NORMALIZED FAMILY DISCOURSES INTERRUPTED: ONCE MARRIED MOTHER-LESBIANS

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the ways in which identity (trans)formations develop within/amongst/between familial relationships embedded in discourses of heteronormativity.

I assert that identities, and the relationships we form as a result of how we identify, are influenced by historically, socially and politically specific constructions. As we "perform" our identities, we shape, shift and alter heteronormative discourses. In turn, our processes of identification are shaped by the complexities of those very discourses.

I interviewed women who, earlier in their lives had children in heterosexual marriages. Later in their lives, as their identities shifted they have had intimate, sexual relationships with women. Their stories contain extremes of agony and joy as they negotiate their shifting identities in a heterosexist society. They have faced their fears of losing their children, living in poverty and being expelled from their communities as they reconfigure their lives to reflect their changing identities. Sometimes their fears were, thankfully, "only" imagined. Other times they were painfully realized. Their transition "from wedded wife to lesbian life"\(^1\) put them in touch with identities they had previously resisted as a result of living within discourses of heteronormative ideologies.

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\(^1\)I take this phrase from the title of a book by Deborah Abbott and Ellen Farmer (1995).
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I can honestly say that this thesis may not have been completed in time without the support of, Amy Sullivan, my "thesis partner". For all the long meetings, phone calls, reminders about deadlines, editing and encouragement, thank you, Amy. Thank you to my friends, Patti, Kathleen, Judy—you know why.

Special love and thanks in and through multidimensional directions amongst my four children, Catherine, Daniel, Joanna and Timothy who, it is my heartfelt hope, will gain deeper understanding of why I needed to shift identities in the way in which I did, and write about it in such a time-consuming manner.

Finally, Colleen, this thesis, for me, has stood as a concrete "representation" of our struggles to find spaces to be together with our woman-centered love. Our "shifting identities" has extracted so much emotion from us, our children, our families and friends. In the middle of our pain and joy; our losses and gains, I think we have all learned the limitations of restricting definitions of what constitutes a "family". I do not think it is an accident that you and I make this journey together.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thesis Framed, Traditional Families Unframed</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Women</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There's No Place Like Home: Shifting Epistemologies</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normalization of Traditional Familial Discourses</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity (trans)Formation</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(In)CONCLUSION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Thesis Unframed, Lives (re)framed</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>107</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I fear what others will hear
I have a secret that is pure and true
   And while it sometimes remains small and quiet
   It, other times, screams out as naturally as it really is.
   It is real.¹

¹written by the women I call “Kerry”.
INTRODUCTION

It has been some women's experience that throughout several years in relationship with a male spouse, establishing routines to balance frenetic schedules of paid and unpaid work, a destabilizing sense of dissatisfaction grows. Women have worked through the complexities of their lives in a variety of ways. Some leave their husbands to live alone, some for another man. Some remain in the relationship and have affairs, some stay for the "good of the children". Still other women rediscover a path they started before they became "attached to man", or they might find a new path altogether. The directions that women take may either parallel their spouse's life, or conflict with it.

In this study I interview women who have made a change from heterosexual wives and mothers to living as lesbians with children. The women I have interviewed are in transition with their heterosexual and homosexual identities. I am not concentrating on any one aspect of their identities, for example their "roles" as mothers or wives or lesbian lovers. Rather, I am concentrating on how they negotiate their transition from "wedded wife to lesbian life".¹

The project is an interrogation into how we come to understand identities within available subject positions. I frame identity formations as fluid and shifting. Identities, subject positions, and subjectivities, although closely related terms, have significantly different meanings. I suppose if I were to somehow distinguish between the terms, I would have three boxes. The largest being subject positions into which would fit subjectivities and then identities. I think the reason I order them in this way is because I view subject positions as the spaces in which we have the capacity to exercise our subjectivities, thereby forming our identities. This suggests that we are constituted through a

¹I credit Deborah Abbott and Ellen Farmer (1995) for coming up with the title of their book, From Wedded Wife to Lesbian Life.
subjectification of personal experiences, social histories, and political influences. Bronwyn Davies (1993) explains that poststructuralist theory offers a distinction between the process of subjectification and socialization. Whereas socialization draws attention to the shaping of identities as framed by our relationships with others, subjectification adds to the complexity of identity formations by acknowledging, in addition, that identities are shaped by and through historically, politically and socially specific discourses which act in concert with our interactions with others (p.13). I apply this distinction as I examine identity formation with the group of women I interviewed. Poststructuralist theory attributes the individual with the capacity to actively engage with discourses available to them and "speak/write the world into existence as if they [the discourses] were their own" (Davies, 1993:13). In this way, discourses are what we have available to shape our understanding of the social world, and we in turn are continually shaping and re-shaping discourses. We are both restricted and enabled within this construct. "Subject positions", or the spaces available in which to claim identities, are constructed by both a personal understanding of our desires—personal subject positions, and political norms—political subject positions.

My specific focus is an exploration of a group of women I have both studied and to which I belong. It is women who question their assumed heterosexuality. This group, by no means homogeneous, I have termed "once married mother-lesbian". I have experimented with language to try and best describe identities shaped by and from women living in a patriarchal society who become a wife and mother in a heterosexual union or marriage. They have either questioned their heterosexual identity all along or find themselves increasingly desiring the company of women, ultimately falling in love with one. Whatever the circumstances, she lives for years as a heterosexual wife and mother and changes her living situation to either live on her own or with another woman as a lesbian with children. It seemed important to distinguish between mother-lesbians and lesbian-mothers. The
first being women who have children within a heterosexual relationship and then reconfigured their families; the second being women who co-parent in lesbian originated families. Hence my choice of placing the word mother before lesbian. The "once married mother-lesbian" identity is as diverse as the women themselves. I should state what I am not intending to explore. I do not interrogate how mothering has changed for these women, though some of this is evident in the transcripts. In her book, Fiona Nelson (1996) addresses the role of mothers who have gone from heterosexual relationships to co-parenting with another woman. I have concentrated on the period in the women's lives as they contemplate their shift from heterosexual to lesbian. For the women I interviewed, motherhood is firmly embedded in both their heterosexual and lesbian identities. All of us are attached to a "mother" identity and feel it is part of our "package"—and an important part. The compulsion to hold onto the term mother and combine it with lesbian reflects the desperate struggle we have all experienced as we insist on holding onto our children and motherhood throughout our transition(s). I have a small sampling of seven women who were available to me through personal contacts. My own location of a "version" of white, middle-class once married mother-lesbian, has brought me into contact with the same. I say "a version of white, middle-class", since in a racist, classist society I am handed privileges at birth which rest on the backs of those unable to "pass" as white (Moraga, 1983). Yet I am only a version of "white" as my olive skin and dark eyes and hair are phenotypically Southern Italian. I am only a version of middle-class because my working-class parents sacrificed their own material comforts in order to raise their children as middle-class. Yet despite that, in a society which offers upward mobility for its citizens who can "pass" for white and middle-class, I fit. As I daily take advantage of this social position I have grown used to, I am able to acknowledge that I have left behind the stigmatism of my youth as I joined my siblings in a migration from working-class immigrants to middle-class North Americans. Memories of being
called a "ginny-wop" while living in our parent's house are things that I have the privilege not to "re-
member". I remain cognizant of the process of be-coming white and middle-class. So although I
and the women I interviewed are white and middle-class, since enough of our lives intersect with
the stereotypical aspects of these categories, the categories themselves are restrictive. They do not
speak to the complexities of economies, subjectivities or colours, within "white, middle-class".

One of the interviews, with two women who live with each other, each other's children and one
of the husbands, does not fit neatly into this study. These two women's story were different from
the other five women. They began spending a great deal of time together when one of the women's
husbands was dying. They developed a strong attachment culminating in a lasting romantic, sexual
relationship. They blended their two families, including six children and one husband. Although
they acknowledge their same-sex relationship and the word "lesbian" is freely used, when asked
pointedly if they considered themselves lesbians, they refused the label. I am cognizant of their
desire not to be labelled, while the other five women insist on being called lesbians.

Four of the seven women I interviewed came together for support through a network of
psychotherapists, also white. The other women were introduced to me through a third party. The
women were chosen because they were willing to be interviewed. One of the most common reasons
for their willingness was that they had each searched, unsuccessfully, for written information about
their specific locations as they experienced their identities shifting. They felt isolated and were keen
to contribute to any production of knowledge which might contribute to filling this information gap.

All seven women initiated change in their lives that reflected their shifting identities. They
explored their desires for women, looked for political and social ways to affirm their desires and had
the resources to act on their changing identities. One of the women comments:
Another says:

It just seems like I’ve been broadening and broadening and broadening. I started off by going to school and then I went into therapy and I met more people. It was almost that the discovery that I’m a lesbian was another step along the way, as if I was going there all the time. .... There I was on this weekend and there was this woman who was sending my hormones all over the place. So I went home and I thought about it and thought well, maybe it’s the "I" word, maybe I’m —gay!— (laughter)...ummm, and that felt really exciting, it felt incredibly exciting. It was like finding an identity. I thought that maybe I am a lesbian, maybe I’m bi-sexual, maybe this is a once in a life time thing, maybe it happens to be this person. So it wasn’t an overnight transformation.

I do not want to collapse their experiences into any common theme or pattern. This is something that I have had difficulty with in the sociological canon as I was taught it. I "learned" that patterns are discernable and assumptions can be made about how people fit into patterns. I am uncomfortable with constructing categories into which experiences neatly “fit”, though as I write I continue to do just this. To this purpose I have only identified the women’s words, in Chapter Two, where I tell a version of their "story". In addition, rather than drawing conclusions about what their combined quotes might mean, I have added some of my analysis as I think through their words. To alert the reader to read these sections as my musings, not as grand conclusions, I have altered the typeface.

I do not want to concentrate only on the individual psychology of the women. Rather, I will attempt to blend my interpretation of how their subjective realities interact with conventional and unconventional discourses available to them. As I begin to discuss the women themselves and their experiences as they explore their identities, I want to emphasize how their individual day-to-day experiences interact with historical periods of the social world in which they live (Smith, 1991). The construction of any identity is embedded in the historicized social world.
Personal and political subject positions are realized through a process of what we understand to be available to us and how we exercise our agency in taking them up. I want to stress this because it is not simply a matter of “choice”. It is a process of acknowledging the complexities within different relationships of power. Privilege is exercised at the expense of others and does create unequal opportunities. People may or may not be able to acknowledge, comply, or resist subject positions in which they find themselves. In understanding what is available to us as subject positions, it is important to understand how “availability” is differently constructed depending on the historical moment, our social setting, and how that is combined with our personal engagement with both. The following chapters will begin to unravel just how difficult it is to locate shifting identities within discourses as we both constitute and are constituted by those very discourses.
CHAPTER ONE

The Thesis Framed, Traditional Families Unframed

At a recent conference in St. Catharine's, a woman asked of an historian engaged in lesbian oral histories how was she able to write of once married lesbians from interviews? The questioner's concern was that she, herself a once-married lesbian, might say one thing in an interview on Tuesday which may not accurately reflect her identity on Wednesday. The day matters. Being or becoming lesbian in a heterosexist society made her acutely aware of her constantly shifting identities. Although we may at various times in our lives be more—or less—aware of our identities as forming or fragmenting, I would suggest that identities are constantly in flux. Factors such as sexual orientation, age, class, race, gender, ability, illness, employment—and there are so many more variables: social, political, and personal—feed into just how we experience either secure or destabilized identities at any given moment. Interviews are not, cannot be, representative of a person's whole life.

I anticipate an interrogation of the validity of my interpretations of interviews conducted for this thesis, therefore it should not be assumed that my interpretations represent absolute accuracy or truth. If a woman's sense of her identity changes from one day to the next, I am only reporting and analysing the one day she spoke to me. That, I assert, is enough. The very point of interrogating shifting identities is to unsettle the notion that identity is ever static. I am not constructing a history or definition about how once married mother-lesbians "do" their lives, though that is certainly an aspect of this thesis. Rather, I am exploring how I begin to understand shifting identities in relationship to "family" and "heterosexuality".
If the women interviewed become concerned that their stories are not told accurately, that will be because I am not writing a biography. I have dipped into their lives for two hours, and asked them to talk openly and freely about how they have experienced their identities shifting as wives and mothers. I know parts of the histories of most of the women I interviewed since I was in a support group with them. This gives me an advantage in terms of the amount of information I have and I can fill in some of the gaps. It also disadvantages my ability to step back and critically examine what I hear. However, I feel that I have been able to write in a way that honours their stories and contributes to understanding more clearly how identities shift. Part of my purpose also is to add to the experiences of lesbians willing to discuss their lives openly so that more women will have access to the affirmation and support these accounts offer. Those of us who came together in the support group all felt that the dearth of information about our positions contributed to our senses of alienation. Each expressed a desire to read accounts that discussed similar experiences to ours, about how we began to view ourselves differently as we were cut off from, or our access was limited to, the positions of privilege our colour, economics, and heterosexuality had offered us in the past.

There's practically nothing out there to help people like us on our way. There's more about lesbian mothers who have adopted children or been artificially inseminated. There is "P-FLAG" which helps parents of gay and lesbian children. We seem to be a missed group. There is a book, The Other Side of the Closet, but typically it is about gay men. I think there might be one paragraph or maybe a chapter about lesbians.

If the women I interviewed do not recognize themselves in my writing, then I have failed to understand what they were trying to say to me. If they only recognize themselves in part, that is because in one interview I could never hope to capture the whole person. If anyone does recognize themselves in full, then it is a lucky "mistake".

I am aware that interviewing women involves "memory work" (Aapola, 1994). For my purposes it is enough to signal "memory" as an inevitable component within interviewing practices. Because
the women made the transition from heterosexuality to lesbianism within the past five years, the memories are relatively fresh in their minds. However, parts of the interviews questioned earlier stages of their lives. Memories are not accurate or stable reconstructions of actual historical events, they are events re-membered and re-constructed. Memory is dynamic and always in process. I think of a magnet at the center of the memory. The magnet has varying strengths and weaknesses for holding onto to memories. The magnet's ability to collect and hold objects or events depends upon it having the strength to maintain its charge. It holds some objects while letting go of others. The "force" allowing a memory to hold onto or let go of objects or events, is affected by the emotional space the woman re-membering is in and to whom she is speaking the memories. Memories, which are subjective reconstructions of a person's experiences, are no more or less valid than "scientific" or "historical" knowledge. I combine lived experiences with discourses articulated in written form to produce, in the writing of this thesis, valid and legitimate knowledge claims. In this I borrow from Dorothy Smith's "standpoint theory" (Smith, 1991). That is, that epistemologies originating from the local conditions of women's realities, and that contest male standpoints, are legitimate sources for knowledge claims.

