted us to be able to see eye to eye; I think it makes things stronger. I think it is dangerous if anything is out of balance, especially in that way. So I try to make sure she sees how strong we both are.

Elaine: I have a tremendous respect for Morgan’s ability. It's not that I put her on a pedestal. I think that we have always been equal. There are lots of different kinds of equality. I think that in terms of being equal in this relationship, and how we support each other, we are very good to each other. We also allow the other person to have the kind of life they want and still be a part of that life.

Morgan: We try very hard to make sure the other person can have the life

they want.

Elaine: I think in those kinds of things we've always worked towards being equal.

Morgan: I know it is not that way with most couples. It's kind of funny how people react to us, especially heterosexual couples. Our neighbor, Marsha, was telling us, "You have the perfect life. You have no stress." I'm like, "Marsha. We have stress." "How can you say that? But you have so much respect for each other." Well, I think we have a great life. But it doesn't mean that stuff just goes away. We just handle it differently. I think we try to look out for each other. We have a great support network of friends.

Betty: Do you see any inequality in the relationship?

Morgan: I worry that Elaine is not getting to her ideal career fast enough. I feel my career is holding her down. I am constantly asking her "Are you sure you don't want me to take a university job so you can go to school?" That's the thing I think I worry the most about in terms of inequality.

Elaine: But I don't worry about that.

Morgan: She doesn't.

Betty: Why?

Elaine: Because I know it will happen when it is supposed to happen.

Morgan: She has so much faith. This woman has so much faith it is incredible.

Morgan, who has earned considerable power and prestige in society, is consistently vigilant toward Elaine's feelings and needs. Morgan does not want or expect Elaine to sacrifice for her career. Elaine described a time when she had a large project she was working on 3,000 miles away from home. As she described some of the complications in her project to Morgan over the phone, Morgan said she could only hear that she was stressed and tired. Morgan reported that she caught the next plane, thinking Elaine needed her help. Elaine, exasperated from working on a

major national event with an inexperienced staff, told Morgan she needed someone who would take whatever responsibility she assigned and do it. Morgan said she made herself a hired-hand doing whatever Elaine needed until they completed the project. Elaine said, “Morgan is an artist who works very independently. But whatever I need or whenever I need her, she’s always there 100 percent!”

Unlike Elaine and Morgan who became partners in high school and have basically grown up together, the next couple have the perspective of both having been married. Meg (Couple 27), an older university student with a year of undergraduate studies remaining, became friends with Kay, an associate professor. Meg had recently ended her nine-year marriage, gaining sole custody of her three-year-old daughter. Kay’s husband of six years had abruptly ended their marriage around the same time.

Commiserating about men, they became good friends. Meg, age 28, was beginning to think her attraction was toward women rather than men. After several months, Kay, age 37, who preferred not to define herself by a sexual label, started having a relationship with Meg.

Meg as a student was working part-time, earning about \$10,000 a year, supporting herself and her daughter while sharing a cheap apartment with her sister. Kay, a tenured professor from an upper-middle-class background, was financially stable, owned her own home, and was carefully investing in her future. Meg was the fifth child of 13 living siblings; Kay had one younger sister. In general, I would say these two women could not have been more unequal. How they worked to achieve relationship equality is a story worth sharing in detail.

Meg: We had a lot of things to get accomplished. I needed to finish my education. Kay took me on. One of the ways that Kay demonstrated her love for me was by how much faith she had in me. I had nothing when we met. I had less than nothing. I had debt, a great three-year-old, and a year left of college. Kay had faith in my mind, my drive, my competence, and my potential.

Betty: Did you have that support in your marriage?

Meg: Oh, no. He felt threatened by me, by my intellect, my drive, and my desire for a better life.

Betty: Tell me more about the difference in how you were treated in your marriage compared to Kay. I'm interested in how lesbians create equality in their relationships.

Meg: Kay said you were interested in different women's experiences. She said you had been lucky to talk to a bunch of women who had been lovers since college. To me, the women you want to be interviewing are those of us that have been in heterosexual relationships where there isn't that nurturing. Where there isn't that equality and everything is lopsided and weird. My relationship with Kay and my marriage to my ex-husband are night and day apart. My ex-husband, when I accomplished something, was anxious to downplay it. When I became more independent, he was anxious to negate it. And when there was any evidence that I could amount to something, it put big fear in him. He didn't want that. He was not a very bright person. He was a blue collar, conservative type guy. What he wanted was a wife/mommy. You know, he wanted somebody to do all the house work. And make things comfortable for him so he could watch football. That was the marriage. That's what the marriage was like. So he discouraged me from trying to finish my education. He resented that I went and did it anyway. He thought that I was putting on airs and being uppity.

Betty: So how did it feel to have all this intellectual support from Kay?

Meg: It felt [like] I had died and gone to heaven. It still does. Everything I am today, is because Kay encouraged me all the way. In 1982, I was nowhere. All I had was potential. Now it's a whole different thing. I think that we are equal or close to it.

Kay: One of the early things we did was get Meg to go to school full time. She had a part-time job, went to school full-time, and got it done.

Meg: Kay became the instant care-giver for my three year old while I finished school.

Kay: Before we get too far along, I want to add that my ex-husband also put me down intellectually. Even though we were at the same educational level, when we went to collaborate on some research stuff, if I would write the first draft or something, I would give it to him. He would rewrite it completely. My work didn't look a thing like my work.

Not even an idea of mine was left in it. And he did this under the guise of trying to help me. He had to be better than everybody, especially me, at everything. I remember we did some skiing; I had a ski instructor once tell me how well I skied, what good movement or something like that. And his response was, “well, I know you think you’re a better skier than I, but I’m more adventurous.” It’s like he had to have something. Always had to have something, one better than me.

After Meg finished college, she took a position in corporate America and started working her way up. Kay’s dream at the time they became a couple was to have a child. So, even though they had an instant three-year-old, they located an infertility specialist and at age 38, Kay started trying to become pregnant. After four miscarriages, she decided to try one more time and at 43 years of age she had a healthy son.

Although Meg and Kay started this relationship unequal in most areas, they worked together to help each other reach their goals and in the process created a relationship of equality. Meg, who feels like she has always been raising children, had no problem supporting Kay’s desire to have a child. In fact, when Kay’s son was seven they adopted a Thai infant. Kay, who had the financial stability and career she loved, had no problem sharing financially and taking time out from her research to become a primary care-giver, so Meg could finish school. I asked Meg and Kay if equality was something they talked about during their relationship; both answered “No, I don’t think so.”

Meg and Kay’s experiences in their respective marriages point to the one shortcoming Hojjat offered about her model:

One possible criticism of the model may be that it does not take into account the unique perspectives of male and female partners. Yet many studies have shown that female partners’ views of their intimate relationships may differ significantly from those of male partners. For instance, is it possible that female partners differ vastly from their male partners in their time orientation . . . within the context of their close relationships (p. 122)?

Although her model is highly beneficial to understanding same-sex couples, it does

seem that “the gender perspective” (Ferree, 1990; Thompson, 1993) complicates the model’s usefulness with opposite-sex couples.

Norton and Trixie (Couple 19) were both married to professors before beginning their long-term lesbian relationship. They address not only their underlying value of equality but also what they consider to be major differences between males and females. Note their response to my probe about what they thought made long-term relationships last.

Trixie: Trust and being able to talk things through.

Norton: I think it’s just talking through things and you really have to work at it. It’s like anything else. You have to sit down and talk about things.

Trixie: But realizing though, that you don’t have to be afraid to be wrong. You don’t have to have some sort of appropriate answer. In a heterosexual marriage you had so many things to do that were expected. You had to entertain. You had to deal with other couples. You had to have children. You had to look appealing so your husband would stay sexually interested. They have all the power and I wanted some of it.

Norton: I resented their power. It started when I was very little; I realized that all the men in my family, all my brothers and my dad would sit at the dinner table and wait to be served. And they got to eat. I had to get up. I had to serve. I would have to bring them everything. I would be the one that would have to help do the dishes. Everything was centered around the men.

Trixie: That also happened to me.

Norton: I would think, “why in the world do they get to have all this? I don’t. When is it my turn?” You get married and the same thing happens again.

