

Lesbian Nonbiological Mothering

Negotiating an (Un)familiar Existence

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I think one of the things that happened for me and that I didn't expect was that I was very worried about being left out. And, you know, what sort of happens is this baby gets all of the attention and then the birth parent gets "how ya doing? How ya feeling?" ... and then ... there's this nonbirth mother ... I just don't think people knew what to do with me ...

And they would say [to Leah] "Oh the baby looks just like you" and you know all of this stuff. If just felt like, again, I was doing a lot and I wasn't getting any credit for it. Not that I needed that ... I just didn't expect it...

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She explained:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I found that the process was slower and scarier because there was this deep down fear ... you know ... is this really going to mesh? Is this really going to happen? Am I really going to feel like that is my kid?

It just wasn't the same visceral, physical, kind of feeling that I experienced when I carried a child. It's taken time and it's taken him growing into his personality. And him, you know, greeting me enthusiastically when I come home ... the little moments when he does ... the physical bonding things like leaning his head on my shoulder and all that ... and the 'ahhh' (and she sighs). Finally the physical feeling has come. But it took much longer. And, there was, you know ... a deep down fear ... a question as to whether it would happen ...

Anne's sentiments resemble the results clinical psychologist Barbara

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

we really talked about that too much....

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Further complicating the matter is the fact that second parent adoptions are not granted to lesbian couples in most parts of the United States. Maria Gil de Lamadrid, attorney for the National Center for Lesbian Rights in San Francisco (1993), explains, “Second parent adoptions are granted fairly routinely in heterosexual context as stepparent adoptions in families blended through marriage. In a lesbian context, however, where the mother’s partner is not legally related to the mother (by marriage), nor is she biologically related to the children, the courts generally do not allow these adoptions” (203). According to Gil de Lamadrid, there are few locations in the United States where the biological mother is not required to relinquish all of her parental rights in order to proceed with a second parent adoption. By implication, most mothers must relinquish their rights in order for the second parent adoption to occur. Note: these legal distinctions vary widely by locale and are constantly shifting. Sometimes they operate informally. The process of determining parental rights can be stressful for lesbian couples after the birth of their child. As exemplified by Kathy, the birth mother has the decision-making power in this process. This is frightening for nonbiological mothers who may be unable to predict their partner’s feelings and emotions after giving birth. Gil de Madrid explains that “Although donor insemination has now been available for some time, lawmakers have not kept up with the new developments and concerns facing lesbian mothers” (206). As increased numbers of lesbians decide to have children and join the lesbian baby boom⁴ a demand for new legislation will continue to coincide. This lengthy and time-consuming process is crucial to solid formation of lesbian families.

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

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

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

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

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

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

linguistic constraints we encounter affect not only our public discourse but our private ones as well" (1993: 226). This becomes evident throughout my interviews with nonbiological mothers even though many of them felt comfortable labeling themselves as such. One mother referred to herself as the "nonbirth" mother instead. However, this also defines her by what she is not.³ A second parent adoption can only occur after the birth of the child. In the case of a known donor, the father's rights must be terminated before the nonbiological mother is granted equal legal rights to the child. In my study, Anne was the only participant who used a known donor. Kathy, Barbara, and Leah used an unknown donor from a local sperm bank.

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

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