Through interviewing I listen for what Anderson and Jack call "muted channels" (Anderson & Jack, 1991). These "channels" do not lead automatically to the undiscovered truth of a life, they are hints about how we come to know things differently depending upon our life experience. Just to

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2For a discussion of her method and its application, see, Becki Ross (1992:Chapter Three).

3The analogy can be transferred effectively to race and heterosexism.
jump ahead for a moment, I will present an example of how I listened for "muted channels". The following is an excerpt from an interview. It is illustrative of how one woman reveals the contradictions she experiences about the changes in her life. There is hesitation in her voice as she expresses herself through language learned in a heterosexual context and she searches for language to reflect her shifting sense of self in a homosexual context.

Well it felt...this can't possibly be me and it can't be true. And it went against all the things that I knew about myself at that point. I didn't know myself. I mean I knew I was a heterosexual mother with [children]. I didn't know at that point that you could do both. So it was shocking. It was all so ummmm....I had lived in a really repressed way for a long time... I hadn't had any sexual feelings... or I hadn't allowed myself to have any sexual feelings.

I sort of shut all that stuff out. And ummm,... so to be open enough to feel this was ummm... a little upsetting, it was exciting, it was ummm...difficult to come to terms with. I sat with it for quite a long time and didn't say anything... to anybody.

This contrasts with the surety with which she speaks about her life as a heterosexual wife and mother:

We've moved a couple of times, still within the same neighbourhood, and in a way in which the boys could continue at the same schools. And over the last five to six years I've begun to move out. I started working years ago. And that's what took me out of the house. And I've begun to make my own connections and friends. For a long time I was, just, literally a housewife and mother.

In this passage she speaks without pauses. The language she needs is readily available to her for articulation. This is a place where I hear "muted channels". I interpret her hesitations to mean that the language she has learned in a heterosexual context to reflect her identity as a heterosexual

"This is only one way to listen for "muted channels". Another would be to interpret a woman's words through a gendered, raced, and sexed historical perspective. For example if a woman talked about her experiences of staying at home in unpaid work while her husband went out to a workplace for paid work, she may not discuss this experience in terms of subordination, patriarchy or sexism. I, on the other hand, would include these discourses in my discussion of her talk."
woman, is inadequate to describe her identity as it starts to shift in significant ways away from heterosexuality. Language learned within heterosexist discourses in a heterosexist society used to articulate heterosexual relationships flows more fluidly then when it is transferred to homosexual contexts. It is not that the language cannot be used to explain homosexual experiences, rather that the meanings are out of step with how they are being constructed and utilized. It requires more work to rearrange the words to represent the meanings being expressed. As a researcher, this is the interpretation I map onto this woman's words and hesitations. She has not acknowledged and made meaning of the different narratives and speech patterns, and in fact, may not agree with my interpretation. Yet this is an example of how I listen for and write about "muted channels".

My use of women's interviews contributes to (written) lesbian discourses that explore how the meanings of family, and identity within families, are constructed in such ways as to make us want particular forms of relationships. I also want to look briefly at how normalized notions of family are racialized, thus excluding how many people experience family.

The very fact that I center on once married mother-lesbians necessarily concentrates this interrogation on women and (hetero)sexuality. The women's stories, then, become a way of examining how we form intimate relationships, how we blend those relationships within our family units and communities, and how we accommodate deviation from the forms of relationships we have learned to want.

This project has its academic origin in an earlier study whereby I, with Professor Bonnie Fox, interviewed couples who identified themselves as "non-traditional" (Fox & Fumia, 1993:Chapter 29). I began to observe the ways in which people talked about families in compliance with, or in contrast to, "traditional, white, middle-class nuclear" family forms. As I was in the midst of questioning my own heterosexual nuclear family, I became interested in why it was so wrenching
and painful to experience family from locations outside this traditional construct. In her article "Experience", Joan Scott remarks that it is not individuals who have experience, rather subjects are constituted through experience (Scott, 1992). How is it then that subjects are constituted through the experience of family, and how does their subjectivity change when they experience family differently? People who engage in configuring families to reflect their ideological views can be content with their own thought out views, yet they struggled with how to interact with those whose views differed from theirs. One house- husband was constantly instructed by female strangers about how to dress his child or to "take greater care". He was consistently excluded from the daily interactions at the park from other female caretakers. Though he, and his partner, had made a decision that she would be the full-time caretaker, his gender marked him by those who thought differently as less appropriate for the position.

During the past few years both in my academic work and in my personal situation I became aware of how state-supported systems of social assistance, insurance policies, adoption practices, employment benefits (Axum, 1989, 1995; Rosenbloom (ed.), 1995; Eichler, 1995; Little, 1994) all contributed to the ease with which certain relationships flourished unquestioned, and others came under scrutiny. Before I announced to my friends and family that my relationship with my husband was ending, no one questioned our economic, sexual, or romantic arrangements or our lifestyle choices. When I told people that we were separating, it seemed that our personal, domestic life was on public display. Representatives of the state helped my husband and me organize our finances and our retirement plans. They assisted in making arrangements for raising our children. Teachers who knew nothing about our personal life had to be informed about intimate details in order for our children's stress to be acknowledged. Once I disclosed my lesbianism, conversations about sex replaced more familiar "chats" about romantic attachments and lifestyle.
Observing the cognitive and emotional dissonance that many outside traditional nuclear families experienced, during the interviews with Professor Fox and in my own personal experiences, made me curious as to why and how shifts away from the normative familial center became constructed as public concern and personal tragedy. I kept asking, "Does it have to be this hard?" I focused this enquiry for my thesis by asking the question in terms of shifting identities. How is it that certain shifts in identities can be so difficult, so painful, so wrenching? What are the forces which resist certain kinds of shifts and why are they there? What do they hold in place? If families function and do not burden others or the state; if families raise productive citizens of capitalism, what is to be resisted? Why do heterosexual mothers and wives who learn they are lesbians and act on that knowledge, fear being cut off from their children, parents, and friends? Why was I so afraid to tell the man I lived with for twenty one years that I only felt like a whole woman in the arms of another woman? How was I, and the women who participated with me in a support group for married mothers who identified as lesbians, to make a transition away from all that we understood in our heterosexual lives to less known positions as lesbians. Where were the spaces to explore our shifting identities, what were the stakes in these shifts and how would we find new "homes"?

I, of course, never got to the bottom of those questions. To better understand what these shifts meant in both personal and socio-political terms and contexts, I conducted in-depth interviews. Oral history interviews is a method reclaimed by feminist researchers committed to adding women's voices to knowledge production (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Geiger, 1990; Patai, 1991).

Subject positions identified through oral histories provide a context for challenging dominant epistemologies (Carty, 1984). Oral histories, though not a new practice of historicizing experience

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5For a discussion about how the state produces policies which disable functioning family units rather than encouraging them, see Eichler (1995).
and contributing to knowledge production, have been used to contextualize epistemologies and contest essentialist notions of "truth" (Gluck & Patai, 1991). In this sense, lived experience used for the purposes of interrupting dominant discourses can be powerful. Yet there are many ways in which oral histories are problematic (Scott, 1992). If a person's life story is taken as the only basis of knowledge claims, how can that be contested? How can a person's account of her lived experience be interpreted or challenged? Do personal narratives assume an unquestioned authority? I suggest they do not. Interpreting stories is tricky, but necessary. Tricky because it forces the question: who has the "authority" to contextualize a life other than one's own? Necessary because lives are inextricably entwined with and shaped by political agendas, social norms, and racist, sexist, and classist societies that go beyond individual experience.

It is crucial to be attentive to the "humanness" of interpretation. By this I mean that we constantly project our own belief systems and experiences onto other people's lives. When interviewing, there are positions of power that need to be addressed. There is often an unbalanced relationship between the (dominant) interviewer and the (subordinate) interviewee. When someone tells their story, it becomes the "property" of the interviewer who has an intended purpose beyond being a listener, in my case to produce a thesis. A new story is produced, based on that interview. The story is not the person, nor is the person the ultimate authority in the story. All these various problematics need to be negotiated to ensure that unrealistic claims and expectations are avoided.

Another aspect of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee, is the dominant/subordinate positions they occupy. Susan Geiger and Daphne Patai acknowledge the need to openly identify this imbalance (Geiger, 1990; Patai, 1991). In particular, they call for the different cultural and historical filters through which we interpret oral histories. That is not to say that the interviewer always inhabits a dominant space in relationship to a subordinated interviewee. There
are all sorts of power structures which interrupt a linear relationship between dominant interviewer and subordinate interviewee. In this study, I was aware of positioning myself as a once-married mother lesbian who reads about and studies "alternate family units". The interviews concentrated on the concepts of forming families and identities. It also allowed the women to be more open with the specifics of their family relationships, because my sense of "normal" families included their lesbian subject position.

Oral histories can be used to decenter, if only briefly, the normalized referent of "white middle-class nuclear 'traditional' family form" (Adams, 1994; Coontz, 1992; Fineman, 1995; Meyerowitz, 1994). One of the places I have observed dominant discourses operating to impose an uncontested "natural" truth is within familial ideology.

Throughout the project with Professor Fox, I became interested in contesting representations of the romanticized nuclear family (Coontz, 1992). To this end I determined to engage with people living in ways that radically contested traditional family forms. Once married mother-lesbians meet these requirements in full. They not only unsettle notions of family, but also the interlocking discourses of patriarchy and the (racialized) "cult of true womanhood" (Welter, 1966) embedded in constructions of traditional family. As Rich (1980) points out:

Not surprisingly, lesbians are seen as a direct threat to the institution of compulsory heterosexuality [and I would add traditional nuclear families]. Lesbian women who, in their selection of other women as lovers, partners or companions, make a clear statement of resistance to economic, emotional and sexual dependence on men. The price of this resistance to compulsory heterosexuality has been enormous. Lesbians have been burned as witches, sentenced to prisons and concentration camps, and more recently, kidnapped and deprogrammed by gang rape. Lesbianism has been called sinful, evil, perverted, deviant, and antisocial. It has also been defined as a psychiatric illness requiring treatment and institutionalization, drugs, and sometimes lobotomy (cited in Kleinberg, 1986:2).

Nation states have modelled the stability of the nation after the notion of stability in the family (Moynihan, 1965; Adams, 1994). Within this model women, at least certain women, must be
"attached" to men to preserve a stable society (Davis, 1981; Moynihan 1965; Adams,1994). For part of their life the women complied with the order of compulsory heterosexuality and traditional family life. Then they deviated and stood amongst, in/between and outside the normalized traditional family. At precisely what point they experienced being outside the normalized family is hard to say. It is difficult partly because it is not a finite process whereby the women arrive at "lesbianism" and "alternate family". They move in and out of familiar and unfamiliar spaces. The threat of losing their children seemed to be an overwhelming fear. For these middle-class women who had the resources to move out on their own, this was the biggest barrier. Some of the women postponed their transition to "lesbian" until the children were old enough to be on their own. Two women I know who are not part of this study and who have very young children are presently living in their traditional heterosexual families while identifying to themselves and a select few confidantes that they are lesbians. They have not told their husbands that they are lesbians. They are paralyzed by the thought of losing their children if their husbands were to become angry and take them away. This fear overrides their knowledge of their legal claim to be the mother of their children (Arnup, 1989).

I have mentioned women who were and were not part of this study. The following describes how I decided who to interview for this thesis. The first woman I contacted was referred to me through a third party. She was a once-married mother-lesbian. Encouraged by her willingness to be interviewed and the excitement I experienced throughout the interview, I decided to continue with once married mother-lesbians. I had not at this stage formally "come out" to my friends and family, and this interview affirmed my own shifting identity, about which I was seeking some comfort. At this time I became involved with a support group with other women who were married and identified as lesbians. I asked four of the six women if they would participate in my research. They also were
willing, although more cautious than the first woman since they had not yet "come out" to their families. Privacy and anonymity were crucial to them. During the year I was shaping this study, each woman told her spouse, and by the time I finished interviewing they were all living as lesbians, having (differently) reconfigured their heterosexual families.

They each agreed to an in-depth interview with the possibility of subsequent conversations to clarify information. In turn I agreed to turn off the tape during an interview at any point, which happened during two interviews, for "off the record comments". In addition I agreed to make available to them the portion of the thesis that told their story in Chapter Two. They would be able to alter information they felt compromised their anonymity or integrity. It was understood that could withdraw from the study up to this point. I arranged, through a telephone conversation, to meet each of them in their homes for the interview. I view the home as a site which encourages comfort for those being interviewed and in addition, this location in a small way off-sets potential power imbalances. There is an amount of irony in viewing the "home" this way, since it is the site of struggle for families who are reconfiguring their home-life. This speaks to how complex notions of "home" are (Dehli, 1991; Martin & Mohanty, 1986; Pratt, 1984). I will discuss this more in Chapter Three.

I transcribed the tapes and spent several months reading and re-reading them. I read literature on oral histories (Anderson & Jack, 1991; Patai, 1991; Geiger, 1990), feminist methodology (Eichler, 1995; Ross, 1992; Stacey 1988) and coding transcripts (Babbie, 1989). I developed a system of actively reading with the transcripts, and making comments in the margins—what Dorothy Smith terms "text-reader conversations" (Smith, 1990). I then developed themes that seemed to be emerging from the transcripts, among them: traditional family/normalization; identities as shifting, fragmented and at least dual; heterosexuality/homosexuality/sexuality; opened spaces for transitions
and changes; identities and identifiable subject positions. I tried to colour code these themes, but found the process confusing. I reverted to relying on the "text-reader conversations" in the margins. From these "conversations" I compiled quotations from each of the women and constructed a condensed version of their story. This was not done as easily as I make it sound. I had difficulty remembering into which theme I placed a quote, as some of them overlapped and were duplicated. Because I was so invested in the women themselves and knew four of them more personally, the women's words were easily remembered. Who and where they 'belonged' according to my devised system was not. In the end I tracked down the quotes by marking on the original copy of the transcripts exactly where I placed them in the thesis.

I wrote and re-wrote sections without organizing into chapters, writing through and into the final two research questions: How is traditional family normalized in such a way as to make some of us want particular forms of relationships and ignore or reject others? This question I break down into component parts of compulsory heterosexuality and racialized, ethnicized, and classed versions of normalized notions of family. The second question is: How do once married mother-lesbians come to understand what the stakes are in claiming identities which separate them from the(ir) perceived safety of heterosexual homes? This question I analyze through a filter of epistemologies as contestable I gleaned from Linda Carty's work (Carty, 1991).