Betty: So in a relationship with a woman do you get to have your turn?

Trixie: Yeah, I think you do.

Norton: If she comes in the evening and I haven’t fixed dinner, I don’t have to feel like I have to get up and fix it. She’ll go get herself

something to eat. She can feed herself. Or she can wash her clothes. It's the same thing with me.

Trixie: Or sexually if I wanted to be the aggressor, I can. And not feel that wasn't my role. If she wants to be the aggressor, she can. It is nice to have that sexual freedom if you want to call it that. Like men have. But it is reciprocal, which makes us free to express whatever we feel.

Norton: Yeah. It's more equal. And with a man, it's just not equal no matter what! It's an unspoken thing. Society has said, all the way along, through all the generations, "this is the woman's place." It isn't my place. He's just another person, a human being like me. He should be doing all the same things that I'm doing. If I don't want to fix his meal, he should fix it himself. But, it didn't work that way. And I thought, "why should I do this?" And with women, or at least with her, I get a turn.

Summary

According to Hojjat's model, couples with significantly different value systems are at risk of partnership dissolution. In an eighteen-month follow-up study Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) found that lesbian couples had the highest dissolution rate. Looking at which couples broke up is relevant to this study. The categories of who broke up are divided into three groups. Couples who had been together less than two years at the time of the original questionnaire had a 22% dissolution rate. Couples who had been together two to ten years had a 20% dissolution rate. Couples who had been together ten years or more had a 6% dissolution rate. The percentages were respectively based on 131, 172, and 32 couples (p. 308). Are the couples who have been together ten years or more less likely to dissolve their relationships because they are equal in ways similar to the couples in this sample? By looking at the reasons Blumstein and Schwartz found for couples that did not dissolve compared to the ones that did, their reasons lend support for the findings of this study as discussed below.

According to their findings lesbian couples who quarrel about money management are likely to break up at any time during their relationship (p. 309). Blumstein and Schwartz further state that lesbians who choose not to pool their

money are more likely to break up (p. 309). They explain in greater detail about conflict with money and power in lesbian relationships:

Dependency is a critical issue for lesbians. Women who saw themselves and their partners as strong and self-sufficient were less likely to break up than those who saw themselves or their partners as dependent and not forceful. Our data have told us that lesbians hold up, as the ideal relationship, one where two strong women come together in total equality. If both women are strong, but one woman is significantly stronger, then the important equality rule is undermined. For example, we find that lesbians in established relationships who have unequal incomes or unequal influence over spending are more likely to break up. We thought such a power imbalance might be so uncomfortable for both women that both advantaged and disadvantaged partners would wish to leave. We find, however, that the more powerful partner was more likely to precipitate the breakup (p. 316).

Holding equality as an ideal may be different from equality being a shared value.

What is total equality? In this study these women did not talk about equality; they practiced it, particularly in the areas of money and power as described in Chapters Five and Six. Determining which partner is more or less powerful reflects more on the balance of power or ascendant type of power characteristic of heterosexual relationships rather than lesbian relationships. The women in Blumstein and Schwartz's study did not explain in their own words the power issues in their relationships but rather completed a questionnaire. I wonder if their responses reflect a hidden, gendered perspective of power inadvertently offered in the wording of the questionnaire.

All of the couples in this study practice a shared value of equality whether it exists as a Philosophy of Life value, a Philosophy of Relationships value, a belief about their own relationship, or an attribute of their partnership. Saying all of the couples practice a shared value of equality does not suggest that the couples are totally equal, or that some of couples are not more egalitarian in their practices than others. Perhaps those questions of degree of equality are not germane to lesbian relationships but rather a carryover of heterosexual concerns where degree of

equality is highly relevant. These 30 lesbian couples take equality for granted in their relationships which suggests to me that lesbian couples are not cognizant of how their practices of money, power, and shared values contribute to the egalitarian nature of their relationships.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Concluding Perceptions

Introduction

In this study, I have conceptualized equality in lesbian relationships from an insider's perspective. I have examined equality in lesbian couples based on what I learned from the 30 couples who have been and remain involved in the study. Perceptions about equality in this study are limited to long-term lesbian couples. Studying equality in lesbian partnerships of five or ten years duration might reveal significantly different findings.

Participants in this study did not consider equality a result of their discussions or intentional practices. I have explained in Chapter 7, using Hojjat's model, that when a value such as equality is shared at the Philosophy of Life or Philosophy of Relationships level, the practice of that value seems innate to themselves or their relationship. If directly asked, long-term lesbian couples are unlikely to unequivocally state that their relationships are equal. As a result of my study, I would offer that they are hesitant to declare their relationships are equal because equality is not something they have not been thinking or talking about. This finding suggests that long-term lesbian couples are not encumbered with the vigilance required of heterosexual couples desiring an egalitarian relationship (See Balisure & Allen, 1995).

Previous studies indicate a significant difference in the ideal of equality and the practice of it in lesbian relationships. Caldwell and Peplau (1984) found that while 97% of lesbians espoused the value of equality in their relationships, 36% reported that one partner had greater power than the other. Reilly and Lynch (1990) discovered that 90% of their sample couples valued the ideal of sharing power, but only 45% agreed that they did so equitably. These studies suggest that equality is an esteemed value which is difficult to practice. Equality has also been a difficult construct for researchers to study.

I offer that determining equality in close relationships is problematic in

several ways. Equality has often been reduced to the power dynamic of a relationship. And more precisely studies of equality are focused on the balance of power, or ascendant power, which is not the type of power practiced in lesbian relationships. How couples handle money in the relationship has not been separated from other decision-making processes of the couple. Equality is discussed as a value; but, the effect of equality as a shared value of the couple appears limited to how couples balance power in the relationship.

I suggest that three practices: how couples handle money, their interdependent form of power, and their shared value system combine to create the egalitarian nature of lesbian partnerships. Interwoven, these practices increase the likelihood of equality in lesbian relationships. Any one of these three practices moves a lesbian couple in the direction of equality. When all three of these practices are present in a lesbian relationship, the synergistic blend creates a powerful experience of equality.

In-depth interviewing allows clues to emerge in the research process in a serendipitous manner. Asking any long-term lesbian couple to rate on a five- or nine-point scale if either partner has equal power in their relationship would not have produced the puzzled response I experienced with couple after couple. My partner and I could not recall having ever discussed equality or taken deliberate steps to ensure equality in our relationship. Before undertaking this study, I simply suspected our response was unique to us as a couple. Before starting this research journey, I discussed with a lesbian professor, respected and published in lesbian studies, why she thought lesbian relationships were more egalitarian than others. Together we questioned if lesbian partnerships were equal and what the factors contributing to equality might be. Both of us thought money would be important but neither of us considered a different type of power or a shared value system to be a factor.

Placing these findings in the context of research studies on equality in close relationships is a complex task. Researchers have stressed the need for economic

self-sufficiency as essential to marital equality (Schwartz, 1994; Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). Couples must negotiate both acknowledged and silent differences concerning their Philosophy of Life values (see Balisure & Allen, 1995). How married couples achieve equality in the practice of power appears to me as uncharted waters. In Risman and Johnson-Sumerford's study they state, "In the six couples where some power imbalance could be identified, the wives seemed to have more influence" (p. 34). Later they add, "In no couple in our research did husbands appear to hold more power than wives" (p. 35). Other researchers have suggested that in marriages where women have more power than men no one is satisfied. I wonder if the women in Risman and Johnson-Sumerford's study practice an interdependent form of power similar to the practice of the lesbian women I studied.

At the end of each couple's interview I asked, "If you were to choose or return to a heterosexual lifestyle, what would you lose and what would you gain?" Their responses to that hypothetical question create more questions than answers. At the time I thought it would be a fun question to end our interviewing experience. However, I began to realize the answers to this question, though sometimes comical, were revealing and poignant. These women, having been in long-term lesbian partnerships, offer a gendered perspective on close relationships. They explain why society's privileges, although real and valuable, are not worth the cost for them. Once a woman experiences equality as commonly practiced in a long-term lesbian relationship, rarely is she willing to enter a heterosexual relationship of male-gendered power and privilege.

