

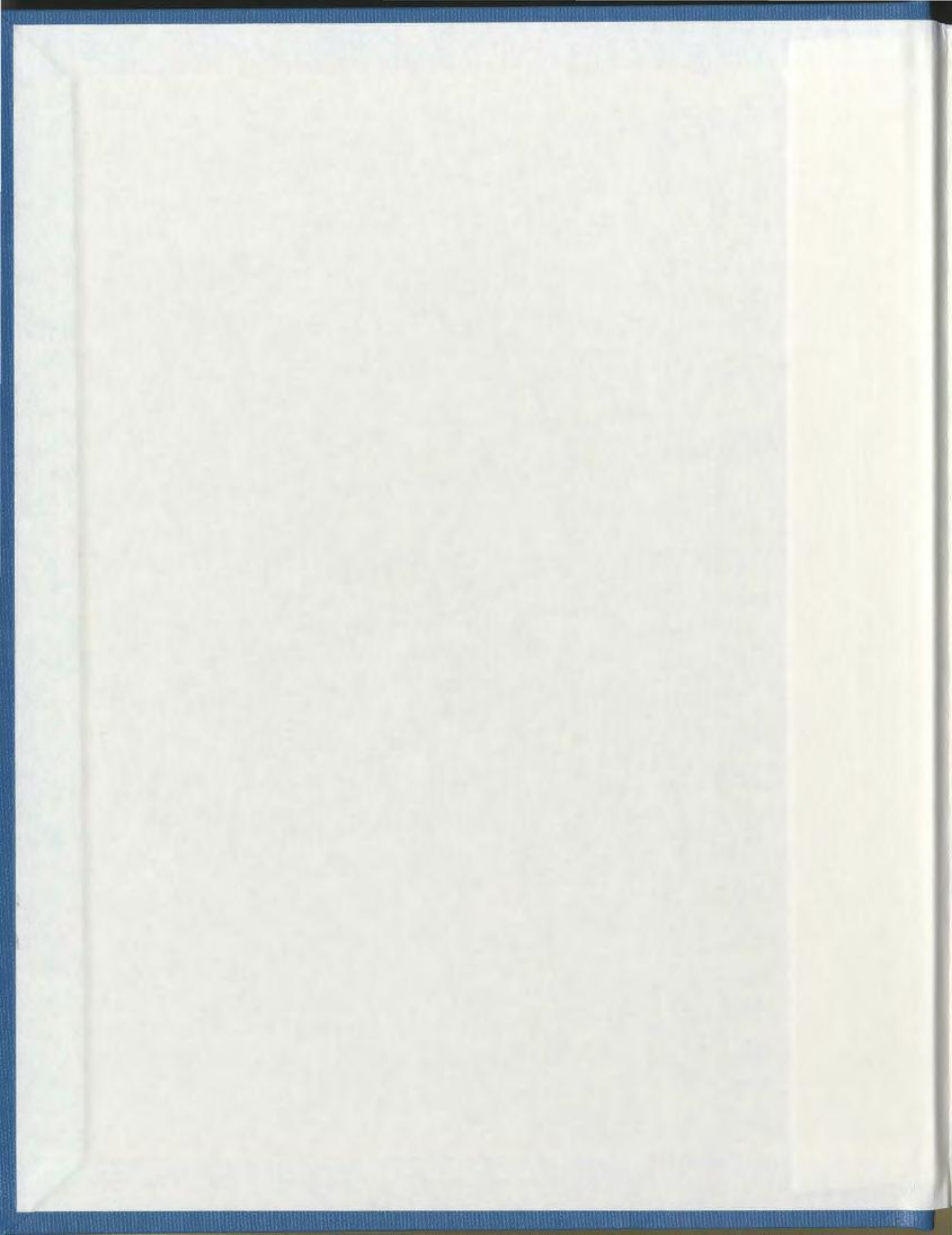
'WHITE PICKET FENCES':
LESBIANS' NARRATIVES OF KINSHIP BUILDING
WITH THEIR SISTERS IN
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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**'White Picket Fences':
Lesbians' Narratives Of Kinship Building
With Their Sisters In Newfoundland And Labrador**

By
Laura Fitzpatrick

A thesis submitted to the
School of Graduate Studies
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
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Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

This thesis is based on a study in which I interviewed lesbians about their familial relationships with their heterosexual sisters. The 'lesbian sister' I analyze in this thesis is both literal and metaphorical. At its most literal level, the 'lesbian sister' signifies a concern with the experiences of lesbian sisters who participated in an interview-based study that composes a part of this thesis. At a metaphorical level, the 'lesbian sister' signifies its concern with the dis/continuities of the lesbian subject in feminism. I discuss the narratives of the lesbians I interviewed from their position within society as family's 'outlaws'. It is through the picture of lesbians as family's outlaws that family as a site of heterosexual privilege comes into view. While heterosexual women's powerlessness *within* the family marks their oppression, it is lesbians' *lack of access to* family that marks theirs. This difference in heterosexual women's and lesbians' experiences of sisterhood suggests that heterosexuality is not equally compulsory for heterosexual women and lesbians and compulsory heterosexuality does not mean the same thing for both. In this thesis I suggest that feminist analysis of family fails to grasp lesbians' position in society as family's outlaws because distinctions between heterosexuality as male dominance and heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance are under theorized. I call for a critical shift in feminist methodology to relinquish the idea that heterosexism is nothing but a by-product of sexism in order to bring into view the specific experiences of lesbian 'sisters'.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 IS SISTERHOOD POWERFUL?

From the beginning of the 1970's women's movements in North America, a vision of sisterhood, based on the idea of a common oppression among women, was evoked.¹ The significance of this vision of sisterhood as a political rallying point for feminism is marked in feminist memory by Robin Morgan's (1970) anthology, Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology Of Writings From The Women's Liberation Movement.² Feminists' theorizing of women's common oppression was disrupted in the 1980's when criticisms began to arise, from a number of sources, about women's diversity. The most widely known challenges came from women of color who criticized the ways in which feminist theory speaks only from a white woman's perspective (Davis, 1981; hooks, 1981, 1984; Hull, Scott & Smith 1982).³ Attention has also been drawn to other defining factors in women's lives such as class, ethnicity, ability and sexuality. Women speaking from these standpoints of 'difference' argue that sisterhood is a false platform that ignores women's varied and complex social realities. Now, at the beginning of a new century, feminism's task is to maintain a subject in

¹This thesis purposefully focuses upon the North American context because lesbians' positions within women's movements differ depending upon the geographic context, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these differences.

²Another well known example from the early women's movement is Daly, 1978. For a more recent reflection upon feminist uses of sisterhood and related concepts see: Grant, 1993.

³More recent examples include: Collins, 1990; hooks, 1989; Spelman, 1988.

the face of women's diversity. In this thesis I pose the question: How might a return to the literal source of the sisterhood metaphor, relationships between familial sisters, inform this task in relation to the *lesbian subject* within feminism?

Is 'Out' Now 'In'?: Contemporary Scholarship On Sexual Diversities

Over the past thirty years many questions have been asked, in varying configurations, about the dis/continuities of the lesbian subject in feminism.⁴ The last decade of prolific theorizing of sexual diversities challenges feminists to rethink how we understand the lesbian subject.⁵ Arlene Stein refers to these challenges in her writing about the "decentering of lesbian feminism" (Stein, 1998, p. 553).

The once clear connection between lesbianism and feminism, in which the former was assumed to grow naturally out of the latter, is not all that clear today. Gone is the ideal of a culturally and ideologically unified Lesbian Nation. A series of challenges, largely from within lesbian communities themselves, have shaken many of the ordering principles of lesbian feminism (Stein, 1998, p. 554).

Central to these challenges is the call to separate out sexual stratification from gender

⁴For discussions about lesbian experience within the specific context of *Women's Studies* see: Frye, 1992; Mintz & Rothblum, 1997; O'Driscoll, 1997; Woodward, 1996; Zimmerman & McNaron, 1996a.

⁵Edited anthologies that consider the dis/continuities between feminist theories and theories of sexual diversities include: Doan, 1994; Heller, 1997; Merk, Segal & Wright, 1998; Weed & Schor, 1997.

oppression.⁶ While some feminists/lesbians have responded with discomfort or ambivalence to the new discourses on sexualities and its call to make distinctions between sexism and heterosexism (Duggan, 1992; Englebrecht, 1995; Jeffreys, 1994; Schor & Weed, 1994), in this thesis I consider how “compulsory heterosexuality” (Rich, 1983)⁷ is *not* equally compulsory for heterosexual ‘sisters’ and lesbian ‘sisters’, and does not hold the same meanings for both (Calhoun, 2000, p.27). In this thesis, I suggest that heterosexuality is not just a form of male dominance over women but is simultaneously a form of heterosexual dominance over lesbians as non-heterosexuals.

While I believe that heterosexual dominance is more than just a by-product of sexism, new scholarship on sexual diversities tends to investigate sexuality as an entity unto itself, as Kath Weston (1998) demonstrates. Weston, reviewing the study of sexuality within the

⁶The introduction to the first reader in lesbian and gay studies, for instance, states that “Lesbian/gay studies does for sex and sexuality approximately what women’s studies does for gender” (Abelove, Barale, & Halperin, 1993, p.xv). For a social science perspective on lesbian and gay studies see the reader: Nardi & Schneider, 1998. For an introduction to queer theory, see Jagose, 1996. Special issues of scholarly journals dedicated to new scholarship on sexual diversities, representative of the flurry of writing in the early-mid 1990’s, include: “Critical Studies of Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Issues” (1994) *Critical Sociology*, 20 (3); de Lauretis (1991) “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities” *Differences*, 3 (2); Dinshaw & Halperin (1993) “Opening issue” *GLO: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1 (1); Escoffier, Kunzel & McGarry (1995) “Queer” *Radical History Review*, 62. “Lesbian and Gay Histories” (1993, 1994) *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 4 (2) and 4 (3); Seidman (1994) “Queer Theory/Sociology” *Sociological Theory*, 12 (1). For an example of a special issue of a journal with Atlantic Canadian threads see: Ristock & Taylor (1998) “Sexualities and feminisms” *Atlantis*, 23 (1).

⁷Rich theorizes heterosexuality as a complex and problematic construct rather than as a natural category. She argues that heterosexuality is “something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force” (Rich, 1983, p.126).

social sciences, draws links between the methodology of much contemporary discourse on sexual diversities and social science research on sexuality ranging from early 1900 anthropological ethnographies on sexuality through to mid century works on sexuality such as Kinsey (1948; 1953) and Master's and Johnson (1966). Weston suggests that these past and present efforts all aim to ask the same question: “[What do we] *really* do in the privacy of the shack, hut, or the boudoir?” (Weston, p. 25, 1998, italics in original). In other words, Weston suggests that this approach amounts to a methodology of reductive empiricism, where sexuality is studied by collecting data, without analytical frameworks that give form to data.⁸ New scholarship on sexual diversities does not tend to consider sexuality along additional axes such as class, race, history, or cultural context,⁹ and also does not typically apply their theories beyond gender appearances and sexual practices to topics of inquiry such as labor, migration, globalization, and kinship.

⁸One way Weston's work has contributed to my own thinking about the new discourses on sexuality is that it has helped me to conceptualize the study of sexuality in the 'pre-queer' era as largely having an interest in the *performance* of sex (performing erotic activity), and the new discourses on sexuality as having an interest in the *performance* of disruptions to sex/gender binaries (such as Bulter, 1990).

⁹Susan Bordo refers to this tendency of not considering sexuality within the context of other social identifications as “thoroughly “textualiz[ing]” the body...giving a...*meaning* at the expense of attention to the body's material locatedness” (Bordo, 1993, p.38, italics in original).

The 'Dyke' Between The Feminist And The Queer

Investigations into sexuality as a structural existence, apart from the ways in which we practice sex and our ideas about our sexual practices, are often absent from contemporary discussions about the lesbian subject, yet such investigations into sexuality can provide valuable insight into questions which are increasingly being asked such as: Is the lesbian future feminist? Is there a lesbian future? (Ruby, 1996). This thesis represents my own process of thinking through these questions about the lesbian subject and in my own mind I conceptualize this thinking as an attempt to understand the 'dyke' between the feminist and the queer (Dever, 1997). Underlining this thesis is my aim to bring 'traditional' talk on gender into relationship with 'new' talk on gender. I tried to meet this aim by using qualitative research methods to investigate a lived context of relationships between lesbians and heterosexual women in order to explore their respective relationships to heterosexuality. I thought such a context might allow for exploration of the distinct, yet intersecting, nature of heterosexuality as male dominance and heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance.¹⁰

¹⁰I found that the focus in feminist/lesbian debates over new scholarship on sexualities seemed to centre upon either women's relationships with men, or relationships among queers. The focus on men occurred within the context of feminist/lesbian discussions about the ways in which new scholarship on sexuality dropped from view the issue of male dominance. The focus on queers occurred within the context of feminist/lesbians discussions regarding the disruptions of sex/gender binaries in order to delineate the contours of heterosexual dominance. Few of the discussions of new theories on heterosexual dominance focused explicitly upon relationships between women of differing sexualities. A review of the 'pre/non-queer' literature on women's sexuality reveals a similar pattern: the number of studies which focus upon women's varied relationships with men far outweigh the number

Lesbians' Relationships With Their Heterosexual Sisters: A Lived Context

For my thesis I chose to investigate the lived context of *lesbians' relationships with their heterosexual sisters*. Since the category sister incorporates the categories woman and family, and since heterosexuality is culturally assumed to be a critical component of both these categories, the category 'lesbian sister' is an oxymoron. While lesbians occupy the role of sister within their families of origin, their lesbian sexuality displaces them from the categories women and family, simultaneously displacing them from the category sister. Because sisters are assumed to share (a heterosexual) sameness,¹¹ heterosexual sisters are not displaced from their sister roles due to their sexuality in the same way as lesbian sisters¹² and

of studies which focus upon women's varied relationships with women. The small number of studies that investigate how sexuality structures women's lives within the context of women's varied relationships with one another typically focus upon interactions between women of the *same* sexuality. For instance, heterosexual women's sexuality is usually analyzed within contexts such as heterosexual girlhood friendships or heterosexual married women's friendships (Hamson, 1995; Hey, 1997; O'Connor, 1991, 1992; Oliker, 1989). Similarly, lesbian sexuality is generally investigated from the perspective of lesbian romantic friendships/relationships (Classical accounts: Faderman, 1981; Smith-Rosenberg, 1974. Contemporary accounts: Becker, 1988; Rothblum & Brehony, 1993). I have found two exceptions: Surface tension: Love, sex and politics between lesbians and straight women, an anthology of personal narratives that explores friendships and perspectives on relationships between women of different sexualities (Daly, 1996), and Part 3 of Lesbian friendships: For ourselves and each other (Weinstock & Rothblum, 1996) which considers friendships across difference, including lesbians' friendships with heterosexual women.

¹¹See **Appendix A: Brief Literature Review: Relationships Between Familial Sisters** which reveals a tendency in research on sister relationships to emphasize sameness between sisters and to represent this sameness as unchanging.

¹²At the centre of a lesbian sister's contradictory relationship to the category sisterhood is the simultaneous experience of living as a lesbian-woman in a patriarchal world and as a lesbian-deviant in a heterosexual dominant one.

for this reason lesbians' relationships with their heterosexual sisters make particularly obvious the differences between lesbian and heterosexual women's relationships to heterosexuality.

There are at least two additional reasons why lesbians' relationships with their sisters is a particularly rich context in which to explore (hetero)sexuality. First, relationships between sisters are typically life long. The nature of time in relationships between sisters is unique in that sisters enter a process of identification, including sex-gender-sexual identification, *together* that they tend to share *across the life span*. The relationship that sisters share is likely to be *the* longest relationship of their lives (McGoldrick, 1989). This is because friendships rarely last from earliest childhood until death. Partners and children enter sisters' lives in adulthood. Sisters' parents typically die before them. Brothers typically die before sisters as well, since women statistically live longer than men do. Thus, if a sister chooses to maintain a relationship with her sister, she can share more of her lifetime with her than with anyone else.¹³ Second, the context of family brings sisters' shared process of sex-gender-sexual identification into relationship with other social identifications such as race, ethnicity, and class.

It is for these reasons that I chose to interview lesbians¹⁴ about their relationships with

¹³Time is a necessary context for studying lesbians' subordination since the very nature of lesbians' displacement is shaped by periods when lesbians are 'in or out of the closet', therefore the context of time that sister relationships provide is significant.

¹⁴For reflections on researching lesbians in Newfoundland and Labrador see: **Appendix B: Mapping 'Out' Geographies: Researching Lesbians And Kinship In**

their heterosexual sisters over time¹⁵ with the hope that a return to the literal source of the sisterhood metaphor might encourage us, as feminists, to rethink the lesbian subject in feminism and to explore new theories of heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance in regards to relationships between heterosexual women and non-heterosexual 'women'¹⁶.

1.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Overall Approach: Epistemology, Methodology, Method

My aim in this study was to explore lesbians' relationships with their familial sisters *from the standpoint of lesbians* and by doing so I made the assumption that knowledge

Newfoundland And Labrador.

¹⁵Since I wanted to investigate how lesbians and their heterosexual sisters negotiate their differences in sexuality, the lesbians I interviewed were out to their sisters and had maintained some form of relationship with them after coming out.

¹⁶A number of scholars (Downing, 1988; McNaron, 1985; Mauthner, 1998) have observed that feminist studies on family neglect relationships between sisters. In their critique of family, feminists have written much more about women's roles and identities as wives, mothers or daughters than they have about women's roles and identities as sisters. The few feminist studies on sister relationships that I have found typically ask the question that Toni McNaron asks in her feminist study on sisters: "What do sisters really mean to each other if they grow up as part of an oppressed group within their culture?" (McNaron, 1985, p.127). In contrast, this study asks questions about how heterosexual sisters and lesbian sisters are *not* equally women and are positioned in opposition to one another within a system of heterosexual dominance. For a discussion of the ways in which social determinism surfaces in feminist gender critiques of family as a social re/producer see: Chapter 5 in Moore 1994.

claims depend, in part, on the situation of the knower.¹⁷ I chose to use qualitative methodology to investigate lesbians' experiences in their sister relationships since a fundamental assumption of qualitative methodology is that in the study of human experience, it is essential to understand the framework within which people interpret their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Inductive analysis characterizes a qualitative approach whereby theory emerges from the data collected rather than deductively proceeding from assumptions and hypothesis. A qualitative research approach is generally advocated for exploratory studies, like this one, that are investigating in-depth complexities and processes (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). Feminist researchers frequently employ qualitative methods for researching women's 'private' lives, including women's familial experiences (For discussions about feminist uses of qualitative methodology/methods to study women's private lives see: Ribbens & Edwards, 1995, 1998).¹⁸

¹⁷Feminist concern with standpoint theory is not so much with what women do, or are observed to do, but rather with establishing a context in which to listen to what women say about themselves in order to discover how they frame their experience, quite apart from what a researcher might claim. Although there are differences between the theories these feminist scholars develop, examples of standpoint theories include: Harding, 1991 (American); Smith, 1987 (Canadian); Stanley, 1990 (United Kingdom).

¹⁸This study was informed by an attention to process and issues of power, characteristic of feminist uses of qualitative methodologies. Evolving issues/debates in feminist methodologies can be found in: Cook & Fonow, 1990; Fonow & Cook 1991; Harding, 1987; Kirby & McKenna, 1989; Klein, 1983; Lather, 1991; Maynard & Purvis 1994; McCormack, 1989; Meis, 1983; Olesen, 2000; Resources For Feminist Research Special Issue: *Feminist Qualitative Research* 28 (1/2) 2000; Stanley, 1990; 1997. For discussions of feminist methodologies as they relate to research on lesbians in a Canadian context (especially lesbians' interpersonal relationships) see: Ristock & Pennell, 1996; Ristock 2002.

The principal method I used to collect lesbians' accounts of their sister relationships was a particular kind of in-depth interview that is generally referred to as life histories.¹⁹ Life history interviews are used across the social science disciplines and place an emphasis upon an individual's responses to societal pressures as opposed to society's responses to individuals (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p. 88). Life histories are particularly useful for generating theory from the "connections of biography, history, and social structure" (Reinharz, 1992, p.131). *Topical* life histories cover a specific experiential topic over an extended portion of an individual's life. I chose to use topical life history interviews in this study in order to investigate and generate theory about the ways in which lesbians experienced sexuality as a structural existence within their sister relationships over time,²⁰ including lesbians' responses to familial expectations society placed upon them as women and as non-heterosexuals.

The in-depth interviews for this study were of an informal conversational style. Since this study was exploratory and was guided by standpoint epistemology, and since lesbians' experiences were not all the same, the form and content of the interviews were guided by how lesbians themselves decided to take me through their experiences as well as by how I

¹⁹Feminist discussions of life history interviews include: Anderson, 1990; Gluck, 1979; Gluck & Patai 1991; Glucksmann, 1994; Gurney, 1997; Stanley, 1992.

²⁰Changes within relations of power over time, including within heterosexual dominance, can be difficult to research because of practical methodological problems (for example longitudinal studies are costly and difficult to carry through). This study tries to circumvent this problem by using topical life history interviews. For a discussion of time and methodological issues as they pertain to women's lives see: Davies, 1996.

responded to what they said.²¹ Lesbians' perspectives on their experiences unfolded as they described them, and I used an inductive method of data analysis whereby analysis occurred concurrently with data collection. My approach to interviews and to data analysis was informed by feminist narrative interpretation (Bloom, 1998). Conversational interviews offer access to thoughts, feelings, and actions in participants' own words. While I often use the words of participants' in this thesis, there were many different threads in the stories lesbians recalled and as a subject producing this thesis, I chose to use participant's words "to tell" *one* thread in their narratives: *displacement from sisterhood*. What is present in this thesis is my interpretation/production of lesbians' displacement from sisterhood, which on any given day, they, or I, may have told with different emphases.²²

1.3

"MY TELLING" OF LESBIANS' NARRATIVES OF THEIR SISTER RELATIONSHIPS

Lesbian Subordination: My Use Of Displacement Theory To Tell Stories

Since same-sex desire is assumed to be *the* defining trait of lesbian identity, two assumptions are commonly made about lesbian subordination. The first assumption is that

²¹Since the nature of a master's thesis is such that research is to be carried out within a limited time frame and with a limited number of participants, I also chose to use open-ended interviews because they maximize "discovery and description" (Raymond, 1979, p.16) and "produce nonstandardized information that allows researchers to make full use of differences among informants" (Reinharz, 1992, pp.18-19).

²²See **Appendix C: Introduction To Participants**

lesbians are subordinated because social life is structured by the division of people into two differently treated groups: people who sexually desire the same sex and people who sexually desire the opposite sex. This assumption is followed by a second assumption that the unequal treatment of lesbians is rationalized by stigmatizing same-sex sexuality. However, I believe that abnormality is culturally associated with same-sex sexual desire only because same-sex sexuality is linked to other more fundamentally stigmatizing characteristics of lesbian identity. One of these other fundamentally stigmatizing characteristics is the cultural assumption that there are only two natural and normal sex/gender categories - 'woman' and 'man'. Lesbians' sexual desire and activity toward members of the same sex displaces them from these two sex/gender categories.²³ A second fundamentally stigmatizing characteristic is that lesbian sexuality is culturally assumed to be inherently different from heterosexual sexuality. Lesbian sexuality is supposedly prone to pathological sexual excess and/or immoral sexual practices characterized by neurotic obsession and compulsion. Lesbian identities are readily reduced to purely sexual identities and as a result lesbians' 'all consuming sexuality' is thought to drive out their ability to form and maintain committed kin

²³Cheshire Calhoun points out that: "Engaging in same-sex sexual activity marks one out as an inferior sort of person only if it raises doubts about one's manhood or womanhood. Heterosexuals, for example, can often engage in same-sex sexual activity without similar stigma because their heterosexual orientation links them securely to the category 'woman' or 'man'. Lesbians and gays who engage in exactly the same sexual activity are vulnerable to being stigmatized because that activity is culturally read as a sign of their failure to be either real women or real men" (Calhoun, 2000, pp. 17-18).

ties with others.²⁴

It is generally assumed that the effects of lesbian subordination, like those of gender or race oppression, are primarily *material* effects (e.g. income, education, housing, health care). However, lesbian identities are not always readily visible and can be closeted, which often allows lesbians to choose to evade the material costs of discrimination in a way that those who have more visible identities cannot. In this sense, the effect of discriminatory policies based on sex dimorphism and sexual orientation is the demand that everyone must present themselves as heterosexual men and women if they are to have full access to basic social goods. From this view, a serious effect of lesbian subordination is *the displacement of lesbians from the public sphere and the displacement of lesbians from a protected private sphere*.²⁵ In this thesis I depict lesbian subordination as the result of having no legitimized place in society, not even a disadvantaged one. Central to this thesis is an attempt to open up

²⁴My understanding of lesbian subordination within a system of heterosexual dominance rejects the view that lesbian identities are defined simply in terms of an orientation of sexual desire. Calhoun points out that this definition closets the lesbian-not-woman and displaces lesbian politics: "...the assumption that being sexually oriented toward members of the same sex is the defining trait of lesbians, has obscured the politics of theorizing about lesbians within a feminist frame that takes its subject to be women. Feminists have been able to assume uncritically that lesbians and heterosexual women are equally *women*, differing only in their sexual object choice" (Calhoun, 2000, p.19, italics in original).

²⁵To view lesbian subordination from the standpoint of systemic displacement, rather than a materialized disadvantaged placement, is not to say that lesbians' subordination has no material costs. Nor is it to suggest that gender or race oppression never involve displacement of gendered or raced identities or that there are no other forms of oppression characterized more by displacement than disadvantage e.g. Jewish identity.

a critical space to theorize the structure of lesbian subordination from the standpoint of lesbians' displacement from the categories woman and family.²⁶

**'White Picket Fences':
The Intersection Of Heterosexuality As Male Dominance And
Heterosexuality As Heterosexual Dominance**

I titled my thesis after the ideologically potent concept of the 'white picket fence' that lesbians frequently used to express their feelings of displacement from the categories woman and family. The phrase 'white picket fence' has been culturally used to signify dominant constructions of the ideal nuclear family and dominant constructions of ideal gender performances that family as an institution incorporates. In my thesis title, "White Picket Fences: Lesbians' Narratives Of Kinship Building With Their Sisters In Newfoundland and Labrador," I pluralized 'fence' into *fences* in order to signify the double meanings that I interpreted lesbian participants to be associating with this concept due to their contradictory relationships to the categories woman and family. In this thesis, I suggest that for participants, as sisters/women family members, the 'white picket fence' represented the ways in which women are *valued* by society in a *patriarchal* world: as a wife to a man and as a mother to his children. I also suggest that for participants, as *lesbian* sisters/women family members, the 'white picket fence' represented the ways in which non-heterosexuals are considered *abnormal* in a *heterosexist* world: lesbians are considered a threat to the

²⁶My presentation of lesbian subordination and use of displacement theory is especially influenced by the work of lesbian philosopher Cheshire Calhoun (1995; 2000).

preservation of family. My interpretation of lesbians' uses of the phrase 'white picket fence', as epitomizing the intersection of heterosexuality as male dominance and heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance in lesbians' lives, is representative of how I have used displacement theory throughout this thesis in "my telling" of lesbians' narratives about their sister relationships.²⁷

Lesbians As Family's Outlaws

In "my telling" of participants' narratives, I chose to position lesbians as family's outlaws as a way to present my interpretation of how participants described the contradictions they experienced being bound by, yet simultaneously breaking, the categories woman and family. Because non-heterosexuals are often understood by society as occupying a pathological sex/gender category and as unable to maintain kin relations, they are seen as fundamentally unfit to participate in family, as a foundational institution of society. While same-sex sexuality is stigmatized by ideological representations of non-heterosexuals as 'outlaws' to the family, lesbians' narratives mark in many ways how they use their culturally

²⁷**Appendix D: Architecture Of The Everyday** is a reflective essay on my personal relationship to the 'white picket fence', which positions me as a producer of knowledge within this thesis. For discussions of feminist/lesbian use of autobiography as a research methodology/method see: Broughton & Anderson, 1999; Kirkwood, 1993; Newton, 2000; Reinharz, 1992, pp. 258-263; Stanley 1992; Zimmerman & McNaron, 1996b. For an example of feminist/lesbian autobiography as methodology/method with Atlantic Canadian threads see Brookes, 1992: "I view myself as both the subject of this text and the subject producing it. In naming myself as the subjective self producing this work, I theoretically shift from a truth perspective to one which I hope enables readers (and me) to see me as a producer and maker of knowledge" (Brookes, 1992, p. 48).

assigned value as family's outlaws in resistance to negotiate meaningful relationships with their sisters.

1.4 THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter 2: Data And Analysis: Lesbians Narratives Of Their Sister Relationships provides my interpretation of fourteen life history interviews and my interpretation of how lesbians framed sexuality as a structural existence within their sister relationships over time, including their responses to familial expectations society placed upon them as women and as non-heterosexuals. Chapter 2 is divided into two main sections: **Growing Up/Coming Out** and **Adulthood**. **Growing Up/Coming Out** describes how young lesbians were displaced from sisterhood because they were assumed to share the same sexuality as their heterosexual sisters. **Adulthood** describes how lesbians were displaced as adults, after coming out, because they were assumed to be qualitatively different from their sisters in relation to the categories woman and family.

Chapter 3: Developing Theory From Lesbian Sisters' Narratives: Theorizing Distinctions Between Heterosexuality As Male Dominance And Heterosexuality As Heterosexual Dominance is a theoretical discussion which suggests that differences between lesbian and heterosexual women's relationship to heterosexuality come into view through ideological representations of lesbians as family's outlaws. I call for a shift in feminist methodology in order to define heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance as

separate from, yet intersecting with, heterosexuality as male dominance.