The thesis is composed of an Introduction, five chapters and a Conclusion. This, the first chapter, provides my reasons for engaging with the topic and explains how I have done it. The second is an introduction to the women I interviewed, where I attempt to make them visible as people without claiming their stories as biographical. Their names have been changed and biographical details have been altered to facilitate anonymity. I have made minimal editorial changes to their words for easier reading. The third chapter explains that although I became interested in interrogating shifting
identities and epistemologies with a particular group of women, this form of questioning has held a fascination for me for many years. Chapter four provides some information on the construction of traditional familial ideology as a backdrop against which, I assert, the women contest and shift their identities within (hetero)normative concepts of wives and mothers. Chapter five discusses theories of identity formation. Throughout the chapters I have interspersed the literature on which I have depended to guide me through the analysis of the transcripts and in writing the thesis. I have "randomly" included autobiographical sections as I processed with the analysis. As well, I have inserted my own thoughts throughout the thesis and formatted them in typeface different from the rest of the text.

And now to introduce the women.

Jane is seventy-one years old, a mother of two grown children, was married twice and is now living in a stable, secure lesbian relationship with a woman who also recently left her "home" of heterosexual marriage.

Vicky is fifty-one years old, a mother of two and was married for twenty-seven years. She now lives alone.

Kathy is fifty-two years old and a mother of three grown children She was married for thirty years, and now lives in a committed relationship with a woman who had identified as a lesbian for most of her adult life.

Leslie is forty-five years old. She has three school-aged children. At the time of the interview she was living in an apartment and co-parenting with their father. She is about to move back to the family home for reasons too personal and complex to discuss here. One of the main factors, however, is insufficient income.
Kerry is forty-seven years old and a mother of two school-aged children. She was married for twenty-five years to a man she considered her best friend until the separation caused her to lose her trust in him. Although they have an agreement whereby they have joint custody, his grief fuelled the children's anger. Kerry lives with her lesbian partner and her partner's four children. Her children visit occasionally. She grieves, daily, the absence of her own children, and the loss of her motherhood identity as she once knew it. Kerry and her partner are struggling to create a blended family.

Josie and Simone are in their early thirties. They live in a blended family with Josie's husband and their two school-aged children and Simone's four school-aged children. They view their relationship as a "natural" extension of their love for each other. Their love for each other accommodates their love for Josie's husband and for each other's children. Their subject position is not "mother-lesbian" since they refuse the label, lesbian. I try and balance their position without reifying the position of "mother-lesbian" in a way which will exclude their family. Their story of transition adds to the complexities of identity transformations.
CHAPTER TWO

The Women

What will follow is an attempt to articulate the stories of the seven women I interviewed for this thesis. The stories are filtered through my interpretations of how identities shift backwards and forwards amongst familiar and unfamiliar places and discourses. How do once married mother-lesbians understand their heterosexuality as "normalized" and integrate their homosexual identification into the whole of their lives and themselves? Bronwyn Davies says that it is through speaking that we bring ourselves into existence (Davies, 1993). How do the women I interviewed speak their heterosexual and homosexual selves into existence? If a person's life is not affirmed in the society in which she lives, then living it requires her to strategize. She may retreat to a secret, internal place, search for points of connections for acknowledgement, or subvert and resist the narratives that are available to her. If our lives are not reflected in and by dominant discourses, in this case by heterosexual relationships within family units, how do we accommodate such "cognitive dissonance"? Linda Carty says that dominant discourses reflect what those in dominant positions of power claim to be true (Carty, 1984). The discourses themselves hold no magical inherent 'power' or "truth". Claiming them as true does. That is not to say that discourses are not effective. For example, discourses do produce available narratives in which to position ourselves.

*** What makes it possible for profound life-changes to take place, or not? How do we come to understand our subjective, lived reality as changeable, or not? ***
As some women experience sexual and intimate desires for other women, there are some discourses in place which affirm these experiences. Work by Carroll Smith-Rosenberg (Smith-Rosenberg, 1975) and Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, 1981) problematic as they may be, do help those of us who have access to academic writing to understand that women have enjoyed a long history of relationships with each other, and that women relate to each other differently than they do to men. What is less understandable are the meanings and importance of these relationships. Women have been encouraged to build relationships with other women, love them, even have sexual contact with them as “practise” to ready themselves for men (Faderman, 1991; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). We have not, however, been encouraged to make our lives with other women, independent of men (Faderman, 1991). Even as it becomes more possible for women to "breed" without men, and while it makes sense in an over-populated world that not all women (need to) reproduce, the normalized notion of what constitutes a family includes a man, a woman and children (Chunn, 1992).

The women I interviewed moved out of long-term marriages, the range of duration being between fifteen and thirty years. There were seven women who participated in this study. Two of the women, a couple, I interviewed together. The others I interviewed individually. Three of the women were referred to me through friends. Four of the women I knew personally in the context of a

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6By “problematic” I mean to flag discussions in the area of gender differences as biologically or socially determinist. This is not necessarily what the authors intend, yet their work can be read in ways which suggest such interpretations. I am concerned here to highlight how relationships between women have been viewed historically and influence what constitutes “normalized” relationships between women today.

7I acknowledge that the notion of which women are deemed "suitable" for (re)producing western patriarchal, post-colonial citizens is a raced, ethnicized concept. And yet, even if we examine (re)production within this framework, not all “women” would need to breed in order to keep the “race” alive and “pure”.
support group with married mothers who identified as lesbians.8 The women I talked with had the financial resources to make their identity-change a lived reality. My (pre)(as)sumption is that there are other women who would make the migration from "wedded wife to lesbian life" if they could afford to (Folbre, 1994). Fear of being abandoned financially or losing their children led some of the women to maintain a lesbian relationship alongside their heterosexual marriage (Cassingham, 1993).

The hatred baffles me: Individual, doctrinal, codified.
The way she pulled the statute book down like a novel

off the shelf, flipped to the index, her lacquer-ed
lips glib around the words: crime against nature, and yes,

he had some basis for threat. I've looked it up to read the law since. Should I be glad he only took my children? (Pratt, 1990:116)

Though there are broad differences in the distribution of wealth within the category "middle class" where I place these women, all the women had sufficient resources to move out. For one it meant long hours of paid work, along with unpaid childcare and domestic work (Hothschild, 1989; Luxton, 1980; Michelson, 1983). For another it meant the ability to quit her job and shed the burden of looking after a large home and family.

Their ages vary from early forties, early fifties to late sixties. They women are all able-bodied, and post-secondary educated. They each have a feminist critique of the patriarchal society in which they live. They have all sought support through individual and group therapy.

8That we "found" a space in which to relate to each other during such a life transition in Toronto in the 90s, speaks volumes for the social "acceptability" of lesbians and women who choose to live without men. Much ground has been prepared by heterosexual women who have divorced and lesbian mothers who have raised their children without being coupled with a man.
What was not common among the women was their personal histories and family backgrounds. Though they are all "white", their ethnicity, religion, and exact location of middle class is varied. The type of education they have, their relationships with men and women, and how they made the shift from "wedded wife to lesbian life" differs in significant ways. The following is a summary of how I pieced together pictures of the women from the interviews, and how I interacted with their stories as I listened to the tapes and read and re-read the transcripts. I have attempted to introduce them to you as whole living, women alongside my analysis which tends to interrupt their wholeness, bringing you away from the them into my own thoughts about them.
JANE

Jane was born in 1926. At the time of the interview she was sixty-five years old. As a woman who decided to live as a lesbian in the mid 80s, she radically disrupted the patriarchal, heterosexual traditional family “norm”. Carol Stack points out that when there is no male “at the head” of a household, the family is viewed by researchers such as Daniel Moynihan as in decline. Moynihan links the demise of the (Black) family to unstable nation states (Stack, 1974: p.44). Race narratives are embedded in this discourse and interlock with homophobic narratives. Because claiming a lesbian identity unsettles concepts which produce normative notions of stable heterosexuality families, and therefore they are a threat to the state.

Before Jane reorganised her life to live as a lesbian she had, between 1950 and 1981, lived in heterosexual relationships as a wife and a mother. In the early 60s, she might have been considered on the edges of traditional family discourse because she divorced, did not have custody of her children, and lived with a man outside the institution of marriage. She eventually re-married. By the time she went through her second divorce, acknowledgement of marriage as a one-time, long term commitment was less entrenched (Coontz, 1992). Jane's story illustrates the multiple and changing subject positions she embraced through the course of changing her sexual orientation and identity as a woman who became marked and identified herself as—wife, mother, and lesbian.

Jane was able to radically re-order her life as she expanded her understanding of what 'normal' was. She always had strong female attachments, and shared a close, female-centered life with a mother, five sisters, and many girlfriends. She never considered same sex relations until later in life (Smith-

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9Coontz (1992) documents that divorce rates tripled between 1960 and 1982 in the United States. Fifty per cent of first and sixty per cent of second marriages are likely to end in divorce within forty years.
Rosenberg, 1975). Jane made efforts to comply with her understanding of how family systems were organized. It was only after many years, two marriages that greatly disappointed her, and a growing awareness of her self-identity as a woman, that she was able to expand her notion of “normal” (Davies, 1993; Pratt, 1991; Walkerdine, 1990; Weedon, 1987). She began to see that she could explore a life outside the boundaries of heterosexual wife and mother. When the boundaries of our conceptual frameworks are pushed, for whatever reason, then different subject positions can be made visible. What is the impetus for stretching those boundaries? And once stretched, what does it take to assume subject positions that re-order the structures of our lives?

Jane was one of nine children: five females, four males. Her father was a businessman who provided the family with a middle-class lifestyle. The mother never worked outside the home.

My father was an alcoholic, abusive. My mother was a very strong woman outside the home, she was a very strong woman inside the home, but she couldn't hold a finger to my father.

...I do not want you, the reader, to easily slip into thoughts that women who end up loving women do so because they were abused by men. I think this is simplistic and does not do justice to the complications of how our life experiences are both developed from the available positions from which we act and how our actions reconstitute social positions. That is, even if we were abused by men, so were many women who are heterosexual. How we act in response to abuse does not construct a lesbian, but...lesbian subjectivities may be

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10Carroll Smith Rosenberg, "Female World of Love and Ritual: Relations Between Women in Nineteenth Century America", Signs 1(1) 1975: 1-29. In this article Smith Rosenberg researches women's diaries and journals to illustrate the strong bonds women experienced within a socially accepted form of behaviour before the sexologists created the term “homosexuality”. There has been much debate about the exact nature of these relationships. For the purposes of this paper, Smith's article supports less restricted codes of behaviour when an expanded notion of "normal" is acceptable. Female relationships at this time included romantic love between women. Acceptable codes of behaviour included intimate emotional bonds, elaborate declarations of love which would today be attributed to lovers rather than close friends, and physical contact, vaguely specified.
constructed as an available position to women who do not want to have men present in their lives. 

Jane spent twelve years in her first marriage. After one year of marriage, Jane abandoned her education and supported her husband in his career pursuits. This was consistent with white, middle-class values in the fifties which separated responsibilities by gender and public and private spheres. The 1950s was an unusual period of glorifying motherhood and the necessity for (white middle-class) women to return to the home from their outside employment during the war years (Adams, 1994). The “dominant” ideology at that time, as seen most obviously in television shows like "Leave it to Beaver", was the mother’s duty to create a safe haven for the man who was the sole provider (Bernard, 1981; Hartmann, 1994; Meyerowitz, 1994). Though this historical phenomenon did not last long, its legacy proved powerful and long-standing. This ideal was based on racialized employment policies and class privilege. Inherent in this is that gender, and the construction of 'the feminine', is inseparable from practices of social organization embedded in state formation.

Jane was immersed in the dominant discourse of the woman responsible for maintaining and organizing the domestic sphere enabling her husband to control the public sphere. Institutionalized marriage, for Jane, was invested with many expectations, some of which were realized, some remained unfulfilled. Jane accepted her role as supportive wife by putting aside her education, and following her husband wherever his study and work took them. She and her first husband had two children, both boys.

After several years during which her husband completed his undergraduate, then post graduate degrees her husband left Jane for a younger woman. Following the divorce Jane finished her schooling.
This suggests that her desire for education did not disappear with her duty to support her husband's pursuits. Giving up goals and dreams must have affected Jane's experience of her own power in marriage.

Jane did not actively resist her life as a heterosexual wife and mother. She talks about her excitement in getting married and the joy of her first pregnancy. She said that she only began to think that institutionalized marriage had serious flaws when "things started to go wrong". Jane says that thinking back, she questions the way she and her first husband shaped their relationship. She felt it left her vulnerable, and unprepared to live independent of a "male-provider" (Bernard, 1981). She also felt that their gender-divided relationship left her unsupported, emotionally. She re-examined the emotional costs, both materially and emotionally, her relationship with her first husband exacted from her.

Jane did not mention that she felt guilty in "failing" to maintain the marriage. Clearly there is good reason for her not feel guilty. Yet I find myself inserting "guilt" associated with the "good woman as good wife". Not in a way that she should feel guilty, rather that I as a wife feel guilty for a "failed" marriage relationship even when it is clear to me I could do nothing to improve or change it. Women's guilt? I can have a feminist critique firmly in place and yet when I need to apply it to MY life, I lose track of the concepts.

Jane reflects on her life from the perspective of someone who spent many years exploring her feelings in psychotherapy. Therapy is another signifier of middle class-ness in so far as access to it is limited and the cost of feminist therapy is high. Moreover, the majority of feminist therapists are white. The women I interviewed were self-reflective and interested in self-discovery. This, perhaps, leaves them open to exploring identities.

J: I think as I look back, oh at this time I was in therapy when the first marriage broke up.

I went into therapy for about nine/tén months with a psychiatrist and then...
D: Male or female?

J: A male psychiatrist who was very nice and kept me from jumping off my twenty-first floor balcony... (laughter). I was in pretty bad shape for a while. It's interesting that I said to him that I thought there might be other issues that I might get into with him. He said, no, he didn't really think so, that I was a pretty stable person and that I was handling the marriage breakup pretty well. So I accepted what he said and got on with my life.