I have grouped the women's comments on lesbian and heterosexual relationships into two main categories: "What would you lose?" and "What would you gain?". Each main category has thematic subcategories. As you read their responses, ask yourself "Which of these women, if any, would work to overcome the inequality of a heterosexual lifestyle?"

What would you lose?

Emotional Satisfaction

June (Couple 28): What I would miss is the whole balance of our relationship. I'm probably not going to get as much satisfaction from somebody who's not going to be open with me or let me be open. I don't think, in general, men are as facile at dealing with emotions. I'm not a big emotion sharing person. I've definitely grown through my relationship with Wilma in terms of emotional expression, and I value that. I don't think men understand women, at all or at least not very well. Men don't see women as the kind of people that women see women as. I just think that I'd have to do so much work to get what I needed out of a relationship with a man. Much of what Wilma and I have, comes easily.

Jean (Couple 26): The main thing, besides the fact that I couldn't be all of who I am with a man, was the fact that in a heterosexual relationship, my relationships with my women friends and my relationship with my husband were very separate. So, if I were spending time with him, I was spending time with him. If I were spending time with women, I was spending time with women. They were never in the same context, or if they were it was difficult. Like if I were having my friends over, and he was there, I couldn't have the same conversation. That was a big issue for me. Because I really value being in a situation, in a relationship where I can have women friends and it doesn't change whether Brenda is here or not here. So my life flows so much better. I can have everything I want in my life, and not have to compartmentalize it. I hated that about heterosexual relationships. My conversations with my friends don't change when Brenda walks into the room. She joins in the conversation. It all just flows together, so it makes my support system all work together, and that makes my life so much better.

Brenda (Couple 26): I echo Jean's comments as well. But also, I could not be who I am as a woman, as a female, because most men couldn't tolerate my outspokenness. I found that out when I was sort of doing the heterosexual thing. Often I would end up in the kitchen with the men, talking about business, or talking about careers. I found all that fascinating, and I always noticed they were very uncomfortable with it. They were very uncomfortable with me being there, they had to kind of treat me like a female.

Sadie (Couple 21): I think I would miss the emotional understanding.

Women understand each other. A man can never really relate to a woman's emotions, like a woman can. We understand each other better. I think I would miss that more than anything.

Una (Couple 16): There is also a way of communicating available only woman to woman. The friendship and support of women far surpass that of men. I love women's thought processes and less testosterone works for Taylor. Women are more supportive in addition to not being constantly in competition.

Equality

Wilma (Couple 28): I do remember this one thing. I had really cool boyfriends, really groovy men. I can remember very clearly when I got involved with June, I realized that my relationships with men weren't equal; but while I was in them, I thought they were. June and I are on totally equal footing. Some of the inequality with the men was my own thing. With a guy I would just start acting out a role. It's like we both started acting out roles. There are prescribed roles and you just do it without even thinking.

Daphne (Couple 3): I think you would really lose a feeling of being equal. I just listen to my co-workers talking about their husbands and I just crack up. There is no way I would put up with it. Women will ask me "how do you and your partner handle this or that?" I will tell them and they start comparing it to the way things are with their husbands. Then they will make comments about how fair we are with each other. The women will say, "That's neat, I like that." Florence worries they're going to accuse me of recruiting, especially when they say, "Now that's not a bad idea. Maybe my husband and I should try that."

Eva (Couple 13): I don't know, but I don't think heterosexual relationships are very equitable, even though the couple struggles to make it equitable. I think two women have much more freedom than a man and a woman. People don't know quite what to think when there's no man involved, but when there's a man involved people assume there is a certain way to be.

Elizabeth (Couple 29): I would miss the egalitarian outlook on things. I don't think it would be as easy. I imagine there would be ways I would enjoy the greater support. But we have figured out how to live our lives pretty well, to get what we need, and what we want.

Identity and Woman-Identified

Babs (Couple 30): I'd have to give up my identity. No man is worth that.

Rae (Couple 30): What would I give up? I'd give up everything, myself.

Jackie (Couple 21): I would lose my identity and everything that matters in my life.

Morgan (Couple 2): It is like so far beyond my sense of reality, I can imagine going to the moon easier than I can imagine a relationship with a man. I can imagine a moon ride much easier than going into a heterosexual lifestyle. That would be like asking if I was going to grow a third arm or something. I wouldn't feel like myself.

Florence (Couple 3): What would I miss? In my case I would be one miserable human being. I'd lose what drives and inspires me, which is another woman. My life is with women. I'm attracted to women.

Casey (Couple 14): First of all I would never go into another heterosexual relationship. I've been there; I've done it. At the time the relationship was good for me; still, I would not go back. I've tried being straight; I went through hell being straight; I'll never go through it again. I was with a woman and then I tried to be straight in a straight world. I won't go back to being straight; it made me nuts. It was very painful for me to be with someone that I wasn't attracted to. I just couldn't go back into a heterosexual relationship. I just couldn't do it. I don't want a man around. I don't mean that I hate men, I don't mean that at all. I just can't imagine that roughness. They are not sensitive.

Rebecca (Couple 22): I'd probably gain a life sentence for murder; I've been married one time, no thanks. And I'd miss all of the wonderful creature comforts of the life I'm living.

Lopez (Couple 22): It'd be dangerous. I'm just out of touch with men. It would be so much against my nature, my true nature.

June (Couple 28): I enjoy the similarities Wilma and I have. I like being with a woman because I am a woman; so part of it is this same gender thing. For me it is not a sexual thing at all, I think I could tolerate having sex with men. I just don't know if I'd want to live with one. I always feel really emotionally identified with women.

Carmen (Couple 6): What would I gain from a heterosexual relationship with a male? Nothing! I've just never had the slightest interest in having that kind of a relationship with a man. I can get along fine with men working with them. We've even had [a male friend] living here and stuff, but it goes so completely against every fiber in my being to even imagine being with a man. I'm not talking about having sex. I mean just having an intimate or personal relationship with a man. Just, being in a relationship with a man that is not work related has no appeal for me.

Carson (Couple 6): I can't imagine a personal relationship with a man where you have a vested interest in everything they think and do. Nor can I imagine a man having a vested interest in everything I think and do. I can't imagine having that with a man? Never! I don't think they think the same way. I think men are different; they are missing a chromosome or gene or something. Even a wonderful guy like my brother, no way!

Carmen (Couple 6): I know a nice young man at work. I mean he is special, one of the nicest guys I have ever met. I cannot imagine being in a relationship with a guy even one as nice as I've described. It just goes against something, whatever that thing is, that made me know when I saw Carson that she was different like me. It's just not natural for me.

Irene (Couple 10): I would lose who I am. As nice as it would be to have that level of acceptance and all those other things, I think it would suffocate me to death. It has taken me forty years to feel as good about myself as I do. I don't think I would have made this progress if I was in a straight relationship. I also think your partner puts your needs and your wants up there with hers. It's like, I want the best for my partner, period. However she defines her life, I want her to have it.

Sas (Couple 10): It's too prescribed of a role. I mean the people who I dated in high school and college, I never would have experimented with who I am in the way that I have. Those explorations just never would have been options.

Trixie (Couple 19): I would miss the warmth of a woman, the nurturing. Women are very comfortable. I can't feel that way about a man. They're of no value whatsoever—even though I don't hate them, I just believe in live and let live.

Norton (Couple 19): Women are much more comfortable to be with. I

resent the things men expect. They expect to be waited on. They expect their food and other services. I would gain nothing and lose everything.

Chris (Couple 23): What would I lose? Oh, god, mutuality, love, interdependence, understanding, intimacy. There aren't enough words to cover what I'd lose. I would lose so much by losing a woman's love.

Elaine (Couple 2): In a heterosexual relationship with a male, I don't think that I would feel like this person truly supported me, or that I could truly be myself with them. I work with too many men. I work in an office that is 99% professional male. There is such a push and pull with a man. Everything is different with men: the way they look at the world, the way they look at others. I would not feel safe, the way I do with Morgan. I feel emotionally safe with a woman. There's such a feeling being with Morgan or even being with other lesbians that I'm sort of home, to myself. And I don't think I would ever feel that way with a man.