Chapter 4: Conclusion summarizes three key points in this thesis: 1) lesbians' narratives about their sister relationships reveal that they and their sisters have different relationships to heterosexuality, 2) family as a lived context reveals how male dominance and heterosexual dominance are distinct systems of power, and 3) theorizing the lesbian subject in feminism requires feminists to relinquish the idea that heterosexism is nothing but a by-product of sexism.

CHAPTER 2:
DATA AND ANALYSIS:
LESBIANS' NARRATIVES OF THEIR SISTER RELATIONSHIPS

2.1
INTRODUCTION

Lesbians' Displacement From Sisterhood Over Time And Through Change

*The Relationship Between
The Category (Heterosexual) Woman And The Category (Heterosexual) Family*

The lesbians I interviewed in this study centered their narratives regarding their sister relationships around the contradictions they experienced in being a lesbian sister, in that while lesbians occupied the role of sister within their families of origin, they were simultaneously displaced from sisterhood by being displaced from the categories 'woman' and 'family'. Lesbians' displacement from sisterhood was attributed to the cultural assumption that heterosexuality is a critical component of the categories woman and family. Lesbians' displacement from these two categories was simultaneous since the categories woman and family incorporate one another, as illustrated by the conversation Amy recalled having with her sister's young son Stephen, to answer his questions about the fact that Amy's son David has two moms.

I can remember my nephew Stephen saying to my partner and I: "Do you have breasts?" I said: "Yes, I have breasts.", and he says: "How come you all got breasts in the same family?" You know, the youngster was trying to figure it all out in his mind (8/24).¹

¹The referencing style (8/24) refers to interview transcripts by (interview number/page number) and continues throughout this chapter.

The categories 'woman' and 'family' incorporate one another in that womanhood (sexuality) reproduces family, and family re/produces womanhood (sex/sexual identities).² Therefore, defining one category as heterosexual automatically assumes the definition of the other category to be heterosexual. Stephen's understanding of woman and family as heterosexual underlines his questioning of Amy and her partner on two levels: their sex/womanhood, and the 'realness' of the family Amy, her partner, and their son create together.

The Theme Of Sameness And Difference In Lesbians' Displacement From Sisterhood

In this chapter I use the theme of sameness and difference to discuss lesbians' displacement from sisterhood. Notably, the ways in which lesbians were displaced from sisterhood, as well as the ways in which lesbians acted in resistance to their displacement, changed over time and this change was marked by the specific event in lesbians' lives of coming out. Prior to coming out, lesbians' displacement from sisterhood was discussed in terms of *assumed sameness*; however after coming out, lesbians' displacement from sisterhood was discussed in terms of *assumed difference*.

The lesbians I interviewed attributed their displacement while growing up, before coming out, to the assumption that both they and their sisters would be the same:

²Womanhood (sexuality) re/produces families in that sexuality underlines women's partnering and it is this partnering that can create chosen families. Family re/produces womanhood (sex/sexual identities) in that, 'normatively' speaking, it is within the familial context that women are assigned a sex of female and a sexuality of heterosexuality.

heterosexual. Because lesbians' subordination was structured by invisibility, resistance to assumed sameness required that lesbians figure out and assert the ways in which they were different from their sisters in order to make themselves visible as *lesbian* sisters. In order to talk about the contradictions of growing up under assumed sameness, lesbians paradoxically employed a discourse of difference in their growing up narratives. These patterns in lesbians' growing up narratives are illustrated in Maggie's story in which she and her sister Louise, who is just two years younger, shared a circle of friends. Their entangled web of friendships sometimes led Maggie to feel "weird".

[I would often hear from friends]: "Yeah, your sister is getting it on." I didn't want to hear it. I didn't want to have sex with guys, so I didn't. I have never slept with a man. So I knew I didn't want to have sex with guys. [But] something was in my head where, I should be doing things before Debbie. So it was like: "I don't want to have sex with guys, but I don't want my little sister to be having sex with guys before I am". It was really weird (1/3).

The focus of Maggie's story is the contradiction of feeling different from her sister in the face of the expectation to be the same. As a young teenage *woman*, Maggie was aware of societal expectations placed upon her to have sex with guys; however, as a young teenage *lesbian* Maggie felt the pressure to "get it on" before her younger sister did as a pressure to clear a *heterosexual* path for her sister to follow. Maggie resisted her invisibility as a lesbian sister when she tried to figure out the weirdness she felt and assert difference.

Lesbians attributed their displacement in adulthood, after coming out, to the assumption of difference between themselves and their sisters. Because lesbians' subordination was structured by exclusionary definitions of woman and family, resistance

to assumed difference in adulthood required that lesbians redefine woman and family in a way that gave lesbians status with their sisters as 'real' women family members. In order to describe the contradictions they experienced living under assumed difference, lesbians paradoxically employed a discourse of 'realness' via a discourse of sameness in their adulthood narratives. These patterns in lesbians' adulthood narratives are illustrated in Dale's story, in which she buys a house shortly after coming out to her sister Jill.

I decided I was going to come out to her, and I told her. You know, we'd grown up wanting to get married, white picket fence, two youngsters, all that stuff. So one of the first things I went through was to buy the house in Flat Rock, painted a picket fence. Then I had my picket fence (7/4).

As a woman, Dale was aware of societal expectations placed upon women to marry a man and to have his children; however, *as a lesbian*, Dale experienced these pressures differently from her heterosexual sister. Dale's subordination was not primarily about the pressure she felt as a woman in a patriarchal society to define her value through the roles of wife and mother since she would not be partnering with a man. For Dale, her subordination was primarily based on the fact that her family, which would be based on her lesbian sexuality, would not be culturally recognized within a heterosexual dominant society as a 'real' family. This was in contrast with the automatic assumption of realness that was culturally given to her sister's family/household based on heterosexuality. Therefore, in order to resist displacement and to structurally fit herself into family as a lesbian sister, Dale asserted her sameness through the act of buying her house and painting her picket fence.

Chapter Overview

The Pressure To Perform Heteronormative Family

My discussion of lesbians' displacement from sisterhood is divided into two sections. The first section focuses upon lesbians' sister relationships during the time period of **Growing Up And Coming Out**, while the second section focuses upon lesbians' sister relationships during **Adulthood**.³ Throughout this chapter my discussion of lesbians' relationships with their sisters during the periods of growing up/coming out and adulthood continually references three interrelated familial pressures that lesbians described: the pressure to be heterosexual, the pressure to publicly preserve their family of origin as heterosexual, and the pressure to reproduce family based on heterosexuality. These three pressures, in relation to lesbians' displacement from the category woman and the category family, are discussed within the simultaneous and contradictory pressures of male dominance and heterosexual dominance that compose heteronormative familial practices. My discussion of lesbians' narratives illustrates how the systems of male dominance and heterosexual dominance intersect yet are not identical systems; neither are lesbian and heterosexual

³Lesbians chose to talk much more about their adult experiences than their growing up/coming out experiences; therefore my discussion of lesbians' growing up/coming out narratives is approximately half the size of my discussion of lesbians' adulthood narratives. It is likely that lesbians focused upon adulthood for a number of reasons including: 1) many lesbians could not seem to remember a lot of specific details from their childhood, 2) I suspect that some lesbians did not talk about childhood memories at length because they were distressing to them, and 3) because lesbians had been living out to their sisters over a longer period of time in their adult years than in adolescence, they had accumulated more experiences of directly negotiating sexual difference with their sisters in adulthood.

sisters' relationship to these two systems identical nor stagnant over time.

Growing Up And Coming Out

Most lesbians that I interviewed began to question their sexuality and/or began to self-identify as lesbian during their adolescent years. Lesbians who experienced this early self-awareness typically described their displacement during growing up and coming out as a series of negotiations with their sisters in relation to assumed sameness that began while they still lived together in their parents' household.

My discussion of lesbians' growing up and coming out stories is arranged into four subsections. **Sisters As Girl Family Members Are Defined As Heterosexual** considers the stress young lesbians experienced because they were assumed to be the same as their heterosexual sisters (and mothers), and because they did not have access to accurate information about their lesbian sexuality. **Lesbian Sisters As Girl Family Members In Newfoundland And Labrador Public Life** uses two narratives to discuss the negotiations young lesbians made with their sisters when they began to resist their invisibility and assert their difference. Analysis focuses upon how relational dynamics between sisters were inseparable from public representations of their families of origin, including the pressure to publicly preserve their family of origin as heterosexual. **Re/production Of Heteronormative Family: The Element Of Time In Growing Up Female** focuses upon the contradictions young lesbian sisters experienced in relation to the expectation for them to grow up, get married to a man, and to re/produce family/children in adulthood. Central to

this discussion is how the passage of time shapes lesbians' contradictory relationships to familial re/production. **Coming Out: The Element Of Time In Growing Up Lesbian** describes the pivotal event of coming out as an act of resistance to invisibility and as signifying lesbians' transition into adulthood through their attempts to integrate their chosen family with their family of origin, just as their heterosexual sisters were doing through their marriage to male partners.

Adulthood

Participation in this study required that lesbians and their sisters had maintained some form of relationship, excluding estrangement, after lesbians came out; therefore none of the lesbians I interviewed experienced total rejection by their sisters as a result of coming out. Lesbians described their adult sister relationships, after coming out, in terms of the process of redefining the meanings each of their sisters associated with woman and family, in order to include them as lesbian sisters. This process of redefinition was described as fluid, and the level of their sisters' acceptance of them as shifting back and forth across a continuum over time. Lesbians' adulthood stories were about the nuances of their sisters' recognition and acceptance.

My discussion of lesbians' adulthood stories is organized into four subsections. **Redefining 'Sister-in-law'** discusses the importance lesbians placed upon their sisters' recognition of their lesbian partners as 'in-laws' and the strategies lesbians employed to gain this recognition. **Kinship Building Between Adult Sisters** is a discussion of how lesbians

compared and contrasted their lives with their sisters' lives in relation to the pressure to perform family heteronormatively. This section is further divided into three subsections. *Lesbian Partnerships As A Family Form* examines sister relationships within the context of a heterosexual sister's ability to recognize her sister's lesbian partnership as a family form. *Sisters As Mothers And Aunts* considers lesbians' displacement from sisterhood in relation to the category children. At the centre of this discussion is the cultural assumption that motherhood is a critical component of womanhood and family, as well as the cultural assumption that lesbians are abnormal and unfit to have, or interact with, children. *Sisters As Adult Children Within Families Of Origin* uses two narratives to illustrate how lesbians typically compared and contrasted how their chosen families based on lesbian sexuality and their sisters' chosen families based on heterosexuality were valued within their families of origin. **Sexuality And Family Are Public Matters** discusses distinctions lesbians made between their sisters' private and public acceptance of them and their chosen families, including the pressure lesbians felt to publicly preserve their family of origin as heterosexual. **Redefining Woman And Family: The Passage Of Time In Lesbians' Adult Sister Relationships** discusses how the passage of time allowed for change to occur within the process lesbians undertook with their sisters to redefine woman and family. Analysis focuses upon how lesbians' narratives inform kinship ideologies in relation to sexual diversities.

2.2 GROWING UP AND COMING OUT

Sisters As Girl Family Members Are Defined As Heterosexual

While growing up within their families of origin, sisters were defined as heterosexual. Lesbians often referred to 'sex talks', given to them and their sisters, as early examples of their parents directly teaching sisters to understand themselves and each other as heterosexual. Lesbians typically described 'sex talks' as being facilitated through the use of sex education books. Dominique described her sex education book, subtitled 'pour les enfants de 10 a 13 ans' (for children ten to thirteen years old), that she and her sister were to share.

And at one point, my sister was 13 and I was 10, so it was the perfect book, right? And [my mother said]: "Here", you know, "read that". And so we had that book, but I mean I didn't learn anything in that. I mean, sure, I learned stuff about the vagina, but I didn't learn it the way I wanted. It wasn't teaching me something I didn't know and it wasn't teaching me what I would have liked to know (10/19).

Dominique's sex education book was supposedly "perfect" (10/19) because she and her sister were assumed to be the same; they were both, as young girls, assumed to be heterosexual.

Lesbians recalled that "sex talks" did not typically translate into on-going conversations between themselves and their parents, as in Maggie's case.

My parents gave me the traditional talk, like you know, my mom sat me down and said: 'Well, this is what is going to happen'. But, like, there was never an open dialogue (1/6).

Sisters' communication patterns regarding the topic of sexuality tended to mirror those of their parents. Faith traced the lack of open dialogue about sexuality between herself and her

sister back to their “family structure” (4/5).

Not with my sister. That’s just something that we’d never mentioned. That sort of thing just wasn’t talked about. I don’t think we really discussed it at that age. It’s just the way our family structure was. It’s just that, you know, those kinds of things are private and personal. You don’t talk about them, right. Even amongst ourselves we didn’t talk about it (4/5).

Faith’s experience of sexuality as a “private” (4/5) subject matter, which was not supposed to be discussed with her sister, was a common experience among the lesbians I interviewed. This lack of dialogue reinforced and maintained young lesbians’ invisibility.

Lesbians’ displacement as a result of their families’ assumption of heterosexuality, and the governing silence around sexuality in their households, was compounded by the fact that lesbians had little or no outside access to accurate information about lesbian sexuality. Faith expressed feeling confused about the sense of difference she felt while growing up in a rural Newfoundland community over thirty years ago.

The word lesbian never entered my mind, but I knew I was different. Growing up the word dyke wasn’t even mentioned because that was thirty years ago, right. A dyke thirty years ago was one of the things that holds the water up, in, where is that? Denmark? Over there. That’s what a dyke was (4/23).

The ‘otherness’ lesbians reported feeling as a result of their displacement was especially distressful when the information lesbians received about lesbian sexuality was in the form of hateful religious doctrine or myths passed amongst peers.

I know that when I was a kid I did kiss a couple of girls. I just thought it was something everybody did. I don’t remember when I realized that it wasn’t. I guess, when I was going to school and, you know, after a certain age, you hear a bit about gay and lesbian, and you just know it’s wrong. That’s all you know about it, right. You don’t know much more than that. That’s the only

thing I heard about it. It plays a role that the population is 90 percent, if not 95 percent Catholic. In the [church] readings, sometimes there would be parts about homosexuality, where it is linked to being a sin (10/9-10).

As lesbians discussed their adolescent attempts to reconcile their familial expectation of sameness with their personal feelings of difference, they often made references to the intertwined nature of relationships between sisters-daughters-mothers. Dominique reflected upon her invisibility within the context of her interactions with her sisters and mother.

[I] never really opened up to [my mother and sisters]. I know that my sisters did talk to my mom about that kind of stuff [sexuality] and I sort of found it weird because I didn't feel comfortable in doing 'so at all. And that [is] exactly that. Because I [thought] that what I was feeling was wrong. Why [was] I more secretive in that way than they were? Because I'm lesbian, and I knew it from the beginning. And I, you know, I had those feelings, but denied them. I remember everybody knew about [my little sister's] first kiss. She told the whole story and mom told [me and my older sister] right away (10/6).

Dominique's sisters felt secure about sharing their sexual explorations as they occurred in adolescence. Because Dominique's sisters were performing womanhood as socially accepted, they assumed their heterosexual experiences would be understood and responded to positively. In contrast, Dominique's adolescent sexual explorations were invisible because, as a lesbian sister-daughter, she did not know how her sisters and mother would react, especially within the context of her Catholic family and community.

While Dominique internalized her feelings about being displaced, Chris outwardly expressed hers. The intensity with which Chris experienced her displacement is epitomized in her words:

I wasn't one of the girls that mommy taught a lot. She couldn't (2/18).

Mothers-daughters-sisters are supposed to follow one another's footsteps. When these footsteps are culturally defined as heterosexual, whose familial footsteps do lesbians follow?

Chris described her adolescent relationships with her mother and her sister as "hostile" (2/8).

She attributed this hostility to her "butchy" (2/8) expression of lesbian sexuality.

I was born with a baseball glove on my hand and not a[n] oven mitt, so mom and I didn't really get along well (2/8).

According to Chris, her sister Nancy was "pretty up there" (2/5) in terms of femininity and had "a set of lady laws that she lives by" (2/5).

I [was] always a tomboy, androgynous, butchy, whatever. They've always been the fairer women. Growing up, Nancy was always, you know, the clean one sitting in the corner and Chris was the one coming home full of mud after playing a game of soccer. So, you know, it was always Nancy shitting on me for being that way, and me shitting on her for being her way, sort of thing (2/5-6).

Chris felt that her sister and mother's shared sense of gender bonded them in a way that Chris never experienced with either of them, making her feel like the "black sheep of the family" (2/18).

[Unlike my sisters] I always kept to myself. I grew up with the mindset of: "I do my own thing". I can't remember ever learning anything from them. I can't ever remember paying attention to them (2/18).

Despite Chris' assertions that she didn't pay attention to the pressure her sister and mother placed upon her to change, to become womanly in a socially acceptable way, it is evident that she *was* paying attention on some level because she was acutely aware that her resistance to perform heterosexual femininity was displacing her outside woman and family. She was living the contradictions of lesbian sisterhood.

Lesbian Sisters As Girl Family Members In Newfoundland And Labrador Public Life

A key way in which a number of lesbians I interviewed began to resist the assumption that they were heterosexual while growing up, and counter their invisibility as young lesbians, was by expressing 'deviant' gender appearance and behavior. This form of resistance was amongst the most contentious between sisters, since expressions of sex and gender are outward and are visible in the public sphere. Chris recalled being approximately fourteen years old, and her sister Nancy twelve years old, when neighborhood boys in their community of less than one thousand people began to harass Chris and call her 'dyke'.

[I was] picked on by guys for not keeping my nose where it was supposed to be. Nancy would give me a hard time because even when I got picked on, I'd fight back. So she'd get crap for the fact that I'd fight back. I mean I don't think Nancy [wanted] to be picked on [too]. No, she didn't appreciate at all the fact that, you know, I'd stand up for myself. I guess it was probably because how it projected on her, sort of thing (2/29).

Chris and Nancy understood their experiences of public scrutiny differently because they each had a different standpoint in relation to the category woman. Chris expressed her standpoint in the following way: "My first point of identification is as dyke not as woman, right" (2/29). Chris experienced public scrutiny primarily from her standpoint as a lesbian in a heterosexist world, which maintains lesbians' subordination through a prohibition of lesbian visibility. Chris thought she and Nancy were being harassed primarily because of her lesbian identity expression. Nancy, however, experienced public scrutiny from her standpoint as a heterosexual woman in a patriarchal world in which females are supposed to be feminine. Nancy thought she and Chris were being harassed because Chris was an

unfeminine woman and therefore Nancy responded to the public scrutiny by pressuring Chris to act in a more feminine way in accordance with the heterosexual woman she was “supposed” to be. For Chris, answering Nancy’s pressure to act more feminine would have resulted in masking her lesbian identity and trying to ‘pass’ as heterosexual.

Just as Chris’ story is about the differences between her sister’s and her own relationships to the category woman, it is simultaneously about the differences in their respective relationships to the category family. Because family is culturally assumed to be heterosexual, a lesbian family member disrupts the public representation of her family of origin as heterosexual, and members of her family can come under public scrutiny since lesbian sexuality is considered abnormal. The cultural assumption of familial heterosexuality positioned lesbian sisters, like Chris, outside the category family, in contrast to their heterosexual sisters who were automatically positioned inside family. As such, lesbians described having to negotiate the pressure to publicly preserve their family of origin as heterosexual with their heterosexual sisters. These negotiations between lesbians and their sisters in relation to the category family took on particular significance for the lesbians I interviewed because their stories were contextualized within Newfoundland and Labrador culture.

Newfoundland and Labrador is characterized by small, close-knit communities of families that have co-existed for several generations, and where, as is typical of many rural areas, individuals are known in relation to their families. Within this context, a lesbian’s actions were often brought to reflect upon other members of her family of origin, *especially*

upon her sisters because of the cultural assumption that sisters are supposed to be the same.

The issue of the sanctioning of a sister because of another sisters' lesbian sexuality is referenced in the only published article on lesbians in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Essentially, I don't have to worry about my family, 'cause they already know. But I would worry about repercussions to my family. People who know them know me. That's happened to me. My sister had a friend when she was much younger, who wasn't allowed to play with her any more because of me. That's the sort of thing that keeps me from being really....public (Stone & The Women's Survey Group, 1990, p. 97).

Other lesbians I interviewed shared this lesbian's experience of public scrutiny, and described having to make conscious decisions about if and how they wanted to live out as women family members during their growing up years.

The pressure a young lesbian felt to perform heterosexual womanhood, and to preserve her family of origin as heterosexual, was mediated not solely by sexuality, but also by other aspects of her family's social identity such as class, race, and culture, as well as by her relationship to her family's social identities. This is illustrated by Kit's story of how the pressure she felt from her older sister Mary to be womanly was mediated by other aspects of their social identities, including race, since Kit is aboriginal and her sister Mary is white.

Kit described how her sister Mary would have "like[d] it if I was more feminine" (6/11).

I know that Mary would have always had said: "Oh geez, you know, lets put a dress on ya. Oh, lets perm your hair. Lets do this, lets do that". She put me in a beauty contest when I was a kid too. She thought I was beautiful. Anyway, but of course that just was not me (6/11).

Mary sometimes engaged in physical violence in order to en/force her ideals of femininity

upon Kit.

[My sister] took me out and got me my first bra, right, and that kind of thing and actually forced a training bra on me. Literally had to hold me down on the couch, forced, you know. It was not pleasant, over a t-shirt of course, but I was so resistant. Oh man, I was so resistant.

Another time, earrings. I had my ears pierced, never know it. I'm allergic to metal. But I remember she and my mother held me down on the couch: "Dammit, going to pierce [your] ears". I was livid and in pain and then to turn out and be allergic to it. It was not pleasant (6/11).

The pressure Kit felt to be womanly was also felt as a pressure to express a particular kind of femininity.

How I appear is always been a big thing for her and I wonder how much of that too actually might have stuff to do with race, like my body and facial structure. You know this sense of: "Ok well you're good looking and I don't know why", you know,; "Ok well you're not a blond kid, but you're still good looking dammit!" You know, like sort of trying to make me more feminine or fit some kind of feminine thing (6/11).

Kit further discussed how Mary's concerns over Kit's appearance and behavior were mediated by differences in race, and also by their family's class position within their Catholic school and parish.

You don't see race here. You don't see that in very homogenous St. John's. There was always issues having to do with violence and bullying and stuff like that when I was a kid going through school because obviously I wasn't Asian, I wasn't black, I wasn't, you know, what the fuck was I. I was very proud of being Indian and I got into a lot of schoolyard fights. The first few years of school I was always beating the crap out of people and they were beating the crap out of me. Of course that's not a very stereotypically feminine kind of thing to be engaged in. I've always been bookie. I just felt I got to be good at something, I might as well be good at this, you know, good at reading. I guess there are things that I think [my sister Mary] may have interpreted as being lesbian or dykie that really probably necessarily weren't, you know. I guess that's kind of what I'm trying to get at.

You know, I didn't really take any great pleasure out of having to protect myself and having to fight. She could never understand why I was having these conflicts and these fights. Why was I so intense about knowing stuff and excelling and doing this and doing that. She'd never understand. Those are masculine things to want and do. They weren't very girlie.

It was just sort of an on-going thing. I often wonder how much of the conflicts we had about appearance and appropriate gender behaviour and her reactions towards lesbianism and all that had more to do with my experiences of being, you know, Indian in a very predominately white community. She wasn't very supportive when I was struggling through that. She didn't understand why I couldn't just put it away, just forget about it.

When I was getting beat up, which started basically kindergarten on, I used to come home and I'd be either cut or bruised or pissed off or something. I mean I was getting in trouble. Teachers were [saying]: "She's out there, whacking the crap out of somebody" Mary couldn't understand that at all right, cause she'd gone to the same school. My great-grandfather gave money for the school to be built. It was required that I go. So I show up and my experience was so radically different from hers and she figured I must be instigating something.

That kind of gone on for quite a few years and I remember being really upset. I was in grade 4 and getting really depressed about the whole thing and she said: "You need something to make you feel [better]". This was the only time she ever did this. We went to a book and we're looking at, you know, prominent women who are aboriginal. It had a few portrait size pictures of different significant aboriginal peoples. This would have been the '70's, right, so I mean it was, what, five pages. There was one with a Mohawk woman called Canetta and she said, because I didn't have a middle name, right: "Maybe that could be your middle name and that'll make you feel proud". I was like: "But I'm not Mohawk, I'm Ojibway, thank-you". She was very pretty. Very femme, long hair, you know, very pretty, and I was like: " a) I'm not her, b) I'm not Mohawk. No, forget it". She even made me something and tried to incorporate the name into it and I had to have nothing at all to do with it. I was just like: "No, no way". She really tried to get me to incorporate that into my name I guess as a way of dealing with bullying or something. It was a bit misguided though (6/18-19).

Mary wanted Kit to perform girlhood 'properly', which Mary defined as white

heterosexual femininity textured by upper middle class and Catholic social identities that Mary herself had modeled when she attended the same school. Kit's behavior at school reflected upon her family since Kit's teachers already knew her sister and their family through its historical relationship to the school and its parish. That Kit was aboriginal in predominately white St. John's gave Kit's deviant gender appearance and behavior a unique visibility that made Mary feel even more uncomfortable. This was especially the case in Kit's later adolescence when Mary perceived Kit as a threat to disrupt her idealized heterosexual family in Newfoundland and Labrador public life.

Re/production Of Heteronormative Family: The Element Of Time In Growing Up Female

Lesbians shifted back and forth across time as they told their stories, as illustrated by the way in which Kit drew upon her days in elementary school in order to contextualize her sister's responses to Kit's displays of lesbian sexuality in late adolescence. Kit also referred to different time periods when she discussed childhood expectations of heterosexuality and getting married.

When we went on to [high school] you know I had a rep so nobody messed with me. I was never called a lesbian in high school. Every now and then I come across a high school [classmate] and they say: "So did you ever get married?" [and I say]: "What? Like, how did you miss that? Like, where the hell were you?" You know, in Newfoundland, right, you start off with a certain group of people. I mean geez, the same people I knew in kindergarten were the people I graduated with basically in grade twelve. Anyway, poor [Mary], I really didn't turn out at all what she expected. She was hoping she'd get a nice little sister, you know, dress her up, she'd get married eventually, you know (6/19).

Getting married is supposed to be what a girl 'does' after she grows up. Growing up can be described, as Kit suggests, as practicing how to "dress" for the two critical roles of womanhood: wife and mother. Although a young lesbian feels the expectation for her to become a future wife to a man and the mother of his children, this vision is not congruent with a lesbian's experience of girlhood/womanhood. Both lesbian and heterosexual sisters experienced the expectation of marriage as the pressure for a woman to reproduce family; however, for a lesbian, this expectation is simultaneously about the pressure to reproduce family based on heterosexuality. References to marriage are prevalent in lesbians' growing up stories as they tried to express the stress they felt from being displaced in this way from the categories woman and family.

It is significant that, as in Kit's story, references to marriage tended to intersect with references to the public sphere. Creating a chosen family in adulthood is a public act since families make up a community. This pressure to create family is intricately linked to the pressure a lesbian felt to publicly preserve her family of origin as heterosexual, since the family a lesbian sister creates makes visible the fact that her family of origin has not successfully re/produced its heterosexuality. This is especially the case for lesbians living in communities in Newfoundland and Labrador where people have often known each other's families over an extended time span, if not a life-time. From this view, references to marriage in lesbians' growing up stories mark lesbians' immense preoccupation with the dilemma that they faced of coming out.

Lesbians sometimes described their coming out process as being interrupted, at times

with devastating consequences. Faith shared one such story when, at the age of seventeen, she got pregnant and felt that “at the time” (4/26) she “didn’t have a choice” (4/26) but to fulfil the familial expectation to marry a man.

I got pregnant before I got married. That’s why I got married. I was kind of forced into getting married. You know, my parents were very upset and Mom said, ‘You’re not bringing any babies home in this house [and] you’re not leaving unless you’re married’, right. We lived in a small community and I was only seventeen, I thought that I had to get married.

The night I got married, I sat on the edge of the bed and cried the whole night. I never even slept because I knew I was making a mistake. I didn’t want to. But at the time I felt I didn’t have a choice. I really didn’t want to get married, especially not to him, and I knew I wasn’t, you know, physically attracted to men. I was just playing this role that was expected of me. That’s the way I was forced when I was growing up. You had to do what was expected of you. I was miserable.

After I was married, you know, it was just an awful life for me. I knew that I was making a mistake and that. I didn’t even tell [my sister] Nell [about my wedding night] until recently. There was a lot of things that I kept to myself (4/25-27).

Faith’s pregnancy and impending motherhood intensified her displacement because it heightened the assumption that she was a heterosexual woman. Faith’s mother, assuming Faith to be a single, pregnant, heterosexual woman, responded to her pregnancy by demanding that Faith redeem herself by marrying a man. However, Faith was a lesbian not a heterosexual woman, and from her standpoint as a lesbian Faith experienced the expectation to get married as the pressure to reproduce family based on heterosexuality. The familial expectation, initially imposed upon Faith for her to be heterosexual, incorporated the further expectation that any kinship ties Faith would form as an adult would also be based

on heterosexuality. Faith's sister Nell also responded to Faith's situation as if Faith was heterosexual.

Nell didn't look down on me in that way because I had gotten pregnant before I got married. She was just ecstatic. She couldn't wait for the baby to be born (2/25-26).

Even though Nell tried to be supportive, Faith understood her sisters' response as the pressure for her to live up to the familial expectation of heterosexuality.