This, Jane's first experience of psychotherapy, was not feminist therapy. Jane explained that her therapy helped her through some very difficult moments, though it excluded the possibility of exploring her sexual orientation. Later in this chapter I discuss a similar experience of another woman. These male psychiatrists had "prepared speeches" about the "normality" of sexual ambivalence, but that should not worry, they were not lesbians. It was just what the women wanted to hear: "They were not lesbian". Too much was at stake, living inside the protection of heterosexual families, for it to be otherwise. They "put away" their questions of lesbian identities. ¹¹

During therapy sessions, Jane said she began to understand that her particular position, as a woman, was limited by discourses of patriarchy which subordinated women and unpaid work to men and paid work. Cognizant of this, she began to understand the possibility for resisting the position

¹¹There is an entire discussion which addresses medical practices concerning homosexuality. For the purposes of this thesis, the points are that lesbianism is often invisible, homosexuality is seen as an abnormal problem that can be cured, and there is no space for homosexuality in heterosexuality. A few of the many authors who address these issues in their work are Jonathan Katz, Katherine Arnup, George Chauncey, Martha Vicinus and Jeffrey Weeks. A good resource is, Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past (Duberman, et al (eds.), 1989).
of heterosexual wife and mother. For Jane, her resistance is directly linked to a sense of identity with feminism. Betty Friedan's "problem with no name", had resonances for her (Friedan, 1963).\textsuperscript{12}

With the "help" of her male psychotherapist, she did not actively resist heterosexuality at this time.

Jane and her siblings were encouraged to marry and re-produce the traditional nuclear family. The first part of her story "fit" with the "normal" (white, heterosexual middle-class) standards of the 50s. When her first marriage ended the "myth" of the nuclear family was shaken. After twelve years of supporting her husband in their separate, defined roles, her husband fell in love with a younger woman. Here we might think of a discourse of "woman" as youthful and beautiful. Jane felt rejected, hurt and she was angry. She remained the caretaker of their two young children. Though her husband paid child support she was in a vulnerable position. She was an "unattached" female without a post secondary education and with relatively little work experience. The protection offered to her under the trope of (white middle class, heterosexual) womanhood was being tested. She was now a woman marked, and who identified herself, as a single mother and a divorced woman. This has never been a strong position for women. The majority of the poor in North America today are parents headed by single mothers (Fineman, 1995; Little, 1994). This “face” of family is not adequately supported by the state.

Jane continued to live in the United States for five years. When her ex-husband re-married, the children went to live with their father. Though Jane did not elaborate on the reasons why they came to this custody arrangement, she indicated that it was an extremely painful decision to make. Other

\textsuperscript{12}Betty Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique} (1963). This book should be read in conjunction with "Beyond the Feminine Mystique" (Meyerowitz, 1994: 229-262).
women have experienced the loss of their children and one wrote poems in order to have somewhere to place her grief.

I often think of a poem as a door that opens into a room where I want to go. But to go in here is to enter where my own suffering exists as an almost unheard low note in the music, amplified almost unbearable, by the presence of us all, reverberant pain, circular, endless, which we speak of hardly at all, unless a woman in the dim privacy tells me a story of her child lost, now or twenty years ago, her words sliding like a snapshot out of her billfold, faded outline glanced at and away from, the story elliptic, oblique to avoid the dangers of grief. The flashes of story brilliant and grim as strobe lights in the dark, the dance shown as grimace, head thrown back in pain (Pratt, 1990).

The nuclear family was re-instated, but without Jane as part of it. As her sons moved to another state with their father and new stepmother, Jane returned to her large family in Toronto in 1967.

So about a year after they moved to another state, I moved back to Toronto. There was nothing to keep me there...I had a few friends there. I wanted to get back to Toronto because I had a big family and my father was dying at that time. I would probably not have moved back until he was dying because he was a very violent man. So I stayed with my mother. He died a few months after I got back to Toronto, that was in 1967. And, ummm, the following year my mother said if I wanted to go back to University that she would fund me.

Jane's life experiences were shaped by unequal, gendered relationships of power represented in the bodies of her abusive father, her first husband and her brothers. She moved with her first husband to accommodate his career goals. When her father died, her brothers took over the family business, eventually selling it and excluding Jane and her sisters from the profits. After her separation from her first husband she moved back in with her parents.

Jane commented that as a wife she worked hard to accommodate the needs of her husband. In addition she said that as a mother she tried to understand what was best for her children at each stage. She felt that they were better off with her, the mother, when both she and their father were not married. When their father remarried, she consented for them to go and live with him. She supported the notion of the heterosexual, two-parent family, but her identity as the "good" middle-
class mother was fragmented. Divorced, single, and living separately from her children unsettled the dominant family discourse based on the "good mother" ideology (Steedman, 1991). What did this do for Jane's identities as woman, wife, and mother?

When she met her second husband, social conditions had changed somewhat. Although there were gender divisions of labour in their relationship, there were fewer of them. Jane did move to accommodate her second husband's employment and his church life. However, with the experience of her former relationship, she said she remained suspicious of gendered relationships of power in the patriarchal family.

At the end of my first year back I met my second husband and we moved in together a few months later. I was forty-one at the time and he was still married, he hadn't had a divorce yet when I met him, I think he had been separated for a few months.) We lived together for two and a half years before he got a divorce which was interesting almost twenty-two, twenty-four years ago. Two of the in-laws in my family—nobody in my family—one brother-in-law and one sister-in-law were quite incensed that we were living together without the benefit of marriage. Of course a few years later it was quite common, but at the time it wasn't very traditional. And my mother was wonderful because she took twenty-four hours to think about it and make up her own mind and she felt we were old enough. She had to deal with friends her own age who might not have the same kind of....understanding and compassion.

Though people in her life, in the early 70s, were still wary of inconsistent marriage relationships, she and her second husband attempted to create a relationship which accommodated Jane finishing her degree, working outside the home, and arranging for her sons to come and live with them.

Jane re-established her position as wife and mother, though it was slightly different this time. She lived with her second husband before they married. She established a career. She worked outside the home. Her sons, now living with them, were in high school. Her second husband contributed to domestic responsibilities, though she still did the majority of the tasks. She was able to re-establish the face of the nuclear family, and reclaim identities inscribed through that structure.
Twelve years later her second husband left her for a younger woman. Her sense of failure and disappointment was overwhelming. Though Jane asserted that she never embraced, unquestioningly, the nuclear family myth, she did attempt to reproduce it. The second divorce profoundly altered her understanding of "normal" nuclear families. She had, in her own understanding, fulfilled her duties as a "woman", but the bargain struck was not met. Jane began to look deeper into the terms of the bargain---what she brought to her marriages, and what she expected from them. Within this, she interpreted the socially prescribed goals she and her partners were trying to achieve.

When my second marriage broke up, I was really angry. I was fifty-four years old and I was angry for a whole lot of reasons. One of which was that I was pretty sure that at that age the possibility of my having another intimate relationship was pretty slim. And the other factor here was that I began to realize that I probably couldn't have the kind of relationship that I wanted with a man. Because the men of my age were brought up to avoid intimacy which is one of the factors in both the marriage breakups. I'm sure, I mean...I brought some pretty serious problems to the marriage as well, but that was a factor. I don't know what first triggered this idea [having an intimate relationship with a woman]. I have always had close relationships with women, of course, I had five sisters and I was close to my mother...always had close women friends.

Aware that fulfilling the script of the middle-class family was not likely for her, she could examine how she was positioned in that discourse, and how she could claim a different position outside it. Jane questioned her position as a 'heterosexual female' long before she found a place to discuss her questions. She was confused about where to find emotional connection and relationships. She was also suspicious of an emerging history of sexual abuse. Jane did not, knowingly, have any lesbian or gay male friends in her life at this point. She said that in one of her therapy groups during the 60s in California there was a lesbian and a gay man, but the point of the therapy then was "to cure them". When she first encountered homosexuality as a possible alternative to a heterosexual lifestyle, her understanding of what was "normal" excluded this as a position available to her. It remained invisible to her.
J: Back then the goal of therapy was to change them. Help them become heterosexual, that was the goal of therapy, which is horrifying.

D: At the time was that something that made sense to you?

J: Yeah, I think so, I didn't think of it at the time as being a terrible thing to do to people. Yes. We were socialized so much to believe that and that there was something terribly wrong with gays or lesbians.

Jane said that in the mid-eighties, around the third anniversary of the second divorce, she began to get quite depressed. She had, by this time, begun to recognize homosexuals who were present in her life. She was beginning to look for spaces that opened up the possibility of being intimately involved with a person of her own gender.

It's almost that I found myself reading books, I got a book called, *The Homosexual Division of America*, and another about the bi-sexual option. It was almost as though something was happening unconsciously. At about the same time I started at this church with a gay minister, who was the son of close friends of my ex-husband's and myself. Also when I started working at one of the agencies, one of the women there whom I really liked, eventually came out to me, told me that she was a lesbian. I think seeing these two people who were just like plain ordinary folk...whom I admired and cared a lot about, who were one gay and one lesbian...ummm...I think they were factors in the sense that they were just ordinary folks so maybe being a lesbian wasn't such a way out thing after all.

Jane assumed a subject position as a heterosexual woman, based on restricted concepts of “normal” that designated heterosexuality as normal and homosexuality as abnormal. She was left with fragmented identities as she attempted to negotiate her social world, sensing she did not fit as a heterosexual woman. She was initially unable to find spaces in which to discuss the complexities of her changing experience. She was able to reject the notion that her identities must fit into a hegemonic “normalized” construction. It was at this juncture that Jane expanded her concept of “normal”. She began to seek spaces that were hidden from dominant heterosexual discourses. Once Jane looked for that space, she made radical changes in her life. This time, self-initiated.

At a point six or seven years ago I made a decision that I was going to become a lesbian. That was the kind of lifestyle I wanted, no I shouldn't say that it was the kind of lifestyle I wanted, it has
turned out to be a wonderful lifestyle in a way, but it's fraught with all kinds of problems in this society, but...ummm... that a relationship with a woman is what I wanted.

What once was not normal, for Jane, became normal. Her "coming out" narrative is much more complex than I have written here. However, I did not want to concentrate on that, interesting as it is. Once she openly identified as a lesbian, she found "community" amongst lesbians who supported her. She had her first lesbian relationship at the age of fifty-seven. She found support in her church community and in groups with older women. Today she is living with a woman and the two of them laugh when they meet the gaze of the stranger perceiving them as a "couple of nice old crones". They exchange a shared thought, "If they only knew!". Jane's own concept of normal has shifted, but she is conscious of many others who continue to be positioned within restrictions of heteronormative discourses.

***Jane is older than the other women interviewed. This places her in a slightly different historical location to the other women. Yet her journey from heterosexual intimacy to lesbian relationships spanned over four decades. For this reason, much of the context of her story is similar to the women who are now in their forties and fifties. As she spoke, the specifics of her social conditioning reflected stronger, uninterrupted connections to "the cult of womanhood" (Welter, 1966). Jane accepted conditions of white middle class women in the 1940s---to abandon careers to support the male breadwinner (Bernard, 1981), subordinate female needs to the male's, and when necessary, work the "double shift" of paid work and domestic work (Luxton, 1983; Hochschild, 1989). Her articulations of her experiences, though differently located historically, was remarkably similar to her younger counterparts. The younger women questioned why they HAD to be in a subordinate role more so than Jane did. However, their questioning did not transform their behaviours and create more egalitarian gendered relationships. This may be why their stories did not sound dramatically different from Jane's.***
VICKY

Vicky met her husband in high school. They married after Vicky finished a three year university degree, while her husband continued to train for his profession for an additional eight years.

Unless you got at least engaged by the time you finished (University) you were a loser. The pressure to marry was huge.

They had two children. Vicky and her husband developed their relationship in the 60s and married in 1968. They formed a traditional, heterosexual family unit reflective of a romanticized version of "family" (Adams, 1994). She became the "professional's wife", mother, and eventually a part-time waged worker. She was responsible for the domestic sphere, which included the entertaining required to promote her husband's career.

Vicky never considered herself anything but heterosexual, though she had difficulty with heterosexual sex from the beginning of the marriage. She says that they "avoided sex a lot", which was easy to do "when you have children who need you twenty-four hours a day and when a husband works at a job that keeps him busy twenty-four hours a day."

Vicky has a sister and a brother. They grew up in a family that had to cope with chronic illness. Her father had a degenerative disease and he required constant care. Her mother elected to look after him herself at their family home rather than heed the advice of friends and doctors to have him hospitalized. Vicky says that living with a chronically ill father shaped her childhood. She was embarrassed by her father's physical appearance and did not want other children to see him. She was very shy socially, and describes herself as a "loner". Her mother was loving but very busy with the care of her father. Vicky, who also sought support from psychotherapy, had this to say:

I think I was loved, although my therapist keeps pointing out that she thinks probably that my mother was less available to me than I would have liked as a kid because she was so preoccupied with a sick husband and having to go back to work and earn a living with young children..
She says that at about the same time that she was experiencing a shift away from heterosexuality she began to "develop strong suspicions that something sexually scary happened to me as a child". Whatever happened to her as a child, she asserts, "profoundly affected my feelings towards men and my ability to be intimate with men".

***Just as with Jane, sexual abuse should not be viewed as the indicator for lesbianism. Although it may be part of the reason why a specific woman is a lesbian.***

Vicky learned to be a "good mother" (Steedman, 1991) from the example of her own mother, who sacrificed her life to provide and care for her husband and children. Vicky attributes her mother's death in part to her over-burdened life. Vicky describes her mother as someone with whom she was very close, and someone whom "everyone loved". Vicky learned that it was more important to "do what is expected of you" than to seek happiness.

Though Vicky loved spending time with her children and truly enjoyed them, she found the demands of young children and an absent husband taxing.

*It's very hard to be a parent alone...I became very depressed and went into therapy when we came back to Toronto. Yeah...you know you do what you have to do when you have little children.. you don't ask about...yeah, but it took its toll.*

Her therapist helped her to cope with her depression. Vicky says that it got better because both her mother and mother-in-law were supportive at this time.

She says that both in her family of origin, and in her relationship with her husband, "matters of the heart" were not discussed. Politics, daily news and family life were the topics of conversation. But feelings were avoided.

When her children reached full-day school age, with the support of her mother-in-law for backup in the event of illness, Vicky went back to part-time paid work. This particular construction of paid work is classed. In a traditional marriage where the husband could provide the "sole-wage", Vicky's
wage was not required for food, shelter and clothing. Vicky gained access to paid work she enjoyed through her education. She describes going back to work extremely important to her.