Intimacy

Martha (Couple 1): Oh, I think a level of intimacy. I would miss the level of intimacy and closeness I feel with Dell. I just don't think that I could have that with a man. Some of the nicest men that I have ever met, I would not share myself with at the level that I have with Dell.

Dell (Couple 1): I agree with Martha. I would lose the intimacy, the sharing, and feeling connected.

Courtney (Couple 13): I know what I did miss when I was in a heterosexual lifestyle, I missed the level of intimacy and friendship that I've experienced with another woman. I felt like I was on another planet to tell you the truth. I felt like I was an alien that was just dropped on a planet and expectations of me were, like, unreasonable.

Liz (Couple 20): What would I lose? I'd lose the snuggling and intimacy we have all the time. There's a softness about being with a woman that there isn't with a man. In my close emotional relationships with men, there was always the sense of reserve and a need to protect my vulnerability. I don't feel I have to protect anything about myself in my relationship with Sally.

Opie (Couple 17): I guess if I was going to go back to a heterosexual lifestyle, I'd have to be with the pope or something. What would I

miss? Everything! I would miss the companionship.

Maggie (Couple 18): And I'd lose everything else besides a standing in the church. Especially intimacy! I don't think heterosexuals have intimacy like we have it. Neither of us had intimacy in our marriages. Some of the best heterosexual examples I've seen, don't have the kind of intimacy we have. The degree of intimacy we have had for 25 years is fairly rare even in the lesbian community we know. But you just almost don't find it in heterosexuals.

Diane (Couple 5): I would lose the level of intimacy: the emotional understanding. There is so much that we don't have to explain. There is a common language, common experiences.

Gertie (Couple 5): What I would miss, would be everything. I would feel alone. I have good male friends, in fact, some of my best friends are straight men. Not to take anything away from those friendships but it's not anything at the level of what Diane and I have. Maybe I'd just be depressed, feel kind of unfulfilled. But since I've known a lesbian relationship, I would be terribly lonely, terribly unhappy. I'd probably spend a lot of my time in fantasy. Or I might even write just to have a place for emotional expression in my life. It would not be a comfortable place for me.

Lesbian Community

Andra (Couple 29): I think we would have to give up an almost clandestine community. This secret lesbian world that exists in this conservative, Republican, southern state capital that goes unseen. There are some parts of that which are fun. I mean going to the basketball games, whether it is at the university or college, where all these heterosexual alums are, or whatever, and there are the women. There are sisters over here, and it is like it is this little secret community. So I would miss that although I would know now, that it was there. I would miss the intimacy or the time I was allowed to spend with women friends. I guess you can do that in the heterosexual world, but the intimacy of us as a couple and going out with other lesbian couples. We have this particular couple that we have been good friends with since their son was born six years ago. For six years we have really cultivated this foursome. I really enjoy sharing what goes on here and what goes on there. They have gotten new jobs, one of them recently. We are excited for them. They don't know what they are going to do if we go to Belize for a year. And again, I don't think that would be different with a heterosexual couple, but it is special to me.

These women are lesbians; they live our lifestyle. We share some of the same struggles; they are real struggles. Prejudices? I guess we deal with prejudices by sharing them.

Liz (Couple 20): To me there's a genuineness and a sharing of commitment and sense of community. I don't tend to think of us as an oppressed community. But I think from an analytic perspective, I think that there's a piece of that. The mutual oppression and the recognition of being oppressed as a community draws a bond that we tend to respond to. And I would really miss that. There's also a sense of, as a lesbian, belonging to the lesbian community. And I never had a sense as a heterosexual of belonging to a heterosexual community.

Taylor (Couple 16): Leaving this relationship for a heterosexual one would be a very, very frosty Friday.

Una (Couple 16): Remember in South Africa there is no frost. She means leaving this lesbian relationship for a heterosexual one would be as impossible as finding snowballs in hell.

Taylor (Couple 16): Losing our strong lesbian community would be harder than losing family. Since the accident 13 months ago, other than Una's family of origin, the lesbian and gay community has been there supporting us every step of the way. Although we have many friends in the heterosexual community they don't have that sense of community. They have always been accepted. They can come and go as they like. They never need to reach out and fight for their rights.

What would you gain?

Trixie (Couple 19): I would gain nothing.

Teresa (Couple 23): What would I gain? I can't see that there is anything I'd gain. Because I've gotten everything I wanted, myself, without the help of a male. And I'm not a man hater. I've worked hard for everything I've gotten, so what could they give me that I already don't have? Certainly emotionally they couldn't come up to what a woman has to offer.

Practical Benefits

Taylor (Couple 16): The largest gains would be the practical privileges like insurance benefits. Heterosexuals receive social approval for everything: getting married, a new job, having a baby. However, let me

be clear. I am not jealous of heterosexual women; I have no desire to be one.

Florence (Couple 3): Oh, god. Being the practical person that I am, you would gain some of the benefits and the opportunities that you wouldn't have otherwise in terms of financial gains and benefits. I mean, automatically we know that a male will earn more money. I think you'd have those type gains.

Opie (Couple 17): What would I gain? I could be on your insurance. You would gain social approval; but, the tradeoff would be hell.

Sadie (Couple 21): What would I gain? The only thing that might be a plus is that you could sit back and not worry about money and someone would take care of you. Society expects a man to take care of you.

Maggie (Couple 18): I would gain standing in the church! Well, you know, the kind of cultural stuff. Where we wouldn't have to worry if our wills were going to be honored. Knowing our presence in the hospital was going to be honored. You know, that kind of cultural stuff. The heterosexual people we know take it for granted that we have the same privileges that they do. We have to teach them the reality is that is not true.

Norton (Couple 19): The only thing that I could possibly gain, I suppose I could gain, would be somebody would support me. But other than that, there is absolutely nothing.

Gender Roles

Courtney (Couple 13): I would gain all the expectations placed on a heterosexual couple: what they do, how they act, the whole male/female relationship. Even though it's changed somewhat, you know, what my parents expected the relationship to be like, what other friends expect. The first time I went off to the kitchen with the women and the men were in the living room watching football, I thought, absolutely not. It was like "that's the way you do it." I thought this is totally ridiculous. There were stereotypical expectations that I just thought, no way. I didn't think this would be a reality in my life but here I was standing in the kitchen.

Diane (Couple 5): All I can do to answer this question would be to compare myself to the straight women I know. They get together and

they bash their husbands. They talk about their husbands like they are scum. I mean, they just bash them. I think “how horrible that you are carrying these feelings about your husband, but you share your life with somebody like that.” I wonder what happens to women when they marry men.

Social Approval, Acceptance, and Freedom

Chris (Couple 23): Let’s see. What would I gain? Social acceptance and the ability to obtain social approval. Social approval to fit into society as it is now designed.

Elma (Couple 7): The only thing I’d gain, maybe, would be that, universal acceptance.

Eva (Couple 13): I would gain social approval, but what’s the cost of it?

Sierra (Couple 14): The social approval you would gain is not worth the hassle you have to go through to get there. So, no, I wouldn’t be in a heterosexual relationship.

Elizabeth (Couple 29): We went on an Olivia cruise together and had the experience of societal acceptance for a week. It was an awesome experience.

Liz (Couple 20): I think what I would gain would be that social respectability. Although, I think we have really established that for ourselves in this community with the people who count. I value my lesbian friends that we had dinner with last night a lot more than I would value social respectability, in terms of the county commissioners or the local bankers or the country club set.

Sally (Couple 20): We would gain social respect, but that doesn’t mean a heck of a lot to me at this point. When I was married, we had just the responsibility of the kids. I don’t know what it would be like living with a man without kids. We had four kids. We never had time for each other, certainly not a lot of it. I don’t know what I would gain. Besides I wouldn’t get involved with a man unless he had a hell of a lot of money, so I might gain that. I don’t know what I would gain. I have no idea. If you put value on things like the church and community stuff you would gain that kind of acceptability.

Daphne (Couple 3): What I would gain from a heterosexual relationship would be that level of acceptance. Society’s version or

acceptance of what is normal. I would miss the associations; I just love lesbians. I love their independence. The energy that lesbians have is incredible. If somebody offered me a pill, and said “here, take this pill and you’ll be straight,” I’d feel like, “no thanks.” Cause I really, I like my lifestyle. I like who I am!