The contradictory relationship young lesbians experienced in relation to the pressure to re/produce family is further illustrated by Dominique's experience of displacement before she came out.

[I would hear things like]: "Dominique is going to be the next one [to have a baby]" or that kind of stuff. I do actually want to have kids. But I always felt there was pressure on me because it [being lesbian] was not obvious. I'm not gonna have a boyfriend. Its not gonna be the natural next thing to happen, like it would have been for [my older sister]. It probably will happen with my little sister before it happens to me (10/21-22).

Dominique's family placed the expectation on Dominique and her sisters to produce grandchildren. Notably, Dominique, as a lesbian sister, is not troubled by the pressure to have a child, but she acutely feels the pressure of her family's assumption that her child will be created within the context of a family based on heterosexuality.

Faith and Dominique's stories illustrate a pattern in lesbians' growing up stories: as lesbians got closer to coming out, they increasingly employed a discourse of sameness in their narratives in order to talk about their assumed difference. Faith shared her marriage story to describe how her feelings of difference and her invisibility as a lesbian sister were

so intense at that time, ten years prior to coming out, that she became paralyzed and unable to assert her desire to create family based on her lesbian sexuality. Dominique's story was about the time in her life when she was on the verge of coming out to her sister. Dominique expressed feeling different while at the same time placed herself inside family as a lesbian sister, and paradoxically did so by drawing on a discourse of sameness between herself and her sisters. Dominique, like her sisters, expected to create a chosen family and drew a line of realness between the family she would create based on lesbian sexuality and her sisters' families based on heterosexuality.

Udele's story of resistance provides another example of this gradual shift in lesbians' narratives from an emphasis on how they were different from their sisters even though they were the same (a discourse of difference across sameness), to an emphasis on how they were the same as their sisters even though they were different (a discourse of sameness across difference).

When I broke up with my boyfriend, there was this sense of: "Oh this is not who you will marry. Too bad he was a nice guy". I was depressed after we broke up. My sister thought I was depressed was because I was heart broken but I was depressed because I knew I had to come out and tell her that I wanted to marry a woman, well, not marry, but, you know what I mean (14/6).

Udele resisted being displaced from family by positioning her choice to have a woman partner as being as 'real' as to that of partnering with a man and thus focused upon the ways in which she and her sister were the same, despite their differences.

Coming Out⁴: The Element Of Time In Growing Up Lesbian

This shift in emphasis in lesbians' narratives from a discourse of difference to a discourse of sameness is most clearly seen in lesbians' descriptions of coming out. Although coming out is commonly defined as an expression of difference, it is in lesbians' stories of coming out that a discourse of sameness first appears as a structured strategy of resistance. Lesbians employed a discourse of sameness during coming out to their sisters by describing coming out as having to do with everyday acts of kinship. Chris illustrates this point when she explained why she needed her sister Nancy to get to know her partner Sue.

Sue was gonna be around for a while and Nancy had to know her. I mean, two months after Sue and I started seeing each other, she went out home with me. I just realized that Sue was going to be the one who was around for the long term (2/45).

Chris needed recognition for her partner in order to further develop the kinship ties between herself and her sister Nancy. It is notable that all of the lesbians I interviewed came out to their sisters within the context of their first, or their first meaningful, lesbian relationship. Maggie recalled how, in a single breath, she came out to her sister Louise and told her that she had a girlfriend.

So when I told my sister, we were driving, and I said 'Louise, I got to tell you something' and I just took a big deep breath and I said 'I'm gay, and I have a girlfriend' (1/2).

It was also within the context of their lesbian relationships that some informants were 'found

⁴See **Appendix C: Introduction To Participants** for a selection of coming out narratives from the lesbians I interviewed.

out' by a sister. It was during Kit's first experience of being 'totally in love' that her sister asked her if she was a dyke.

I was outed. I had been having an intense relationship with a friend. And all the signs were there, you know. 'You're spending all your time there'. So, she was watching my behavior, obviously. I was totally in love, wandering around making a fool of myself. I was spending all my waking moments at this woman's house. So she says to me: "Well, you know, the way you carry on with her, you know, I think you're a dyke". I guess unfortunately I responded with: "Well, yes, actually, as a matter of fact. Her father would like to shoot me" (6/2-3).

Even Dominique, who was my only informant with one remaining sister to come out to, discussed her intention to use the context of her girlfriend to do so.

If I talk to my older sister, I will definitely let you know. Since now she met my girlfriend, I can talk to her and say 'Oh by the way, she's more than just a friend' (10/29).

Whether lesbians discussed their memories of coming out, or of being found out, or of their plans to come out in the future, they always did so within the context of their kinship practices.

April explained that she came out to her sister because it was "something she needed to know" (3/2).

I didn't feel like I wanted to say it was a problem. You know, like, 'Hi, I have to tell you something', as if it's a problem, because to me it wasn't a problem. It was never a problem. It felt like something she needed to know (3/2).

Why did April feel that her sister "needed to know" (3/2) that she was a lesbian? The answer is that sexuality brings people into relationship with one another. Lesbians needed to make references to their chosen kin in order to participate in everyday conversations with

their sisters. For lesbians, responding to seemingly benign questions such as “What did you do over the weekend?” or “Where are you going for the holidays?” requires that they live out. Macy’s story illustrates this point. Macy’s sisters became challenged by her sexuality when she decided to come out to their parents.

I think the time when we had the greatest misunderstanding related to sexuality had to do with my coming out to my parents. And this must have been late 70s. So it would have been six or seven years after I had been first involved with a woman and a couple of years after I started identifying as lesbian.

My relationship with my parents was so distant. You know, I never wanted to talk to my folks, terrified they would have questions. It was really bad. It wasn’t like we were arguing about things. It’s just, we had nothing to talk to each other about and I wouldn’t share anything about my life at all. So I decided to come out.

I think the reason that both of them [my sisters] were upset with me was because they didn’t think I needed to upset Mom and Dad like that. So they didn’t understand what that meant, to hide their life and to be in the closet around your family and their immediate reaction to that was not good. They were just really mad at me. ‘How could I do this to Mom and Dad.’ How selfish of me and, you know, they were just really upset.

At this point, I think they would probably deny that that was their reaction, you know. I don’t think they would acknowledge that it was as strong as I remember it. I was surprised by their reaction. You know, because [they had] always been such good allies and supportive and things like that. It sort of felt [like they] turned against me or something. You know, so I was surprised by it and I felt like they didn’t understand. You know, that this was what I felt was my one hope of having a relationship with my parents, was to be honest and I didn’t feel like it was something I had done to them (5/5-6).

Because sexuality brings people into relationship with one another, Macy expressed that her relationship with her parents would have continued without any substance if she had remained closeted and not answered their everyday questions about her life. Macy’s sisters’

heterosexual privilege blinded them to the fact that Macy's only intention in coming out to their parents was to receive the same recognition for her chosen kin as her sisters were already receiving for theirs. Unable to understand this, Macy's sisters instead attributed her coming out as being entirely about sex/sexuality; an uncomfortable proposition for her sisters that Macy suggested was partly due to the white, Protestant and upper middle class manner that characterized her family. Macy resisted the accusation that coming out was 'inappropriate', for while the act of sex may not be a daily topic of discussion, references to kinship certainly are. Coming out disrupts the cultural assumption that family members and families are heterosexual and reveals something that is deeply hidden by heterosexual privilege; kinship practices incorporate sexuality. Heterosexual privilege hides the fact that a heterosexual sister is talking about her practice of sexuality whenever she talks about her everyday as including her male partner, such as when she is talking about what she and her partner did over the weekend.

Like Macy, other lesbians explicitly discussed coming out in terms of seeking recognition for their chosen kin, and by doing so asserted sameness/realness as an act of resistance to being potentially defined by their sisters as family's outlaws. Coming out is a pivotal moment in lesbians' lives precisely because the method of lesbians' displacement shifts from assumed sameness to assumed difference. Lesbians were breaking expectations of them to be heterosexual in a culture where being lesbian is abnormal, and in Newfoundland and Labrador public life that has implications for their sisters as family

members.⁵ The questions in most lesbians' minds when they came out to their sisters were, "Will they still love me?" and "What self will they love?" The ways in which these questions weighed on lesbians' shoulders varied,⁶ however lesbians held in common the experience that coming out was mediated not just by sexuality but also by their other social identifications such as class, race, and culture.

Udele's discussion of coming out incorporated reflections upon her family of origin's working class status.

⁵By coming out, lesbians were also breaking the silence around sex and sexuality that governed their households, which was sometimes described as a difficult part of the coming out process, regardless of a lesbian's age. Maggie began to discuss her coming out by saying "To explain a little bit of it, me and my sister have never really talked about sex a whole lot growing up" (1/2).

⁶The weight of these questions was dependent on factors such as: 1) how a lesbian felt about being lesbian, 2) how accepting she thought her sister(s) would be, 3) if she and her sister(s) had any other queer family members, 4) the time in history she came out, 5) the level of closeness she already felt with her sister(s), 6) how much it mattered to her what her sister(s) thought, 7) her level of financial independence at the time of coming out, and 8) her past performances of gender and sexuality and her sisters' knowledge of these performances. Lesbians sometimes referenced the coming out process as having serious effects on their well being, such as: Maggie: "I got really upset during that time. I guess I was probably depressed, but I didn't really think about it then. I was just to the point where I was absolutely miserable. I wasn't suicidal, but that's surprising, because I was really depressed(1/14-15). Faith: I had a nervous breakdown....They call it clinical depression, right.... it was triggered by, you know, me coming out...and being disowned by my parents, it was like a devastating thing" (4/3-4). Cecilia: "I drank and got into a lot of trouble. I ended up in jail" (13/55). Rhonda (in order to ensure confidentiality, the regular alias that appears throughout this chapter for this lesbian, has been substituted within this quote): "There were times when I was suicidal and many things unhealthy but I don't believe that they were related to my sexuality. There were times that I was depressed because of it [being lesbian] but looking back I don't believe that I wanted to kill myself [for being lesbian]. My sister knows I tried to kill myself and spent time in the hospital but these are things that I don't like to talk too much about (0/5).

Sometimes I think that in my family there are worse things I could have done besides come out. I could have ended up on welfare and living in housing with kids and no money, or working at the mall, right, like my sister. I have a little more education and money than her and its almost, like, this saves me. I'm still ahead of her in a way, right. My parents can say I went to Cabot. When I run into people that know my family, they talk about my work, see. The work talk distracts, from me being lesbian and talking about my life, like (14/25).

Udele's experience of being a lesbian sister is mediated through her family's working class identity. Despite her lesbian sexuality, Udele has 'made something of herself' in a way her sister has not. Udele experienced the pressure to publicly preserve her family of origin as heterosexual as being connected to the pressure she felt not to let her lesbian identity ruin her chances for upward mobility. Kit reflected upon her coming out in relation to her identity as an aboriginal woman.

I honestly do believe that people of other race, or other ability or other something, there isn't quite the same sense [about coming out]. There's almost this sense of: "Well I'm other anyway". Its not quite the same bridge to go through, especially in very homogenous St. John's and given my history with my sister around issues of race and gender appearance (6/21).

While Kit's coming out was shaped by differences in race between her and her sister, as well as by the way in which Kit occupied a space of difference within her family and "very homogenous St. John's" (6/18), Dominique's coming out was shaped by a sense of a shared French Catholic identity with her sister, family, and community.

Religion for me was definitely an obstacle for when I came out. We're French Catholic. Religion is important for me, in who I am. Being spiritual is important for me. When I was going to church every week, in the homilies homosexuality was linked to sinning. So I was torn between religion and my body. I'm supposed to fight it, it's just temptation. I didn't know how to deal with it when I was 17. I had nothing around me to help me. Our French

community is small, so you take the risk of telling one person and everybody else at the same time.

I'm hoping [my sister] will eventually get exposed to more of it [information about lesbian sexuality], and she's gonna think about [me being lesbian] more. I hope eventually she'll be more free to ask questions to people. I mean, right now, she is living there and she probably doesn't want to ask her friends: "What do you think of lesbians"? Because they will say: "Why? Are you a lesbian? Is someone you know a lesbian? Tell us". Right? You know, that kind of thing. I would like for her to be more comfortable with it, and be able to talk about it. But I mean, it took me a long time, with the religion thing, so, you know, I'm not expecting her to be comfortable with it right away (10/29-30).

Because family's social identifications are defined publicly in relation to 'others' (other classes, other races, other cultures) the pressure lesbians felt to preserve their family of origin as heterosexual was further mediated by pressures to preserve their families in other ways ('good' working class, 'idealized' white, or 'good' French Catholic). Therefore, lesbians' discussions of coming out to their sisters were mediated by the similarities, differences, and changes between their and their sisters relationship to their family's social identifications.

2.3 ADULTHOOD

For lesbians, coming out marked the first step towards integrating their families of origin and their chosen families. Because coming out for lesbians was about the establishment of kinship ties, it marked lesbians' transitions into adulthood as they asserted their independence through the formation of their chosen families. The process of creating their chosen families and living out required lesbians to re/construct themselves as lesbian

sisters in adulthood. This involved a process of redefining what it means to be a woman family member within their families and communities, and required resistance to displacement in adulthood structured by their assumed difference from their heterosexual sisters. Lesbians, paradoxically, employed a discourse of sameness/realness as they discussed their resistance to this displacement.

Both Dominique and Bella received little recognition from their sisters for their lesbian partners and drew upon a discourse of sameness/realness to express their feelings of injustice about their displacement. Dominique came out to her sister approximately one year prior to this study. Dominique routinely asked her sister about her boyfriends, however her sister refused to reciprocate by asking Dominique about her girlfriends.

I'm asking her how's it going with her boyfriend, or like, is she seeing someone. I would like her to do the same thing, to ask me, you know, 'Are you seeing someone? How's it going with your girlfriend?' That kind of stuff. But she doesn't do that. Like, we don't talk about it. Just not talk. It is the same as just like, this [coming out] didn't happen. That conversation didn't happen. She didn't hear it. We don't talk about it. She doesn't ask me about my relationship, that's it. She won't ask me, because she knows that she doesn't want to hear the answer. She's not comfortable with it (10/5)..

Dominique would have liked her sister to associate the same meaning to her girlfriends as Dominique associated to her sister's boyfriends. In Bella's case, her sisters have given little or no recognition to her lesbian partners since she came out over thirty years ago. Bella felt distanced from her sisters by their refusal to talk about her chosen kin. She expressed feeling dissatisfied by this, and reflected upon what needed to change in order for her to feel more connected to her sisters.

My sisters' lives are more about them. When I'm with 'em, the focus is on their lives more, and they don't ask me about my life. I'd like my relationship with them to be more honest and I want them to give me a bit more in honest. We [need to] have something a little bit more revealing happening in our conversations.

They have to be able to talk to me and be concerned about who my partner is and their needs, and what their life is, as well as mine, and how they fit into my life. They [need] to include that person and be very comfortable, the way I do with their [partners]. It is a necessary part of relating to them as a couple.

They have to talk about what we're both doing together. They have to have curiosity about what we actually plan, and about our life. It can't all be about them all the time and their inability to talk about my life because I'm a lesbian. They'll certainly talk about my work, and books I read, or something like that, but they won't go into my relationships so much (9/10-12).

Bella, echoing Dominique, would have liked to see her sisters interact with her lesbian partners as she had with theirs. Dominique and Bella's stories illustrate how lesbians' feeling of dis/connection with their sisters in adulthood were directly related to their sisters dis/placement of them from the categories woman and family, which lesbians gauged by their sisters acknowledgment of their lesbian partners.

Redefining 'Sister-in-law'

When lesbians felt included within family, they expressed this acceptance through a discourse of sameness/realness that commonly included references to the ways in which their relationships with their chosen kin and their sisters were integrated. Macy described being satisfied by how her sisters have recognized her lesbian partners over the years, and reflected upon this by expressing how she felt her girlfriends had been integrated into her

family of origin in general, and into her sisters lives in particular.

I think that one thing is true of all my girlfriends. I mean, its true that whenever you have a partner there is a way in which you are not just involved with a partner, you are involved with the family, and there is no denying that my sisters are very integral in each other's lives (5/20).

References to integration were also made by lesbians within the context of recalling specific conventional kinship practices, which were initiated by their sisters in such a way that lesbians understood them to be signs that their sisters accepted their partners. Dale made a point of sharing how her sister Jill and her former partner Shirley had developed a friendship, and said: "When Jill got remarried, she asked both of us to be her Maids of Honor, equally" (7/11). Similarly, one of the things that Amy immediately shared about the relationship between her partner and her sister Nadine was that: "My partner's her children's godparent" (8/2). These kinship practices, initiated by their sisters, were important for Dale and Amy to share because they are direct examples of where their sisters recognized their lesbian partners and therefore were willing to redefine the category woman and the category family in a way that included them as lesbian sisters.

The 'in-law' that sisters 'normally' offer one another is a man in the capacity of brother-in-law. However, lesbian sisters offer their sisters a sister-in-law. As Udele's sister Georgia once remarked jokingly to a friend: "My 'brother-in-law' is a woman" (14/5), or as Cecilia commented about the relationship between her sister and her partner Germaine: "What I usually do is just try and joke around with my sister. I would tease her and say: "Don't make a pass for your sister-in-law" (13/4). Lesbians discussed at length the nuances

in their sisters' recognition of their partners over time and the strategies such as friendship, education, resistant use of language and humor, and being supportive of their sisters' kinship practices, that lesbians employed to gain their sisters' acceptance of their lesbian partnerships, in ways that were congruent with how they themselves viewed their relationships. This was because lesbians viewed whether or not their sisters treated their partners as 'in-laws' as being simultaneously about whether or not they themselves were being positioned as family's outlaws. Lesbians described nuances of acceptance along the lines of male-female gender differences and femininities and masculinities.

Faith compared her past marriage to a man with her present life as a lesbian, and how the change in her sexuality has shaped the closeness between her and her sister Maria.

[Coming out] actually made Maria closer, but my life now and my life then with my sister is a bit different. Like when I was married we, the four of us, did things together. You know, like Maria and I, and our husbands. So the four of us did things together, and very rarely did Maria and I go and do something together just the two of us. It was always the four of us. So it was always a family oriented, you know, the sister, the husbands, the kids.

And now, it's different. [At the moment] I'm single but if I did have a significant other, Maria would include that person. It is the same in my sister's point of view but her husband feels indifferent because it is three women and him, you know. Whereas when I was married, it was a lot easier for the four of us to get together because the men would talk and the women would talk. I think it would depend on the occasion or what was happening. Like, say if my sister invited us up for supper, like a family supper, we would definitely be included, but say if some of my lesbian/straight friends and I were getting together for a game of cards, her husband wouldn't be included. It would just depend on the occasion of what was happening at the time.

Yeah, we're different now than it was then because we shared a lot of the same things. Our whole households were the same and our family life was the same and our interests were the same. She didn't know at the time that I was

only playing the role, where I knew that this was the life that she wanted but she didn't know that was not the life that I wanted. So our lives were different then than they are now, but to sum it up, I think we're closer. We're closer now. But yeah, our life was different then than it is now for sure (4/51-53).

Faith's story raises questions about how a lesbian's female partner in the role of in-law to her sister disrupts the male-female gender dynamics that normally shape sisters' in-law relationships. A heterosexual sister's male partner can be bumped out of the picture as a budding friendship develops between the sisters and the lesbian sisters' female partner. When an in-law relationship is asymmetrical in this way, and a male partner is relegated to the margins, a heterosexual sister can be defined in ways other than as a wife to her male partner, and a critical space may be cleared for sisters to further develop their relationship so that it becomes more of a friendship between peers. For a lesbian, an opportunity may arise to use friendship as a critical strategy to involve her sister in her chosen family and this can often lead to increased acceptance. Cecilia described how she and her partner Germaine would take her sister out for social activities such as bingo and shopping.

[Germaine and I] spent a lot of time with [my sister]. And we took her out. We took her to Bingo and shopping. And she kind of enjoyed it. I think it helped her be more at ease with [Germaine and I] being together. [It has become] more like home, doing things together. Now they started to ask for help from us, whereas before they didn't. [They] will ask: "Listen we don't have enough can you help us out and give us some kind of support?" They are starting to ask more and more and are treating us more as a couple than they did years ago. These are the things I'm seeing after thirteen years of being with [Germaine] (13/8-9).

Cecilia's use of the word 'home' evokes a sense of sameness and suggests that sister-in-law, as an extension of sister, can take on new and complex meanings in relationships between

lesbians and their sisters. This is epitomized in Macy's Christmas holiday memory.

When we are together at Christmas time, a very typical thing is [my sister] Donna gets up, leaves her husband Neil, and she crawls in bed with [my partner] Rana and I. We all snuggle and we talk for hours.... I wouldn't crawl in bed with Donna and Neil (5/21).

Snuggling under the covers together is a very sisterly thing to do and Macy's partner Rana appears to be placed in a sister role in this story. A number of the lesbians I interviewed directly referred to how their partners and sisters have shared a "sister bond". Dale even expressed that if I include anything about her sister Jill, she would like it to be the relationship that developed between Jill and her former partner Shirley.

My group of [lesbian friends] became family. My partner Shirley was an only child and most of our friend's families lived out of town. So it was an easy space for us to draw together and be family. When my sister Jill and her husband broke up, she lost her community at the riding association and that was a lot of the reason why she became one of the 'girls'. She felt that the pain of losing her community was more painful than losing her husband. Jill would come to the house, meet a whole pile of the girls who just happened by and happened by and happened by. I guess the biggest thing that I'd like said, is that through my lesbianism Jill has said that she has come to value women's friendships. When Jill got divorced, she would come over all the time and stuff. Shirley was there for Jill and Shirley had a sister in Jill too because Shirley was an only child (7/10-11).

While friendship was an avenue that lesbians welcomed to gain recognition as a family member, this avenue also led to frustration when relational dynamics got confused and friendship became the only standpoint from which a heterosexual sister felt comfortable viewing her lesbian sister's relationship, as in Maggie's case. One of the most difficult things that Maggie tried to articulate was how she felt her sister Louise viewed her lesbian relationship with her partner Violet as just a friendship.

I don't think Louise really comprehends what the relationship is in her head. I don't think she looks at it as if this is a relationship. Like, this is a relationship! We're not just friends. We're in a relationship! Like, I don't think she comprehends that. I think she just sees us as, I think she just thinks we're together (1/28-29).

Maggie described how her sister Louise would sometimes become jealous over her partner Violet.

I know Louise gets jealous. We had a huge incident Christmas. Whenever I go home, like every night I would call Violet and I would just be chatting with her. I am usually on the phone with her about an hour but it is usually late. I do it when everyone is gone to bed and I will call her then.

Christmas Eve, it just so happened that we went to midnight mass and opened gifts Christmas Eve. We started a new tradition. So, I had made plans to call Violet anyway. So, we opened up our gifts, and we're sitting around for about half an hour and then I got on the phone. And [Louise] kept coming in the room and interrupting me and I got really pissed off with her, and I was like: "Look, I'm on the phone, come in after I'm done". And she just got so pissed off. And when I approached her on it. I got really upset [and said]: "Well look, I don't understand what's going on". She said: "Well, I don't get to see you, and then when you come home all you do is talk. I really miss you. I don't understand why you have to be on the phone with her so much".

I think it would be different if my partner was a guy because I don't know if she feels like she is being replaced or something. Like you have different relationships with guys. And I think for her, in her head maybe, she thinks, well if it was my boyfriend I wouldn't be on the phone with him that long. I wouldn't be giving him so much attention. Why are you giving her all this attention? (1/8)

Louise felt like a rival and feared possible replacement because she viewed the relationship between Maggie and Violet as a friendship or sisterly bond. Maggie's story is indicative of others that I heard where friendship was often understood by a heterosexual sister to fully describe the relationship dynamic of lesbian partnerships. Lesbians frequently commented

that they had to help their sisters understand that their lesbian partners were not just friends.

Amy recalled a conversation she had with her sister Nadine.

Nadine used to say to me: "When people say to me your sister Amy and her" and she would say to me: "What am I supposed to call Trudy? Your friend?" [I would say]: "Don't say friend. Like, you don't call [your husband] Thomas your friend" (8/3).

Misunderstandings about the role of friendship in lesbian partnerships were sometimes connected to a heterosexual sister's lack of understanding about how lesbian sex and sexuality shapes lesbian partnerships. Ivy recalled a memory where her sister Holly's attempts to recognize Ivy's lesbian partnership were incongruent with Ivy's own understanding of her partnership.

She kind of hates to think that she's not broad minded, she's sort of feminist, you know, and she really does want to accept the situation. And so, she tries. You can see that she's not comfortable. I mean she's told me funny things, like [my former partner] Sarah [is] a wealthy woman, a very wealthy woman. And so she once said: "Geez, you know, lesbians hardly ever make love. I mean, I'd go with her if I could get my hands on that kind of money". She makes those kinds of statements, right (12/5).

While Ivy's sister assumed stereotypes about the lack of the erotic in lesbian partnerships, effectively desexualizing Ivy and her former partner, Kit's sister Mary used friendship to (hetero)sexualize Kit and her former partner Ann, in order to feel more comfortable with their lesbian partnership.

Mary hated Ann. Oh, she hated her. It was epic. But by the end of the 13 years they were good friends.

I moved in with Ann when I was 20 and Ann had just turned 21. My sister flipped out one day and phoned the house, where I was living with Ann. The two of them got into a screaming fight. I had never ever come across such a

thing before. My sister was saying: "She's too young, she's too young. How can the two of you live together? She's not old enough to know what's she's doing", you know, all this. It was quite embarrassing. They just had this big fight over the phone, slammed up the phone, angst upon the land, and then that was that.

They got to know each other. Started reading books together and, you know, started shopping together. So, I guess in a sense, because Ann, you know, is much more feminine than I am, quite girly, and I think in that weird kind of way she kind of gained this other person, this other, this sister kind of bond that she never had with me. It was really kind of cool and creepy at the same time (6/5).

Why did Kit find this cool but also "creepy"? (6/5). Kit went on to answer this question by contrasting her sister's relationship with her current partner Wendy, who Kit described by saying: "When I met Wendy, I was like, 'Wendy is a lesbian, like there were no two ways in my mind' (6/7-8), with her sister's relationship to her former partner Ann who Kit described as "more wifey" (6/7-8). What can happen when one of these 'for sure' lesbians becomes an in-law to a heterosexual sister as a result of her lesbian sister's same sex relationship? Kit tried to analyze this question within the context of her experience.

Wendy, isn't the stereotypical wifey kind of person. In [Mary's] conservative mind view, [my relationship with Ann] was almost kind of ok, because it was recognizable. 'Oh, you're going to be the engineering type person, who doesn't like doing this, this and this, therefore, I'll attribute some masculine qualities to ya', or, you know, 'And, you are the more wifey person, more feminine person, I have some dialogue'.

And neither Wendy or I are like that. So I think maybe that has something to do with it cause Mary and Wendy, beyond trying to be pleasant to each other, because, of course, we do family stuff. We do thanksgiving, we do Christmas, and, you know, all that other stuff. There's just this disparity, and no real connection (6/7-8).

Kit described a process whereby her sister Mary related to Ann as a heterosexual feminine

female instead of as a lesbian and, by extension, had heterosexualized Kit into a masculine male. However, Kit and Ann were not reproduced by her sister as an exact replica of a heterosexual couple, as Kit said the following:

[Mary had] a sense of, you know, [Ann and I] would be together and there would be a house and likely she would come live with us. I was intrigued by that one. Ann was like, you know, "I'd rather kill myself". You know, cause nobody wants that (6/8).

Although Ann shared a friendship with Mary, and may have seen herself as feminine, she did not see herself as a heterosexual feminine female. Nor did Ann see herself as only having a friendship with her partner Kit. Mary's intention of inserting herself into their partnership to create a friendship and household of three "sisters" did not interest Ann or Kit.

While a sense of gendered sameness may have helped heterosexual sisters feel more at ease with their lesbian sisters and their partners, Kit's story is a reminder that women do not always share the same sense of gender. Kit was not the only lesbian who mentioned that she had to negotiate lesbian masculinity with her sisters. Faith commented how the performance of lesbian masculinity would make her sister feel uncomfortable.

My sister would not be comfortable with woman that are 'extreme' butches. She'd be uncomfortable with that. I don't think she'd know how to handle herself or how to handle that person, you know? She wouldn't know how to relate to them. You know, they don't act or look like a woman, but they are a woman. So she wouldn't know how to relate to that type of person. Women that you'd have to take a second look. Is that a man or woman? Not only in the looks but in the mannerisms too, right, and I don't think my sister would be comfortable with that, you know (4/55-56).

Chris is a lesbian who performs lesbian masculinity. Chris explained how her sister Nancy utilized Chris' masculine gender expression as a way to deny that lesbians' relationships

incorporate committed kinship, by likening Chris' sexual practices to that of a stereotypical heterosexual masculine male.

There had been a mess between Nancy and I over it [being lesbian] when I was living with her, so I ended up moving out. The woman I was dating came into my bedroom after I had spent the night over there to return something and Nancy figured I was just rubbing it in her face, the fact that I spent the night at this woman's house. [She said]: "There was no need to be showing up at the apartment with women and everything else because it was none of her business what I was". But yet it was her business, so, you know, she didn't want to see it. Considering that I came out to her when we were living together sort of thing I just needed her to either be accepting or shut her mouth. She choose neither of the two.

I think she always had the image of me and the bar scene and 'picking up women'. She always just sort of took that as a given and that nothing could go beyond that point. My life has always been completely separate from hers. So the only contact that [she] had with anybody that I was ever seeing is if the woman happened to answer the phone in the morning when Nancy called. I always wanted to see the picture on the other end of the phone (2/45-47).