*** As I think about what happens in the women's lives to open spaces for considering new and different possibilities, I stop at this point in Vicky's interview. Do middle-class women, with access to jobs that are stimulating, gain a sense of independence? Is this different from middle-class women who stay at home full time? These questions slot women into categories which leak. I keep getting stuck in the complexities of women's lives, social settings, and political movements which influence subject positions. The writing about their lives on the page makes them sound "flat". Middle-class, and their relationship to it, does matter. It means that they/we are able to explore unfulfilled needs experienced within heterosexual relationships. Even as I say that, there must be many women who have the ability and time to explore unfulfilled needs who choose not to. What, then, creates the environment and the desire for the women in this study to take the time to work in spaces where they interact with lesbians, take academic courses where they meet lesbians, and join support groups where they interrogate their sexual identities? At what point can they/we risk losing our "comforts" and move to an unknown space of homosexuality, a space where we might, and do, lose our children and our financial security?***

Vicky talks about her decision to go back to work.

When the boys were in grade school I did go back to work which was very, very, very important for me. So I had my own life as well as my home life, but then it was this routine of leading the dual life having two responsibilities which was exhausting.

*** Much has been written about the double burden of paid and unpaid work that women do. It is interesting to note that Vicky attributes having her "own life" to her paid work outside the home. I wonder about the value placed on paid work. I have spoken with so many women who have echoed my own relationship to paid work as affirming and domestic work as thankless and invisible. I cannot believe that a pay check has such power, yet it is concrete evidence of acknowledgment of "work". Then it makes me think about the failure of (white, liberal) "wages for housework" movement. Was the failure due to the ways in which women are constructed as subordinate that made it impossible to consider paying them? Or did the resistance come from women who did not want to be coerced into domestic work for long periods, justified through wages? Or was it both? Have we learned to desire a separation from home and work?***

When the children were much older, Vicky had arranged her domestic and professional life to enable her to spend one to two days a week with her aging mother. During this same time, Vicky
and her husband agreed that they needed to see a sex therapist. The focus of sex therapy was unquestioningly heterosexual. Some of the pieces of the puzzle were beginning to fall into place for Vicky. In this highly charged heterosexual space, she was able to say to herself that she did not want to be involved sexually with men. Around the same time, her mother died suddenly, her father was hospitalized, and her children were grown and ready to live on their own.

If you picture my mother's death like the first domino with a whole bunch of dominos lying down, that's what happened. It was one thing after another. Once you start, you know sometimes when people deal with a very traumatic event, you just suddenly question everything. You're open to questioning everything like a huge jolt! Nothing is the same anymore and you're open to...to... I don't know if I explained it very well.

Vicky realized that she was beginning to be attracted to women. Then she fell in love with a woman. Minnie Bruce Pratt says that our eyes see only they are taught to see, and experiences broaden our perspectives (Pratt, 1991). Not until our learning can be transformed into an understanding of how entrenched assumptions can be shifted, can we be open to new experiences. Even then, new experiences do not necessarily promote change. The desire for difference is often in tension with the resistance to change.

My challenge after I first got hit was, is this real, am I really a lesbian? (I had clues all along. And I ignored them all because I think looking back at it, at some subconscious level, I knew I was sitting on a keg of dynamite. I remember the first time she was wearing these big black shoes and I thought...ummmmm! And the way she walks, and I thought...ummmmm! (laughter).

Vicky allowed herself time to experience her attraction to this woman, whom she knew to be a lesbian. There were two reasons Vicky says she would not have been able to pursue a lesbian relationship with this woman. One was because of their professional relationship and the other was that the woman had a partner.

The women in this study, while still unclear about their lesbian identity, often chose an unavailable person as the object of attraction. The "safety" of uninvolve ment allowed us/them to avoid thinking about what we/they had to give up. They/we could feel the (gain) elation of lesbian identity, while delaying or resisting changing their lives. During this
time in my migration, women who had lived as lesbians for a long period and women who had recently made the shift from heterosexuality, commented that "I wanted to have my cake and eat it too". Ambivalent spaces are uncomfortable.

As Vicky did not engage in a lesbian relationship, she needed to find ways to explore her identity outside an interpersonal context.

***For women who make a transition from heterosexual to lesbian identity and do not have a lesbian partner, or lesbian sex to confirm their attractions, there is a troubling question—How can I be sure? The act of shifting from heterosexual to lesbian orientation in a heterosexist society makes it difficult to identify as a lesbian without the sexual act. Lesbianism is about much more than lesbian sex. The assumption of heterosexuality minimizes the need to be defined by a sexual act. Women in this study have had to do conscientious personal work to integrate a lesbian orientation without or before engaging in a relationship to confirm their feelings.

One of the things women do is that they look for spaces, such as literature, lesbian support groups, and women's dances. In Toronto in the 90s there are several groups, some with religious affiliations such as Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, (MCCT), community centers such as "The 519", and dance bars and entertainment houses such as, "The Rose", "Tangoes" and "Buddies in Bad Times".

***During the period of my research, I was becoming more aware of lesbian and gay issues due to my own vested interest. It has been a time of immense political activity in Toronto's lesbian and gay history. I have file folders bulging with newspaper articles reporting on the status of adoption for lesbian mothers, the Canadian Charter of Rights interpretation of the validity of same-sex benefits, corporations that support same-sex benefits and ongoing debates between editors and their readers about the morality of homosexuality. National radio frequently addresses lesbian and gay political issues. Situation comedies include lesbian and gay themes, titillating audiences with the promise of a kiss. High profile movie actors and musicians have openly claimed their homosexual identities. Four weeks after moving in with my partner in 1995 we attended a Metropolitan Community Church Christmas Eve service at Roy Thompson Hall, the epitome of middle class conservatism. It was full to its 2,600 person capacity. We were in company with lesbian and gay families, singles, couples, extended families, and friends. The effect was that what we had just done did have a normalized space. ***
Vicky first went to the library and "read lots of books". She says some of it was just awful and some of it was very helpful. One in particular was important to her, though she could not remember the name.

*I picked up one book which was a series of essays looking at homosexuality from a Jungian point of view. The reason it attracted me was because there were a couple of essays by women who described themselves as late-life lesbians. Cause I couldn't figure out how this could be happening to me...I just couldn't. How can you switch gears so late in life?? It was overwhelming!*

Then she tried to make connections with other lesbians.

*I only knew two lesbians and I contacted them both, which was very hard to do. In one case the connection was good and in the other case it wasn't. I joined a support group and that was a lifesaver.*

Vicky then realized that she had to tell her husband. She was afraid of how he would receive the information. As they were not accustomed to dealing with "matters of the heart", she did not have a clear idea about how he would react. He did not say very much. The house became even more tense with silence than it had been. She was going to therapy at that time. Her husband kept wondering, "what's going on here, has your therapist given you a prognosis yet?" (Laughter)

*It doesn't work that way. And things got tense and tenser and tenser. I was trying to hide my reading material because it was so upsetting for everybody.*

But the news of her lesbian identity and of the family breaking up was devastating to all concerned.

*Well, eventually I told [the children]. And the was the next hard, hard thing to do. I sat down with them, and one of them started to cry and though it was going to be the end of the family. [The other] very cavalierly patted me on the knee and said, "Well, you've been a good mother and I guess you deserve our support." And interestingly enough she's been the one who..., she's got it much harder..., I think its been much harder. But for her it was the break-up of the family. Its two mega issues they've had to deal with.*

Vicky describes the next months as hard to remember clearly. So much was happening. She felt she needed to carefully "pace" her movements and changes.
I just did each thing as I felt ready and as I knew what the next step was. Sometimes I would do one thing and I wasn't quite sure what the next thing was to do. And once it became clear and I was ready then I would do it. And that would be repeated.

They lived for a time not discussing what the consequences of Vicky being a lesbian were. Her husband, she says, waited for her to officially announce that the family was separating.

So that the big thing after coming out to the [children] was sitting down with my husband and the boys and actually separating. And that was another hugely painful thing all over again.

Vicky has worked very hard to maintain an amicable relationship with her husband, and to be involved with her children as their mother. This has not been easy. The children stay with their father for holidays and visits. But she is satisfied that she has done what she needed to do. She has had two short relationships with women which has convinced her that sexual desire was not the issue, rather the target of her desire was. She has learned through her relationships that she is a warm, passionate, loving woman able to communicate her feelings and share life to the fullest with a woman. She says she will no longer settle for less.
KATHY

Kathy was brought up in a traditional family in Britain. She had two brothers and a sister. She went onto training college after secondary school, but it was understood that her brothers were being educated to support themselves and a future family whereas Kathy would marry and be supported by a husband. This is precisely what happened. She married at the age of twenty-two. She moved with her husband to Canada and worked in a bank as a teller. She soon became pregnant and left the paid workforce until her children, three in total, were older.

Kathy, more than the other women, discussed her subject position as a middle-class and white woman. She talks about herself as "British", "anglo-saxon" and "protestant". She says, "I mean I was all those “right” things, and I walked through the world not realizing what privileges I had."

She did not understand this as a phenomenon until much later in life when she went to university in the eighties. At the time she simply understood it as the way life was. When Mary moved away from heterosexual identification, she had to negotiate her relationships she had formed in the context of her "straight" world.

The people that I know from my straight days are very traditional so I felt that I could...I also know a lot of people who are fairly deep Christians and a lot of people like that have difficulties with homosexuality. So, yeah, I felt at times it could cost the relationship. Not in terms of someone yelling at me and telling me what a terrible person I am, but just a cooling off, and jumping away, you know, "Mary’s changed so much I don’t want to know her any longer."

Kathy was desperate to have children and enjoyed that stage of her life tremendously. Her relationship with her husband was very close in the beginning. They were "all in all to each other". Sexually, the relationship was always problematic and deteriorated more when they had children. Kathy began to lose interest in her husband and less and less wanted to be in a partnership with him. She was "passionate" about her children, but did not enjoy being in a couple. She says they were not a "vibrant" couple and spoke very little and did not enjoy the company of other couples. When
one of their children "had fallen off the track that middle class children were supposed to stay on", Kathy and her husband pulled together and bonded as a couple as they hadn't for many years. Not sexually, but emotionally. When the child was "back on track", they "lost it". They began to live more and more separately. Her husband went back to school to finish a master's degree and she went back to school to do an undergraduate degree. At university Kathy came into contact with people who led different lives from her. They were from different generations and different ethnic and racial backgrounds. The material she was reading taught her to think more critically about her traditional, white upbringing. This, in turn, opened up spaces for challenging heteronormative discourses which she now saw as contestable. She had less and less to talk about with her husband. During the rough spell with their child, they engaged in family therapy for support. From this Kathy sought further support from individual and group therapy. Here she met people who did not share her traditional background. Then she fell in love with a woman. She did not at first understand what was happening to her. The woman she in love with was not a lesbian. Kathy had not felt sexual attraction for anybody for so many years that it was "shocking" and at the same time, "wonderful" to her. Kathy said that beginning to see herself as a lesbian changed the way she thought about herself. Outside the traditional heterosexual couple relationship, she felt she had potential in other ways, "I had the potential to be a person on my own rather than in a relationship". She has told her husband and her three children that she is a lesbian. She has been in a committed relationship for a year, slightly less than the time she has come out. She and her husband separated fairly amicably, they both have girlfriends. They still have issues around assets and support payments, but they are working hard on solving those difficulties. The children have been able to accept their mother's choice, but grieve the breakup of the family.
LESLEI

Leslie did not want to live with a man, but desperately wanted to have children. She met a man who was her escape from working class to middle class. He was a law student and unlike her family his family valued classical music and literature, and related to each other on intellectual matters. It was the professional family Leslie longed to be part of. Her own family of origin was abusive and degrading. She had two brothers one who suffered from mental illness. Her mother, though exceptionally bright at school, considered femaleness a curse. Leslie was spoken badly to, she grew up thinking that "cunt was a term of endearment".

Leslie had inklings of her attraction to women from an early age. She did not however understand them and did not understand how she could fulfil her dream of having children without a man supporting them. She is well qualified in the health care profession and supported herself and her future husband as he completed law school. She said that during this time she felt uncomfortable when he came to stay the weekends. Even in the early stages of their relationship there was some violence. She got to a point where she was having body reactions and shaking so much she could not hold a cup of coffee in her hand without spilling it. But "against [her] better judgement", she married at the age of twenty-six and had her first pregnancy at twenty-seven. She miscarried this and five subsequent pregnancies. Both she and her husband were devastated by the difficulty in having a baby. Then she had the "perfect baby". They were both very happy. It was everything she had dreamed of. Within the year she was pregnant again with twins. She thought this was a gift for having such difficulty in the beginning of childbearing. Tragedy accompanied this pregnancy also. Only one twin survived. She and her husband bonded together over this excruciatingly painful loss. Leslie then put all of her energies into work outside the home, inside the home, and exercised compulsively. She says that one of the reasons for she was not close to her husband was that she felt
numb and closed off feeling in order to survive the loss of their child. She could not even cry. She continued to raise her children, having one more eight years later. The relationship with her husband deteriorated. They had good family times, but the violence escalated and her fear with it. She felt isolated as she did not have time to socialize with friends and they did not socialize as a couple. At the time of her child's death, the social worker who was a woman was very nurturing and Leslie felt some desire, but was so guarded emotionally she did not attend to her feelings a great deal. Then as her children got older and the need for a man to have children with declined, her need for emotional attachment began to surface. She feel in love hard and strong with a woman whom she was working with who declared herself bi-sexual. It was a short-lived, but passionate time. Leslie was not able to settle for the stagnant relationship in which she had been living for so many years. The violence escalated as her husband suspected she had an attachment to a woman. In fear she sought the support of a group of women who were in marriages but identified as lesbians. She learned what her legal rights were, went to a lawyer, and moved into an apartment within six months of meeting these women. Her husband does not know the extent of her commitment to living a lesbian life style. At times Leslie waivers as he pleads with her to come home, and her children want the parents back together, even though they demanded they separate when things got increasingly violent just before Leslie moved out. She has tremendous guilt about breaking up the family and lapses into inaccurately re-membering a family life that was harmonious. This pull, her struggle to survive on her own financially, her children being unsettled as they move back and forth between her apartment and the family home where the father lived, combined with her loneliness, makes her unsure of her future.
KERRY

Kerry talks about her history living as a heterosexual wife for many years without children. She and her husband developed an extremely close relationship. She refers to him as her soul mate and best friend. From the beginning of their relationship she was non-orgasmic. They went to a sex therapist which helped them but did not solve the "problem". They were content to continue to have a close relationship for the next twenty-five years. When they discussed having children, Kerry insisted that her husband be prepared to do half the work involved to care for a child. She describes their family as traditionally middle class with material comforts of home, cars and overseas trips, yet less traditional with the domestic sphere shared.

Kerry tells a story about herself when she was five years old. She always knew that she was going to turn into a boy.