Gertie (Couple 5): As far as what would I gain, it would be societal support. A society that would sustain and support our relationship rather than tear it down. I wouldn’t have to struggle so much with my identity in presenting myself to the professional community. Not being in accord with society has never bothered me. Maybe I taught myself not to miss society’s approval.

Jackie (Couple 21): I would probably gain social acceptance because I, unlike Sadie, have been abused because of my sexual preference. My years in military service were bad. I mean for eight years, I went through hell. I was told to lie. I was so pissed. I had to make all these decisions by myself and I was young. I mean, it wasn’t like I could talk to somebody and say “how should I handle this or that.” There were no gay people to go to like there are now. These young people can discuss things with each other. I mean, it was terrible. Then working for a special unit with security clearance, they investigated you for everything. Florence, my ex-girlfriend, was an electrical engineer for the military. We were really concerned over our livelihood. Sadie has never experienced any of that. Even now when we’re up at the beach or something and nobody’s around, Sadie will want to hold my hand. I say, “No!” I stay away from her so she won’t hold my hand in public.

June (Couple 28): I would gain a tremendous number of goodies from society. From family, I think as much as my family loves Wilma and accepts her at this point. Let’s pretend Wilma vanished into thin air and I took up with a man. God, would they be happy. They’d be thrilled to death. That would be the most wonderful thing to happen to me. They’d be so happy for me. Personally I can’t imagine that I’d gain anything. With the boys we are very active in the heterosexual world. Social acceptance would make our lives with the boys easier. Sometimes I would just like to pass. Just be regular like every other couple. As a lesbian couple with children, there is a certain amount of energy you have to expend all the time.

Babs (Couple 30): What would I gain? Social acceptance.

Rae (Couple 30): What would I gain? Probably more acceptance from the community at large, my family.

Andra (Couple 29): I guess I would like the freedom when we travel together in any airport to be able to touch, to hold hands, or have an arm around each other on the airplane. I think it would be really something. I would relish that unconditional acceptance.

Lopez (Couple 22): I can't imagine gaining anything. We are out everywhere. We really don't, I mean, being here in this rural area we don't really experience that much. I'd say we experience more about color than being lesbian.

Rebecca (Couple 22): Someone might say, social acceptance; but I feel I have social acceptance. The community accepts us because we spend money. Money is money. Every shop keeper knows us. It crosses color and sexual boundaries.

Polly (Couple 17): We would gain the freedom to walk down the street and hold hands. Social approval is the only thing that I really think I'd gain.

Wilma (Couple 28): We would have the freedom to dance in public. We could publicly display our affection. Public displays of affection are a big deal to me. I absolutely hate not getting to be public with someone. As out as we are, people don't treat us as a couple. They don't see you as like a family. June and I had this weird thing happen. We started going to Unitarian Universalist Fellowship for a variety of reasons, including because we thought it would be good for the boys. The first time there we cried the entire time. I mean we're crying the whole time and we're like, "well, are we hormonal or what?" So we went back the next week and the same thing happened. So we're like, "what in the hell is happening with us?" Then we realized it was because we went as a family. It was a supportive environment. Many of the people there knew us and knew we were coming. It felt like the way we went with our families as children to church. We were sitting there in the service and a lot of people who were there knew that we were sitting with each other because we were a couple. It was sad. We had no idea we were so oppressed by this. The feeling of oppression had so much power even after all these years. Even though being gay is so old news to us. I think that's what you'd gain. You'd just go. You could be free to be who you are, wherever. If you walked down the street holding hands it would be okay. I mean June and I'll do that occasionally, not very often, because it takes too much energy. I don't want to worry about it. I just want to be able to hold hands.

Mary (Couple 7): See, I can't even conceive of this because, this is how

I've been since I was eight years old. It's all that I've known or that I've been really aware of. The idea of not always having to live in fear, that someone will find out and create very negative circumstances would be great. Whenever I "come out" to someone there is always a fear of rejection or harm. That fear wouldn't have to be; I wouldn't have to deal with that. I "come out" to my clients by talking about Elma, and what we do. Losing my fear of negative consequences is the only thing I would gain by being heterosexual. The fear that may have minor to major ramifications would be gone.

Dell and Martha (Couple 1) offered a story to explain how they learned about social approval:

Dell: What I'd gain would be instant acceptance. I have a short story to tell you on this. It was one of the big revelations of my life. I have a friend at work named Ray; he is a kind of computer nerd guy. He's a little older than we are and a very nice man. He's single, never married. He's a geeky guy. He wanted to date me. He didn't know I was a lesbian so I told him and he was like, "oh, let's be friends." He also knew and liked Martha. He learned to scuba dive. One Thanksgiving Ray and I decided to go on a dive trip together. Martha couldn't get off work but she encouraged us to go.

Martha: It was around Thanksgiving time.

Dell: Ray had just become a certified diver. Martha and I hadn't been diving in a while and I said "Let's go to Key West for Thanksgiving. We'll only be gone four days and it will be fun." I booked with one dive shop and he booked with another shop; it was so close to the holidays we had to take what we could get. So we were even staying in different hotels; but we were on the boat together. Since Ray and I were similar ages, and we were friends, everyone on the dive boat assumed that we were a couple. Maybe not married, but living together, or boyfriend and girlfriend. The acceptance I received from that group, the kind of camaraderie, in that 'you're one of us,' was one of probably the five most revealing experiences of my life. I have never in my adult life, of course, felt that kind of acceptance. It was a different world.

Martha: I remember you telling me about going on a night dive and Ray wrapped the towel around you, [because I was cold] she was freezing. It was a friendly gesture. But I mean it was like, people drew so much out of that kind of stuff. Dell and I have been scuba diving with a wide variety of people, a lot of whom were very nice. But there have been times where there's been obviously the unspoken message

for us to go sit on that end of the boat, and we'll sit on this end of the boat.

Dell: But it's not the same. Let me tell you. I mean, this was and is a real eye-opener. This happened to me six or seven years ago and I had been in a lesbian relationship for nearly twenty years. It was like, "oh my god, this is what people have." And it was depressing to me. I didn't want to change, but it is so unfair. It was a real sense of support, I mean, it's crystal clear in my mind.

Irene and Sas (Couple 10) shared how they learned about social invisibility:

Sas: For my medical ethics course, I had to interview a physician and write a paper about an ethical issue relevant to his practice. I chose a gay physician in private practice. In the process of discussing medicine we talked about how society really supports heterosexuals. So much is taken for granted about how heterosexual relationships work and those assumptions are reinforced at so many levels. I miss having that kind of structurally ingrained support for our relationship.

Irene: Sas's faculty advisor invited his students to his house at the beginning of the semester and invited all the married spouses. Sas is out, she's the first openly out person at that medical school, yet we were not invited.

Sas: So although my relationship is a matter of record, did he choose to ignore that? Did he actively ignore that? Am I supposed to confront him and say, "Is this an oversight?" Just having that reinforcement and affirmation from your professors or lack thereof. I'm wondering "is this guy going to be sabotaging me the whole time I'm here? Trying to undermine my work, professional work as well as my relationship? I miss having the freedom to challenge his sexual discrimination. I decided it was better not to confront him. I just let it go and we did not go. I did not go.

Irene: I think that's probably the gain, just the automatic acceptance. Not having to worry about it. After 17 years, there is no part of my life that Sas is not a part of. So it's really difficult to have any kind of relationship with anybody where our relationship doesn't become apparent.

A photographer's theme prevails only when it finds expression in the dominant visual elements of a composition such as large shapes, rough textures,

jagged lines, and differences as much as similarities. The dominant elements in this study were how the women practiced money, power, and shared values in their relationships. Beyond the dominant elements of equality, this chapter provided untouched images--revealing intersections, contrasts, and anomalies--of what lesbians' value most about their long-term partnerships. As in a photograph, our understanding of relationship equality also comes from the intersections, contrasts, and anomalies as much as from the expected.