Chris described how her sister came to recognize for the first time that Chris' lesbian relationships did incorporate committed kinship.

I didn't tell Nancy until 3 or 4 days before I went home for Christmas. She didn't know I was coming home. She knew I was dropping out but nobody had told her that I was staying out and that Sue and I had separated.

I told her about [the separation] and all of a sudden Nancy was on the other end of the phone and [asked]: "How ya doing?" and all this jazz and I was like: "Yeah".

The night before I was going to leave [to return after Christmas], once again here was this concerned little sister sitting on the couch full of questions and, you know, so I mean that was completely utter shock. I never really expected it from her and now all of a sudden she was wondering what the hell was going on

I mean its been really weird but that's the first time. Maybe because it's the

first time she's ever seen me hurt.

Even last weekend when she was in here, [she said]: "Financial help if you need it". Can you imagine? [She asked]: How long are you go' in to be living at the place you're living at now? Are you moving back?"

I've been a mess and she's gotten quite an eyeful over the past little while. I think she finally just realized that I was serious about something. I think this was finally a wake-up call in that sense. For once [I got a] little bit of recognition with my relationships. Before they didn't matter. But I think suddenly she realizes that, yeah, they do matter (2/13-14).

The lesbians I interviewed described at length the nuances of their sisters' recognition for their lesbian partners because, as Chris' story suggests with its references to her separation, household and finances, such recognition is about if and how lesbian partnerships are recognized as 'real' family forms. Since sexuality re/produces families, lesbians' adulthood stories focused upon contradictory relationships to heteronormativity that were made particularly obvious within the context of building familial ties with their sisters.

Kinship Building Between Adult Sisters

When lesbians discussed furthering their kinship ties with their sisters in adulthood, they frequently raised questions such as: Can lesbians turn to their sisters when they need support for transitions in their kinship practices such as 'marriage' and 'divorce'? Are lesbian sisters and their lesbian partners viewed as co-parents? Are lesbian sisters and their partners invited into their sisters' chosen family in the capacity of aunt? How are lesbian sisters' chosen families viewed in comparison to their heterosexual sisters' chosen families

within the context of their families of origin?⁷ It is notable that within this context of discussing their sisters' positioning of them inside or outside family lesbians made reference to the ways in which their heterosexual sisters were living sexuality/family 'queerly' or 'straightly'. When Dominique was gauging how the one sister that she had yet to come out to might respond to her coming out, she described how this sister was living family 'queerly', in that she had two children with the man she lives with, but is not married to (10/12). As Macy was discussing her sister's acceptance of her, she explained how her sister Meagan, now in her fifties, has always lived in communal households and was currently living with her male partner and five other people (5/26). When discussing their respective chosen families within the context of their family of origin Macy commented: "My lesbianism isn't the first thing that challenged my parents. My sister's first husband was Catholic which in the early 60's was a big deal. Her second husband was Jewish and that was like a bigger thing" (5/13). Similarly, Dale recalled her Catholic parents having to adjust to her sister Jill living with a boyfriend, and also to Jill's two divorces (7/7), as a way of discussing Jill's acceptance of her and how they supported each other in solidarity against familial criticism.

Lesbians also made references to the ways in which their heterosexual sisters were living family 'straightly'. Bella described her sisters' lives as being "very kind of straight and

⁷It is only heterosexual women who have a heterosexual woman's relationship to women. Heterosexual women do not have the same sexual, romantic, marital, co-parenting, or financial partnering relation to other women as lesbian women have. Kinship patterns between lesbians and their sisters are shaped by a heterosexual sister's ability to make this distinction and a lesbian sister's ability to help her heterosexual sister with this process.

narrow” (9/21), and commented “In my mind they have the family institution behind them” (9/21) as a reason why they do not accept her lesbian partnership as a ‘real’ family form. Udele made a note of the level of normality her sister was practicing “My sister may not have children but she lives in the suburbs and everything else about her life looks, you know, what is expected” (14/56) in order to describe nuances in her sister’s acceptance. The intensity with which lesbians referenced heteronormativity is expressed in Faith’s story where she compares her familial life with that of her sister: “She has the white picket fence. Her life was very straight-laced and there is no conflicts. There’s no downs. I don’t think she grasps the conflicts of being a lesbian in family” (4/38). Faith interpreted her sister’s life as being without “conflicts” (4/38) and more “straight-laced” (4/38) since her sister is living within the context of what society values; a long term heterosexual marriage with children. Faith struggled, as did the other lesbians I interviewed, to articulate the insidious pressure she felt and the “conflicts of being a lesbian in family” (4/38) when the family she chose to create was not accompanied by a “white picket fence” (4/38).

Lesbian Partnerships As A Family Form

Lesbians focused upon several significant points of reference within adult partnerships, including ‘marriage’, ‘divorce’, ‘affairs’, and ‘spousal’ abuse, when they discussed the level of recognition they received from their sisters for their lesbian partnerships as chosen families.

Macy and her partner were married within their religious community and Macy used

the language of marriage to describe their relationship. Macy felt that her sister Donna acknowledged their marriage as a family form that she and her lesbian partner created together.

I remember we arrived at Donna's house and we were sitting on her deck having something cold to drink and I told her we were getting married. Donna said: "You can't get married before me, you are my little sister". It was funny. She said this so playfully but she really meant it. She was past the age of when she thought she should have been married or found someone.

When Donna decided to get married, she asked me a lot of questions about marriage: "How do you decide that? Do I compromise? Is it the right thing? Will it just drive you crazy? Will you resent it and hate it later?" So, its not like she thinks our relationship is not a real relationship because its two women.... But I do remember her saying: "No but Neil is a guy" [and me saying]: "Oh yeah that would be different". You know that sort of thing. Like, with children, when they first started sleeping together I always forget that heterosexual people can get pregnant. I always forget that part of sex. You know, its like: "Oh yeah, right, how about that, bummer isn't it" (5/15).

In order to describe her sister's acceptance of her lesbian marriage, Macy recalled memories in which she and her sister drew parallels between their lives as sisters/women. These parallels were similar, yet not entirely the same, as Macy described her sister's response to Macy's lesbian marriage as "funny" (5/15). Macy and Donna celebrated each other's marriage as a milestone that marks adulthood for women that sisters typically celebrate with one another, yet Macy and Donna associated different meanings to marriage. While Donna, as a heterosexual woman, felt pressured to marry a man before her younger sister; Macy, as a lesbian, felt pressured to perform marriage in a heteronormative way. For Macy, the question was not getting married, but whether or not her sister would support her by celebrating her marriage since it was to be based on her lesbian sexuality. While Donna may

have accepted Macy's family form if it had not been structured as a marriage, Macy's use of the language and practice of marriage to describe her lesbian partnership likely normalized her performance of family in ways which helped Donna to understand that their respective marriages would structure each of their adult lives in similar ways and therefore were equally 'real' whether they were married to a man or to a woman. At the same time as these similarities were recognized, the differences between the texture of their family forms were also recognized and notably, these differences included issues about the incorporation of children within their chosen families. Since children are assumed to be a critical expression of womanhood and family, both in a patriarchal and heterosexual dominant world, lesbians often referred to their relationship to the category 'children' when discussing whether or not their sisters recognized their lesbian partnerships as 'real' family forms.

Dale connected her sisters' failure to recognize her lesbian partnership as a family form to the fact that Dale and her partner did not have children. Dale recalled how she and her partner Shirley had invited Dale's sisters to their tenth anniversary celebration.

Shirley and I had a big tenth anniversary party. I sent [my sisters] invitations that they probably just saw as cutesy. It was a picture of Edna [our cat], done on computer and [it read]: "Edna's Mommies Are Having An Anniversary Party" and like, you know, that wasn't important enough (7/26).

Dale's sisters did not come to her party, with the exception of her sister Jill. It is notable that of Dale's sisters, Jill's childless heterosexual relationship most closely paralleled Dale's family form. Dale felt that part of the reason her tenth anniversary "wasn't important enough" (7/26) for her other sisters to participate in was because Dale has no children and

instead, Edna The Cat was on the front of their invitations where families would typically display their children. While Dale had failed to meet the patriarchal expectation placed upon her as a (heterosexual) woman to have children, Dale was not a heterosexual woman but a lesbian. Therefore, Dale felt her sisters' lack of recognition primarily as a result of the heterosexual dominant definition of family as being heterosexual and as including children. While in a patriarchal world a woman is viewed as less valuable if she is without a man and children, in a heterosexual dominant world lesbians are viewed as abnormal because their chosen families are with other lesbians and are not dependent upon the procreative imperative in the same kind of way.

Lesbians described the importance of sisters' mutual support for each other's chosen families, not only during times of celebration, such as marriages and anniversaries, but also during times of need, such as divorces. For instance, Dale's relationship with her lesbian partner dissolved after twelve years. In order to resist assumed abnormality in comparison to her sisters, Dale employed a discourse of sameness/realness by juxtaposing the levels of recognition that she and her sister Judy gave to each other when their respective chosen families dissolved. Dale described how, when her long-term lesbian partnership dissolved, she received no support from her sister Judy despite the fact that Dale had supported and housed Judy and her two children after Judy had left her husband.

Shirley and I had taken in my sister Judy because her and her husband broke up, took in her and the kids and helped. I never heard from Judy for four months after she found out [Shirley and I] were broke up, and then I might have seen her once after that (7/29).

Judy failed to recognize that the shelter she and her two children had taken refuge in was the familial home that Dale and her partner Shirley had built together. Dale felt Judy did not acknowledge her break up from her lesbian partner as the dissolution of a family in comparison to her own since Dale was not married to a man and had not reproduced children.

In contrast to Dale's story about the lack of support she received from her sister, Elaine's⁸ story was about the support she received from her sister Bonnie when Elaine needed to talk about the possibility of an affair occurring in her lesbian partnership.

Six or seven years ago, in that sort of time frame, I was really frustrated with [my partner] Sandy. I was just really frustrated because I felt like she was avoiding some things inside of herself and the way she was doing that was by filling her date book with other commitments, responsibilities, travel, trips, you know all that kind of stuff. The last was of which was noticing me, you know, and I was worried. I was really worried about my tolerance and endurance for this. If this was going to be the path for the next twenty years, I wasn't interested. But it was very similar things that I had heard [my sister] Bonnie talk about her and [her husband] Dan. So she and I talked.

You know people talk about seven year itch and Sandy and I were sort of at that point in our relationship. That's when Bonnie had [an extramarital] affair was about that time [seven years into Bonnie's marriage], you know, and I got worried. So anyway, Bonnie and I had great talks about that. We had very good conversations about that.

You know the kind of things that I know other gay people experience, including that their relationship wasn't viewed as important, or as the same, but I don't get that from [my sister]. Those were really good conversations that Bonnie and I had. That period of time, I felt real connected with Bonnie, you know, kind of talking with peers. I definitely thought about it as different because she is with Dan and I am with Sandy and some of that is man/woman stuff, but it helped (0/19-20).

⁸In order to ensure confidentiality, the regular alias' that appear throughout this chapter for this lesbian, her partner, and her sister have been substituted within this story.

Even though Elaine was in a childless lesbian relationship and Bonnie was in a long term heterosexual marriage and had children, Elaine was able to acquire support from Bonnie about issues that were directly associated to their sexual differences. Elaine felt that Bonnie accepted her lesbian relationship because Bonnie was able to view it “as important” (0/20) and “the same” (0/20) as her own, or in other words, Elaine felt that Bonnie viewed her lesbian partnership as a ‘real’ family form.

When heterosexual sisters were unwilling to include their lesbian sisters as ‘real’ family members, lesbians became isolated from their sisters’ support and this sometimes had serious repercussions for lesbians’ well-being in times of difficulty or crisis. Katie⁹ was abused by a number of her former lesbian partners, but this abuse remained invisible to her sisters since they refused to accept her sexuality as anything but a problem and had not created a space for Katie to talk to them about her experiences with her lesbian partners.

I was getting into a bad lifestyle, let’s put it that way. [My relationships] were damaging. The people I got involved with were very disturbed people. They had sides to them that were scary. Really scary.

I mean, it got really hard, you know, and then you’d break up and I used to get very upset. Of course it would really, really hurt me when I used to break off, and I’d have to do major adjustments in my life. Or they would start fighting with me, and I’d get upset, and there was violence, you know. I just couldn’t [break up], and then it would perpetuate, it would just keep going. The more I would get in relationships, the more I would repeat it.

My situations have just been so different than my sisters. I wasn’t verbal about it. I was secret or just silent about those changes in my life. I have had

⁹In order to ensure confidentiality the regular alias that appears throughout this chapter for this lesbian has been substituted within this story.

many more relationships than my sisters. I'm just so different that they leave me in question. What I represent to them is not clear to me. There's this whole thing probably '[a break up] is going to happen because its happened before'.

I have different insecurities that I can't hold up myself as being equal to my sisters, in my own mind. I just don't have that fortress. I don't have children. I don't have a house. I don't have a car, even. I want to be settled. I want to live somewhere. I want, you know, a calmer life. I don't want to be thrown out of my house again. I don't want to have to start over again (0/25-26).

Abuse within lesbian relationships is even more hidden than abuse against women within heterosexual relationships. One reason for this is because the supports a heterosexual woman may turn to in crisis, such as sisters, may not be available to a lesbian if she is considered by her sisters' to be family's outlaw. Katie had been subjected to her sisters' homophobic view that her sexuality could change if Katie would just seek therapy (0/8) and neither of Katie's sisters would engage in conversations with her about her lesbian partners. Katie could not trust to ask for her sister's support with the crisis of abuse that had occurred in her lesbian relationships. Katie feared her sisters would interpret these experiences as confirmation that her lesbian sexuality was abnormal.

Katie was further silenced because she felt a pressure to have a "fortress"(0/26) defined by a long-term relationship, children and a home. The emotional and material effects of abuse had hindered her from developing a chosen family and financial security. For Katie, this pressure to have a fortress was mediated by class pressures because Katie was not able to maintain herself in the upper middle class status of her family of origin and was now living on social assistance. Because Katie could not tell her sisters about the abuse she had

experienced, they remained blind to why Katie was 'unable' to build relational and financial security in her life. Instead, Katie's sisters attributed her repetitive break-ups as evidence that lesbians are only capable of non-committed, free-sex relationships. As a lesbian sister, Katie found herself being positioned ever further outside family by her sisters because she was 'unable' to produce even a close replica of a heteronormative looking family, whose definition was mediated by class.

Sisters As Mothers And Aunts

It is within the context of heteronormativity that children, as an assumed critical expression of womanhood and family, either brought sisters closer together or created distance between sisters by arousing heterosexist and homophobic responses. Those lesbians who were mothers, or who were aunts to their sisters' children, often drew on their experiences in these roles to explain how their sisters positioned them inside or outside the categories woman and family.

Amy and Cecilia's sharply contrasting stories illustrate the range of motherhood experiences that lesbians described. Amy and her sister were both mothers and Amy used their shared experience of motherhood as a strategy to build friendship with her sister, which led to a strengthening of kinship ties between herself, her sister, and their respective chosen families.

My relationship with my sister Nadine developed in terms of friendship, me and my partner and our kids and all that over the years. Her kids are six and eight years younger than mine so we've basically pretty much spent the last

fifteen years in each other's lives in a big way. They moved to our community and we had a very strong relationship. She would deliver her children to our house and say: "I can't stand it anymore, you take them for the weekend" and those kinds of things (8/1-2).

Amy felt that their shared experience of motherhood underlined the ways in which she and Nadine were similar, which helped them to redefine meanings associated with womanhood and family.

If you raise two youngsters in a small community, you had to pretty much find all the places where you were accepted, and my sister was one place I didn't have to even struggle. If I had to go into the hospital and have a small surgery, it would be: "Oh my, well Katie can come over here until Trudy is home from work". Or when I took a job that was thirty minutes out of town, [Nadine said]: "Well, we could do this until Trudy gets home". It was not: "Oh, let's help Amy 'cause Trudy's somewhere else". It would be: "Let's help Amy and Trudy" (8/39).

Amy felt her sister Nadine treated her and her partner Trudy as a couple who, together with their two children, were engaged in family practice. Amy placed the focus of her story upon the fact that her lesbian partner Trudy was viewed as a co-parent. The kind of recognition that Amy's sister Nadine gave to Amy's partner signifies, to Amy, whether or not her family with her lesbian partner Trudy would be viewed as a 'real' family, and therefore positioned inside or outside her sister Nadine's kinship network.

Motherhood was not always a point of unification between sisters. Cecilia recalled how she came out to her sister Theresa and gave birth to her son around the same time. Cecilia explained how Theresa demanded adoption of her son.

She came up to me. I was kind of a surprised I guess, in some ways, that she wanted to look after my son when I came out. She didn't want the family to be a part of who I am, you know. She wanted to raise him and she made it

clear. [She said]: "Listen, do you want to be with her? Do you want to be lesbian? Your son is not going to be a part of you being lesbian growing up. If you want to see your family, you're not going to see her". She told me to sign the adoption paper. She said: "If you are going to be with her, if you want to be with her, sign the adoption paper" (13/32-35).

Theresa did not understand that Cecilia's partner Germaine was a member of Cecilia's kinship network in the same way that she herself was. To the contrary, Theresa pitted Germaine in opposition to Cecilia's family and by doing so she simultaneously positioned Cecilia in opposition to family by only permitting her to be either a sexual actor or a family member. Theresa viewed Cecilia as a danger to her son, ruled by sexual instincts to the exclusion of parenting ones. Theresa assumed Cecilia to be different, and did not want her 'heterosexual' family disrupted by a lesbian presence, so she positioned Cecilia as family's outlaw and demanded adoption of her son. Cecilia described the difficult choice she made within the context of her Innu culture, family, and community.

I had to make a choice. I was cut between two worlds. You are in the middle, you know. Where do you go from here? So I had to make a choice. Should I go to my family or should I go with [Germaine]?

[My sister] has her own beliefs you know. Me coming out as a lesbian in the community was embarrassing to family because of her own catholic beliefs and that shit. She is the one who took the kid and raised the kid when I had him. She was scared with how people think in the community. She was more being protective with herself and around the family, rather than with me, you know. So, he'll be raised in a catholic oriented community.

I'm always going to see my family. I could still see my son every day despite [him] living in the same household with my sister. Everyday I would come on her place and knock [and say]: "Are you up"? [And] I seen my sister raising me and I finished my education and all of that, [so] who knows wonderful and beautiful. And I think it was wrong to let her tell me what to do and how I shouldn't be with Germaine. My people try to live with each

other, and understand each other and be part of each other. I had to make a difficult choice. So that's what I did. She adopted my son (13/32-35).

Cecilia's decision to let Theresa legally adopt her son may be seen as relinquishing her individual rights and giving into her sister's homophobia; however, Cecilia explained how extended family plays an important role within Innu kinship practices. She discussed how clear lines of distinction are not typically drawn between familial relatives, and how the informal placing of children and elders across households was not an uncommon practice within her community. Cecilia's daughter, for instance, had been living in her sister's household in an informal arrangement for thirteen years prior to the birth of Cecilia's son. As Cecilia put it, "We treat everybody in our family the same...everybody is just 'family'" (13/36). Cecilia, herself appreciative of being raised by Theresa, understood a shared sense of sameness with Theresa as two women/sisters engaged in the practice of mothering, mediated by the collective nature of their Innu identity. Cecilia felt that situating her son in her sister's house was a matter of the public-symbolic and she did not allow this to prevent her from participating in the everyday collective raising of her son. While Theresa understood Cecilia to be occupying a space of difference, Cecilia had always seen her sister as being the same as herself. Therefore, Cecilia's resistance can be found in her refusal to accept that her lesbian sexuality changed this.

Cecilia also explained how, within her Innu culture, Theresa's demand for legal adoption paradoxically meant that Cecilia was being asked to symbolically relinquish her collective rights to a shared sense of identity. Cecilia explained how though Theresa was

responding to Cecilia's disruption of the public preservation of their family of origin as heterosexual, she was primarily responding to Cecilia's disruption of the preservation of their Innu people as heterosexual. Legal adoption was Theresa's attempt to no longer permit Cecilia to use her kinship practices to participate in the development of their people. Cecilia's resistance can be found in her and her partner Germaine's creation of a visible lesbian household within their Innu community of fifteen hundred people. Cecilia believed that the Innu sense of collective identity would, over time, help her people to accept her and her partner Germaine's household as part of the community, and come to share her understanding of sameness across difference.

With the exception of Cecilia, all of the lesbians I interviewed were practicing family culture in a way that made clear distinctions between the chosen families sisters created in adulthood and their family of origin. For this reason, if a lesbians' sister had children, the familial role of aunt became an important point from which lesbians and their sisters negotiated acceptance. This importance is illustrated in Faith's discussion about a conversation she had with her sister Maria regarding their parents homophobic attitudes towards Faith as a mother.

We were discussing my parents one day and my sister said that Mom was concerned about me raising the kids in that type of environment, you know.

I said [to my sister]: "What type of environment? The way I look at it, I'm raising my kids to be very liberal, and you know there's more choices in this world than have to get married and have kids and blah blah blah. In my opinion I'm raising my kids better than I was raised".

My parents are bigoted. If you're not heterosexual then there's something

wrong with you, you know. Being normal means being heterosexual and being married and you know.

That's what I said to my sister: "In my opinion, my kids are being raised better than other kids has" (4/27).

I asked Faith if Maria agreed with their parents, or if her sister had been able to redefine her understanding of motherhood to include Faith. Faith responded by referencing Maria's treatment of her as an aunt.

She even told her son that I was gay. Occasionally, the boys, my son and her son, will be arguing about something and Paul, my sisters son, will say: "You're such a fag" and you know, I've gotta say something to educate, right (4/28).

It is notable that Faith answered my question about Maria's perception of her as a mother by referencing Maria's acceptance of her as an aunt to Maria's son; an acceptance that Faith did not take for granted. In doing so, Faith illustrates how lesbians used the category of aunt as an indicator to gauge the level of their sisters' acceptance of them as a woman family member.

While Faith's sister was honest with her son about Faith's sexuality, Dale's sister Janice displaced Dale from her role as an aunt. Janice refused to tell her daughter the truth about Dale's sexuality and refused to permit her daughter to visit Dale's home. Instead, Janice had labeled Dale's partner Shirley as 'roommate', and did not want her daughter to be told that Shirley was a part of their extended family and therefore also her aunt.

Janice said: "You're not going there". She didn't want [her daughter] Mary to be lesbian. [She said]: "Well Dale, you have to understand I would never ever want Mary to be a lesbian". I said: "Janice", and instead of, you know, freaking out because that's not much my nature, I said: "Of course I totally

understand, I would die myself if I raised a heterosexual child. I really understand how we want our children to be like us". So, you know, you get the shock value right, which is far more fun (7/20).

Janice's homophobic fear that Dale would 'turn' her daughter into a lesbian positioned Dale and her partner Shirley outside 'normal' family. Dale responded with resistant humor by positioning herself within family as a hypothetical mother, and used the cultural assumption that family re/produces sexual sameness to question the assumption that only heterosexuality is normal, and that family can only be based on heterosexuality. The belief that same-sex relationships are abnormal and based wholly upon sexual gratification, and that lesbians are incapable of developing committed kinship ties, contributes not only to the false belief that lesbians try to sexually influence others, but also to the misconception that AIDS is a gay disease. Bella's sister was concerned that Bella may be placing her children's health and welfare at risk and encouraged her to get an AIDS test.

One time I wasn't feeling well. So my sister said: "Well, did you ever have an AIDS test?" She encouraged me to have one. It had to do with being around her children and their family in general. I got angry, and it got out in my family that she requested this of me. So, I was very angry, actually, but I didn't tell her. I didn't confront her and say: "Well, is this why you're suggesting I do this?" She confronted me and said: "Well, aren't you afraid of AIDS in having relationships with women?" And I got mad at that, but I didn't say anything. She put my relationships into question, you know, like 'Who cares who I'm having sex with'. Her attitude was: Well, if you're having sex with someone of your own sex, you're gonna get AIDS (9/16).

Dale and Bella's stories are clear examples of homophobic associations to the categories woman and family, and are typical examples of how lesbians' experiences of the pressure to perform heteronormativity was mediated by their relationship to the category children

within a system of heterosexual dominance.

Sisters As Adult Children Within Families Of Origin

Lesbians also discussed their relationships to the category children by commonly referring to themselves and their sisters as adult children within their families of origin. The lesbians I interviewed tended to compare and contrast the values that members of their families of origin placed upon their and their sisters' respective chosen families, as in Ivy and Udele's stories. While both Ivy and Udele discussed patriarchal pressures, Ivy's story emphasized the homophobic association of abnormality with her chosen family, and Udele's story emphasized the heterosexist association of less importance with her chosen family compared to her heterosexual sister's chosen family.

When Ivy identified as heterosexual and was in a marriage of over fifteen years with three children, it was understood that she would take on the responsibility of taking care of her mother. However, after Ivy came out as lesbian this responsibility was revoked and was passed on to her heterosexual sister Holly.

And that [my sister Holly living with my mother] probably has a lot to do with the fact that I'm a lesbian. Because, what happened was my mother was living in Placentia. She was alone. And so we wanted her to move here where we could see her, where she's getting old. And she wasn't really interested in coming here. She didn't want to come here. And then she found a condominium here that she really liked the looks of, and so she's gonna buy that. And it was said: "You shouldn't do that because it's not a good investment. You should go and live with Holly."

Now I know that my mother had always thought that when she got old and

feeble, [she] would come and live with me. I went and helped my mother when her mother got sick. And kind of helped Mom get Nana through the last and really difficult years of my grandmother's life. And it was always a kind of joke, that I'm in training here. You know, I'm learning how to do it so that when Mom gets sick, I'll take care of Mom. And I was not in a [lesbian] relationship at all then. And I think it was gonna be really tidy and nice if Ivy took Mom.

Then Ivy got involved with this woman, and [it was said]: "We're not putting Mom in an improper situation like that". And Holly wanted a bigger house, so it suited Holly to get the bigger house, to take Mom, and it got me off the hook, 'cause I didn't want to take Mom. I don't think Mom should be taken in yet. I think she should be on her own. And this relationship with Paula does get me out of things that I don't want to be in. I can use it to get out of things in my family that I don't want to be part of (13/27-28).

The patriarchal association of women as (family) care takers assigned Ivy with responsibility for the care of her mother. However, Ivy simultaneously talked about how it was heterosexual dominance that exited her from occupying this space of care. Ivy's new household was deemed by her heterosexual siblings to be an "improper" situation to put their mother in because, after coming out as a lesbian, Ivy's choice of partner resulted in having a woman occupying the role of 'in-law' instead of a man. This visual reality sexualized Ivy's household in a way that dropped from view the sexuality incorporated within her sister Holly's heterosexual household. Once Ivy began living lesbian, her familial status ceased to be. Instead of an 'in-law', her siblings saw Ivy's partner as a sex partner only and, by extension, Ivy was seen to be ruled by sexual pleasure to the exclusion of personal kin commitment. Ivy no longer clearly embodied the innate sense of care that women are assumed to have and therefore was displaced from the category woman in addition to being displaced from family.

While Ivy's story described how a lack of recognition for her chosen family decreased her responsibilities within her family of origin, Udele's story described how a lack of recognition for her chosen family led to an increase in her familial responsibilities. Udele described how her parents routinely prioritized her sister's chosen familial responsibilities over Udele's, because her sister, though childless, was married to a man while Udele's partnership was with a woman.

In my family, I am the one who is always asked to do things rather than my sister Georgia. A little while ago my father was going away and I was asked to sleep over with my mother so she wouldn't be alone. I was busy with a conference I had to organize for work. I asked my parents to see if Georgia could do it. Well, this was a big deal.

They don't think to ask her because she has a husband. My mother was like: "Well, we don't ask Georgia because, you know, she has responsibilities. She has a husband to cook for". Yeah, and I thought in my head, 'and a husband she is supposed to sleep with at night'. So, you know, [my partner] Tanya and I are not thought about in the same kind of way (14/48).

Udele encouraged her parents to redefine their understanding of her chosen family and to view it as the same as Georgia's chosen family. The normality that Udele's mother readily recognized in Georgia's chosen family resulted from the patriarchal valuing of a heterosexual woman in the role of wife to a man. Although Udele, as a woman, recognized that her mother's comment reflected society's definition of family as including a patriarch, and felt the implications of not having a man as the head of her household, as a lesbian, Udele felt displaced not because she was without a man to cook for during the day, but because she slept with a woman at night. Udele felt that her family and her familial responsibilities were invisible because family is defined as heterosexual.

Sexuality And Family Are Public Matters

Lesbians also discussed their families of origin within the context of the pressure they continued to feel in adulthood to publicly preserve their family of origin as heterosexual. When the lesbians I interviewed discussed their sisters' acceptance, of them and their chosen families, lesbians made distinctions between private and public acceptance. This distinction is illustrated in Dale's story. Dale's former partner, Shirley and sister Jill were friends. Jill rides horses and is a member of a riding association, but Jill never invited Dale and Shirley on a riding expedition, even though Shirley was always expressing to Jill her desire to go.

Shirley always used to say, 'I'd love to get on a horse'. Then my sister Becki got a boyfriend and a month after they were out riding. Becki was allowed on a horse and Shirley was always saying that she wanted to go. So [an argument happened] one night.

Shirley said: "Jill don't think that you're any different than the rest of them [Dale's other siblings] and Jill just about died". She said: "What are you talking about?"

[Shirley] said: "I have never been invited riding because we are lesbian. You are ashamed of bringing us to the stables. So it's fine to say that you can come into our home, you love the girls, you think lesbians are wonderful. But when it comes down to it, we aren't good enough because we are lesbians and you are ashamed of us in front of you're asshole friends who are nobody anyway because if that's the way that they are, they're just pretentious bigots" (7/9).