I assumed that whatever you started out as, you turned into the other. And even though I knew this wasn't true, I remember looking out the window and thinking I know it wasn't true, but hanging onto the idea anyways.

Her male psychiatrist interpreted this as "penis envy", a freudian term to indicate that women experience a lack, due to our lack of a penis, of male power. Her female lesbian psychiatrist interpreted it as Kerry feeling like she was a lesbian. Kerry describes three pivotal events in her life she says are indicators that she was never unquestionably heterosexual. The first was when she was with her first boyfriend for six years, and was going away with him for the weekend. She was at the time a student nurse and living with "fifty other women non-stop for three years".

...I was...packing my bags to go on holiday with [my boyfriend]. What I am doing is jamming my clothes down with both hands and saying, "Oh god this can't be true!" Having no sense of who I was thinking about, fearing that I was lesbian...that this will wreck all my life. Sort of the sense that [Kerry] you always kind of get it wrong. Just jamming my clothes down, "Oh god please don't let this be true!" Putting it away...
The second event was when she was married and working full time, before children. She became
attracted to her female squash coach. She went to her then male psychiatrist and told him she was
worried she was a lesbian.

*He had a prepared talk and out it came. Ninety per cent of the population have...interesting that
I've remembered it so clearly...homosexual tendencies and fifty per cent of them act on them, and
don't worry about it, you're not. And I said, "OK! I put it away again. I obviously did not want
to think I was and I absolutely loved my husband.*

The third event was when Kerry was working in a hospital. She had what she describes as a"countertransference". She was counselling a young girl, who was a lesbian and the girl told Kerry's
colleague that she dreamed of having sex with Kerry. She realized that she was overly invested in
her concern for this girl. Kerry now says that her countertransference was her own need to be a
lesbian.

After she and her husband moved to Toronto, she began working in sexual assault. There were
lesbian women she worked closely with. She was at first intimidated, yet intrigued by these women.
She laughed with her husband about how she thought that lesbian would "take over the world" one
day. Her curiosity about these bright, strong capable women who did not seem to need men or
heterosexual women heightened. One of the women she worked closely with came out to her, and
Kerry hardly took a breath before she heard herself say for the first time to herself or anybody else,
"That's ok, I think I'm bi-sexual". She then fell in love with a woman who was a lesbian. This
woman was safe.

*She was 40 and I was 41. I felt like a 16 year old virgin...She was really safe because she's very,
I mean people who didn't know this about her would never know this about her. She's very, very
beautiful...in a traditional sense. She wore pumps and skirts."

*It was an awful time. It was wonderful because it was so exciting and titillating, but it was awful.
The awful part was I was wanting to throw myself into this without thinking. I didn't know what
the hell I was doing.*
Kerry's attraction to this woman did not result in a relationship with her. What it did was affirm a desire that had been present in her life for a long time. I asked Kerry if she felt that the jobs she held, which put her in contact with lesbians, provided an opportunity for her to explore a lesbian identity, making available a subject position otherwise invisible to her? Her reply was that the reason she sought the jobs she did was because she was looking for spaces to come into contact with lesbians. Although she feels much of this was not thought out, she is convinced that it was operating in her job selections.

***I am reminded about how painstakingly I tried to examine what it is that leads us to radical life changes and identity shifts. Is it that we learn to see more difference when we meet radically new situations? Is it that we search for subject positions not readily available to us? Is that how we write ourselves into existence and participate in the construction of discourses? Kerry says that the woman to whom she was attracted was safe because she was not easily spotted as a lesbian. If we refuse to conform to a "lesbian uniform", do we interrupt discourses on lesbianism? Or do we dress straight because we want to "pass"? Or does it even matter why we do what we do, it still alters the discourses which continue to shape identities. Do we as once married mother-lesbians defy both heterosexuality and lesbianism, or (re)define both. Do we make it impossibly complex for our children?***

Kerry had to balance her relationships within a heterosexual context—husband, children, family and friends—along with her growing lesbian relationships. She said she compartmentalized her heterosexuality and homosexuality. She and her husband spent less time socializing with heterosexual couples. Kerry joined a group of women exploring lesbian identities. She began to tell select people about her changing sexual orientation identity. The separate spaces she kept for her heterosexual identity and life style and her lesbian identity and life style became more difficult to maintain. She was on a holiday with her family, and all she could think about was the woman with whom she had fallen in love. This woman was not even a reality in her life, she had moved to a
different part of the country and subsequently married a man. She was, however, the embodiment of her lesbian identity.

*It was like for that year I still loved her, but I didn't love anybody else...without ever seeing her.*

Kerry told her husband she was going to a group exploring lesbian identity. She told him that he did not need to worry about their relationship. She felt certain she would not interrupt the family, she could put it away as she had done three times before. It was not so easy to put it away this time. She could not control her attractions to women, but she was conscious that she allowed herself to have feelings for a woman only when she was not available to Kerry. In this way she could feel like a lesbian without acting on those feelings. She told herself that she would wait five years until she dealt with this issue. And that is just what she did. Kerry joined the group for married mothers who identified as lesbians.

*I think what the group did for me was similar to what the other group did for me. It talked about, umm...people said things that supported how I was feeling, my fears and my struggles.*

The group disbanded for the summer and Kerry took another family holiday. She was distracted from the heterosexual setting of the family. She spent a week watching a gorgeous woman who taught aquafit classes. When she returned to Toronto she thought she could not put off the inevitable any longer. Her desire to be with a woman was uncontrollable.

*It was time not to put this off anymore. I was starting to feel like, you know, in spite of the fact that, you know, that I decided I can't do this...that it was getting bigger than my resistance. ...I needed to have a lesbian relationship.*

Kerry fell in love with one of the women in the group and they have committed their lives to each other and are in the process of blending their families.

*I was feeling like this is what I've been thinking about all these years, this is really where I'm suppose to be.*
I do not want this to sound like a fairy tale lesbian narrative. The process of separating from a man who was her best friend was agonizing for both Kerry and her husband. Her health deteriorated, her mental health suffered, and she contemplated ending her life when she was especially despondent.

When she fell in love with this woman, she understood her sexuality in a way she had not before. She knew what she had to do. She told her husband that though he was her best friend and soulmate, she could not live as a heterosexual wife any longer. She intended that they would continue to support each other and raise their children together. She was in therapy and she and her husband went to mediation to work out a plan for re-organizing their family. They had jointly decided to split the assets and co-parent the children. They had worked out at the mediator that they would tell the children in September they were separating because Kerry was a lesbian. Kerry rented a house for two months so that the children could get used to the idea, then they would tell the children that Kerry was moving into a house with her female partner. On the night that they told they children everything went wrong. Kerry’s husband did not think she would go through with leaving and was not himself prepared for the separation. They sought help from a mediator and agreed to jointly tell the children that Kerry was leaving the marriage—not the children. She needed to live her life honestly. Unable to contain his own grief, Kerry’s husband sat in a corner unable to say anything, crying. From then on Kerry was ostracized from the family and blamed for causing its break up.

The kids, uh, well...[my son] thought it (the separation) was because of him, of course, and he said he would never tell anybody, it was the shame of his life. My daughter went upstairs and started hyperventilating (her asthma medicine). [My husband] let me down that night, he sat over there looking so profoundly sad and the four months later, at Christmas the kids told him that they remembered him crying. Four months later was the first time he said they talked to him about it. And then everything just sort of unwound...[that] I felt that we had planned. And he started to
let me down one thing after another, the cottage stuff he hadn’t told me about\textsuperscript{13}, it became one nightmare after the other.

We went for walks, and the thing about the kids, he had no intention of making the kids be with me, "WHAT?!" You know I couldn’t believe this, it was awful.

[The kids] think that I left because I left them, and it took me a while to get in sync with what was happening because it wasn’t my experience. I’d hear these...and I’d be numbed by them...I’d be shocked, and it took me a while to react to them...I had to have some realization time to realize what was happening, what was being set up. It was absolutely them [the children] being abandoned by the bad mother and I’ve had to go back and say.... frankly a lot of damage has been done so strongly that they still don’t believe I didn’t leave them, and as my husband says, "you left the family unit, you didn’t leave your marriage, you left the family."

Well in reality I did. I left what everybody in that foursome thought was going to be intact forever. [My son] said, "My friends would talk about their parents being divorced or stuff like that...in my life I knew that was not something I had to worry about." He held my hand that night and said, "No, no, no, no, no, no" in the saddest voice. He just held my hand like that, my daughter doesn’t even let me touch her....

[My husband] keeps saying, [Kerry] you’ve had all these years to reconcile this and we’ve had none.

Kerry has bought a house and has a bedroom set up for both her children. Her daughter slept over a couple of times at the very beginning, but not since. Her son has spent the night twice in one year, when her partner was not there. Her husband will not set up any arrangement to encourage the children to spend time at Kerry’s house. He continues to say that he will not force them to do

\textsuperscript{13}When Kerry and her husband purchased the cottage twelve years ago, it was financially wise for the mortgage to be in the husband’s name. In law, anything in one person’s name only is the property of that person. When couples separate that property must be divided, as it was the property of the marriage. Though Kerry wanted the cottage to be placed in both their names, and not bought out of it, her husband was not compelled to do so. He was required, by law, only to buy her out of half the cottage. As it happened, he could not reasonably afford to do this. In essence what happened was he kept the family cottage. The children spend holiday times with him and Kerry must ask permission to be with her children at what was formerly their family cottage. Her partner is forbidden to go to the cottage.
anything they do not want to do. The children have said to their mother when she asks them to do things with her: "But what will Dad do?" Kerry's partner has four children and two cats and a quarter share in a cottage. All these factors are constant reminders of the things she left behind to make her transition from "wedded wife to lesbian life".

The children have two devoted parents who spend enormous amounts of time and energy raising them the best they can. What the children do not have are parents who are able to communicate through their own pain and move on to reconfiguring their family to include both parents. Kerry's husband kept the family home, the children's stability has been maintained within this home. The complexity of a new home, a lesbian mother and her partner, and four other children is a lot for any child to learn to accommodate. Without encouragement from the parent they feel they have to protect, the children have a lot at stake to maintain their "comfort" of home. Kerry and her partner have a long road ahead of them to blend their lives and families, but both are committed to doing just that.
JOSIE AND SIMONE

Josie and Simone are both in their mid thirties. Their relationship developed over a time when Josie joined a group of women committed to supporting Simone during her husband's illness in the following months following his death. Josie has two school-aged children and is still married. Simone has four school-aged children. They live in a spacious home with a pool and trampoline out the back. Josie's husband lives with them. All three share romantic, intimate, love relationships. The work is gender divided, with the husband working long hours in paid employment and the two women running the domestic sphere. With six children it keeps them very busy. They work comfortably and well together and the interview was interrupted many times with their need to attend to a child home sick for the school day, the phone ringing constantly, they finally put the answering machine on, and side conversations as they remembered and commented to the other the various details of someone's lesson, or appointment or school problem. The house was brimming with activity, art work and projects cluttering family room spaces.

Josie was discontent in her twelve year marriage. Her husband worked long hours and she had a separate life with her female friends and children, going on day trips, to cottages and skiing. Her husband seemed preoccupied with work and did not respond her growing sense of alienation within the relationship. She was contemplating ending the relationship. There was a pivotal point in their relationship, during a family holiday in the summer of 1992, when Josie knew the relationship was over, but did not know what to do about it. She felt that her husband was oblivious to the state of the relationship. Both she and her husband had five siblings. Josie is from and Italian background, and the importance of "intact" families has been stressed.

*It was very scary to try and end a marriage, and of course you have children. You know that's always hard. You can make decisions for yourself when you don't know have children. Family to me has always been very important. And the thought of breaking it up was very difficult. And*
you go from the traditional values of putting a home together, you know the actual trappings as such. Like all the gardens, the schools, the make-up, clothes, and everything. Then you go to realizing that you have a lot more in life... that without the structure of a family, and without what you had wanted... It's very difficult. It's very difficult...it was very difficult...

At about this time, a friend told Josie about Simone's situation. Simone had one of those "rare" marriages. She and her husband of twelve years had been close and enjoyed shared interests. Simone's husband had just died. She had four young children. They were in need of community support. A group of women gathered and made a roster so that Simone was not alone in the last weeks of her husband's life and for a period after he died in January 1993. Simone found it intolerable to spend nights alone and the women took turns spending the night with her. Although Josie was not emotionally connected to Simone at this stage, she offered to become part of the support team when she observed signs of exhaustion in her friends.

The first day I was there I was nervous because I didn't know what to do and she handed me a whole series of writing to read that she'd written in the last little while and it made everything clear to me what she really needed. It wasn't even...there was at that point never anything in mine...it was the transition between wanting to help someone and really help them. There was a difference in caring, and a difference in really feeling that you would be happier if they would be happier if they were happier. And there was the one step that's deeper. And that happened during that time and I don't know...I can't describe...the transition. It just occurred. And even trying to talk to friends, its very difficult to explain, because there was never any thought that I was attracted to women...just being women made you have a lot in common and in this particular situation it just went one step further. And even to this day there has never been another like it.

Josie and Simone began a relationship in February of 1993.

It was one of those weird beginnings. Neither of us had ever, I don't know how you would say it...I guess...it just had happened and we were really shocked and surprised at ourselves and then we kept saying how amazed that we were and it was very difficult to tell anybody else at the time so we kept it to ourselves for a while...

Josie and Simone became inseparable. They spent most of their time together with each other's six children in the summer of 1993. At the end of the summer, when they decided their relationship "was more than an infatuation", they began to tell their closest friends. Their friends were supportive
though they expressed concerns for the children and Josie's husband. They told Josie's husband on New Year's Day in 1994 while both families were on holiday at a cottage.

"One of our greatest fears was [Josie's husband] and his reaction. Now our guess was that he would act magnanimously, but what if he had a homophobic streak that we didn't know about? What if we ended up in the courts of law fighting about the kids? And that was a real agonizing fear.

***The concern that the "right" to be mother will be removed or contested is a fear that all the women interviewed had to deal with in some form, even when the children were grown and no longer living with them. The language this woman uses to negotiated her own fear of the man's homophobia is that she expected him to be "magnanimous". This again points to the interlinkedness of patriarchy depending on female subordination to support its structure. This woman does not consider the different subject positions as her choice to be a lesbian, rather is much more conscious of what those available subject positions are. She is dependent on the husband not contesting their right to mother the children. Even if in the letter of the law he has no more claim to parental rights, practical wisdom informs us, as women who deviate from heterosexual norms, differently. The hand of the older, white, middle class judge exercises at the very least, symbolic, "disciplinary" power over us.***

At first Josie's husband, shocked by the news, thought the only choice was for him to remove himself, Simone to buy him out of the house and the children to reside with the women. He never presented them with ultimatums, "me or her, or the kids or her." The women said that he never "displayed any possessiveness" over [his wife's] body. Nor does he now. They "each have their own relationship [they] had to work out".