In the introduction of this study, I suggested that while popular images of lesbians forming relationships are becoming more prevalent, depictions of lesbians who have established and are sustaining long-term partnerships are noticeably absent. The 30 couples in this study who are sustaining long-term relationships have offered insights into the meaning of equality. What if society considered the practices of lesbian women regarding money, power, and shared values not as peripheral insights of a subculture but as keys to understanding equality in any close relationship?

POSTSCRIPT

Mailing a final draft of my work to the participants felt like releasing a kite that I had made from pieces of precious fabric given to me by each couple. I knew the string--my commitment to this work--by which I held the kite was strong; but would the kite fly? It felt as if the women in the study were the wind, so I had to trust them to keep the kite aloft. Thirteen days later I received my first response, an e-mail from Katie and Anna (Couple 12):

Thanks so much for sharing your dissertation draft with us; it was certainly interesting to read about all the different couples yet recognize similar attitudes, actions, and values. . . . I'm sure your committee enjoyed reading your work and society could certainly benefit from the message you provided. We would certainly be willing to participate in future studies, and we appreciate your contributions with this valuable study. . . . We also think you did a great job changing people just enough to provide some cover, but making them very similar to themselves.

Success! The kite was up and I wanted it to soar. Knowing what the other couples thought became almost an obsession. The wind kept blowing as the next day I heard from another couple, then another and another. After ten days, I started calling couples who did not routinely e-mail me. Today is November 1, a month since I mailed the draft, and I have received an e-mail from, or talked with, 17 of the 30 couples.

Indeed, the kite is flying. Some of the couples have sent the kite to incredible heights; a few have focused on their piece of fabric, wanting it to glisten in the sun or be dulled by cloud shadows. Other couples have enjoyed the similarity of their fabric swatches; while two couples wanted the material to be thicker. Everyone seemed glad the kite was made and that they had contributed to it.

The responses of these nine couples reflect the directions, the velocity, and the temperatures of the wind. As the reader, I invite you to feel the wind as you watch the kite fly.

Elaine & Morgan (Couple 2)

We started off with plans to read just the 4th and 8th chapters since we're so busy right now and became so interested that we read the entire thing. We don't have any changes, but we do have one question if it becomes a book? Will those who wish to reveal their true identities be able to do so or will everyone remain anonymous. It's just that we're very proud of our long-term relationship and would like to be out in the book. We certainly understand, however, if this can't be done to keep true to the original manuscript, continuity's sake, etc.

Mary & Elma (Couple 7)

It really tickled our funny bones to discover we are not as unique as we thought in our handling of money and household runnings. After observing straight relatives, we thought we were just "different." We're lesbians, which does make a difference. Often the analogy of two horses in harness is used when straight people speak of marriage, but we really are that way, keeping the load even and each doing what is necessary to share the work.

Teresa & Chris (Couple 23)

We absolutely loved the snapshots, including our own. It was especially interesting to see that your "snap" of us was not completely how we would define ourselves. It seems to give a different view of us than we have of our relationship. Not worse or wrong, just different. It gives us a look at us from another perspective, which is most interesting. Of course, we were most fascinated to see that we handle the finance thing in such a unique (for this group) way. Now we can ponder on the meaning of that!

That first para[graph] was inspired. . . sets the tone perfectly. Then the body--"tell 'em what yer going to tell 'em". . . uh huh! And the last para[graph] is equally perfect. . . protecting us because today's world makes it necessary. . . nice touch!

These tables I like a lot. . . but dammit, I wish they were able to be the TRUE pictures of us. . . real names, occupations, etc. . . . All I could think as I read them was "She works as hard at concealing us as she does as revealing us for the world. . . would that it weren't necessary."

In chapter 4, I was struck by the many differences between us in the

"details". . . and the basic similarity in strength, purpose, determination to make our lives our way in a hostile world, and the success we have found, both financial and psychological. THAT is how I want the world to see us. . . good job of showing it.

In chapter 5, again, the differences leap out. . . as does the fact that we have indeed "handled" the money situation so well . . . that's the leading cause of arguments in couples, you know (straight, of course) . . . we done good proving that economic disparities do not have to mean economic disagreements.

In chapter 7, Hojjat's Model fits us well. . . BUT. . . as I give it more thought & read your Fig 1, I am moved to add (tho you probably won't & I can see why) to your application statements: "Sharing money, time, space, and the pressures from a hostile world creates a special bond." I do think a large part of our relationships is that "Us against the world" thing which psychologically bonds us so strongly. There's a ton of research on the "Us-Them" dyad which supports this.

Courtney & Eva (Couple 13)

Your study is rich, insightful, and brings a validity to our lives and relationships from a unique perspective. Yes, our lives are diverse, but you have contributed greatly to the realization that each of the couples interviewed is not representing just our own isolated and unique way of defining and building equality in our relationships, but rather that we are participating in some mystical manifestation of a higher collective consciousness that is working toward a greater good. We are both grateful and humbled by the opportunity that you have given us to better know ourselves and other women in long-term, loving lesbian relationships.

Meg & Kay (Couple 27)

The stories are fascinating, and I think you've shown how equality can be actualized in close relationships, and how it has to be practiced constantly to be real. I didn't address this in our interview, but I was very conscious for many years that Meg thought of herself as the inferior partner in the relationship. I never thought of her that way, never treated her that way, and often tried to talk her out of it. Along about 10 years into the relationship, I think she finally got it, and I haven't had to talk her out of it since! Maybe, as you say, the (heterosexualist) society could learn a lot from us!

Norton & Trixie (Couple 19)

I find that you most certainly covered the equality in long-term lesbian relationships. This is a valuable study and I found myself laughing over the "What would you lose? What would you gain?" part of the study. . . we all seem to value being respected, being "allowed" to be ourselves, being somebody, not hiding anything, being able to be intimate, and the non-gain socially does not seem to bother the lesbian community to any great extent. I also liked the partnership snapshots and kept referring to them as I read along.

Diane & Gertie (Couple 5)

First, I must say that your work is extremely smart and thought-provoking. I love your style of presentation: it is somewhat poetic in the flow and in the imagery. Thank you for this contribution that validates our lives so singularly.

[Since my interview with Diane and Gertie their circumstances have changed; Diane lost her job and Gertie got promoted. Their description of the ramifications of these changes extends the information in Chapter 5.]

It was a "traditional" arrangement, one described in your paper as Gertie being perhaps in a "provider role," although it didn't feel like that. We both were engaged in specific tasks to attain our shared goals, and Gertie's pay seemed a resource enabling us both, enabling our family as a unit. As always, we had no delineations as to what was "her" money versus what was "my" money. We are, as you noted in your paper, communal in that way as pertaining to our family and needs. We view our assets as shared resources, entirely under joint ownership, just as all debt is shared.

Our mothers had taken time off during their careers to manage their homes in similar fashion but our families didn't see us in that same way. Just the other day Gertie's dad referred to me as "unemployed." It is apparent my parents think that too. Despite the work we've done to validate our relationship to our parents, I think the tendency still is for them to view us in many ways as "roommates" instead of as spouses who have the same privileges and responsibilities they have as spouses.

My point, as it pertains to the theme of your dissertation, is that homophobia we encounter externally and what we have internalized

automatically defines us differently than how heterosexual couples can be defined. Perhaps lesbians remain, to some extent, independent of each other within our relationships because we don't have the benefit of society acknowledging us as a joined unit of shared resources and shared goals. I'm sure too that to some extent, we remain codependent as well within our relationships to make up for support we lack elsewhere. Now there's a unique concept, I must say: independent codependency.

It was fascinating reading too, that gave us much to discuss about our dynamics and dyads in general. The individual stories were quite compelling and the transcripts revealed so much that never could be conveyed another way, the subtle nuances of coupling and the manner of interacting that is singular to women. All of the couples were so interesting and, dare I say it, cute, each of them unique unto themselves with some similar threads weaving among us all.

Sierra & Casey (Couple 14)

Once I received your dissertation draft, I couldn't put it down until I was completely done. Your information I found to be extremely interesting, enlightening about other lesbian couples yet at the same time, I was not surprised about the interpretation of the equality in our lives. To me, you simply verified the practice and for that, I thank you for pushing yourself to complete such an overwhelming task. There was one issue that I was surprised [by] and that was the number of individuals who had not secured postsecondary degrees yet have done very well in terms of financial stability. This is not to imply any lack of intelligence but merely provides me with an awareness that despite either the opportunity or desire to secure additional education, lesbians ARE empowered to strive to attain goals whatever they might be in terms of occupational attainment. The information was both pleasing and encouraging.