Jill felt comfortable publicly accepting Becki and her boyfriend's heterosexual partnership by inviting them to the stable to go riding with her, however Jill did not feel comfortable to publicly accept Dale and Shirley in the same kind of way. Jill listened to Dale and Shirley and soon after their argument, Jill asked Shirley to go riding (7/10). One reason for Jill's

initial reluctance to invite Dale and Shirley to go riding is that public displays of lesbians' kinship disrupt the cultural tendency to confine sexuality and family to an idealized private sphere. Just as heterosexual privilege hides the ways in which family incorporates sexuality, it also hides the fact that sexuality and family are public matters. Heterosexual privilege drops from view the reality that anytime a heterosexual sister practices kinship in public contexts, she is simultaneously practicing her sexuality publicly.

Some heterosexual sisters were not used to viewing sexuality and family as public matters, and lesbians described these sisters as feeling uneasy about publicly interacting with them. Ivy recalled the following memory of her sister Holly's discomfort with the possibility of being publicly associated with Ivy's lesbian sexuality.

One of the funny things that Holly said to me, when I had my first affair with a woman, and then we broke it off. And I was walking down the street with Holly, and she said: "I'm some glad we look so much alike, so that people won't think that I'm your new girlfriend" (12/17-18).

Newfoundland and Labrador public life figured prominently in lesbians' adulthood stories of acceptance because the line of distinction between private and public is especially blurred within the context of small Newfoundland and Labrador communities. Lesbians' stories typically describe their sisters public acceptance in terms of the varying levels of 'outness' their sisters accepted. Chris explained that her sister Nancy preferred that Chris remain 'closeted' in situations that involved interactions with people outside of their family of origin, including interactions with Nancy's boyfriend's family.

She still doesn't like to have to explain it to others. I went to show her the [engagement] ring I had bought for Sue on the day I had bought it, and Nancy

wouldn't look at it because there was company around. She refuses to mention it to anybody. Her boyfriend's family was around, and his sister and her partner were there, and Nancy didn't feel it would be proper for her to have to explain why Christine had a diamond ring in her pocket and was showing it. She didn't want them to know (2/3).

Kit described how her sister included her and her former partner Ann in public activities, but that this inclusion was accomplished 'quietly'.

The librarians that my sisters know have a book club, and they would meet, like, once a month, or once every few months. [My partner Ann and my sister] would go, and they'd read books together. We never discussed [with the librarians] flat out: 'Oh well, you know, Ann and I are seeing each other, we're lesbians you know'. We didn't get into that, but there was this expectation when I was accepted to engineering school, that of course Ann and I would be going. We were basically treated like a couple without Mary and the other librarians really wanting to get into too much of the details of that, which I was always intrigued by (6/5).

Amy shared how her sister Nadine publicly accepted Amy in being fully 'out' and encouraged her children to do the same.

I remember when [my nephew] Stephen came home and said: "I told the teacher my cousin David has two moms" and he'd say: "Is that all right Amy?" I'd say: "Indeed it is". And so I said: "Did your teacher write it down"? And he said: "Yeah, some people have two moms". So, through giving permission to her children to acknowledge us, his cousin has two moms and stuff, we got to play out and challenge a lot of the stereotyping in the community. And it was always ok for Nadine to do that (8/4).

Lesbians referred to the pressure they felt in adulthood to preserve their families of origin as heterosexual, not only within the context of lesbians' public interactions with their sisters, but also within the context of lesbians' public presentations of themselves as lesbians. Kit described how her sister Mary's responses to her expression of lesbian identity changed over time with changes to Kit's identity expression.

She's made comments. She loves television right. Comments like: "Ok, if you are going to be a lesbian, I'd rather you be an Ellen [reference to lesbian comedian Ellen DeGeneres] lesbian", you know, or like: "Why can't you dress nicely?"

One time when I was in first year university and I was quite scary, artsy, butch then. I had big motorcycle boots, shredded black army pants, green shirts like with the arms ripped off, spiked hair, of course, pretty much shaved on the sides and spiked on the top and oh man did she ever hate that. I remember she freaked out one day and ran into my closet and literally shredded two of my second hand jackets. She was in a rage. I was about 19 then. She would have been 29, 30. She should have not been quite so, but it just enraged her and of course the more that I've become, you know, more professional, that's ok.

So if I'm going to be a lesbian I think she'd prefer me to be more like an Ellen lesbian rather than scary butch, artsy, *visible* lesbian I would say. I just laughed. What could you say, right? You know given that history. 'Yeah, you wished I was blonde, blue eyed and dressed well. What else is new. You always wished I looked a certain way, projected a certain image, that I'm never going to, not going to ever happen' (6/10).

Mary's concerns over Kit's expression of 'proper', white, middle class womanhood that characterized their childhood relationships is, in adulthood, mediated by Mary's knowledge that Kit is a lesbian. Issues of race, class, and appropriate gender behavior reappear in their adult sister relationship as Kit described by recalling Mary's suggestion to her that she should perform 'proper' lesbianhood, which Mary defined for her as white and middle class and modeled by lesbian comedian Ellen DeGeneres. Mary's comments about Kit's gender presentation in adulthood were explicitly connected to her concern over Kit as a visible lesbian in public. A sister's fear that people would make familial associations between herself and her lesbian sister were particularly heightened when a lesbian's public presentation of herself as lesbian was connected to her sense of being a part of a lesbian

community. Chris reflected upon differences between the meanings she and her sister Nancy associated to Chris' living out.

Nancy wants me to stop using the word dyke to describe myself. She sort of thinks I'm the only dyke in the world. It comes from ignorance growing up in a small area and not being exposed to anything different but, you know, straight white middle class sort of thing, but it also comes from just not being willing to open her eyes to anybody outside of her own little world.

So, you know, when I say the word, 'the gay community' or whatever, Nancy's always sort of like: "What do you do, all band together? I mean what bullshit is that?" or "I don't know why you have to be open about your sexuality? What difference does it make? People don't know when they look."

And I say: "Well, you know people assume that I'm straight when they look" (well at times) "that bugs me". She doesn't understand why that would bug me and why you know it means I have to speak out about it because she figures if it is something you can hide then why not hide it. What difference does it make to your life.

She doesn't sort of think about how different things affect your life because I mean it comes from being closed off and coming from a place where you don't have to say anything. She's the straight white little secretary that wears her dresses and her diamonds and you know goes to the office every day so I mean she doesn't have to question anything. Right? So, she doesn't get that at all (2/6-7).

The lesbians I interviewed did not say that their coming out and living out within the context of their sister relationships were for political purposes; however in their discussions, many lesbians expressed the sentiment that they "should" be out to family.

Lesbians' stories about their negotiations with their sisters around public acceptance were significant for lesbians, because such stories often marked the challenge lesbians faced to help their sisters think beyond the sentiment of accepting them 'despite' their difference

and to simply accept them as normal. It was important for Chris to express how her little sister “started the whole: “Let’s do all my Canadian Law papers and everything else on queer issues”. She’s been fantastic with it....She is standing up in the middle of the classroom to someone making a fag joke. So the kid really kicked in for me” (2/5). Likewise Macy considers it an “act of solidarity” when her sister Meagan said things like: “Well my sister is a lesbian and let me tell you what she thinks” or “Let me tell ya what I’ll let you say or not say around me” (5/32). Faith made a point of saying that her sister: “wanted to go [to the pride parade] , and that kind of made me feel good, just knowing that she was interested in going with me” (4/23). Amy recalled the following memory of challenging her sister to accept her as normal.

I remember when my father died. Everybody was there. My niece Dawn, who’s about eleven or twelve, and at some point, Dawn looks around at all the Smiths, and says to my partner: “Everyone here is related, except you Trudy”. And so we’re all there thinking, ‘Oh, it’s one of these moments, right, a funeral, a family event’. So I said: “Yeah, well Trudy is related to me”. She said: “Yeah, well, you know, not like an uncle”. And I said: “Well Trudy and I are [together] like your parents”. [She said]: “Oh gross, Amy”.

So I remember we were walking back to our house, and I said [to my sister, Dawn’s mother]: “Dawn needs to know that it’s an okay thing, that maybe one day she’ll love someone who’s of the same gender, and that you will think that’s okay. Not that me and Trudy are ok even though we are different”.

So, a few months went by [and she said]: “I guess you were right. I guess I just thought, you know, just saying that you were okay was enough. How would I tell Dawn that?” And I said: “Well you know, simple. Let Dawn know that all those possibilities are open to her. She is no different from the rest of the world. The point is not to have Dawn apologize for hurting Trudy’s feelings.” It always took stating the obvious to them. It was obvious to us, but wouldn’t be to them (8/23-24).

It was important for lesbians to make distinctions between private and public acceptance because acceptance 'despite' difference is contradictory for lesbians. When lesbians are accepted into family 'despite' being different, their placement in family on these terms maintains the cultural assumption that normality is defined as heterosexual.

Redefining Woman And Family: The Passage Of Time In Lesbians' Adult Sister Relationships

As in Amy's retelling of her memory of challenging her sister to accept her as normal, the lesbians I interviewed were occasionally able to point to specific events to which they could attribute change in their heterosexual sisters' acceptance and understanding of them as lesbian sisters. However, more often than not, lesbians' understandings of how and why changes occurred in their sisters' acceptance of them were hazy. As Sidney's story illustrates, it was a gradual shifting over the passage of time that seemed to make accommodation for change.¹⁰

...then my sister started getting into Christianity. I went out to visit her and she told me that she had found God. [She] basically sat there and said to me, "I accept you, but not your sexuality. I accept you but not that part of you. In the Bible, that is not acceptable to God." That was really hard. What can I say? For the next three or four years, we agreed to disagree. That's what I said to her, "Okay, let's just agree to disagree." I was 22.

You could tell she wasn't seeing, Amanda, my girlfriend at that time, as any

¹⁰When I sent Sidney a draft of this thesis, she told me that she felt this sentence denied how her support of her sister Catherine over the years was a key reason why Catherine gradually began to accept her as a lesbian.

kind of significant other. It's nice to agree to disagree, but if you don't ask me how Amanda is doing, and I'm asking you how Richard is doing, then there's something not right there. We've both been in relationships for about the same amount of time, although ours was not a marriage, because we were not legally married. Given again that she was following her religious beliefs, her attitudes towards lesbian sexuality was something that was already decided for her. I think she [felt] she couldn't change [her beliefs]. That's the way it was. It's written, you know?

When she got divorced, it was devastating for her. [Amanda and I] pleaded for her to come visit us because she was so devastated about her marital breakup. It was Amanda's idea. She said: "Let's pay for her to come". And we did. When she came to visit that was the first time she was ever in my [home] where Amanda and I were sleeping in the same room. I think she was battling with her own beliefs that were telling her what she should think. So, I said, "You know, Catherine, I think that you'd be surprised about how many things we agree on. We agree on world peace, we agree on ethical treatment of animals, we agree on anti-racism, and all of these things, right? And so, what are we gonna to do? Focus on the things we don't agree on?" Again, it's hard to agree to disagree, and it's hard not to talk about issues when they arise. So, that was what it was like at the time. That was when I was 25.

I was with Amanda for almost eight years. In the last few years [of going out with Amanda my sister might say] hi to her, or, if Amanda answered the phone, she might talk to her. When I was breaking up with Amanda, I didn't cry on [my sister's] shoulder. I think I said, "It's really hard. It's a big decision to leave this relationship." I probably said that to her, but I didn't ask for her help. I didn't phone her right away and ask her for her advice. I don't think that I had any major support from her where I felt, "Well, thank God she was there for me." I think it's more been me being there for her. I was 29 or 30 when Amanda and I broke up.

[My sister] got remarried. I went to her wedding. I was supportive of her new husband, who was also of this religion. When I started seeing Trina, that was six years ago, and Catherine's response was "Okay, whatever, there's some new person in your life". And there was never any asking about her. We'd talk on the phone and I would say, "How's Tom? What's he doing? What's new?" or "Hi Tom, well happy birthday." She would never ask about Trina but I overlooked that and maintained contact with her. I've always said to her, "Listen, Catherine, if you need help, if you need to phone me, I'll always be here for you." I was always there for her even when she didn't want

anything to do with me and was very closed. She wasn't coming to visit me. It wasn't a priority for her. But I would make regular visits to see her.

When she started saying she was having trouble in her marriage, I supported her. I took two weeks off to go and spend time with her and just try to help her out. And I did. I'd get up at 4 o'clock in the morning if she was feeding. And I would help her financially. Catherine and her husband have three children and are struggling on one salary. I brought gifts for the kids and left them some extra money. She started talking a little bit more about her personal life than we ever did before. I think for her to phone me up and for her to complain about her husband was difficult because I think in a way she felt like she was betraying him. "Well, I'm gonna say this but I don't want you to think it's that bad. And I don't want you to think that he's bad."

I think she's realized that I'm a major ally for her, and a friend. So she's seen this as an outlet. So I think [me being there] has opened up the lines of communication. She's counting on me more and opening up to me more, and I'm also pushing the boundary by saying, "I'll listen to you, and I'll support you. But I'm going to say things about myself, and that's the price. Like, you'll get my support, and any way I can help you, I'll will. But, I'm not going to pretend there's a part of me that doesn't exist. So that's the trade-off. You want these things? Great, you'll have them, but you've got to listen to me and know that, that's who I am". And I couldn't do it any other way because she needs to know that as a lesbian I am normal.

Then, I don't know what happened, to be honest, but twenty years after she knew [that I was a lesbian], one day she finally said, "And how's Trina?" And I was shocked. [Last summer] we paid for her to come, with her two children, because she's really stressed. They stayed with us for ten days. One day she said, to [my nephew] Peter, "Oh where's Auntie Trina?" We were speechless. I've never asked her [about it] because, in a way, it doesn't deserve the question. It was ground shaking. Let me tell you, I never thought we would even get that far on this issue. Because to me what she's saying is, "Trina is family." "[She was telling her son Peter] Trina is family to you. You're 2 years old, and I'm telling you that is Auntie Trina". And one day Peter is gonna to ask her "Why is that Auntie Trina?" [Peter will probably say] "She's not your sister. Sidney is your sister. Who is Trina?" [And my sister will need to say] "No. Trina's not a sister." One day she'll have to explain that.

For her to say something like that is absolving the past. Because to me, it's

her saying, "I was wrong." without really saying that. Because when someone tells you fifteen years ago that they accept you but not your sexuality, and then fifteen years later they're calling your girlfriend, who you've been with for six years, their children's aunt, that's huge. When all those years before, she never asked how my partner was, or who they were, or what they did. What happened was I was so supportive of her over those years, I think she realized that, "How can I not love this person and her partner?" How can she put a wall there and pretend my partner doesn't exist?"

I think she's already stepped through that kind of caring about Trina thing. There's no question there at all. When she says, "Tell Trina to give me a call if she wants" [it means] she likes her. She wants to have a friendship with her too. I think that she's already surpassed my expectations. I received a postcard from her a couple of days ago, and it said, "Love to Trina." I always thought, 'I'll be there for you but this is who I am. I'm not gonna pretend. If you need my support, I'm offering you that and it would be nice if I received your support one day'. The story with my sister is that I tried to work on that the best I could. We went [from] Christianity to "Let's agree to disagree". To me being supportive of her and to her coming to visit me after I'd been in my third and fourth relationships. Now at my fourth relationship and after twenty years, she's calling my girlfriend Auntie Trina. So that's why I phoned, because to me, I don't know what your thesis is on. But if it's simply lesbians and their sisters, there's something interesting there, I mean, I think. Anyways, so that's the story on that (11/1-43).

Paradoxically, while lesbians' accounts of why and how change occurred were hazy, the nuances lesbians described underlined a concrete challenge to kinship symbolics. A predominant tendency in studies on kinship is to outline a symbolics grounded in blood and marriage, or in other words the order of nature and the order of law (Schneider, 1968). Sidney was aware of how foundational these symbolics are; she took them as points of references in her own life. It was important to Sidney that her sister learn to view her lesbian relationships as 'normal' or 'real' and to recognize that she is 'married' despite her relationship being unsanctioned. While the lesbians I interviewed employed these symbolics

they were also simultaneously contesting them. In Sidney's case, she described this contesting as a "twenty year" process of "figuring out and shifting around a lot". Lesbians need to contest concepts of family, since lesbians' kinship practices cut across these categories of blood/nature and marriage/law (Weston, 1991, p.3). Lesbians have been labeled perversions of nature and have little or no legal status for the relationships they create and consider kin. While lesbians' stories featured these familiar symbols, a redirection of them occurred in order to open up new ways to conceptualize kinship. Sidney's story is representative of the stories other lesbians described, and is significant in that this redirection of familial symbolics cuts across the categories 'heterosexual family' and 'gay family'. This cutting is epitomized in Sidney's story by the naming of her partner as Aunt. The naming of Auntie Trina figures as an "enormous" moment in Sidney's experience primarily because the "ground" this naming "shakes" lies upon a fault line that disrupts the cultural definition of family as 'heterosexual' (or 'gay').¹¹ By doing so, a critical space is cleared for redefining

¹¹The current practice of naming families according to a sexual orientation, e.g., 'heterosexual family' or 'gay family', can be understood as part of a larger discourse regarding 'new family forms' and 'family values' that emerged in the mid 1980's. Examples of new family forms include stepfamilies, those made possible by new reproductive technologies, common law heterosexuals, interracial families, or children parented by not adopted. Within this discourse of 'alternate families', it is 'gay families' as opposed to 'heterosexual families' that are depicted as the 'alternative family'. Any alternative must be an alternative to something. This formulation presumes a central paradigm of family shared by most people in society and that central paradigm is the 'heterosexual family' presented as 'real' and privileged within kinship analysis and within society. The question that many scholars tend to ask is: 'Do alternative families mirror or counter 'hegemonic' forms of kinship?' However, the narratives of the lesbians I interviewed illustrate how this question creates and maintains a binary of heterosexual-homosexual families and fails to provide opportunities to explore how kinship is actually lived by lesbians in their everyday.

the categories woman and family and for also redefining how these categories incorporate one another.

2.4 CONCLUSION

Lesbians' narratives regarding their sister relationships centered around the contradictions they experienced, over time, in being a lesbian sister while being simultaneously displaced from the categories woman and family. Lesbians' experiences of displacement from the categories woman and family were complex since these two categories incorporated one another, and because the interplay between these categories was intersected by other social identifications such as class, race, and culture. While lesbians' narratives focused upon changes in their sister relationships over time, lesbians were often unable to point to the reasons for why or how these changes occurred. These narratives about lesbians and their sister relationships challenge us to rethink current cultural understandings of sexuality and kinship, and how 'woman family member' is defined.

CHAPTER 3:

DEVELOPING THEORY FROM LESBIAN SISTERS' NARRATIVES: THEORIZING DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN HETEROSEXUALITY AS MALE DOMINANCE AND HETEROSEXUALITY AS HETEROSEXUAL DOMINANCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Outing The Lesbian Subject

Lesbian-feminist theory has traditionally viewed lesbian subordination wholly as a by-product of sexism and has investigated the experience of lesbians as women in a patriarchal culture, but has placed much less emphasis on investigating lesbians' experiences as 'deviants' in a heterosexist one. My intention in this chapter is not to deny that heterosexuality plays a substantial role in maintaining patriarchy, but rather to suggest that this is not the only possible function heterosexuality might have. In this chapter, I suggest that a central function of lesbian subordination is the preservation of one of society's foundational institutions: the *heterosexual* family, whose benefits are sufficient to explain why heterosexuals would have an interest in maintaining a system of heterosexual dominance even in a gender egalitarian society.¹

¹In this chapter I treat male dominance and heterosexual dominance as distinct systems of power however this does not mean that I discount current theoretical perspectives on identity that suggest we *experience* systems of power in relation to one another. Spelman articulates such current thoughts on identity in relation to feminist theory, and writes that feminist thought is problematic when it portrays a woman's identity: "as a sum of parts neatly divisible from one another, parts defined in terms of her race, gender, class, and so on. We may infer that the oppressions she is subject to are (depending on who she is) neatly divisible into racism, sexism, classism, or homophobia, and that in her various political

Chapter Overview

This chapter is divided into three sections. **FEMINIST THEORIZING NEEDS TO RELINQUISH THE IDEA THAT HETEROSEXISM IS *NOTHING BUT* A BY-PRODUCT OF SEXISM** is divided into three subsections. **The Quintessential Lesbian-Feminist Theory** uses Adrienne Rich's classic essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" to illustrate how lesbian-feminist theory typically traces heterosexism back to male dominance. **The Unhappy Marriage Of Lesbian Theory And Feminist Theory** uses Heidi Hartmann's article "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union" to raise questions about the adequacy of feminist gender critiques in advancing lesbian interests. **The Feminist Subject Closets Lesbians** presents two key ways lesbian specificity is subsumed under the feminist subject 'woman'. This section is divided into two subsections. *Lesbian-feminism Puts The 'Homo' Back Into Homosexuality* considers how lesbian-feminism positions the lesbian subject within feminism by emphasizing the potential commonalities or continuum between lesbians' and heterosexual women's experiences. *How Has The Anti-Essentialist Project Played 'Out' For Lesbian Difference?* suggests that within a difference-sensitive feminist framework, lesbian-feminists typically consider differences among lesbians, as opposed to differences between

activities she works clearly now out of one part of herself, now out of another" (Spelman, 1988, p.136). I agree with Spelman that each different part of our identity is inseparable from one another and therefore the significance of each part is affected by the others. This means that lesbian subordination is not experienced separate from gender, race, and class oppressions. However, this does not mean that lesbian specificity does not exist.

lesbians and heterosexual women. **THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT** considers lesbians' displacement from the categories woman and family. This section is divided into two subsections. **The Feminist Woman** uses the theory of Monique Wittig to discuss how lesbian-feminism typically situates lesbians in relation to the categories woman and heterosexuality in ways that result in displacement of lesbians' specificity. **Heterosexuality As Heterosexual Dominance** suggests that institutionalized heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance is about ensuring reproduction through the preservation of the heterosexual family as a fundamental practice of social structure. **FEMINISM, FAMILY, AND DEFINITIONAL FORCES** discusses how feminist analysis of family typically drops from view the ways in which a system of heterosexual dominance positions lesbians as family's outlaws.

3.2

FEMINIST THEORIZING NEEDS TO RELINQUISH THE IDEA THAT HETEROSEXISM IS *NOTHING BUT*² A BY-PRODUCT OF SEXISM

The Quintessential Lesbian-Feminist Theory

Lesbian-feminist analysis recognizes that lesbians experience a distinctive set of discriminatory practices; however it typically traces those practices back to male dominance. Homophobia and heterosexism are seen, by lesbian-feminists, as specific ways in which patriarchy gets enacted and therefore the elimination of gender oppression is thought to be

²The phrase "nothing but" is borrowed from Calhoun (2000).

sufficient for liberating lesbians. A typical example of this form of lesbian-feminist analysis is Adrienne Rich's essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence" (Rich, 1983).

Rich theorizes heterosexuality as a complex and problematic construct rather than as a natural category. She argues that heterosexuality is "something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force" (Rich, 1983, p. 126) and plays a central role in maintaining males' right to the sexual access of women. Thus, according to Rich, feminists, especially heterosexual feminists, are making a mistake if they do not critique heterosexual orientation because it would result in "an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other*" (Rich, 1983 p.125, italics in original). From Rich's perspective, practices that enforce male sexual dominance over women, including the taboo on lesbianism, are at the heart of patriarchy.

Feminists typically use this essay to draw inferences about the relationship between sexism and heterosexism. Cheshire Calhoun points out that since heterosexism plays a central role in all women's oppression, including the specific subordination of lesbians, heterosexism is often inferred as "*nothing but*" a by-product of sexism (Calhoun, 2000, p 8, italics in original). Calhoun points out that Rich claims that a feminist agenda is "a *necessary* condition for eliminating the subordination of lesbians" but Rich does not "show that eliminating gender oppression is *sufficient* for liberating lesbians" (Calhoun, 2000, p.8). Eliminating gender oppression is *not* sufficient for liberating lesbians because male

dominance is not the only system of power with an investment in heterosexuality.

According to lesbian-feminist theory, heterosexuality re/produces women's social, economic, emotional, and sexual dependence on men and is thus a system of male ownership of women. From this feminist standpoint, the relationship of lesbians and heterosexual women to heterosexuality is assumed to be fundamentally the same: both experience heterosexuality as the demand that women be dependent on and accessible to men. Many aspects of lesbian-feminist theories fail to account for the specifically lesbian experience of subordination. In lesbian-feminist theory, heterosexuality is assumed to be equally compulsory for heterosexual women and lesbians, and compulsory heterosexuality is assumed to mean the same thing for both. Lesbian-feminist theory does not conceptualize a specifically lesbian relation to heterosexuality.³

³Many critics have now shown how Rich's argument subsumes lesbians under the category woman. In addition to Calhoun 2000, Dever's 1997 critique of Rich, in particular, has also informed my thought. For a discussion of lesbian-feminist thought, written in the same time period as Rich's essay, that represents an effort to counter Rich's formulation of lesbian existence, see Rubin, 1984. Rubin writes: "Lesbian feminist ideology has mostly analyzed the oppression of lesbians in terms of the oppression of women. However, lesbians are also oppressed as queers and perverts, by the oppression of sexual, not gender, stratification" (Rubin, 1984, p.308).

The Unhappy Marriage Of Lesbian Theory And Feminist Theory⁴

If lesbian-feminism does not depict lesbian specificity, then how adequate is feminist analysis for investigating lesbian existence? Nearly twenty years ago Heidi Hartmann wrote the now classic article: "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union". Hartmann wrote that the marriage of Marxism and feminism "has been like the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism" (Hartmann, 1984, p.172). Have lesbian theory and feminist theory fallen into a similar unhappy marriage in which "that one" is feminism?

Hartmann argues that traditional Marxism does not incorporate a concept of sex-class, and thus of patriarchy as a political system distinct from capitalism. This means that Marxism treats women's oppression as a special case of class oppression. Marxism drops from view the gendered nature of women's lives. A parallel complaint can be raised about feminist theory. Feminist theory lacks a concept of heterosexuals and non-heterosexuals as members of different sexuality classes. Thus, feminist theories lack a concept of lesbian subordination as a political structure that is distinct from patriarchy. Feminist theories treat lesbian oppression as a special case of patriarchal oppression and thus drop from view the lesbian nature of lesbian lives.

⁴The phrase "The Unhappy Marriage" comes from Hartman 1984. While I use the "Unhappy Marriage" to parallel Hartman's critique of the relationship between Marxism and feminism with my critique of the relationship between feminist theory and lesbian theory, Zita, 1994 uses the concept of "The Unhappy Marriage" to critique "the nature of the marriage hidden behind the veil of queerness...namely the union between the sexes required for the enterprise of gay and lesbian studies" (Zita, 1994, p.258).

Just as gender oppression can exist in a class-egalitarian society, heterosexual dominance can exist in a *gender*-egalitarian society (one that is not structured around male dominance). Because one can give a class analysis of male dominance, does not mean that gender oppression is solely a function of class oppression. The fact that much of lesbian experience can be analyzed through the lens of gender oppression does not mean that lesbian experience cannot also be analyzed through the lens of lesbian subordination.

The Feminist Subject Closets Lesbians

The feminist subject closets lesbians when the only way it understands lesbians' experiences is by applying the theory of male dominance. I explore this idea by considering two of the most common ways lesbian-feminists aim to incorporate lesbians into feminist thought; the first is through lesbian-feminists' employment of a commonality/continuum discourse and the second is lesbian-feminists' engagement with the current anti-essentialist project.

*Lesbian-feminism Puts The 'Homo' Back Into Homosexuality*⁵

In the beginning of the second-wave women's movement in North America,⁶

⁵The concept that lesbian-feminism put the 'homo' back into homosexuality comes from Lamos (1994).

⁶This thesis purposefully focuses upon the North American context because lesbians' positions within women's movements differ depending upon the geographic context, and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss these differences.

feminists conceptualized women as sharing a *common* oppression. The essentialism embedded in this 'common oppression' framework was challenged from a number of points of 'difference', especially by women of color. Although lesbians protested heterosexual bias in feminist work,⁷ Calhoun argues that their protest during the second-wave had a distinctively different texture than that of women of color. Women of color "protested by emphasizing their *difference* from white, middle class feminists" and underscored "the racial and class *biases* encoded in dominant feminist theorizing" (Calhoun, 2000, p. 4, italics in original). Lesbian-feminists "protested by emphasizing the potential *commonalities* or continuum between lesbians' and heterosexual feminists' experience" (e.g. valorization of woman-loving; resistance to compulsory heterosexuality) (Calhoun, 2000, p.4 italics in original). Lesbian-feminists underscored the "incompleteness of dominant feminist theorizing of resistance to gender oppression when it failed to call into question heterosexuality itself" (Calhoun, 2000, p.4). Women of color argued that methodologically "feminist theorizing was too narrowly focused on only one system of oppression and the narrow focus was itself a product of many feminist theorists' racism and classism" (Calhoun, 2000, p.4). However, lesbian-feminists did not understand the problem in their case to be methodological; lesbian-feminists believed that they were marginalized within feminism because feminist analysis of male dominance did not extend far enough to include

⁷Feminist politics were largely exclusively centered upon issues that were of concern for heterosexual women including discriminatory education and workplace policies based on sex and heterosexual marriage status, issues regarding contraception and abortion, heterosexual intimate relations/sexual practices.

heterosexuality as a form of male dominance. The problem was attributed to “simply an uncritical adoption of cultural ideology about the naturalness and immutability of one’s sexual orientation” (Calhoun, 2000, p. 4).