"He took it in his stride...It wasn't how dare you! ..It was more why are you leaving me out more than why can you make love to a woman.

Simone, Josie and her husband and the six children have moved into a larger home and they have blended their lives and families. It has been most difficult for Josie because of her "history with" her husband. She says they do not remember the past in the same way. Yet, she is pushing herself to understand that she can depend on the love of both her husband and Simone. Josie says it is different for Simone and her husband because they have to be considerate of her when they are
together, and Josie does not like that. They all work very hard at communicating and understanding how to live in this newly configured family. They have had to both live as if their family was 'normal' and at the same time caution the children that although they consider it normal and healthy, others may not.

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\text{We don't want their friends to be [prevented from] coming here. We feel that our relationship is loving and healthy and that's all the kids are going to see. They're not going to see any wild sex orgies...they're just going to see a united family.}
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\*\*\* As mothers these women protect their children. In this case they are compelled to protect them against homophobia in a heterosexist society. I wonder if the reality is that the parents of their children's friends would think about the danger of their children being exposed to "sex orgies", or if it is their own internalized homophobia? What are the stakes for them, as they have to "perform" heterosexuality faultlessly, and what are the costs to the children? The mothers on the one hand want the children to feel normal in their familial setting, and yet unsettled that possibility in order to protect them. \*\*\* 

Other than their children and close friends, they present their blended families as a married couple living with a widowed woman. Their parents know everything "except for the fact that we sleep in the same room". The children's teachers know they all live together, but not that they are lovers. When they are with people who do not know the whole story, they "perform" heterosexuality. Although Butler introduces a more radical interpretation of performativity (Butler, 1990) which demands repetition and defies categories, the stakes at hand alter such playfulness.

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\text{It's hard to tell the kids that this is totally normal and this is ok, but don't talk about it! [One child] got herself in trouble. She went and started advertising to everyone that we are lesbians to all and sundry. And she did it in a way, you know, "You know what, MY MOTHERS ARE GAY!"}
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After another mother announced this behaviour to the mothers, they told this child to be "a bit more discreet", that unfortunately she may be unfairly judged. Though the mothers felt she was fine with this instruction, when on this daughter's field trip one of them said to the other, "Oh, come on, sweetheart", and the child "claimed nobody wants to have anything to do with her because of our
relationship." The mothers go on to observe that this statement is unfounded as this child has had many friends over to the house, has been to other friends' houses and is hosting the graduation party, all since "the incident".

***We worry that we might be responsible for pain in our children's lives. Yet we are aware that no person grows up without inevitable pain and conflict. We do not, contrary to the messages our guilt produces, inflict pain on the basis of our sexual preference, not always. Our children have thoughts, fights and even get bad grades, separate from our lifestyle decisions.***

The women do feel that it is anybody's business what the details of their relationships are. They raise their children to understand their family arrangements based on love not based on being man and woman. They say, "we do not talk about finding your husband or wife. In general we emphasize the importance of happiness." They adopted the ministry of youth's definition of family they recited as "a family exists when there are adults living together with children in a loving and nurturing way with the intention of permanence."

***I am struck here by the invocation of state approval.***

Both these women used the term "lesbian" and "gay" in relation to their identities and in the language they use with their children. I asked them if they considered themselves lesbians, and they responded, "No. Not at all."

***Simone and Josie do not want to be labelled. I wonder about my own need to "pass" as heterosexual in certain settings. My mother, though accepting and supportive of my lifestyle and my partner, has never told her friends that I am divorced because she is afraid to mention that I am a lesbian. The shame is too great. She explains this as her need to protect me. We do not even live in the same country. Yet, I do think she needs to protect both herself and me. She does not want to feel pain inflicted on her daughter's homosexual body by her homophobic friends. As I re-read this part of the transcript I think about how these women pass in order to maintain heterosexual privileges they anticipate will be removed. Josie's husband's boss and wife are supportive and exceedingly accommodating of their blended families. Would they be if they knew who was sleeping with whom? Would their children be safe in their schools and community if the world viewed them differently? It is not a risk they can
afford to take. Because of their privilege, they are able to pass. They can show the world what the world wants to read on their bodies. What is the cost to them? What happens if their “performance” is substandard and they forget too many of their lines?***
CHAPTER THREE

There's No Place Like Home: Shifting Epistemologies

The once married mother-lesbians I interviewed provided a site for investigating identities as personally constructed and politically contested positions. To initiate this pursuit, I began by investigating epistemologies, or more simply: how do we know what we know?¹⁴ How did women who lived within traditional heterosexual family units come to know of non-traditional homosexual spaces to which they could shift? How did they find, define, and inhabit those spaces? It has been instructive for me to examine not just that people's identities shift, but how and why they do. It is pivotal within this understanding that there are differently constituted social spaces within which to "perform" identities (Butler, 1990: p. 136-141).

As I discuss shifting identities experienced by these women, there are overlaps with other groups. In particular, as I write I am conscious that many of the observations I make are applicable to once married heterosexual mothers. It is not, however, my intention to explain that various groups experience their subject positions similarly or differently. I want to be clear that the group I refer to in my investigation of shifting identities is that of once married mother-lesbians. More specifically, in this study the small group of women are white and middle class.¹⁵ As a backdrop to

¹⁴There are three chapters in three different books which I wish to especially recognize for clarifying the often times complicated concepts of epistemological inquiry. They are Judith Butler (1990: 142-149), Linda Carty (1991: 13-44) and Minnie Bruce Pratt (1984: 11-63).

¹⁵I discuss in the Introduction that there are multiple positions which make up categories of "white and middle class".
this interrogation, the following is a discussion about how I learned, informally, to contest knowledge claims and later how I found more formal channels through which to explore epistemologies. It, in part, explains how I have arrived at writing this thesis, claiming a subject position for women whose identities overlap with, but do not “fit” traditional categories.

My experiences as a gendered, classed, and ethnicized individual, set against the myth of the "American Dream" in postwar, middle-class, white North America, rendered contradictions the norm. I received idealized messages that American citizens could, like Abe Lincoln, start with nothing and end up as president. To shift class positions was not only possible, but expected from "hard-working" people. These messages were promulgated through institutions accessible to me—my schools and the media. What I was not so aware of was that the “dream” was a gendered, classed, ethnicized, and raced myth. Another message I was receiving was that my place as an Italian American female was to be paired with a male provider and raise children. My family of origin reinforced these messages which complimented traditional Italian family values. Upholding the tensions created by both sets of messages encouraged me to integrate questioning knowledge claims into my day-to-day living. My ideals were rarely in sync with my realities, as a female in a patriarchal world, or as a working class ethnic in a “blue-blood” upper-class small town.

Two articles have been important to me for developing an understanding of how the specificity of my personal/political history has both shaped how I perceive the world and how I act in it. One is, "Identity: Skin, Blood, Heart" (Pratt, 1984) and one is, "Black Women in Academia: A Statement from the Periphery" (Carty, 1981). They both taught me to understand my subject positions in the context of relationships of power operating in the society in which I lived. I learned to examine the social and political contexts when I am in situations where I feel unable to hold positions of power and privilege, and to check the contexts in which I feel able to hold those positions. Whose
ideologies and bodies do I bolster when I do not have access to what I desire? And whose epistemologies and bodies do I subordinate when I assume an entitlement to privilege?

Minnie Bruce Pratt, a white, Christian-born middle-class woman from the southern United States made it possible for me to see that there was a way of investigating my experience of marginalization and complicity, through the lens of exploring "sexual identity". Pratt examines the production of sexual identity as a classed, gendered and raced construction. She tried to make sense of her painful experiences of losing her "comforts of home", because of her love for women. To do this Pratt forced herself to deconstruct her personal history within political movements. She painstakingly re-examined her past, searching for explanations of how she got to a place that robbed her of privileges she took for granted, for example the right to be the mother of her children. Pratt, like myself, discovered she had privileges at the same time she realized she was giving them up. One of the women interviewed had a similar revelation.

*I come from a privileged class...I have a voice that sounds British, I don't expect to be on the down side. I expect to get respect from anybody and everybody. I have a great deal of anger when people are not treated properly by the judicial system, the police and this sort of thing. Because that is what I get and what I expect. I hadn't realized it was a privilege. And now that I am choosing to give up that privilege, I, um, I'm beginning to realize how many people aren't like the way I was. I felt as if this was it. This was the way one lived one's life, you asked for things and you got them or you didn't get them, nobody reviled you for what you were...I'm meaning in the heterosexual world.*

For Pratt the implication was that her taken-for-granted privileges excluded those outside the protection of heteronormative subject positions.

..each speaking-to another person has become fraught, for me, with the history of race and sex and class; as I walk I have an interior discussion with myself, questioning... . It is an exhausting process, this moving from the experience of the "unknowing majority" (as Maya Angelou called it) into consciousness, (Pratt, 1984, p.12).

Pratt stepped outside the protection "marked off for me by the men of my kind as my "home" which led her to question how that home was constituted. Pratt interrogates the concrete place of
her home and interpolates the meanings derived from that place. The term, "home", indicates concrete places and at the same time it is a metaphor for the illusion of the comfort those concrete places evoke. The pull towards those (illusionary) comforts is strong, if for no other reason than it is familiar. Especially during times of rapid changes the race to "home" helps to order emotional chaos. Dehli comments of Pratt, "her story points to the unsettling realization that any "comfort of home" within feminism (or elsewhere) for middle class, white feminists in a classist, racist, sexist, and heterosexist North American Society, is predicated on exclusion, denial, oppression and violence" (Dehli, 1991:48). Martin and Mohanty critique Pratt's notion of "home" (Martin and Mohanty, 1986:191-212). They caution against racing to a "place of comfort" when that home is steeped in practices of "exclusion, denial, oppression and violence" (p.212). If the referent continues to be the "safety" of white, middle class women's "home" then they are right. The momentum may always be to return to that place, thereby re-centering the center (eg. of white middle class women in feminism). If, however, "home" is viewed as a social construction, then the comforts of that place can be seen as illusionary. This is what Pratt discovered. Once outside the "protection" of the comforts of home, the comforts she took for granted were an illusion.

Yet when we find ourselves outside the comforts of home, as the women I interviewed did, the loss of home does not feel like an illusion. To move out of the familiar comforts of home and give up so much in terms of identity and material comforts, seemed to paralyse me and the women I interviewed. How do we learn that "homes" are constructed places and that it is possible to move to new "homes"?

So I gain truth when I expand my constricted eye, an eye that has only let in what I have been taught to see (Pratt, 1984:17).
Each of the women spoke of when they knew they had reached a point where, as Kerry put it, the urge to explore her lesbian identity "was getting bigger than my resistance". For Jane, it was after her second husband left her for a younger woman. Vicky speaks about the "domino effect" of her mother dying at the time she and her husband began sex therapy together. When she admitted to herself that she did not enjoy intimacy with men she interrogated what it might mean to be a lesbian. Kathy explains that she and her husband drifted further and further apart. After one of their children emerged from a difficult spell, Kathy and her husband disengaged emotionally, in a more formal and final manner. Kathy sought spaces previously outside her traditional lifestyle at therapy groups and in Women's Studies. Leslie identified a time when at a party, she watched a woman who she said looked like a "tight and unhappy woman". She knew at that moment that if she did not get out of her marriage, she would become that woman. Kerry said that she consciously "put away" her affinity for women three separate times in her life. Although she was as satisfied as she could be in her heterosexual marriage, her lesbian identity became too strong to resist. Working with lesbians taught her not to fear them. She says that at the point when she stopped "fearing" lesbians, she fell in love with one. For Josie and Simone, they developed an intimate relationship in a time of crisis. Unfamiliar to same sex attraction, they doubted their love for each other. They soon accepted that they would continue to be connected long after the crisis subsided. Jane, Vicky, Kathy, Leslie and Kerry all sought social, literary and institutional spaces in which to learn more about an identity which was "enticing" them. In addition, they explored where they could find support from professional therapy and established lesbian communities. They began to understand that the identities and relationships which had formed them and which they, in turn, formed, were contestable.
When the eye expands and learns to see more than it was "taught to see", possibilities for different subject positions arise. Pratt lost her children because she declared her rejection of a man and her love of a woman.

During this time I discovered that expressions I had thought to be exaggerations were true: if you are helpless with grief you do, unthinkingly, wring your hands; you can have a need to touch someone that is like hunger, like thirst. The inner surface of my arms, my breasts, the muscles of my stomach were raw with my need to touch my children (Pratt, 1984:27).

***I watched my partner, who lost her children when she moved in with me, pacing through the house, wringing her hands and rocking her body as memories bathed her body in grief as constant as the tide.***

***It scared me to think about any possibility of losing my four young children as I began to contemplate an impending journey that would require me to give up what Pratt and others term "comforts of home" (Pratt, 1984:27; Martin and Mohanty, 1986; Dehli, 1991). I also learned to see a possibility of getting past fears that would disable me from taking that journey. Some of the women I spoke with told of their own senses of getting to a point where decisions to remain in a heterosexual marriage seemed impossible.***

The women I interviewed spoke about their relationship to their identities as those identities shifted. The process was not linear, but moved in and out of old familiar homes and new unfamiliar ones. One of the woman said it took years to develop a consciousness that allowed her to act on her lesbian desires. When she was at the point of acting, her behaviour made it difficult for her to recognize herself.

*I've always been a pretty conventional and cautious person at one level and what I keep doing is outrageous, unconventional things!, (laughter). That was one of the craziest things I've ever done is have that affair! I mean it went against everything I had ever done.*

This woman explains her action as the "incredibly powerful" pull that women can feel when attracted to a woman. The women I interviewed together, talked about their feelings when they first realized they were attracted to each other.

*I was very attracted to men, and I still am. So it's quite unusual to find ourselves in a situation...and there's no doubt that it's very strong. I mean we have trouble being apart. So we're
emotionally very connected and physically, it just became part of the package...[Y]ou feel something that deeply and it has to go that one step further...When we were together in the beginning it was so new and we didn't know if it was going to last, so we kept it quiet...