In response to the wind I find myself needing more string to allow the kite to continue to soar. I took a risk writing this dissertation as a book. Given the strength of the wind, however, I am glad I made the commitment.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS OF INVESTIGATIVE PROJECTS

Title of Project Lesbian Relationships: A Study of Relationship Equality

Investigator Betty C. Etzler, LCSW

I. The Purpose of this Research/Project

You are invited to participate in a study about long-term lesbian relationships. This study involves in-depth interviewing for the purpose of contributing to the general public's understanding of homosexuality. This study involves 29 couples in addition to yourselves.

II. Procedures

The procedure to be used in this research is in-depth interviewing. The time and conditions required for you to participate in this project will be pre-arranged between you and the researcher. The interview will be approximately three hours in length.

I do not anticipate any risks or adverse consequences.

As a safeguard, I encourage you to express any discomfort and if necessary to stop the interview.

IV. Benefits

Your participation in the project will provide information that may be helpful to other lesbian couples; it may offer insight regarding your own situation, and beneficial to heterosexual couples.

No guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

You will have the opportunity to review and comment on a draft of this project if you so desire.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

Your participation in this study will be kept strictly confidential. At no time will the researcher release the names of the participants in this study to anyone without your written consent. Your names, location, and other possible identifying information will be changed for your protection. Fake names which you may choose during the interview will be substituted for actual names in written reports of the research.

The research interview will be audiotaped. These tapes will be transcribed by Betty Etzler or a designated transcriber, bound by a professional code of ethics to confidentiality.

VI. Compensation

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

VIII. Approval of Research

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Sociology.

IX. Subject's Responsibilities

I know of no reason I cannot participate in this study. I voluntarily agree to participate in the study.

Signature

Signature

X. Subject's Permission

I have read and understand the Informed consent and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this project.

If I participate, I may withdraw any time without penalty. I agree to abide by the rules of this project.

Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I will contact:

Betty C. Etzler
Principal Investigator

(540) 772-2919
Phone

Carol A. Bailey
Faculty Advisor

(540) 231-7534
Phone

H.T. Hurd
Chair, IRB
Research Division

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APPENDIX B: ORIGINAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Themes

These themes will serve as a guide for me to strive to have a conversational partnership with the participants.

A. Background Realities

1. How did you meet?
2. Help me understand some individual characteristics you brought to this partnership.

Employment history

- 1). Did your mom work, how did that affect the family? Your attitudes about work?
- 2). What was your dad's ideas about your future?

Family history

- 1). Was being a tomboy part of your childhood experience, any comments.
- 2). Discuss your perception of the division of household labor in your family.
- 3). Can you give me examples of power differences and how they were resolved in your family?

Sexuality history

- 1). Were you able to avoid the pressure of romantic heterosexual dating?
- 2). In thinking about your future where did marriage fit? Did you ever have the idea you didn't want to marry?
3. What was involved in your becoming partners?
4. When did you first live together? Where? Circumstances?
5. Did you think this relationship would last fifteen or more years? If so, why?
6. What was it like living with ___? How was it different from other people you had lived with family, husband, roommates, former partners?

B. Economic Realities

1. In the beginning of this partnership did both of you see yourselves as having to work the rest of your life? Has that view changed and if so, how?
2. How does your employment attitude compare with those of single and married women, and men?
3. What influence has your sexuality had on work, job choices, and relationships with other workers?
4. Has "coming out" had specific economic consequences in your life? Or would being out have specific economic consequences in your life.

5. How do you manage two careers or jobs?
6. What is the gender composition of your occupation, reasons for this situation and your experience of being a woman in this job.
7. What is the centrality of employment to your sense of self.
8. Discuss whether you would be able to be invested in your work to the same degree you are now if you were in a heterosexual marriage?
9. To what degree is your geographical location based on economic work opportunities?
10. How do you manage money in this partnership?
 - 1). Who makes the financial decisions?
 - 2). Who pays the bills?
 - 3). Are you buying this home together or does it belong to one of you? If owned by one, how do you handle the inequality involved?
 - 4). How do you manage differences in the amount of money you earn?
 - 5). If you were to break-up how would your standard of living change?
 - 6). How would you divide your assets in a break-up?
 - 7). When you entered this relationship did you assume that any earnings or property you had would remain solely yours?
 - 8). If you were to inherit money would it belong to you or both of you?
 - 9). How have you provided for your partner in case of serious accident or death?

C. Partnership Realities

1. How do you make major decisions? Minor decisions?
2. How would you describe your problem-solving style as compared to your partner's?
3. Can you give me examples of how you faced and dealt with crises (health, financial, interpersonal conflicts, parenting issues)?
4. Tell me about a situation in which your way of problem-solving as a couple has been difficult but fair?
5. What is your attitude about the use of drugs and alcohol? Has alcohol or drug use ever presented problems for you as a couple?
6. Has physical abuse ever occurred in this relationship? How did you resolve it?
7. When you felt the biological clock ticking, what was it like for you? Did you consider having or adopting children?
8. If relevant, describe how you manage parental responsibilities?
9. You have heard of lesbian bed death in long-term couples where lesbians stop engaging in sexual relations at some point in their relationship. How would you describe the changes in your sexual behavior over the course of the relationship?

D. Social Realities

1. Describe your friends? Are their ex-lovers or ex-husbands in your social network? Do you have separate friends, how does that work?
2. Is this a monogamous, non-monogamous or other type of relationship? Has it always been so?
3. Have you ever been separated during these years? If so, what were the circumstance? How long? What was it like? How did you get back together?
4. Where all have you lived during this relationship? Describe what has been involved in moving. Do you see yourself making any more moves?
5. Have you ever had other people living with you during this relationship? If so, who and how did it affect the relationship?
6. Are you open with your parents about your sexuality? How do they treat you as a couple?
7. Describe how your social life has changed over the course of the relationship?
8. In what ways have you been active in the lesbian/gay community? Are you currently active in a community? Describe what it is like?
10. As a couple have you ever had psychotherapy? If so, briefly describe the reason and the outcome.
11. In what ways are the two of you similar, different on issues like:
 - feminism
 - religion/spirituality
 - politics
12. Describe how you balance a sense of emotion separateness and togetherness in the relationship? Has it changed over the course of the relationship?
13. Are one or the other of you more emotionally invested in this relationship?

E. Egalitarian Realities

1. Describe how you manage household tasks? How has that changed over the course of the relationship?
2. Is equality something you have talked about in this relationship? Explain what you believe about it.
3. What concrete steps do you take to make this relationship equal?
4. What are the inequalities in this relationship? What strategies have you tried to overcome them?
5. If you were to return to a heterosexual lifestyle what would you miss versus what would you gain?

F. Parenting Realities

1. How has being a parent changed your relationship?
2. Talk about the heterosexual idea that women must have children but lesbians must not have children.
3. In what ways is it different raising children in a lesbian household versus

raising them in a heterosexual household?

4. One couple with children suggested that lesbians and gay men without children are more narcissistic, any comments?

5. How does co-parenting with another lesbian make things easier, harder?

Give me other important questions that you think I should add to this guide. Are there questions I should omit?

APPENDIX C: LAST INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Themes

These themes will serve as a guide for me to strive to have a conversational partnership with the participants.

A. Background Realities

1. How did you meet?
2. Describe your relationship history
3. Was being a tomboy part of your childhood experience, any comments.
4. Sexuality history
 - 1). Were you able to avoid the pressure of romantic heterosexual dating?
 - 2). In thinking about your future where did marriage fit? Did you ever have the idea you didn't want to marry?
3. What was involved in your becoming partners?
4. When did you first live together? Where? Circumstances?
5. Did you think this relationship would last fifteen or more years? If so, why?
6. How do you show each other that you love them? Appreciate them?
7. What is the most favorite gift your partner has given you? Why?