The political climate of the times was such that lesbians sometimes felt threatened with ostracism from the second-wave women’s movement. Many heterosexual feminists felt that feminism’s association with lesbians and thus with deviancy, undermined the credibility of their movement.⁸ Attitudes toward lesbians were still often influenced by psychoanalytic theorists, who pathologized lesbian sexuality. These political times required lesbians to pledge their allegiance to feminism by drawing on a discourse of sameness⁹ as women rather

⁸An American example is the Radicalesbians’ essay “The Woman Identified Women” (1973) which was written as a direct response to Betty Friedan’s reference to lesbians as a ‘lavender menace’ to the women’s movement. For historical discussions of this event see Phelan, 1989; Schneir, 1994. For a Canadian example of lesbian feminist organizing during the mid to late 1970’s see Ross (1995): “In the mid-to-late 1970’s in Toronto, lesbian feminists felt caught between a mainstream culture that either ignored or oversexualized their existence, a woman’s movement and left organizations mostly content to preserve the invisibility of lesbians, and a gay-liberation movement that tended to equate political lesbianism with asexual puritanism” (Ross, 1995, p. 136). For a review discussion of lesbian feminist movements see: Taylor & Whittier (1998).

⁹Resisting sexism was seen as simultaneously resisting heterosexism. For instance, Radicalesbians held that women who chose lesbianism were on the vanguard of the women’s movement since lesbianism was “the rage of all women condensed to the point of explosion” (Radicalesbians, 1973, p. 240). Ti-Grace Atkinson is a key example of the political lesbianism of this time period: “Because of their particularly unique attempt at revolt, the lesbian role within male/female class system becomes critical. Lesbianism is the “criminal” zone, what I call the “buffer” zone, between the two major classes comprising the sex class system. And it is crucial that both lesbians and feminists understand the strategical significance of lesbianism to feminism” (Atkinson 1974, pp. 136-137). See also: Birkby et al. 1973; Myron and Bunch, 1975; Frye 1983.

than calling attention to lesbians' differences from their heterosexual sisters, including lesbians' position outside the category woman. In this sense, lesbian-feminists put the homo (sameness) back into homosexuality (Lamos, 1994). It was not the time nor place for lesbian feminists to entertain the possibility that lesbian subordination might itself be a political system that heterosexual women as a class might have a strong interest in maintaining.

How Has The Anti-Essentialist Project Played 'Out' For Lesbian Difference?

Since the beginning of the second wave women's movement, the focus of feminist investigation has moved from a single system of oppression - gender oppression - to multiple, intersecting systems of oppression. Feminist thought has grown to recognize that 'woman' does not signify a set of universal commonalities and that a single feminist agenda will not address all women's needs. The anti-essentialist project has meant that in some senses the category of analysis is no longer 'woman' but 'difference'.¹⁰ Elizabeth Weed writes that feminism has grown to encompass "a more plural understanding of 'women' and a notion of 'situational identities' determined by the exigencies of the social field" (Weed, 1989, p. xvi). In other words, feminism has come to recognize that "sisterhood is powerful but difficult" (de Lauretis, 1986, p.7). Although this new category of analysis appears to be an opportunity to explore lesbians' difference/specificity and to address charges of

¹⁰ For examples of feminist theoretical discussions about women's 'difference'/essentialism (from the late 1980's to mid 1990s) see: Alcoff, 1988; Crosby, 1992; Fuss, 1989a; Johnson-Roullier, 1995; Weedon, 1987.

heterosexism in feminist theory, this is not how the difference-sensitive feminist frame¹¹ has played 'out' for lesbians.¹²

One of the central aims of feminism within the difference-sensitive frame is to trace intersections between gender oppression and other forms of oppression. In this tracing, differences in race, class, and ethnicity are understood to place women in opposition to each other within systems of race, class, and cultural oppressions. Lesbian-feminism within the difference-sensitive frame followed the shift in a feminist focus from commonalties among women to differences among women; however, the focus in lesbian-feminist theorizing has become *differences among lesbians* as opposed to *differences between lesbians and heterosexual women* (Calhoun, 2000). The anti-essentialist lesbian-feminist project is concerned with issues such as: avoiding a totalizing discourse that speaks for all, the challenge of creating community in the face of political differences, and constructing new conceptions of female agency and female friendship.¹³ These became issues for lesbian-

¹¹My use of the phrase "difference-sensitive" comes from Calhoun, 2000

¹²Rosiland Delmar's words written in 1986 take on new meanings within the context of new theories of sexual diversities and the ways in which these theories challenge feminism to rethink sex/gender binaries: "...one of women's liberation's paradoxes that although it started on the terrain of sexual antagonism between men and women, it moved quickly to a state in which relations between women caused the most internal stress. Women, in a sense, are feminism's greatest problem" (Delmar, 1986, pp 27-28).

¹³Special issues of feminist journals sensitive to lesbians' 'differences' (as women-non-queer) include: "The Lesbian Issue" (1992) Feminist Studies, 18 (3), aimed to represent "the multiplicity of lesbian identities" (p.463); Schneider (1994) "Sexual Identities/Sexual Communities" Gender and Society, 8(3); Zimmerman (1995) "Sexual Orientation" NWSA Journal, 7(1); McNaron, Anzaldua, Arguelles & Kennedy (1993) "Theorizing Lesbian

feminists because feminists' general concern with women's relation to women was transposed in lesbian-feminism to a concern for lesbians' relation to fellow lesbians.

Only race, class, and ethnic differences *between* lesbians, not lesbians' difference from heterosexual women, appear within the lesbian-feminist difference-sensitive frame. Differences between lesbians and heterosexual women are not similarly understood as differences that place lesbians and heterosexual women in opposition to each other within a system of heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance. This is because we lack a conceptualization that lesbian subordination is a system distinct from the system of gender oppression.¹⁴ As a result, the difference-sensitive feminist frame paradoxically excludes representations of *lesbian* difference. The assumption remains in the difference-sensitive frame that lesbians have the same relationship to the category woman as heterosexual women and therefore can be theorized within feminism. Neither the 'whether' nor the 'how' of this theorizing can be problematized as a result, and feminism continues to act as a closet for

Experience" *Signs*, 18(3). For a widely referenced social science text about lesbians' class, race, and ethnic differences, see: Weston, 1996. The concern over female agency/friendship to which I refer is typified by Raymond, 1986.

¹⁴Calhoun (2000) argues that an investigation of differences between women of color does not have the effect of masking raced identities in the same way investigating differences between lesbians masks lesbians' identities because: "The general contours of differently raced identities under a system of racial oppression have first been delineated, investigating differences among black women is able to reveal the *intersection* of race with other differences such as class or nationality. In analysis of institutionalized lesbian and gay subordination and of the socially constructed category 'lesbian', there is nothing lesbian for differences of race, class, ethnicity, and nationality to intersect *with*" (Calhoun, p.56 italics in original). This is because lesbians are subsumed under 'woman'.

lesbians.

From the early years of the second wave women's movement through to the difference-sensitive feminist frame of the 1990's, lesbian theory and feminist theory remained one, and that one is feminist theory. Lesbian-feminist analysis still has no conceptualization of lesbian subordination distinct from a system of gender oppression, and therefore has no structure to theorize lesbian difference. Lesbian subordination needs to be taken as a conceptually distinct axis of oppression, that intersects with systems of gender, race, and class oppression.

3.3 THE POLITICS OF DISPLACEMENT

The Feminist Woman

In order for lesbian subordination to be taken as a conceptually distinct axis of oppression, feminists need to rethink lesbians' relationship to the category 'woman'. While Monique Wittig suggests lesbians live outside the category woman¹⁵ she still views lesbian sexuality primarily as resistance to male dominance. Wittig denies that 'man' and 'woman' are natural categories and argues that the two sex classes are the product of oppressive gender relations between men and women.

For there is no sex. There is but that is oppressed and sex that oppresses. It is oppression that creates sex and not the contrary. The contrary would be to

¹⁵Monique Wittig ended *The Straight Mind* with "Lesbians are not women" (Wittig, 1992, p. 32). My reading of Wittig has been informed by Fuss, 1989b; Hale, 1996.

say that sex creates oppression or to say that the cause (origin) of oppression is to be found in sex itself, in a natural division of the sexes preexisting (or outside of) society (Wittig, 1982, p.64).

In Wittig's view lesbians are "beyond the categories sex".

For what makes a woman is a specific social relation to a man, a relation that we have previously called servitude, a relation which implies personal and physical obligation as well as economic obligation... a relation which lesbians escape by refusing to become or to stay heterosexual (Wittig, 1992, p.20).

Lesbian-feminist analysis, such as Wittig's, assumes womanhood only to mean living in "servitude" to men. However, according to this definition, there are other ways of living outside the category woman besides living lesbian (e.g. the heterosexual celibate, the marriage resister, the married woman with an egalitarian marriage contract). Wittig's analysis does not provide a conceptual framework in which to understand lesbians' specific deviancy from the category woman. She does not explain how a heterosexual woman's resistance to womanhood differs from a lesbian's resistance to womanhood. Because lesbians and heterosexual resisters are theorized to have the same relation to the category woman, in Wittig's theory there can be no differences between the two. However, I suggest that 'gender-deviant' heterosexual women, do not exit the category woman in the same way as lesbians. Gender deviance would result in heterosexual women exiting the category woman only if Wittig's description of what it means to be a woman was complete. I suggest that, contrary to Wittig, *heterosexuality is a critical component of our cultural conception of the category woman.*

If lesbians experience womanliness (the expectation to look and act like a woman)

as oppressive, it is not wholly because womanliness requires subordination to men (though this may also be one component of her experience). For a lesbian, the expectation of womanliness is based on the cultural assumption that heterosexuality is a natural inevitability for her. Therefore, Wittig's logic that equates lesbian sexuality with escape from male control via their escape from heterosexuality/womanhood is bound by a heterosexual viewpoint of lesbian sexuality. From a heterosexual feminist viewpoint, living lesbian may appear to offer *women* a liberating escape from male control; however, lesbians, *as lesbians*, (not as women) do not view their practice of sexuality as an escape from men since lesbians do not view men as potential partners.¹⁶ Lesbians do not choose to fall in love with, have sex with, and set up a household/chosen family with women *as a class* but rather with *a particular lesbian/woman* (Calhoun, 2000, p. 45).¹⁷ From the standpoint of a heterosexual woman, heterosexuality is typically experienced as a form of male dominance over women; however for a lesbian, heterosexuality is simultaneously experienced as a form of heterosexual dominance. Lesbians' daily experience as lesbians is not one of liberation but rather one of subordination within a system of institutionalized heterosexuality that privileges heterosexuals, including heterosexual women.

¹⁶The idea that heterosexuality enables men to control women is not even something that is evident to all lesbians.

¹⁷Loving a particular woman does not necessarily negate the fact that lesbians can embrace women *as a class*, especially lesbian-feminists; however, this is not the kind of woman-loving that lesbians are prohibited from expressing under a system of heterosexual dominance.

Contrary to Wittig's claim that "lesbianism provides for the moment the only social form in which we can live freely" (Wittig, 1992, p.20), lesbians do not live freely. When a lesbian lives out she faces subordination in every area of her life. A lesbian may be denied the right to marry or to adopt children. She may be denied access to children she already has. Pressure may be brought to bear against her autonomy, lesbian partnerships, and chosen families. She may be denied housing or forced to find a new home because of harassment from family members or neighbors. These injustices often make good mental health and a stable personal life difficult to sustain. Autonomy in the 'private' sphere is compounded by a lesbian's subordination in the public sphere. A lesbian is prohibited from publicly expressing her kinship/sexuality. She very often has to pretend to be heterosexual in order to prevent harassment in her workplace or to retain her job. She is not represented in cultural production and therefore is displaced from civil society. A lesbian is no longer subjected to state sanctions in North America such as institutionalization or imprisonment but she may still be subject to 'therapies' to cure her, including electroshock treatment.¹⁸

Lesbians' displacement from the private and public spheres means that lesbians may be free from an individual man in her personal life; however she lacks many of the freedoms that heterosexual women have because they are heterosexual. Although a lesbian escapes individual patriarchal control, she endures heterosexual control over both the public and

¹⁸For discussions about the historical and current social, legal, and economic situations of lesbians within the specific context of Canada see: Arcsott 1996; Eaton, 1990; Kinsmen, 1987; Lahey, 1999; 2001; Peterson, 1996; Rayside, 1998; Smith, 1999. For the specific context of Newfoundland and Labrador see: Muzychka, 1992.

private spheres for her lesbian sexuality. My criticisms suggest that while heterosexual women are oppressed by a political system of male dominance (and this may also be a component of a lesbian's experience), lesbians are subordinated by a political system of heterosexual dominance. Heterosexual women's (especially heterosexual feminists') and lesbians' relationships to heterosexual dominance and to the category woman are not the same.

Heterosexuality As Heterosexual Dominance

Heterosexuality is a political and economic system of male dominance that enables what Gayle Rubin refers to as the "traffic in women" (Rubin, 1975).¹⁹ However, for the lesbian-not-woman, heterosexuality is simultaneously a system of discrimination against non-heterosexuals. Heterosexuality as discrimination against non-heterosexuals has been theorized in various ways including as the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1990), the 'heterosexual panorama' (Blasius, 1994), as 'heteronormativity' (Warner, 1993) and as the 'heterosexual assumption' (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan 2001). Despite differences in these theories, three key assumptions typically underline heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance: the natural identity of people is man and woman, that people's natural sexuality is heterosexuality, and that the natural social unit for people is family based on

¹⁹As such, the heterosexual marriage contract positions women, including women's re/productive labor such as childcare and housework, as men's property.

heterosexuality.²⁰ These assumptions of heterosexual dominance are reflected in the social, legal and economic structures of society, especially those that shape familial practice.²¹

A principle function of heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance is to organize social life in such a way that reproduction is ensured by structured male-female couples and their families.²² In order to ensure reproduction, sex/gender dimorphism is required so that desire can be heterosexualized.²³ Family is fundamental to institutionalized heterosexuality because it is conceptualized as the focus for male-female couples and their reproduction of

²⁰For example, Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan (2001) identify three features of the 'heterosexual assumption' as including: "the naturalistic fallacy; gender and sexual binarism, and their hierarchical ordering; and the ideology of parenting" (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001, p. 42). They define "the naturalistic fallacy" as the belief "that heterosexual sexual behaviour is 'natural', linked to reproductive imperatives derived from our animal nature, and finds its inevitable culmination in the biological family" (Weeks, Heaphy & Donovan, 2001, p. 42).

²¹Lesbian-feminists often mistakenly equate heterosexuality with sexual desire and, by extension, equate the heterosexual taboo on lesbian sexuality with the prohibition of same-sex sexual desire. The prohibitions of same-sex sex is only one example of the exercise of heterosexual dominance. All of the social, economic, and legal structures that support the relational coupling of men and women constitute heterosexual privilege and lesbians' experiences of heterosexuality as a system of heterosexual dominance.

²²This purpose of heterosexuality is evident when, as Calhoun points out, it becomes threatened, as in the case of women entering the paid work force or practicing lesbian sexuality, and some version of a 'race suicide' argument is typically employed (Calhoun, 2000, p. 45).

²³Prohibitions are created against category crossing/disruptions and non-heterosexual desire. Social practices and institutions such as heterosexualized humor, a sexual division of labor, gendered dress, social supports that facilitate heterosexual coupling, and gendered rites of passage are created to support sex/gender dimorphism and heterosexuality (Calhoun, 2000).

child bearing, child rearing, and (hetero)sexuality.²⁴ Examples of institutionalized heterosexual dominance from my study include: the ways in which young lesbians, within their families of origin, were assumed to be heterosexual and were subjected to preparation for a life of heterosexuality, lesbians' struggles over linguistically being displaced by heterosexualized familial language (e.g. redefining the meaning of 'sister-in-law'), the denial of their lesbian partnerships being treated as a 'real' familial unit (e.g. Bella's sisters' refusal for over thirty years to speak to her about aspects of her life that concerned her lesbian partners (9/10-12)), the denial of legal/social license/support for marriage, the denial of parenting (e.g. Cecilia's sister's demand that Cecilia give up her son for adoption (13/32-35)), and the denial of 'Aunting' as a kinship practice (e.g. Dale's sister's refusal to tell her daughter that Dale was a lesbian and her refusal to let her daughter visit Dale's home (7/20)).

3.4

FEMINISM, FAMILY, AND DEFINITIONAL FORCES

It has been the success of feminist analysis to document how family structures heterosexual women's subordination to men in both lived and ideological contexts, within the household, the public economy, and the welfare state (For a review essay see: Zinn,

²⁴The far-reaching societal practices that facilitate heterosexuals' creation of families, including dating services, premarital/marriage counseling, marriage and divorce laws, family rates, family health care benefits, and tax deductions for married couples, are central to institutionalized heterosexuality (Calhoun, 2000). For a recent multidisciplinary anthology about heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance within the context of family see: Bernstein & Reimann, 2001 and for a recent sociological discussion see: Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001.

2000). However, when this achievement is presented and/or interpreted as *women's* relation to family, it is built upon an ideological construct of family as *heterosexual*. Feminist analysis of family is developed through a gender lens determined to spot the ways that family structures *heterosexual* women's subordination to men. Feminist analysis fails to grasp that lesbians are positioned by society as *family's outlaws* (Calhoun, 2000). Lesbians fit into the feminist picture in many ways but only when lesbians are defined as lesbian-*women* living in a patriarchal world.²⁵ Because distinctions between the systems of male dominance and heterosexual dominance are under-theorized in feminist analysis, *feminist analysis of family* has also failed to grasp the distinctions between a heterosexual woman's relationship to family and a lesbian's relationship to family.

One of the primary ways lesbian-feminism understands lesbian existence is through the concept of family, in that lesbian status allows a woman to evade subordination to men within the family. Lesbian existence has been defined as resistance to dependence on men in personal relationships, resistance to compulsory motherhood, resistance to being a "helpmate" for a husband and children, and resistance to confinement within the domestic sphere (Atkinson, 1974; Birkby et al., 1973; Bunch, 1987; Frye, 1983; Myron & Bunch, 1975; Wittig, 1992).²⁶ In the process of re-envisioning lesbian's personal lives, lesbian-

²⁵Lesbians can be in or have experienced heterosexual marriages. Lesbians could be divorced, or could be single parents working in a sex segregated workforce that pays women less, without childcare or support, and vulnerable to welfare policies and so on.

²⁶The classic slogan "feminism is the theory and lesbianism is the practice" which depicts lesbian relationships as a means of subverting male domination is portrayed in

feminism often calls upon lesbians to not only resist participating in heterosexual male dominated families, but also to resist participating in *any* family form (For a recent call see: Robson, 1998).²⁷ From this standpoint, lesbians are often encouraged to resist motherhood in order to resist the maternal imperative, to resist closeting their lesbian identity through motherhood status, and to reserve energy in their lives for political action against male dominance. It is also from this standpoint that lesbians are encouraged to resist marriage. Lesbian marriage is thought to be incapable of transforming gender structures in that it only duplicates heterosexual norms rather than radically rethinking family (For recent accounts see: Ettelbrick, 1993; Polikoff, 1993).

The problem with lesbian-feminist analysis, as presented above, is that its starting point is heterosexual women's experiences within families, and what drops from view is the reality of lesbian difference from heterosexual women, *even as lesbians are being discussed* within feminist discourse. Why do feminists give *lesbians* the distinctive task of non-participation in family practice as a form of *woman's* resistance to the sexist practices and oppressive gender ideology connected with the family *based on heterosexuality*? Lesbian-feminism evaluates "the value of family, motherhood, and marriage for *lesbians* based on the

Atkinson's widely referenced question: "Can you imagine a Frenchman, serving in the French Army from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., then trotting 'home' to Germany for supper overnight?" (Atkinson, 1974, p.11).

²⁷Robson discusses contemporary efforts to gain legal recognition of lesbian families and writes: "we have forgotten the lesbian generated critiques of family as oppressive and often deadly" (Robson, 1998, p.155).

heterosexual nuclear family's effects on *heterosexual* women" (Calhoun, 2000, p.137, italics in original). Lesbian-feminism centres around heterosexual women's interests, as opposed to lesbians' interests; lesbians' kinship practices are judged according to their ability to transform gender relations since it is relations between men and women that primarily underlines lesbian-feminist analysis. Lesbians' practices of family are inevitably judged harshly as reinforcing a primary institution of gender oppression. The end result is that lesbian-feminism does not clear a critical space to explore any specifically *lesbian-not-woman* political interests in relation to kinship.

When lesbian-feminists ask questions about the radical potential of situating lesbians inside rather than outside family, they assume *paradoxically* that lesbians' private arrangements are essentially different from heterosexual women's. My argument is: *it is not the structure of lesbians' familial relationships, but rather the ways in which society defines lesbians' structural relationship to family, that differs essentially from heterosexual women.*²⁸ The traditional form of family is based upon a symbolics of biology, depicted as a unit of procreative sexual identities linked through the order of nature and sanctioned by the order of law. In contrast, lesbian kinship networks have been suggested to be based upon

²⁸The lesbian-feminist argument that lesbians' intimate relationships are essentially different from those of heterosexual women fails to consider the 'queerness' of many heterosexual women's familial practices. Calhoun (2000) demonstrates how lesbians' deviance in relation to familial norms was constructed as a response to deviancy within 'heterosexual families'. She argues that claiming lesbians' kinship practices "are (or should be) distinctively queer and distinctively deviant helps conceal the deviancy in heterosexual families, and thereby helps to sustain the illusion that heterosexuals are specially entitled to access to a protected private sphere" (Calhoun, 2000, p.159).

a symbolics of choice depicted as a network of chosen people who “lay claim to family ties of their own without necessary recourse to marriage, child bearing, or child rearing” (Weston, 1991, p. 35). As Weston points out, there are different ways to *talk* (or different sets of symbolics) about family, but my research indicates that heterosexual sisters and lesbian sisters alike *enact* both sets of symbolics.

Although ideologically, heterosexual women’s kinship is biologically linked, heterosexual women also employ an organizing principle of choice. A heterosexual woman enacts choice through marriage. She can choose non-biological children through practices such as step-kin, adoption, foster care, as well as procreation via semen or egg donation. Additional non-biological kin may be chosen such as ‘honorary’ aunts, uncles or godparents. An example from my study is when Amy’s heterosexual sister Nadine asked Amy’s lesbian partner Trudy to be a godparent to her children (8/2). Heterosexual women may also employ choice to terminate or deny kinship status to these chosen individuals, divorce being an obvious example. The lesbians I interviewed described how their heterosexual sisters made choices about denying their lesbian sisters’ partners in-law status. An example from my study was Sidney’s heterosexual sister, who for twenty years denied Sidney’s lesbian partners ‘sister-in-law’ status (11). Heterosexual women also make choices about the role and status of kin regardless of biological relationship. An example from my study is when Dale’s sister Jill ‘adopted’ Dale’s family of lesbian friends as a communal family also (7/10-11).

While lesbians’ practices of family incorporate fictive kin and assign their chosen

kin primary familial status more often than heterosexual women, lesbians also incorporate in one way or another biologically determined kinship, procreation, and/or parenting. For instance, all the lesbian sisters I interviewed continued to think of their (biological) sisters as kin. The role of aunt to their sisters' children figured prominently in lesbian sisters' narratives for the very reason that it marked their biological relationship to family. While lesbians did not feel subject to the procreative imperative in the same way as their heterosexual sisters, four the of lesbians I interviewed were mothers and three lesbians expressed a desire to have children in the future. •

If both heterosexual women and lesbians use the same symbolics, then the familial relationships heterosexual women and lesbians structure are not, in theory, essentially different. However, lesbians' structural relationship to family is, in lesbians' lived experience, essentially different than heterosexual women's. Lesbians are denied social and legal entitlement to use *either* set of symbolics; only heterosexuals are socially and legally permitted to use both sets of symbolics, *however they choose* (Calhoun, 2000, p.158).²⁹

²⁹Lesbians cannot legally marry. They face discriminatory policies in relation to joint-adoption, adoption, foster care, and alternative insemination agencies. Lesbians commonly face struggles to gain recognition for their chosen families from their family of origin as well as societal recognition for lesbians' chosen kinship of friends/alternative familial networks. Lesbians' cultural history includes the association of abnormality that positions lesbians as outside relationships with children as evidenced by child custody decisions where heterosexual orientation can outweigh a lesbians' biological closeness, and by discriminatory policies related to parenting. Sometimes lesbians' families of origin refuse to accept biology as a reason for maintaining their relationships with their lesbian relatives. For reviews of the current and historical social, legal, and economic situations of lesbians within the specific context of Canada see: Arcscott 1996; Eaton, 1990; Kinsmen, 1987; Lahey, 1999, 2001; Peterson, 1996; Rayside 1998; Smith, 1999. For specific context of Newfoundland and

Calhoun argues that lesbians' desires to be positioned inside rather than outside family is not necessarily about access to traditional family forms, but rather about access to *familial status*. Familial status is not necessarily about conformity; paradoxically, familial status may be viewed as the right to contest the meanings of family. (Calhoun, p.156). Calhoun observes that the traditional family form as an ideological construct "characterizes neither dominant cultural conceptions of the family at all historical moments, nor actual families during historical periods where the ideal image of the nuclear family has in fact reigned" (Calhoun, p.155). The familial practices in which heterosexual women participate have failed to adhere to norms governing the traditional family form in relation to composition, gender, and sexuality. However, heterosexual women's multiple deviations do not cause them *to forfeit their entitlement to 'real' familial practices*, however these families may be defined and redefined. On the contrary, "because heterosexuals are assumed to be naturally fit for family life, they have had cultural authority to contest dominant familial norms that were not serving their interests" (Calhoun, 2000, p.156). It is this cultural authority that has permitted heterosexual feminists "as heterosexuals (if not as women)" (Calhoun, 2000, p.156) to contest how family structures gender roles for men and women.

Jeffery Weeks writes the following about the current contesting of family.

Existence of a diversity of family and household forms is...perhaps the most challenging issue of all [those currently confronting the family], because it poses in an acute fashion the question of value: not only the empirically verifiable issues of what is changing in the family, or families, but the more

Labrador see Muzychka, 1992.

critical question of what ought to change, and what are the most appropriate means of satisfying individual and collective needs (Weeks, 1991, p.143).

Without familial status, lesbians cannot participate in this conversation about what ought to change. In Canada, at this time, the assumption is that it is only heterosexuals who have the right to participate in the social and legal organizing of family. Outlaw status means for lesbians that they do not have the authority to challenge existing familial norms, define needed changes, and participate in a process to carry these changes through into social and legal spheres. From this view, when the lesbians I interviewed expressed wanting their kinship practices viewed as 'real', their desire was not *necessarily* solely to practice traditional family forms but a desire for a right to family *however lesbians determine* to use the kinship symbolics of biology and choice.

3.5

CONCLUSION

Lesbians' specificity is closeted in the feminist subject when heterosexuality is understood only through the lens of male dominance. An example of this closeting is the way in which the historic construction of lesbians as family's outlaws is overlooked in feminist and lesbian-feminist analysis of family. *It is through the picture of lesbians as family's outlaws that family as a site of heterosexual privilege comes into view.* The family has historically been, and continues to be, constructed as the natural domain of heterosexuals

only. When lesbians' denial to family remains invisible, so do lesbians' interests in kinship practices and distinctively *lesbian* political goals in relation to family (Calhoun, 2000, p.140).

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

4.1

LESBIAN SISTERS AND HETEROSEXUAL SISTERS HAVE DIFFERENT RELATIONSHIPS TO HETEROSEXUALITY

Given that one of the primary ways feminist analysis has understood lesbian existence is through the concept of family, in that a lesbian status is seen as allowing a woman to evade subordination to men within the family, one would think that a feminist study about the ways in which lesbians' sexuality mediates their sister relationships would be a rich context in which to explore the ways that family structures women's subordination to men. However, in this study I found that when lesbians were given an opportunity to discuss their sister relationships, they did not discuss their lives in terms of escaping a male partner, or in terms of the ways in which the absence of a male partner made their lives easier than those of their heterosexual sisters. Rather, lesbians discussed the ways in which they were invisible as young lesbian girls (e.g. their desires for girlfriends were invisible while their heterosexual sisters' desires for boyfriends were validated), as well as whether or not their sisters recognized their chosen lesbian partners in adulthood. Lesbians did not discuss feeling free from a relationship structured by marriage; they discussed how being without legal recognition for their lesbian partnerships contributed to their sisters' struggle with recognizing their lesbian partnerships as 'real' chosen families. Lesbians did not discuss the similarities and differences between their lesbian partnerships/households and their sisters' heterosexual partnerships/households in regards to issues such as housework, childcare, financial management, or dispute resolution; they discussed whether or not their sisters even

recognized their lesbian partnerships as forming familial households. Lesbians did not discuss feeling free from the motherhood imperative in comparison to their heterosexual sisters; they discussed motherhood, whether they were mothers or wanted to be mothers, in relation to the question of whether or not their sisters viewed them as 'normal' and 'fit' to raise children, the level of recognition they received from their sisters for their lesbian partners as co-parents, as well as recognition for the 'realness' of the family form lesbian sisters created.

Why didn't lesbians focus their discussions explicitly upon the ways in which male-female gender relations shaped their lives in comparison to their heterosexual sisters? Lesbian and heterosexual sisters have inherently different relationships to heterosexuality and instead of lesbians feeling free within patriarchy, they felt mired in the contradictions that resulted from the intersections of male dominance and heterosexual dominance. While lesbians occupied the role of sister, they were simultaneously displaced from sisterhood by being displaced from the categories woman and family. Lesbians attributed their displacement from the categories woman and family to the ways in which these categories simultaneously assumed a definition of heterosexuality and incorporated one another. While lesbians, as women, had the same societal pressures for familial performance placed upon them as were placed upon their heterosexual sisters (e.g. heterosexuality as male dominance), lesbian sisters were simultaneously displaced from the category woman; thus, lesbians as lesbians-not-women, simultaneously experienced heterosexuality as a system of heterosexual dominance in which they and their sisters were positioned in opposition to one another.

Lesbians' growing up narratives, before coming out, were about their contradictory experiences of being placed in a subordinate position in relation to their sisters, structured by assumed sameness. Lesbians' adulthood narratives, after coming out, were about the structural shift from assumed sameness to assumed difference that continued to maintain their subordination to their sisters. The feminist supposition that lesbians, given an opportunity to discuss how their sexuality mediated their sister relationships, would frame their stories around how family structures women's subordination to men, rests upon the feminist assumption that lesbians and heterosexual women are equally women: *but they are not.*

4.2

FAMILY AS A LIVED CONTEXT REVEALS THAT HETEROSEXUALITY AS MALE DOMINANCE IS DISTINCT FROM HETEROSEXUALITY AS HETEROSEXUAL DOMINANCE

It is notable that when lesbians were discussing whether or not their sisters accepted them as lesbians, they talked about the ways in which they and their sisters' were practicing *family* as opposed to discussing attitudes towards and practices of *women's sexuality*. This suggests that the central issue in lesbians' subordination as sisters was not the ways in which they were breaking norms *for women* because of their same-sex sexual orientation and their same-sex practices (though this was a part of their experiences). For lesbians-not-women, the central issue in lesbians' subordination as sisters was the ways in which they, as non-heterosexuals, were breaking norms *for family*, because the institution of family, defined as

heterosexual, is a cornerstone of heterosexual dominance.

I interpreted lesbians' narratives about their sister relationships within the context of institutionalized heterosexual dominance and provided examples of the ways in which lesbians were positioned as family's outlaws including: assumed heterosexuality and preparation for a life of heterosexuality while growing up, the expectation to re/produce family based on heterosexuality in adulthood, the pressure to publicly preserve their families of origin as heterosexual, and the lack of social and legal recognition and the language to define their familial status in society.

It is through lesbians' positions as family's outlaws that family, as a site of heterosexual privilege, comes into view as well as feminism's failure to develop a structure in which to understand lesbian specificity. Feminist analysis of family has focused upon documenting how family has structured women's subordination to men. When this analysis is presented as *women's* relation to family, it assumes an ideological construct of family as heterosexual, thus closeting lesbians' experiences within family. Feminist analysis fails to make distinctions between heterosexual women's and lesbians' respective relationships to the category family: while *women's* powerlessness *within* the family marks their oppression, it is *lesbians'* lack of *access to* the family that marks theirs.

4.3 THEORIZING THE LESBIAN SISTER: A CALL FOR A SHIFT IN FEMINIST METHODOLOGY

Although much of lesbian experience can be understood through the lens of gender oppression, this lens only focuses upon the experiences of lesbians as *women* in a patriarchal society. As this study suggests, when male-female gender is the only lens that feminists use to understand lesbian existence, the specificity of lesbians' experiences as *non-heterosexuals* in a heterosexist society is dropped from view. This thesis questions the comfortable feminist assumption that because feminism is about women, and because a lot of existing lesbian theorizing has been produced within feminist conceptualizations, lesbians are already securely at the centre of feminist theories in a way in which women of other diversities have not been. Rethinking this assumption requires heterosexual feminists to recognize that heterosexual dominance positions them (as heterosexuals) in opposition to lesbians (as non-heterosexuals) within the system of heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance. I suggest that the critical shift in feminist methodology to relinquish the idea that heterosexism is nothing but a by-product of sexism, currently called for by theorists of sexual diversities, will help to clear a critical space from which the contours of lesbian sisters' specificity can be delineated within feminist theory. Whether or not this space is satisfactorily cleared will depend upon feminism's ability to conceptualize and include the lesbian-not-woman subject position.

Lesbians' experiences of womanliness and its oppressive nature are not identical to those of heterosexual women who stand within the category woman, even when they are

performing heterosexual womanhood in resistance. Lesbians do not aim to make womanliness a better fit. When lesbians experience womanliness (the expectation to look and act like a woman) as oppressive, it is not primarily because womanliness requires subordination to men, although this may also be a part of her experience. Rather, the expectation of womanliness for a lesbian is primarily based on the assumption that the sex/gender category woman is a natural possibility for her and that she should 'pass' as a woman.

From the perspective of most heterosexual feminists, the problem is not that the category woman exists, but rather with its construction within patriarchal society. 'Woman' has been constructed as the 'other' and has been equated with subordination to men; feminists aim to rupture that equation. The feminist project has not been about the elimination of the category 'woman' but rather has focused upon reconstructing the meanings associated with this category. Feminist projects have tried to reconstruct the category woman by revaluing and redefining feminine traits and by appropriating some masculine traits, with and without redefinition, so that the category woman can no longer be used to rationalize male dominance. A more recent form of reconstruction has been the attempt to redefine the category woman employed within feminism itself, so that it cannot be used to rationalize dominance within feminism such as racism and classism. This reconstruction has been based upon the concept of multiple categories of woman in order to explore the intersection of gender with other political identities. Thus, the *feminist* experience of the category woman has been the experience of *being* a woman in a male dominant society, as well as in a racist

and classist society.

Lesbian specificity has remained closeted within feminist's appeal to open the category woman to construction and reconstruction, as well as within feminists' conceptualization of multiple categories of woman. Feminist reconstructions of woman challenge norms for acceptable female bodies, male-female gender norms, and norms restricting woman-loving relations between women, however these reconstructions typically do not challenge the idea that the only 'normal' sex/genders are woman and man. From a lesbian perspective, what has to be challenged within a system of heterosexuality as heterosexual dominance is the expectation that females must be, or must appear to be, women; for this expectation denies the lesbian 'sisters' subject position.

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APPENDIX A

BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW: RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN FAMILIAL SISTERS

In this review I suggest that the private lived cultures of relationships between sisters are under explored. I briefly look at representations of relationships between sisters within public knowledges, before exploring in more depth representations of relationships between sisters within research. I conclude with a brief discussion of possible reasons why relationships between sisters are under explored.¹

A.1 REPRESENTATIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SISTERS IN PUBLIC KNOWLEDGES: BRIEF COMMENTS

Mauthner (1998) argues that relationships between biological sisters are relatively invisible personal relationships and are limited in their own language, public discourse, institution and images compared to, for instance, motherhood, marriage or the family. According to Cotterill (1992, 1994), representations of relationships between sisters are even underrepresented compared to relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, which, she suggests, exist publicly through a long tradition of parody.

¹This literature review was conducted at the offset of my thesis before I conducted interviews. Guided by what I found in the interviews, my research found its focus within the literature on lesbians and kinship as opposed to the literature on relationships between sisters. The focus on lesbians and kinship is reflected throughout the thesis, especially in **Chapter 3: Developing Theory From Lesbian Sisters' Narratives: Theorizing Distinctions Between Male Dominance And Heterosexual Dominance**, in which I discuss feminist analysis' failure to make distinctions between heterosexual women's and lesbians' relationships to the category family.

There are at least two exceptions to the social invisibility of relationships between sisters: representations of sisters in rivalry, and representations of sisters in devotion. Representations of sisters in rivalry are addressed in literature such as childcare manuals for parents (Fabera & Mazlish, 1987; Reit, 1985) and in our intellectual literary inheritance. As Bernikow (1980) has pointed out, the most famous sisters in literature are usually in deep antagonism. For instance, representations of the sister relationships between Rachel and her sister Leah in the Old Testament, Cordelia and her sisters in King Lear, Cinderella and her wicked stepsisters in the fairy tale Cinderella, and Chekhov's Three Sisters all portray sisters in rivalry. Images of sisters in devotion flourish in film, fiction and media (Adaptations of Jane Austen's novels are a good illustration of this image of sisterly devotion, see also: Cahill, 1989; Mackay, 1993; McNaron, 1985). The image of sisterly devotion has also provided the women's rights movements a metaphor for political organizing (Daly, 1978; Grant, 1993; Morgan, 1970). These two dominant representations of sisters as rivals and sisters as devotees, based on gender stereotypes, generally reduce the varied and complex textures of relationships between sisters to a dualism.

Relationships between sisters have been the subject of popular psychology and autobiography (Dowdeswell, 1988; Downing, 1988; Fishel, 1994; Foster, 1995; Mathias, 1992; McNaron, 1985; Ripps, 1994; Saline & Wohlmuth, 1994; Spender & Spender, 1984) and these construct a form of public knowledge about relationships between sisters; however the knowledge is more descriptive than analytical, focuses more on individual aspects than social aspects of this tie and are limited in their ability to provide substantial knowledge of

the private lived cultures of relationships between sisters.

A.2 REPRESENTATIONS OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SISTERS IN RESEARCH

The number of studies on marital relations and parent-child relations greatly outweighs that of studies on sibling relations. Texts on the family, for instance, typically do not index “sibling” or “sister”, or if they do, references are incidental, while women’s roles as wives, mothers or daughters are referenced extensively (Examples of Canadian texts on the family include: Anderson et al, 1988; Baker et al., 1996; Chambers & Montigny, 1998; Conway, 1997; Eichler, 1988; Lynn, 1996; Mandell & Duffy, 1988, 1995).

According to my literature review and according to other researchers (Mauthner, 1998; McGoldrick, 1989; O’Connor, 1987), what is known about sibling relations concerns developmental psychology and medicine as opposed to social or cultural aspects of this tie. For instance, reviews of trends in the sociology of the family usually mention little about sibling relations and/or acknowledge that research on sibling relations is an underdeveloped area of research in sociology (Reference guides to the field of sociology: Aby, 1997; Borgatta & Borgatta, 1992; Chafetz, 1999; Magill, Pelgado, & Sica, 1995; Smelser, 1988).

Notably, when research on sibling relations is conducted, it appears that gender distinctions are often not made. Widely referenced texts on sibling bonds, for instance, astonishingly do not even list “brother”, “sister” or “gender” in their indexes or if they do, their references are minor (Bank & Khan, 1997; Boer & Dunn, 1992; Brody, 1996; Cicirelli,

1995; Hoopes & Harper, 1987; Khan & Lewis, 1988). Reference guides to research on the family index "sibling" but do not index research on siblings according to gender specific sibling dyads (Examples of reference guides published in the 1990's: Kagan, 1998; Levinson, 1995; Smith, 1999; Sutherland, Barman, & Hale, 1992).

When sisters enter research on gender specific sibling dyads, the focus is usually relationships between brothers and sisters (Dunn, 1984; Gaines et al., 1999; Lassman, 1995; McHale, Crouter, & Tucker, 1999; Van Aken, 1999). Moreover, the subject references of "brother-sister relations" and "sibling relations" are used interchangeably in research studies, databases, and library catalogues. According to my literature review, studies on relationships between sisters, without the presence of male kin, are few in number. Sadly, one of the most common contexts in which I found relationships between sisters to enter research is when examining incest perpetrated by a kin member (Brown, 1997; de Young, 1981; Lipovsky, Saunders, & Murphy 1989; Monahan, 1994, 1997; Wendt, 1994).

According to what I have found, and according to a number of other feminist researchers (Downing, 1988; McNaron, 1985; Mauthner, 1998), the absence of representations of relationships between sisters are echoed in feminist studies. This is ironic since it is within the realm of feminist analysis, where an emphasis is placed on the social realities of women's lives, that one might expect to read about relationships between sisters. This is especially true since sisterhood has been a powerful metaphor for feminist organizing. (Daly, 1978; Grant, 1993; Morgan, 1970). Yet, in their critique of family, feminists have written much more about women's roles and identities as wives, mothers or

daughters than they have about women's roles and identities as sisters (Examples from Canada include: Abbey & O'Reilly, 1998; Arnup, 1994; Arnup, Levesque, & Pierson, 1990; Church, 1999; Gagnon, 1998; Krull, 1996; Lynn & Wilkinson, 1998; McMahon, 1995; Morton, 1992; Porter & Porter, 1999; Sethna, 1998; Silverman, 1985, and Canadian feminist texts on family often do not index "sisters" or "siblings" see for example Anderson et al., 1988; Baker et al., 1996; Eichler, 1988; Lynn, 1996; Mandell & Duffy, 1988, 1995). This emphasis on women's identities as wives, mothers or daughters is reflected in reference guides to feminist research or to research in women's studies where women's roles as wives, mothers, and daughters are extensively referenced compared to women's roles as sisters. Although "sisterhood" is frequently indexed, its reference is only to feminism's use of sisterhood as a political metaphor. (Examples from reference guides published in the 1990's: Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1999; Ariel, Haber, Offen, & Searing, 1991; Boles & Hoeveler, 1996; Humm, 1995; McCullough, 1991; Pedersen, 1996; Tierney, 1999; Watson, 1990).

Research on women's kin ties in Newfoundland and Labrador also emphasize women's roles and identities as wives, mothers or daughters (Examples include: Benoit, 1981, 1991; Broderick, 1994; Davis, 1985; Martin & McGee, 1997; McNaughton, 1996; Porter, 1993; Richler, 1989; Szala, 1979). The only references to sisters in Newfoundland and Labrador that I have found refer to various orders of religious nuns.

Social Differences/Changes In The Lives Of Sisters²

According to what I have found, there seems to be a tendency in research to emphasize *sameness between sisters and to represent this sameness as unchanging*. One exception to this emphasis on sameness, is consideration of differences between physical and mental health of sisters, especially in childhood (Kay, 1988; Mazzocco, Baumgardner, Freund, & Reiss, 1999; Miller, 1986; Murray, 1998). However, aside from differences in health, sisters' social differences seem to be rarely considered. Change within the context of relationships between sisters appears on the periphery of discussions about transitions in kinship practices, for example, provision of care for aging parents or marital and child care restructuring (Anderson, 1984; Edwards, 1993; Finch & Mason, 1993; Mason, 1989; Matthews, 1987; Vaughan, 1987). The cultural emphasis on sameness between sisters has hindered researchers in asking questions about relationships between sisters that start from (or even take into account) the notion that differences between sisters as well as changes over the life course in individual sisters' lives, occur across various social axis, especially over the life span including sexuality, physical and mental health, disability, education, financial and class status, and marital and parental status.

²The issue of differences between siblings enter research most often in the context of differences between brothers and sisters, partly because, as I mentioned above, most research on gender specific sibling dyads concern brother-sister relations. Differences among brothers or differences among sisters are considered to a lesser extent than differences between brothers and sisters.

Sexuality In The Lives Of Sisters

According to what I have found, the ways in which sexuality mediates relationships between sisters is an under explored subject. I have found no books that are dedicated solely to the subject of sexuality in the lives of sisters and I have found no articles that review literature on the subject. One exception to this is a chapter in the classic text on sibling bonds by Bank & Khan (1997) which considers the sexual influence of siblings. This chapter however does not consider in any depth siblings of varied sexual identities.

Of the literature I have reviewed, more has been written about (hetero)sexuality in childhood and adolescence than in adulthood and old age.³ The only studies of childhood sister relations that examine sexuality that I have found are studies of mid-life sister relations that retrospectively study childhood experiences of sexual abuse, especially incest (Brown, 1997; de Young, 1981; Lipovsky, Saunders, & Murphy 1989; Monahan, 1994, 1997; Wendt, 1994). Aside from incest, the studies of adolescent sister relations that I have examined tend to be about, aside from incest, early pregnancy, eating disorders, or gender roles (East, 1998; East, Felice, & Morgan 1993; Freudenberg, 1982; Oz & Fine, 1991; Rouam, Basquin, & Duche, 1984; Stoneman, Brody, & MacKinnon, 1986; Vandereycken & Van-Vreckem, 1992). Studies of mid-life sister relations or sister relations late in life have focused upon transitions in heterosexual marriage relations (Allen, 1989; Anderson, 1984; Lopata, 1979;

³References that I found that consider the ways in which sexuality mediates relationships between sisters, for the most part, are heavily influenced by developmental psychology and usually pinpoint a specific experience during a specific life stage. Notably the author(s) often do not investigate the specific experience from a broader standpoint of women's sexuality or from a longitudinal or life-history approach.

O'Bryant, 1988; Vaughan, 1987).⁴

Sisters Of Marginalized Sexual Identities

Notably, in the literature I have reviewed, most of these studies on sexuality in the lives of sisters only consider sisters' practices of heterosexuality. For instance, the dating patterns and sexual practices explored in adolescence are those between boys and girls, and the gender practices explored relate only to heterosexual femininity. Mid-life transitions in marriage and widowhood late in life are all explored in the context of heterosexual relationships. Lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered sisters appear to be absent from the discourse.

When lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered women enter the literature as family members the emphasis once again is on either marriage or parent-child relations as opposed to relationships between siblings. In the works I have reviewed, lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered women enter literature more often as a parent, a daughter or as a spouse than as a sister (Canadian examples: Arnup, 1989, 1991, 1995; Browning, 1995; Day, 1990; Dineen & Crawford, 1988; Epstein, 1996; Fumia, 1997; Gavigan, 1999; Herman, 1990; Nelson, 1996; O'Brien & Weir, 1995; Schneider & O'Neill, 1993; Stone, 1990).⁵ In

⁴A lack of information on sexuality in the lives of sisters at mid-life and late in life reflects the tendency in research on sibling relations to emphasize sibling relations in childhood over sibling relations in adulthood, and the tendency in research to view sexuality as unchanging over the course of the life span.

⁵It appears to me, as it does to Mauthner (1998), that the question of gays or lesbians as parents has received more attention than relationships between biological sisters. In

reference guides to research on homosexuality, or to research on lesbians, “siblings” or “sisters” are typically not indexed (Examples from reference guides published in the 1990’s: Garber, 1993; Gillon, 1995; Johansson & Percy, 1990; Maggiore, 1992; Ridinger, 1990). I have found only one annotated bibliography which indexes “siblings”; however, the citation under this category reads “see also brothers” (Anderson & Adley, 1997). Out of the nine references listed under “siblings” in this bibliography, only one pertains solely to sisters and this one reference is from a psychiatric perspective (Bailey & Benishay, 1993). I have found one book which considers lesbians as sisters but the book is only about relationships between sisters that are *both* lesbians (Fleming, 1995). The theme of sameness reappears in disguise. The only places where I have found lesbians, and bisexual and transgendered women to consistently enter the literature as a *sister* are in the fields of genetics and psychiatric medicine (Bailey, 2000; Bailey & Bell 1993; Bailey & Benishay 1993; Bailey, Pillard, & Neale, 1993; Blanchard & Sheridan, 1992; Blanchard, Zucker, Siegelman, Dickey, & Klassen, 1998; Gundlach, 1977; Pattatucci, & Hamer 1995; Williams, 2000; Zucker, Lightbody, Pecore, Bradley, & Blanchard, 1998).

There has been very little written about sexuality in Newfoundland and Labrador, especially women’s sexuality. The amount of research on the experiences of lesbians in Newfoundland and Labrador constitutes a minor part of this research. Most of what has been

Canada, an emphasis has been placed on lesbians’ roles as mothers compared to lesbians’ roles as daughters or spouses. Examples of lesbians as daughters or spouses from the United States include: Becker, 1988; Burch, 1993; Griffen, Wirth, & Wirth, 1986; Johnson, 1995; Mackey, O’Brien, & Mackey, 1997; Muller, 1987; Pearlman, 1991; Rafkin, 1987; Slater, 1995; Weston, 1991.

written about lesbians in the province considers lesbians' roles in the public sphere. These include lesbians' experiences in the school system as students and teachers (Finlay, 1998; Shortall, 1998), as community activists (Anonymous, 1992; Brake, 1991; Dopler, 1996) or as Canadian citizens in regards to human rights (Gays and Lesbians Together, 1991; Gay Association in Newfoundland, 1985?, 1985; Hodder, Lacey & Shortall, 1996; Muzychka, 1992). Of these ten documents, only three focus solely on the experiences of lesbians (Anonymous, 1992; Dopler, 1996; Muzychka, 1992).

A few exceptions to this focus on lesbians' public roles exist. Muzychka's (1992) report addresses laws and policies that affect lesbians in the province; however, within this discussion the author mentions some aspects of the private lives of lesbians. Aside from Muzychka's report, I have found three documents that consider the private lives of lesbians. Two of these documents consider lesbian community building and discuss issues of identity and friendship, but these documents are cursory attempts to broach the subject and say very little about lesbians and families (Perreault & Parent, 1997; Stone and the Women's Survey Group, 1990). The third document, a master's thesis, considers women's experiences with sex as a form of power (Yetman, 1990). Some of the women Yetman interviewed for the study led lesbian lives, but the focus of the study is not lesbians' experiences of sexuality or family. However, this is the only study I could find which documents in some detail aspects of the private lives of lesbians in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Relationships Between Sisters Of Varied Sexual Identities

The number of texts about the relationship between sisters of varied sexual identities, which emphasize the theme of sexuality, appears to be minuscule. There are the above mentioned articles from a genetic or psychiatric perspective which usually compare aspects of heterosexual and homosexual siblings. Aside from this, it is usually within texts about “coming out” to family members and loved ones that there are small sections dedicated to the issue of “coming out” to siblings; however, gender distinctions between siblings are usually not made. In addition, a lot of literature on “coming out” is directed at both gays and lesbians which further clouds the specific experience of a lesbian “coming out” to her sister. I have found one substantial exception within a larger study on accounts of sister relationships (Mauthner, 1998). Mauthner dedicates a section of her study to turning points in sisters’ lives, including the turning point of “coming out”.⁶

Aside from literature on “coming out”, I have found only five texts that consider sexuality in the lives of sisters of varied sexual expressions. Four of these five texts are autobiographical. “My Gay Sister”, an article in the American women’s magazine New Woman considers how one woman learns to accept her siblings views on sex, self, and motherhood (Bernstein, 1997), “Waiting with Wolves”, an article in the lesbian newspaper Off Our Backs, explores the meaning of lesbian feminism in the author’s life, including what coping skills the women’s movement taught her that were not a part of growing up with her

⁶Incidental references to lesbians “coming out” to their sisters are often made within larger discussions of lesbians (and) kinship. See for example: (Markowe, 1996).

sisters (Witherow, 1995), “Reflections on Homophobia, My Sister’s Wedding, and Social Work” an academic article in the journal Reflections, explores a lesbian sister’s reaction to her sister’s wedding (Peyer, 1997), Familial Homosexuality among Women and its Relationship to Gender Role Nonconformity in Childhood and Adult Sex Role, a doctoral dissertation in psychology which considers varied sister dyads, including heterosexual and lesbian sister pairs (Caretto, 1991), and excerpts from essays in the book The Family Silver: Essays on Relationships between Women by lesbian sociologist Susan Krieger explore her relationship with her heterosexual sister (Krieger, 1996).

A.3

THREE POSSIBLE REASONS WHY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SISTERS ARE UNDER EXPLORED

There are at least three possible reasons why, as this review has suggested, relationships between sisters are under explored. First, personal relationships fall under the domain of private life, a marked contrast to traditional focus in social science research of public, institutional, and structural forms of social life. Personal relationships *between women* are particularly neglected across disciplines because of androcentric bias (O’Connor, 1992; Ribbens & Edwards, 1998). Studies on relationships between women tend to be overlooked even in those disciplines where we might expect to find such studies, for example, in psychology, social work, or history.

Second, although feminist scholarship aims to make women and their relationships visible, its emphasis on women’s gendered servicing and caring roles overshadows research

into other roles, such as friends/bilateral relationships to one another. Although there are historical accounts and recent studies of girls/women's friendships (Faderman, 1981; Hamson, 1995; Hey, 1997; Lasser, 1988; O'Connor, 1991, 1992; Oliker, 1989; Raymond 1986; Rose & Rodes, 1987; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975), friendship between women remains a relatively underdeveloped research area. This is partly because friendship is not institutionalized and therefore can be difficult to define (Allan, 1989; Adams & Allan, 1998).

Mauthner's (1998) accounts of sister relationships suggests that a third reason for absences in research on relationships between sisters is the "gap between the idealized and politicized myths of sisterhood as solidarity and similarity upheld by the women's movement and women's personal experiences with a sister, which can include conflict and arouse painful and ambivalent emotions about what is often a sensitive relationship" (Mauthner, 1998, p. 41).

APPENDIX B

MAPPING 'OUT' GEOGRAPHIES: RESEARCHING LESBIANS AND KINSHIP IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

To the best of my knowledge, this study represents the first qualitative scholarly study on lesbians in Newfoundland and Labrador. Given this, I think it is important to reflect upon the social context of Newfoundland and Labrador for studying lesbians and kinship. For the purposes of this appendix, I have limited my discussion on this topic to two points, one methodological and one theoretical (For a recent multi/inter/disciplinary anthology on sexual identities and politics outside the metropolis, see: Phillips, Watt, & Shuttleton, 2000).

B.1 GEOGRAPHIC-SEXUAL-RULE

The lesbians I interviewed found it difficult to talk about their sister relationships without making references to intersections between geography, sexual rule, and a concept that Jeffery Week's calls the historical present (Weeks, 1985, pp. 5-10). For example, Bella couldn't remember a specific moment when she actually came out to her sisters, that is according to contemporary notions of coming out. On the contrary, she said "it came in dribs and drabs" (10/2). Her experience of coming out to her sisters is reflective of a time period in which family awareness of a gay member often occurred through nonverbal cues as opposed to contemporary notions of a deliberate verbal disclosure of a lesbian sexual identity. She reflected upon her early experiences of living lesbian over thirty years ago and told me the following:

I was living away from them so they wouldn't have any way to meet [my

partners] and back then they didn't ask, because it just wasn't done then so much. You just had a feeling that you just had bound, you know. [You] had this wall that just couldn't be penetrated, you just couldn't do much about it. Its just the whole era thing was more hidden but I lived in the city, so that realm I could be freed up. So that was where it was healthy for me, but I didn't take it home (10/7).

Now in her fifties, and with more than thirty years of adult lesbian living behind her, Bella reflected upon her current relationships with her sisters.

I think things the way they are now in society makes me feel better about being who I am I think there's things that I should fix that I have to do work on with them [my sisters], you know, a lot of its my fault in a way? I think because people my age had to be closed so long, you know, it becomes habit and a lot of it's the fault that society did on them. I have never really sat and talked about being a lesbian and its gone on like that, and I think its time even if I live away because we're getting older and that might be a good idea (9/9).

Lesbians referred to geographic-sexual rule and the historical present, not only within the context of living out in their sister relationships, but also within the context of their living out by their very participation in this study. Lesbians frequently referred to geographic-sexual rule when they discussed their participation. For example, Faith commented:

See this is why I'm glad I came back from Ontario. My sister could of talked with you too. I should have called her and told her to come over (4/23).

The theme of geographic-sexual rule in the lives of LGBTQs is not a new one. Gary Kinsmen's pioneering exploration of the history of Canadian lesbian and gay communities discusses the concept of sexual migration. In his chapter "Gay/Lesbian Liberation and Communities", Kinsmen writes:

There has been a mass 'sexual migration' of gays and lesbians from rural areas to the larger cities, where our lifestyles are more acceptable and family connections are weaker. This has led to concentrations of overtly gay men in

certain neighborhoods. Along with the commercial ghettos, there have also emerged gay residential ghettos in downtown Toronto and West End Vancouver, in close proximity to the gay commercial areas. ... This concentration of gays and lesbians has provided a solid base for resistance...(Kinsmen, 1987, p.183).

As Kinsmen implies, coming out to family members was largely “out of the question” for Canadian lesbians and gays before the 1970’s. However, a deliberate disclosure of a lesbian or gay identity to family members is very much the question for lesbians and gay men at present (Weston, 1991, p.47). This shift is curious since we know that coming out remains a contradictory strategy for countering homophobia within a flow of forces that simultaneously opens and forecloses possibilities for emancipation. From this standpoint of prevailing contested sites, an overt gay rights movement in Canada has *structured the possibility* for gays and lesbians to come out to family members. Prior to the advent of this movement there was simply too much at stake for gays and lesbians to live out. During this period, coming out largely referred to coming out to others in the ‘gay world’, as opposed to families of origin, and it is to this that Kinsmen refers within the conceptual frame of ‘sexual migration’.

I recall the history of the gay rights liberation movement since it is this history that has cleared a critical space for this study to exist. In other words, when the gay rights movement structures possibilities for coming out to family, it also structures possibilities for where we choose to live out our kin ties. While references to geographic-sexual rule in lesbians’ narratives are not new, it is significant that the lesbians I interviewed bring new questions to bear on this theme. Lesbians are still largely represented as urban phenomena

in both public and research knowledges. This study describes experiences of lesbians in rural and small town/city. What does this rural standpoint open or foreclose for studying the ways in which sexuality and kinship mediate one another. Is there anything specific about Newfoundland and Labrador as a social context that shapes the answer to this question.

B.2
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
AS A SOCIAL CONTEXT FOR STUDYING LESBIANS AND KINSHIP

An exception to the focus on the urban is Micheal Riordon's collection of stories Out Our Way: Gay and Lesbian Life in the Country that documents the rural experiences of lesbians and gays in every Canadian province and territory. Riordon did not make it past the second page of his preface before he found the need to refer to the unique meaning of rural living for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.¹

What counts as rural? A lesbian from a Newfoundland outport calls Cornerbrook 'the city'- its got a mall. Her partner laughs; she grew up in

¹When Canadians think of the Atlantic provinces they tend to mistakenly assume that Newfoundland and Labrador is comparatively the same size as the other three Atlantic provinces. However, Newfoundland and Labrador is more than three times the total area of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island combined (405,720 km²). Canadians often define rural as living in a small community usually within reasonable proximity to a larger centre or city. Newfoundlanders and Labradorians define rural as living in a small community too but their experiences also typically involve travelling long distances before reaching another small community. Moreover, in order to reach the largest community of St. John's with a population of approximately 170,000, a highway drive of up to approximately ten hours across the island of Newfoundland can be required. If you are travelling from Labrador you can add a boat and/or plane trip to this ten-hour road trip. To further illustrate what Newfoundlanders and Labradorians may mean by rural, one of the women I interviewed is from a community of 500 people that is only accessible by small boat.