B. Economic Realities

1. In the beginning of this partnership did both of you see yourselves as having to work the rest of your life? Has that view changed and if so, how?
2. How does your employment attitude compare with those of single and married women, and men?
3. What influence has your sexuality had on work, job choices, and relationships with other workers?
4. Has "coming out" had specific economic consequences in your life? Or would being out have specific economic consequences in your life.
5. How do you manage two careers or jobs?
6. What is the gender composition of your occupation, reasons for this situation and your experience of being a woman in this job.
7. What is the centrality of employment to your sense of self.
8. Discuss whether you would be able to be invested in your work to the same degree you are now if you were in a heterosexual marriage?
9. To what degree is your geographical location based on economic work opportunities?
10. How do you manage money in this partnership?
 - 1). Who makes the financial decisions?
 - 2). Who pays the bills?

- 3). Are you buying this home together or does it belong to one of you?
If owned by one, how do you handle the inequality involved?
- 4). How do you manage differences in the amount of money you earn?
- 5). If you were to break-up how would your standard of living change?
- 6). How would you divide your assets in a break-up?
- 7). When you entered this relationship did you assume that any earnings or property you had would remain solely yours?
- 8). If you were to inherit money would it belong to you or both of you?
- 9). How have you provided for your partner in case of serious accident or death?

C. Partnership Realities

1. How do you make major decisions? Minor decisions?
2. What happens in the decision-making process when one of you knows more about a particular subject than the other. For example, if your partner was a nurse.
 2. How would you describe your problem-solving style as compared to your partner's?
 3. Can you give me examples of how you faced and dealt with crises (health, financial, interpersonal conflicts, parenting issues)?
 4. Describe the Trust you have for each other.
 5. If your partner said something to someone else about you that was harmful, how would you handle it?
 5. What is your attitude about the use of drugs and alcohol? Has alcohol or drug use ever presented problems for you as a couple?
 6. Has physical abuse ever occurred in this relationship? How did you resolve it?
 7. When you felt the biological clock ticking, what was it like for you? Did you consider having or adopting children?
 8. If relevant, describe how you manage parental responsibilities?
 9. You have heard of lesbian bed death in long-term couples where lesbians stop engaging in sexual relations at some point in their relationship. How would you describe the changes in your sexual behavior over the course of the relationship?

D. Social Realities

1. Describe your friends? Are their ex-lovers or ex-husbands in your social network? Do you have separate friends, how does that work?
2. Is this a monogamous, non-monogamous or other type of relationship? Has it always been so?
3. Have you ever been separated during these years? If so, what were the circumstance? How long? What was it like? How did you get back together?
4. Where all have you lived during this relationship? Describe what has been involved in moving. Do you see yourself making any more moves?

5. Have you ever had other people living with you during this relationship? If so, who and how did it affect the relationship?

6. Are you open with your parents about your sexuality? How do they treat you as a couple?

7. Describe how your social life has changed over the course of the relationship?

8. In what ways have you been active in the lesbian/gay community? Are you currently active in a community? Describe what it is like?

10. As a couple have you ever had psychotherapy? If so, briefly describe the reason and the outcome.

11. In what ways are the two of you similar, different on issues like:

feminism

religion/spirituality

politics

12. Describe how you balance a sense of emotion separateness and togetherness in the relationship? Has it changed over the course of the relationship?

13. Are one or the other of you more emotionally invested in this relationship?

E. Parenting Realities

1. How has being a parent changed your relationship?

2. Talk about the heterosexual idea that women must have children but lesbians must not have children.

3. In what ways is it different raising children in a lesbian household versus raising them in a heterosexual household?

4. One couple with children suggested that lesbians and gay men without children are more narcissistic, any comments?

5. How does co-parenting with another lesbian make things easier, harder?

6. How does it being the birth mom or not being the birth mom?

F. Egalitarian Realities

1. Describe how you manage household tasks? How has that changed over the course of the relationship?

2. Is equality something you have talked about in this relationship? Explain what you believe about it.

3. What concrete steps do you take to make this relationship equal?

4. What are the inequalities in this relationship? What strategies have you tried to overcome them?

5. If you were to return to a heterosexual lifestyle what would you miss versus what would you gain?

APPENDIX D: BACKGROUND DATA SHEET

This information will be used to describe participants of this study as a group. Please complete the following questions with the knowledge that your responses are completely confidential.

1. Your age (years): ____
2. Partner's age (years): ____
3. Your race and ethnic group: _____
4. Your religious preference: _____
5. Your geographical origin at birth (state or foreign country): _____
6. Your highest educational level (HS, BA,BS, MA, MS, Ph.D., etc.): _____
7. Current employment status:
____ full-time employment
____ part-time employment
____ self-employed
____ full-time student
____ part-time student
____ retired
____ other (please explain) _____
8. If employed, what is your title and field: _____
9. If student, what is your field: _____
10. What is your individual average gross yearly income?
____ less than \$ 12,500
____ \$12,500 - \$19,999
____ \$20,000 - \$29,999
____ \$30,000 - \$39,999
____ \$40,000 - \$49,999
____ \$50,000 - \$59,999
____ \$60,000 - \$69,999
____ \$70,000 - \$79,999
____ over \$80,000
11. Approximately what percentage of your household income do you provide? _____

APPENDIX E: LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

Betty C. Etzler
Street
City
Phone

October 1, 1998

Dear,

Finally after 19 months, I have a dissertation draft to share with you. Thanks to your willingness to share your lives, this has been an incredible journey. As you read this material, I hope you are proud of who we are, how we love, how we live, and most of all how we care about people.

I invite you to share your impressions of this work with me. Tell me what you like and what you would like to see changed and how. I will carefully consider all feedback. If there are any particular words, phrases, or sentences that you think need improvement, tell me. If you know a reference source I need to check, tell me. Most importantly, tell me what you think about my interpretation of the equality in our lives. Does this make sense to you? As lesbian women with a standpoint apart from heterosexual patriarchy our perspective does provide a critical and possibly corrective practice.

The easiest and fastest way for you to provide feedback is through e-mail (etzler@roanoke.infi.net). I have purposely used line numbering so I can locate the text easily. So do provide a text number if you are suggesting a textual change. If e-mail is not your style, a letter or phone call would be appreciated.

Because longitudinal studies are so valuable, I would consider it an honor if you would be willing to participate in future studies. I see this as only a beginning; Imagine 5 or 10 years from now, how other women might benefit from the incredible richness and diversity of our lives.

The timeline for this work, which as you now know never turns out like I plan, should roughly be something like the following:

Feedback from participants no later than Oct. 31
Final dissertation to committee - Nov. 5
Dissertation defense somewhere between - Nov. 14-20
Graduation - Dec. 19
Begin book negotiations - Feb 1999

Working with the stories, trying to understand the equality of our lives, the patterns, the commonalities and the uniquenesses has been the most exciting challenge of my academic career. This dissertation is about you, about us. Imagine someday being able to proudly check on any form, Status __ lesbian partnership. If you want a final copy of the dissertation please indicate so in your feedback. I will copy and send them in January. To save some of the printing cost I have not included references and appendices if you want them let me know.

With utmost respect,

Betty C. Etzler

APPENDIX F: VITA

BETTY C. ETZLER

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EDUCATION

- Ph.D. Department of Sociology, Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University.
Blacksburg, Virginia. December 18, 1998.
- M.S.W. School of Social Work, Florida State University.
Tallahassee, Florida. March 1980.
- B.S. Department of Education, Carson-Neuman College,
Jefferson City, Tennessee. May 1968

PROFESSIONAL POSITIONS

- Adjunct Social Work Faculty, Radford University, Radford, VA, Fall 1998 - Present.
- Psychotherapist, Private Clinical Practice, Roanoke, VA. July 1987 - Present.
- Clinical Social Work Consultant, Roanoke Valley Artificial Kidney Center.
August 1985 to January 1995
- Assistant Professor, Social Work Program, Ferrum College.
August 1982 to June 1987.
- Assistant Professor, Social Work Program, Southwest Missouri State University.
August 1980 to July 1982.
- Social Work, Teaching, and Administrative Positions. 1968 to 1980.

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Educational Technology
Family
Research Methodology

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