Chicago. By rural I mean not-the-big-city, I mean places where we lack the critical mass of our urban cousins... (Riordon, 1996, p. xii).

I have a sneaking suspicion that Canadians do not view Newfoundland and Labrador as a center of queer culture. With the lingering emphasis on the urban, researchers studying marginalized sexualities may not think to look at our province. However, according to my experience Newfoundland and Labrador is exactly where a researcher may want to choose to situate herself to view the interplay between marginalized sexuality, family, and community.

A Reflection On Methodology

I suggest that one reason why an urban emphasis in research on lesbians continues to prevail is because of the assumption that an urban setting will provide a researcher with ready access to lesbian informants and their 'cultures' and 'communities'. In other words, it is commonly assumed that the metropolitan allows the researcher to see things because of the assumption that the big city permits lesbians to be seen in ways that smaller centres don't. But it strikes me as rather odd that researchers tend to think that they can spot a single lesbian more readily in a city of 1.5 million than in a town of 15,000. Paradoxically, the odds of spotting a lesbian would increase even further if researchers visited a community such as Sheshatshu in central Labrador with a population of just 1500. The smaller the context, the more visible a lesbian becomes since she is known by everyone in her community to occupy a space of 'difference'. This is illustrated through Cecilia's story of living out in her Innu community of Sheshatshu.

“Hi Cecilia, you lesbian!” kids call out to me on the road. I don’t care what people think or say. The more they tease me, the more strength they give me. It’s amazing. That started happening in 1991 when I was first involved with Germaine. The whole community came to see us. They wanted to know if Cecilia Rich was really with Germaine Penashue? I think the whole community was shocked right.

People start talking and knocking on the door. They would [be] spying in the window and everything right. [I would say]: “Hi, what are you doing there?” [It was] just to see that this is true. That- what they see in us is true and this is a reality, this is real or you know, true. We would just laugh about it. [I would say]: “Yes come on in and join us”. I didn’t say nothing [except]: “I’m doing fine. What can I do for you?”, you know.

They were just kind of curious. They don’t have to say that but you can sense in their face you know. ‘I’m going to find [out] for myself [if what] people are saying is real or true’. Even the nun came over to see us. The more people come in and visit us the more people give us strength, like we were lighter and lighter as the years went by, you know. Like we were flying, like we are up in the air. Do you know what I’m saying? They gave us strength. They [got] tired of us. Tired of visiting us, tired of this and that. They were the ones who were tired. I wasn’t. They are starting to realize and accept the fact that I am an Innu lesbian in a community population of 1500 people and I don’t give a shit. I grew up [here] and this is where I want to be, you know. They’re my people (13/57-59; Rich, 2000).

Smallness makes a huge difference within the context of research because it provides a researcher with a microcosm in which to explore abstract concepts like private and public, and complex concepts such as family and community. This seems obvious to me now but when I first stumbled across this notion I was confused since smallness within the context of research on lesbians has been primarily discussed only for what it forecloses.

A Reflection On Theories Of Identity

It is commonly assumed that small communities in Newfoundland and Labrador are oppressive for lesbians partly because *'lesbian culture'* does not exist in small communities and because lesbians visibly occupy a space of 'difference'. However, we have no research to confirm, refute, or inform this common assumption. Many of the lesbians I interviewed did not feel that they were clearly occupying a space of difference in their communities because they felt they were the same as everyone else: they were Newfoundlanders or Labradorians, or in Cecilia's case, she was Innu like the rest of "her people" (13/59). This shared sameness as Newfoundlanders or Labradorians was an undercurrent beneath lesbians' negotiations with their sisters. In other words, lesbians were insisting on keeping Newfoundland and Labrador their home.

At a time when lesbians are still largely seen as urban phenomena in a post modern world, lesbians living in Newfoundland and Labrador presents an interesting case since Newfoundland and Labrador is not post modern in quite the same way as large Canadian cities. For example, at this historical moment, sexuality is organized in terms of identity. The aim to define lesbian identity brings researchers to urban settings precisely because *lesbians' cultures and communities* exist in the 'big city' and these are thought to be the expression of lesbian identity. If we choose to listen to Cecilia's story, and we listen carefully, she encourages us to ask many questions about the *diverse* meanings we associate to the notion of *lesbians' cultures and communities*. What might be the contours of a lesbians' identity *as a Newfoundlander or Labradorian*? My hope is that continued

disruptions to geographic-sexual-rule will mean that one day we might have some answers to this question.

APPENDIX C

INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

C.1 THE CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Building trust between participants and myself was a challenge since my study relied solely on interviews and I needed to build trust *as I collected data* (unlike in ethnographies or participatory studies where trust can be built over time). I tried to be flexible in my response to the debate about the benefits of being a stranger or a friend to participants. I believed that some lesbians would feel safe to disclose their narratives if they knew me in some capacity, while other lesbians would feel safe to talk about their lives if I was a stranger. In an attempt to be flexible in addressing lesbians' varied needs of safety, I used several methods to attract participants for this study. The first method was by word of mouth whereby I told friends and acquaintances about the study and asked them to pass the information along to lesbians they knew. The second method was by posting paper and/or electronic notices of the study in public places, at public events, and with organizations across Newfoundland and Labrador that lesbians were known to frequent, I had past or present association with, and/or were popular with large pools of women.

Ten lesbians contacted me to participate in this study after I circulated my call for participants. Out of a concern to address lesbians' diversity including, age, class, race, and culture, I contacted four lesbians to participate in this study. Of the fourteen lesbians I interviewed, five lesbians knew me on varied levels, personally or professionally. Nine lesbians did not know me, with three of these nine having a third party vouch for me, or what

Shulamit Reinharz refers to as being a “knowledgeable stranger” (Reinharz, 1992, p.27). Lesbians expressed three main reasons for participating in this study: 1) they felt close to their sisters, 2) they were struggling with difficult situations in their sister relationships, or 3) they were experiencing change in their sister relationships.

C.2 INTRODUCTIONS TO INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS

Due to the smallness of communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as the smallness of the lesbian community, I cannot provide detailed individual biographical sketches of the lesbians I interviewed because their anonymity would be jeopardized, even though the names of participants as well as the names of the people they mention are replaced by alias' in this thesis, and identifying information is altered to protect identities of lesbians. I am including a selection of lesbians' coming out narratives as a way to introduce the reader to participants via their age, coming out circumstances, and summary of the relational dynamics with their sisters. I am also including tables of group demographics at the end of this section, not for statistical purposes but as a way to provide the reader with an introduction to the lesbian participants while ensuring their confidentiality.¹

¹It is notable that the lesbians I interviewed expressed concern over their identities being protected, not so much for their own safety/privacy as much as for their sisters' safety/privacy. Since in Newfoundland and Labrador people are known within the context of their families, and since the lesbian community is small, lesbians were acutely aware that they might be easily identifiable and thus their sisters/families would be identifiable. Lesbians were concerned for 1) possible repercussions for their sisters including public

Four Lesbians Between The Ages Of 20-29 Years Old

CHRIS has two younger sisters. Chris came out to her sisters when she was 21-22 years old. Chris' sisters had opposing reactions to her lesbian sexuality. While her sister Lily is "very open minded and publicly expressive of the fact that she doesn't give a damn" (2/7) that Chris is lesbian, Chris' sister Nancy "doesn't say a word in public about [Chris] being gay". Chris feels that she has influenced Lily to "look at life in a different way" (2/22) and to "be a little more open to who she can be not who she should be" (2/21) and feels that Nancy "doesn't like it at all ... [but she] has gotten to the point where she's accepted the fact that it isn't a stage" (2/3) and was beginning to acknowledge her lesbian partnership.

DOMINIQUE has two sisters. She came out to her younger sister when she was 24-25 years old and has yet to come out to her older sister. At the time of the interview, Dominique described her younger sister as in the process of working out how she feels about Dominique being lesbian.

I said: "Oh, by the way, did I tell you that I was going out with someone?" She said: "No." I said, "Well, yes, I am." She says: "Oh." I said: "And you met that person." And she said: "Oh, really?" I said, "Yah." She said: "Is it Steven?" I said: "No." [She said]: "Is it Bob?" I said: "No." [She said]: "Is it Perry?" I said: "No." She said: "Well, that's all I know." And then she said: "Is it Tony?" I said: "No." She said: "Well, I don't know. I don't know anybody else?" I said: "Well, [the name starts with] a 'J'". And she said: "Well, the only person I know starting with a 'J' is Julie ." I said, "Yah." She said: "Oh." And then she said: "Well, I thought that if I knew someone that was gay or lesbian, it would be normal, it would be cool."

scrutiny for having a lesbian sister and 2) protecting the details/confidences of their sisters' lives from being revealed.

And at the same time, she said: "It's weird but I guess it's normal." And that was the end of the conversation. She just changed the subject to something else. And about a month after, I went back home and I said: "By the way, how about what I told you in St. John's? Like, do you have any questions?" Cause she's only 16. And she said: "Nope." And that was the end of the conversation.

So that's the way my sister deals with it. 'It's cool, it's no big deal, like it's normal but let's not talk about it', you know. That's the message that she sent. She said that it would be cool, but maybe it's not that cool, now that it's me and not someone else. It would be cool if it was a friend who wasn't related to her, but now she has to look at it closer. She has to think about it again, you know, before she can have her own idea on that (2/3).

MAGGIE has one younger sister. Maggie came out to her sister when she was 20-21 years old. Maggie described her sister as accepting of her lesbian sexuality. However, overall, Maggie felt that her sister did not understand that she and her lesbian partner were in a relationship and not just friends.

So when I told my sister, we were driving, and I said: "Louise I got to tell you something". I just took a big deep breath, and I said: "I'm gay, and I have a girlfriend". And, she said: "Really? Cool". That was it! That's all she said. And I was thinking: "Is she not saying anything because, you know, she doesn't know what to say?" and then she said: "What's her name?" and she goes: "Well you know I don't care". She's like: "Its not a bad I don't care. I just don't care". She said: "It really doesn't make a difference to me. Its fine".

Her lack of reaction was good. Like, it was good because, it wasn't a bad reaction, but I think she doesn't understand that the relationships I have with women are real relationships. Its not like she don't want to talk about it at all. Like, I'm in this relationship with Violet and that's fine. Louise gets along with her. But, I don't think she gets that we are in a relationship (1/2-4).

UDELE has one older sister. Udele came out when she was 16 years old. Udele's sister had already suspected Udele was lesbian. Udele felt her sister always accepted her as a lesbian and cannot remember specific details of the conversation she had with her sister about coming out.

Four Lesbians Between The Ages Of 30-39 Years Old

APRIL has one older sister. April came out to her sister when she was in her early 20's. April cannot remember coming out to her sister. She felt that her sister always accepted her as a lesbian which she partly attributed to the fact that their parents were "hippies" (4/3), and that she and her sister grew up in a socially progressive, "socialist", (4/3) household.

FAITH has one older sister. Faith came out to her sister when she was 27 years old, after she got a divorce from a ten-year heterosexual marriage. Faith expressed feeling close to her sister despite the fact that they had serious disagreements about things like the 'cause' of lesbian sexuality (4/37) and her sister's belief that 'real' marriages are only those that are heterosexual and sanctioned by the church (4/25).

I had a nervous breakdown. I lived [away from home], alone, with two kids, being single. I was only working part time, no family. I was in a [lesbian] relationship that didn't last. My parents weren't speaking to me, [they rejected me for over three years after I came out] It was very rough times.

I discussed it with my sister from the beginning. I'd get on the phone and call her and tell her. She'd talk for an hour at a time. My sister is the only one in the family that knows. My sister is a nurse, so when I was taking medication and going through all of this, difficulties I was in, I was in therapy for two years, and she was the one that I could discuss it with. I

started going to [a therapist and] she made me talk about things, see things at different perspectives. And once I started talking and discussing things with the therapist, I was more open to talk to my sister about things as well, you know. So it was pretty close to being at the beginning of my illness, I discussed it with my sister (4/36-38)

KIT has one older sister. When Kit was 17-18 years old she was 'found out' by her sister. Kit described her sister as "Catholic and conservative" (6/3), and as being "appalled" (6/2) when Kit confirmed her suspicions. Kit felt that her sister remained "loving" (6/3), yet they have had many misunderstandings regarding Kit's lesbian sexuality.

I know that my sister was appalled. She was really uncomfortable with it, really embarrassed. Didn't know what to do, what to say. It was almost like a personal failing that somehow I didn't turn out right. She was awkward, just sort of weird with the whole thing. Hard to talk to. Still loving, but hard to talk to.

I remember once being really sick [around the time I came out]. I had a really bad flu and I used to come into town, because she lived in town, and at the time, we were living in the Goulds. I stocked up on videotapes and books and all that, and she let me hang out at her apartment. But I managed to sort of, you know, in that groping ridiculous way you do when you are kind of coming to terms with stuff, I had picked out every video with some sort of lesbian theme or context I could find, right. She came home from [work], you know after she had a full day. Sat down, was watching this movie [and said]: "Oh this is interesting". And she got part way through, and she went: "There are lesbians! Is this the whole subject of this movie?, Jesus!" Like it had been, you know, yet another fraud, right. It was like, ah shit. So it was pretty, pretty complicated, I guess (6/2-3).

SIDNEY has one older sister. Sidney came out to her sister when she was 16-17 years old. Although her sister was initially supportive, she became a Christian a few years after Sidney came out, and subsequently refused to acknowledge Sidney's lesbian partners for the next

fifteen years. However, two years prior to this study, to Sidney's surprise/joy, her sister began to accept Sidney as a lesbian once again.

I was talking on the phone to my girlfriend. And my mother said: "Come on, it's dinner time." My mother got really angry because I didn't get off the phone right away, and she said: "I want to talk to you after dinner." So I thought, [my mother was] starting to pick up on [it]. [Mom said]: "What's going on with you and that girl?" By that point, I had already been with a couple of girls and had girlfriends, so I was comfortable with it.

[My mother outed me and] I said: "I've read up on it, and I'm comfortable with it, and I don't think I'm a freak." Literally, those are the words that I used. She kind of gripped her chair, and she said: "I'm horrified" and freaked out [and said things like]: "Don't go anywhere near your brother." He was 6 years old at the time. She said I was grounded permanently or whatever.

My sister wasn't home at that moment but when my sister came home that night around midnight or something, and I was still up. I had to tell my sister because I was supposed to go on a ski trip with school the next day, and I was in the school play, and all. If I was grounded, I couldn't do any of these things, right? [When I told her] Judy said: "Oh I knew that." She was very supportive. We stayed up probably till 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning talking [and] just hanging out (11/12-13).

Four Lesbians Between The Ages Of 40-49 Years Old

AMY has four sisters. Amy came out when she was in her mid-twenties after a divorce from a heterosexual marriage. Amy had a distant relationship with two of her four sisters, for reasons that were not made clear to me. Amy focused her stories around her sister with who she shared the experience of being mothers.

CECILIA has two older sisters. Cecilia is Innu and lives in Sheshatshu, Labrador. Cecilia wants her story told in order to help future lesbian and gay Innu and Inuit. Cecilia came out when she was 30 years old. Cecilia's sisters, at first, had a very difficult time accepting that she was lesbian, but over the years Cecilia feels her sisters have come to accept her and her lesbian partner.

[When I came out], she told me she don't want people laughing at us because we are Catholic and Indian and all of that, right. She was a strict catholic person herself and she wasn't too pleased. She grew up in a very old fashioned strict catholic-oriented thing. She wanted me to leave my partner. She asked me to leave her and all of that. I said no. I know how to look after myself. I know what I'm doing, you know. I just kind of wondered if she is somewhat blamed me for the sickness that she has, you know. Because in my culture, people tend to believe that you're destroying a person's health because of the way you are living, a kind of a make-believe myth I guess, you might call it (13/5).

DALE has four sisters. Dale came out when she was 29 years old. Dale has had a difficult time gaining the acceptance of two of her sisters and is not close to her youngest sister, which Dale attributes to a difference in age despite this sister's acceptance of Dale as a lesbian. Dale is closest to her sister Jill, who figures predominately in her narratives.

I decided I was going to come out to her and I told her and I screeched and I balled and it was all a negative thing and you know, my life sucks, I'm a lizzy blah blah blah and it was a real negative thing. You know she was really worried about me, ah, I was not happy about being a lesbian. She was really shocked. She never expected it. I femmed myself up a lot. To hide it. I had long red nails and high healed shoes and acted totally in opposition to what I felt. I had a sister-in-law who was feminist and I would knock her at the supper table on Sundays with her feminist jargon to hide. I said anything associated with being different. She just wanted me to be happy (7/5).

MACY has two sisters. Macy came out when she was in her early-mid twenties. Both sisters were supportive of Macy as a lesbian, and Macy described feeling close to her sisters.

Macy shared her experience of being 'found out' by her sister Megan.

When I was with this woman, we went up and visited Megan and we didn't come out to her per say, but at one point, we were just getting ready to walk out the door, she turned around and she said, "Well I just want you to know that I am completely okay with your relationship and what is going on here". Well, the woman that I was with was like, this was new for both of us but it was really outside the realm of acceptable for herself; a very catholic, very like, and she was like freaked out that my sister Megan had figured this out herself and had commented about it. So Carla was like, and I was like this is totally cool, you know. And is, Megan is very politically astute and aware and conscience and thoughtful and all of that kind of stuff and excellent ally and in so anyway way I'm like, "that's great, that's pretty neat". Though Carla freaked out about it. Like this shouldn't be obvious, right. So I never, that was coming out to Megan. She just, you know, was smart enough to see the relationship and figure it out (5/8).

Two Lesbians Between The Ages Of 50-59

BELLA has two sisters. Bella cannot recall when she came out, but she believes it was in her late teens. One of the reasons why Bella participated in this study is that she had been thinking a lot about her sister relationships in her own life. Bella expressed wanting to build stronger ties with her sisters.

IVY has two sisters. Ivy was married to a man for fifteen years and has two children. Ivy is currently in a lesbian relationship and expressed feeling personal freedom due to recent advances in the gay rights movement. Ivy's story focuses upon her relationship with a sister who she described as being awkward around Ivy's chosen family.

TABLE 1. AGE OF LESBIANS

	Number Of Lesbians
20 – 29 years	4
30 – 39 years	4
40 – 49 years	4
50 – 59 years	2
Total:	14

TABLE 2. RACIAL/CULTURAL

	Number Of Lesbians
Indigenous	2
White-English	11
White-French	1
Total:	14

TABLE 3. CLASS BACKGROUND (FAMILY OF ORIGIN)

	Number Of Lesbians
Working Class	8
Managerial/Professional	6
Total:	14

TABLE 4. CLASS (PRESENT)

	Number Of Lesbians
Working Class	6
Managerial/Professional	5
Student	3
Total:	14

TABLE 5. HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION COMPLETED

	Number Of Lesbians
High School	3
College	2
University	7
Graduate School	2
Total:	14

TABLE 6. RURAL/URBAN BACKGROUND (FAMILY OF ORIGIN)

	Number Of Lesbians
Rural	7
Urban	7
Total:	14

TABLE 7. RURAL/URBAN (PRESENT)

	Number Of Lesbians
Rural	2
Urban	12
Total:	14

TABLE 8. PREVIOUS HETEROSEXUAL MARRIAGE

	Number Of Lesbians
Yes	3
No	11
Total:	14

TABLE 9. LESBIANS WHO ARE PARENTS (biological or social)

	Number Of Lesbians
Yes	4
No	10
Total:	14

**TABLE 10. LONGEST RELATIONSHIP WITH SAME SEX LOVER
(to the nearest number of years)**

	Number Of Lesbians
Under 1 year	1
1 - 2 years	2
3 - 5 years	3
6 - 9 years	3
10 - 14 years	3
15 + years	2
Total:	14

TABLE 11. PAST OR PRESENT SAME SEX MARRIAGE

	Number Of Lesbians
Present Marriage	1
Past Marriage	0
Never Married	13
Total	14

APPENDIX D

ARCHITECTURE OF THE EVERYDAY¹

My house is small but its presence in my life continues to be large. It is a bungalow with the main floor and basement having 750 square feet each. The oversized lot my small house sits on is grassed and is lined by mature trees and my version of a *white picket fence*. Since I have lived in my house, a fence has been erected, mailboxes have been replaced, outdoor light fixtures rewired, screen doors hung, window frames mended and water pipes from the street to my property lowered. Steps have been painted, doorbells repaired, trees pruned, street numbers nailed up over my door, water gutters cleaned and entrance posts replaced. Shrubs have been planted, a gate hung, fallen telephone wires dealt with, a driveway tarred, the foundation painted, apples from my tree collected. House maintenance is tedious to me and I have not learned a lot of the skills required to do these kinds of jobs. Why has my house and its maintenance found their way into my thesis? How is my house a part of the architecture of my everyday? Maybe it is because my disinterest in learning about how to use tools makes me feel like a bad feminist, a bad lesbian, and a bad family member. But, a more likely reason is that the purpose of my house (just beneath the surface) is unclear to others because I am a lesbian.

When I first bought my house, my father was happy to drop by to fix something and contribute to the wealth I was building that would always be my own, apart from my

¹My title is taken from Harris, S. & Berke, D. (1997). Architecture of the Everyday. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

assumed future husband's. His visits were often characterized by the kinship practice of giving gifts and he would typically present me with a tool. During these visits, he would try to teach me things about what he was fixing, and how to do it myself the next time, or at least until I got a man, or for when the man may prove useless under a variety of circumstances. I tried to pay attention to his teachings but despite his efforts to teach, and my efforts to learn, my mind would primarily focus on the life stories we were simultaneously engaged in sharing. He would make fun of my lack in proficiency in using tools. He would say: "You have a university degree but you can't use a hammer".

My parents do not want my money to be under the patriarchal control of a man. However, it seemed (just beneath the surface) that my father was assumed to be exempt from this rule. My father was more than willing to fix something for me but only if he agreed with how I wanted it fixed. Father knows best. For instance, I decided to make a studio out of an existing one-bedroom apartment in my basement. My father felt this was not pragmatic and refused to help me begin this project. I took a sledgehammer to the bedroom walls knowing full well that he wouldn't be able to walk away from the mess I had started. He feels it is his duty to look after me because I don't have a man. I am *his* daughter. I feel guilty for being a bad feminist, a bad lesbian, and a bad daughter for playing with patriarchy and heterosexual dominance in that way, and for not learning how to use tools.

Lesbians often describe their parents' responses to coming out as including feelings of disappointment, guilt, worry, or anger. I think my father felt tired. I think he worried (just beneath the surface) that he would be doing my house maintenance for a long time. When

I came out, I believe he thought that if I was going to be a lesbian I should have paid more attention to learning about tools. On the one hand, his sense of responsibility for me seemed to increase because I would never have a man, and on the other hand he noticed when my lesbian partner began to fix things. He seemed to be confused. Who should he be trying to teach when he dropped by to fix things? He found a more captivated audience for his tool lessons in my partner than in me. I was glad my lack of interest was camouflaged. But how should he relate to her? How much work should he expect from her? Would she become part owner of my house?

In contrast to me, my heterosexual sister Ann has been married to a man for over 12 years. She and her husband recently purchased a new house in a newly developed suburb. My father will visit Ann's house anytime she calls him, but the work he does in her house is hardly ever disputed and is accomplished neater than in my house. He will never show up with his toolbox uninvited or leave his toolbox in her basement as he does with me. He is not the man of that house. Linda, my lesbian sister, is the only one in my family who really shares my father's interest in tools. Compared to her I feel like a bad feminist, a bad lesbian, and a bad daughter. Linda and I hated each other growing up, a problem that was made worse by the fact that we shared the same bedroom. Now, much to my chagrin, she has come to live in the house next door.

My house is semi-detached. After a number of years of living in my house, my 86 year old neighbor who lived in the attached dwelling died. Since her house was attached to my own, I wanted to buy her property to ensure control over what happened next door. But

by this time I had returned to university to do my master's and I didn't have the necessary income. I played with power and approached my father and pleaded pragmatic patriarchy. I told him that it made good business sense to own the adjoining property. We agreed that I could have first option to buy his half from him if I desired to in the future (for which I reserved the right) or he could buy my half from me. In the meantime, I would look after renting the property; he could maintain it. He bought the property.

A year after my father and I entered into this arrangement, Linda broke up with her long-term girlfriend. Since the house she had been living in was originally her partner's, Linda moved out and, in a melancholy, was moved in next door to me. It has always been a worry for my parents (just beneath the surface) that my sister has lived in houses owned by her girlfriends and that what she fixed went towards the equity in 'other' people's homes. I think my father had a hetero patriarchal plot of his own. My father was glad to finally have a chance to move Linda into a house of her own and to try to domesticate Linda's 'queer' kinship tendencies. Linda soon started telling our father that she didn't need him to come over to put up her shelves or this or that. Our mother would remind our father that, unlike me, Linda always did "those kinds of things". My sister Ann asked me one day, "Why does dad feel he needs to be over at your place? He doesn't bring me tools?" (Since Linda has moved in next door to me, 'Your' now refers simultaneously to my house and Linda's which bothers me). I hear from my sister (just beneath the surface) sibling rivalry. I said "because we don't have a man like you".

My father then decided that he wanted Linda to buy the house attached to me. I didn't

want to be living next door to my sister. I was angry at my father's suggestion that overlooked our business arrangement and my living space. I told him that my household was invisible to him because I was not heterosexual and would never be married to a man. It was invisible because I did not have children. It was invisible because I didn't like tools or fixing things. I told him that (just beneath the surface) he feels a need to find a solution to (fix) us being lesbians. I told him that his plan to domesticate us into two 'old maids' might fit well with his working class notions of family sticking together but it did not sit well with me. Something I never said was that I think Linda's masculinity makes her life more visible than mine. She should have her own house since her lesbian masculinity makes her look like she should be the head of a house. And she likes fixing things.

One day I was over at Linda's place visiting and we were chatting. On my way out the door, she asked me if I was going to the woman's dance that weekend. I wasn't. She said with a smile trying to lighten the situation of her living next door: "Too bad. We could share a taxi back home with our pick-ups". I don't think this is the kind of material advantage our father had in mind when he pictures two unmarried sisters living side by side. Whether or not I like Linda occupying the house next door to me at this point in our lives, we will always occupy together (just beneath the surface) a cultural space as lesbian family members.

Last Christmas my father announced that he had decided to give his grandfather's toolbox to Linda. This was an important decision for my father. His grandfather's toolbox is loaded with memory, experience, and expectation. The old box is made from Newfoundland pine with an initialized silver square on the top, and is filled with lots of

tools. I felt jealous. So did Ann. My father's gesture incorporated contradictory obeisance to the masculinity-femininity binary. He recognized Linda's skills in using tools. Sometimes he recognized her skills as a woman, sometimes as a pseudo-man, and sometimes as a lesbian. In any case, one thing is for sure, my father knows that the toolbox resides in Linda's home and therefore is ready and waiting for him the next time he visits *his* daughter's house, just in case something needs fixing. In addition to feeling jealous, I also felt, unlike Ann, included in something profound because it recognized that Linda and my chosen lesbian kin are considered family. My father's gesture disrupted notion of family as heterosexual and based in a patriarchal symbolic of biology and laws...for who would Linda pass the toolbox onto? He trusted that whoever it was, that person would be family.

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For me, these stories are about the value society places upon familial practices (My thinking through these stories has been informed by Krieger, 1996). What determines this value? When is my family/household de/valued because it does/not have a patriarchal head? When is it de/valued because it does/not have a heterosexual head? *How does the valuing and the meanings associated with familial practices change depending upon who is practicing them?* (e.g. a heterosexual man, a heterosexual woman, a lesbian, a gay man, a person performing masculinity (upon what sexed bodies), a person performing femininity (upon what sexed bodies), a person from the working classes, a person from the professional classes, and so on). Within the context of familial practices: How do the less valued try, in ordinary ways, to keep their value from being lost? How do the less valued use their

culturally assigned value in resistance? How do the less valued not only keep their value but also pass it on? What will the next generation make of the wealth of the generation before? These are the kinds of questions that brought me to my thesis research. These questions are about the everyday whose own value is hard to see because it tends to fade into the landscape of the ordinary and rest just beneath the surface of what is seen. I am asking these questions because the everyday often differs from the statistics it engenders.

A house is often “taken for granted as a ‘neutral’ container for domestic activity, invisible in the public eye, a given of the built landscape” (Morton, 1997, p.168). However, feminists and lesbians both know that the house is a public and political space. My house was built in the post war period as were most others in the neighborhood. This time period was the beginning of the domestic mystic for women in which the house functioned as a space to construct femininity in isolation from the public sphere. While houses have historically marked heterosexual women’s invisibility, lesbians use houses as “a site where they make their sexual identity visible in a conscious attempt to challenge assumptions of heterosexuality” (Elwood, 2000, p. 12) that position them as deviants outside the category family. In the cultural imagination, lesbians, purportedly not ‘ordinary’ people, are usually not pictured within such ordinary spaces as houses with ‘*white picket fences*’. In my thesis, I reflect upon these questions within the context of lesbians’ kinship building with their heterosexual ‘sisters’ whose *contradictory* relationships to the ‘white picket fence’ are not described well by the words I know.