The woman quoted above attempts to articulate how her relationship with another woman developed into a sexual relationship. Several of the women I spoke with said that they initially felt their attraction to another woman was "person specific". This quote signals the struggle to make language learned in one context, in this case heterosexuality, fit into a less familiar context, homosexuality. As this woman shifts her identity from heterosexual to bi-sexual, she explores how to integrate the two. At first they kept their relationship a secret, not knowing themselves where it would take them.

A mother of three children describes the long period of getting ready to leave the marriage, before she considered living as a lesbian. "Home" is not simply an idealized place of comfort. The "comfort" may be familiarity. Fear of an unknown new place may be enough to keep a woman in an unsafe space. (I recently had a phone conversation and discovered from the woman quoted below that although she is presently living separately from her husband she is considering moving back in with him. Women in abusive relationships move out, on average, eight times before making the final break.)

I just muddled along, I was ready to leave many times. And um, I never quite got the [courage] up to leave. It never happened. I never felt that I had a companion or anybody that I could share anything with [in my relationship with my husband]. I never felt a kindred spirit. There were violent outbreaks sometimes, not really all and out, but it was tense enough and certainly isolating.

The same woman discusses how she felt in the weeks just prior to leaving her marriage,

I have never been able to masturbate ever, so I needed it, [the marital relationship] for sexual release. That was a big thing. I needed it for that, as release. But it was strictly that. I saw it as

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16Colleen Kearney, Counselling in Psychology, MRP, University of Toronto (OISE), 1994.
fucking. And that was ok. But what happened was it started to feel I was losing a piece of myself, every time. There was always an edge of degradation, always an edge of brutality. There was always an edge that I was being overpowered...that I was losing myself. So it became very expensive.

Psychological "homes" are part of the familiarity we grow use to. Where we find places to express our sexuality and how we express it is contained in those spaces. The extreme complexity embedded in sexual expression makes it difficult to know what we desire to hold onto and what we desire to let go of.

Then this same woman admitted to herself that she had to move out.

I was in a high state of anxiety. But [my lover] gave me the courage to get out. We were at a party and there was a woman there about sixty with a very tight face, a very tight unhappy woman and [my lover] said to me, "If you don't get out of where you are, this is going to be you." I knew this was 100% true, that I had no choice, that I could change my life or I would become that woman. I knew that was a fact.

When I read to this woman what I had written about her, she sighed and said she thought it was accurate and she guessed that she might have to go through the cycle another time. I mentioned that many women leave eight times before making the move permanent and she commented that she hoped two would be all it took for her. She was certain that if she returned to her husband, she would leave again. She just did not know how to stay away and survive economically (she took a twenty per cent pay cut with government cut backs to the health care system) and emotionally (her youngest phones her when he is with his Dad and leaves long, mournful messages on her tape begging her to pick him up).

Another woman reveals her struggle to try to communicate in a relationship where talking was not a familiar pattern. This was before she had knowledge of her lesbian identity. She was moving away from the ideological "home" of heterosexuality and did not know how where to go with her feelings of guilt and ambiguity.
For a long time I didn't deal with it. We went on living together. We had mutually, I mean we didn't talk about things very much but we had mentally sort of agreed that...we didn't have sex for a long time. We didn't do very much together. He did his own thing and I did my thing. There was always a feeling of tremendous guilt. That I should be, ... somehow... functioning better as a wife and mother. I felt as if I was the one who was letting down my side of the bargain... Because I didn't want sex, because I was beginning to lose interest in him. I didn't want to be a couple any longer.

For this woman, her learned gendered, heterosexual role within a marriage relationship left her feeling responsible for its breakdown. She did not question why her husband did not initiate conversations about improving their communication. In her relationship now, she says that she learned how to argue and yell and verbally communicate in ways that allowed her to express her needs in the relationship and hear the needs of her partner. It was, at first, scary for her, as her "comfort" was silence. Now she sees it as important to the health of her relationship with this woman.

It is complicated to discuss notions of home because we all have such different relationships to our re-membered homes. There is safety and danger in those memories. Pratt shows us that in re-mapping our geographical places of home, we can re-map the ideological homes that reside there. When I speak of shifting identities from heterosexual wife and mother to mother-lesbian, I speak of the "home" of heterosexuality. The urge to re-center the heteronormative "home" is strong.

Pratt re-examined the social geography of the (home)town in which she was raised, and deconstructed the ideology behind the positionings of public and private buildings. Some of the buildings, such as the courthouse, were conspicuously displayed as the “proud face” of the town while others, such as the lower class residences, were obscured as “shameful secrets”. She read archival records in order to locate herself, her family and her ancestors within systems of to understand how it came to be that the colour of skin, or the places of worship, or access to income were relative to the power of the individuals who occupied those spaces. Pratt's interpretive journey
is a very real, practical exercise that can be done. I did it. I went back in my mind's eye and looked differently at my home town. I saw the town hall on the hill in relation to the residences of the working-class, English speaking Italian-American sub-community where I was raised. This part of the small town was originally nicknamed "The Project" and later re-named "The Woodlands" as it upgraded, had its borders defined by a railroad, forest and roads. I noted the proximity of the tennis courts and private swimming pond to the upper-class residences called the "Cliff Estates", and the nameless middle-class residences which provided a buffer between the Cliff Estates and the Woodlands. I looked at the proximity of these amenities, the judicial buildings, the library, and the schools in relation to all three sections of this small town. I began to understand that it was no accident that in a small town of 30,000 people there were geographically separate neighbourhoods with defined boundaries arranged through landscaping and tree planting, styles and sizes of houses, schools which looked different from the outsides and insides, churches, proximity to town amenities and the one shopping centre, and the three country clubs. The control of power was reflected through the educated voices who had grown used to holding power and it was perpetuated through performing this power in town hall meetings. As Pratt did, I grew up restricted by the taken-for-granted aspect of the small town in which I was raised.

..I was shaped by my relation to those buildings, and to the people in the buildings, by ideas of who should be working in the Board of Education, of who should be in the bank handling money, of who should have the guns and keys who should be in the jail; and I was shaped by what I didn't see, or didn't notice, on those streets (Pratt, 1984, p.17).

It is this history that has led me to re-examine the stories of the women in a way that seeks to contest knowledge which contributes to normalized identities. A socio-political sense of what is "normal" is mediated through a personal sense of identity. For me, identities which reflect mainstream values are assumed to be "natural" and "normal" (Corrigan, 1985; Adams, 1994). What
is understood to be “right” and “normal” identities, are contradicted by our failure to remain consistent with “normalized” forms.

I am third generation Italian-American raised in a suburb of Boston, Massachusetts. The community in which I lived was populated with successful businessmen and professors from the many surrounding educational institutions (e.g. Harvard and Radcliffe). The residents who had power in the organization and running of the town placed an emphasis on higher education. Large percentages of students continued their schooling to the post secondary level. During my primary and secondary school years, I harboured thoughts about being positioned as less entitled to the American Dream. I learned to limit exposing such thoughts to the judgement of those speakers/teachers who would silence me. When I needed to release some of the tension that acts of daily silencing creates, I disguised my thoughts in my anger. My “outbursts” would “silence”, if only briefly, those who had limited the spaces in which I could explore my need to contest knowledge-claims. Teachers who did not encourage my challenge to western patriarchal thought, taught me to seek my answers elsewhere. I developed and used strategies to question “factual” school-knowledge and “identity-producing” school-training knowledge (hooks, 1994:56). “Factual”, “objective”, empirical, scientific knowledge was disrupted when I combined it with my experience. This did not make me an easy child/student for my parents or my teachers.

When it came time for me to consider post-secondary education, without scholarships or financial assistance, the prospect of school-incurred debt was overwhelming. I attempted to mediate the temptations of upward mobility through a “good education”, and my lived experience where debt felt incapacitating. This required me to mediate the knowledge of working-class realities with middle-class values. I experimented with transcending working class-ness. I was neither working-class nor middle-class, white nor non-white, American nor non-American, Italian nor non-Italian.
I was/am degrees of all these positions into which I assert my subjectivity. Fragmented and ambivalent identities were part of the fabric of my subject positions. As students, we were constructed as classed, sexed, gendered, raced, and ethnicized “future citizens”. On the cusp of working-class/middle-class, I understood my place in the discourse of “entitlement” and “individual rights” embedded in conservative liberalism (Adams, 1994: Chapter 2). It was my responsibility to transcend working-class, and it would be my fault, not the educational institution's, if I failed.

Adams reminds us that in the 1950s the normative nuclear family was romanticized like no other time in United States history. This was a specific historical period which followed six years of war. The disruption and loss associated with World War II were proceeded by a time of bolstering the economy and rebuilding the nation. Key to the project of stabilizing the nation was the reintegration of the men returning from the war. Women who had enjoyed relatively lucrative industrial wages, were made to vacate those jobs in the interest of rebuilding the nation.17 Even though for many women this meant a return to lower wages, the message was: return to the kitchen, look after the men, and rebuild the loss of national human resources through childrearing.18 Although emphasis on “the family” was not new, the shape it took was specific to this postwar period. The family, traditionally a site of economic interdependency and human survival, took on a new ideological dimension of love and self-fulfilment through nuclear family relationships. Familial ideology entrenched during this time has a stronghold well into the 1990s in all of North America.

Throughout my adolescence, I was not able to grasp as my own, white, male, middle-class values which espoused the “right” to be independent. I was more aligned with fulfilling my "duties" as a

17Here I refer to the film "Rosie the Riveter".

18The rebuilding of a nation and human resources is, of course, steeped in racialized and gendered practices, (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992: Chapter 2).
woman. In her article, Davies (1990) terms this the "The Problem of Desire". As feminists we might develop ideological constructs of how we desire to be in the world, which contradict our "feminine desire" (p.501). I interpreted and created for myself a "classed, gendered, version" of the "American Dream". What I could believe was that vicarious attainment of upward mobility through an "entitled" man was possible. I would be the guardian of the domestic sphere (Coontz, 1988) and my reward was the television version of the "American Dream": a house, a home, and children—all in abundance. The idea of two women having children together, for me, had not yet been "invented".

Brought up in an upper middle-class town, my "dream" was a particular classed version of the American dream. I wanted what I saw was available to my friends from very wealthy families. I wanted to travel the world without money anxieties. I understood the desire for accumulating money to be an enjoyment of material comforts. I was not able to connect money to the power dynamics within upper and middle classes who have access to that money.

My resistance eventually found a space. After leaving my home of origin, I found people and places who affirmed my questioning and began to think that perhaps there was validity in not deferring to the "educated" voices of the press, books, and more "qualified" family and friends. After joining the hordes of itinerant middle-class travellers of the seventies, I worked my way around the world.19 In England I met "the man of my dreams". In 1974 we were married. Following ten years

19I experienced life as a middle class white woman in a way I had never been able to in the United States. Merely mentioning that I was from the U.S. assigned my body with wealth, wealth I did not have but was perceived as having. When I mentioned the town I was from, when recognized, greater wealth was bestowed upon me. I was more white, less ethnic, and much wealthier. I rarely mentioned that my ancestors were from Italy. I played with my identity while travelling. In a way I "passed" for something I was not. When it became necessary for me to "pass" as lesbian while I was still making the transition, and now when I "pass" for straight, the feelings are reminiscent of the days when I "passed"
of travelling and living in different countries I ended up back in North America. Here I determined to finish a drawn-out process of higher education.

In my mid-thirties, I had access to education without incurring debt. My husband's salary provided the material comforts to pay for another woman to fulfil household duties I would not have time to complete. I had engaged with the comforts of middle class life and with power dynamics which allowed me access to education at the expense of someone who did not have access to that position. I still maintained responsibility of the domestic sphere, and it continued to occupy the bulk of my day, but I delegated enough to make it possible for me to study. When my fourth child was a year old I returned to finish an undergraduate degree. Formal education began to make more sense to me when I discovered feminist studies. The courses I took encouraged investigating and challenging of epistemologies. One of the first courses I took was Feminist Theory. Here I encountered a whole book about challenging epistemologies (Bannerji et al, 1991). I began to understand that my individual experience of being marginalized was made possible through institutionalized, political constructions of heterosexism, racism, sexism, and classism. After analysing an article by Linda Carty I saw my positions of marginalization as both "inside" and "outside" a political construct.

In her article "Black Women in Academia", Linda Carty (1991) theorizes her experiences as a Black woman negotiating her way through white Eurocentric academic institutions. She identifies how knowledge is produced and claimed as "true" by those in positions of power and dominance.

The history which Black women bring to academia is not recognized because academic discourse can only reflect the interests and concerns of its creators. As such, most theorizing for white and middle class.

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I owe a great debt to Julia Creet who taught this course and to my fellow students who gave so much of their time, energies, and sophisticated thoughts which created opportunities for true intellectual growth.
about knowledge and the process of knowledge validation within this society's context has been Eurocentric, white and male (Carty, 1991:p.17).

I was able to empathize with the feeling of being silenced in a classroom where my "experience" was overshadowed by those whose experiences were being reflected by the information being taught.

The paper I wrote began:

Upon the first reading of Linda Carty's chapter in *Unsettling Relations*, "Black Women in Academia" (Bannerji et al, 1991) I understood her to be explaining her experience of negotiating academic institutions that made no effort to accommodate her identity as a female Caribbean-Black Canadian academic. I understood her to have resisted the dominant ideologies while not allowing them to defeat her. I perceived her as an outsider, who was able to work within the academic institution and validate for herself her own knowledge claims. She seemed able to do this while adopting the tools she needed to create space for her experience of knowledge within the conventional system. I first understood her to be creating space in the educational institutions for me.

The second time I read Carty's chapter, the following quote stood out and demanded that I separate myself from the text. There were no white, Italian American working class women present (paper for an undergraduate course).

Like white, middle class men before them feminist theorists have assumed a legitimacy which has been obtained through the oppression of other women. In doing so, we attempt to strive for a commonality among women, but what we accomplish is a stand of authority and superiority (Carty, 1991:p.31).

I began to understand that at the same time I was feeling validated, I was being implicated. I held privilege that I had never acknowledged. I learned that from the perspective of a "Black Woman in Academia", knowledge claims are white, male, and eurocentric. I am not male, but I am white and eurocentric. Carty's article taught me that knowledge claims are contestable at multiple sites and from varying perspectives. This does at least two things. It opens up possibilities of deconstructing practices of knowledge production. It also critically examines how we are variously implicated in knowledge production, depending upon the positions we occupy as subjects in relation to that knowledge (Dei, 1996; Carty, 1991).
If spaces are opened which acknowledge the existence of marginalized groups and individuals who elude affirmation by the (re)production of dominant knowledge claims, something is gained at the expense of something that is lost. Who stands to gain and who stands to lose? (Razack, 1994). Those whose values and histories are reflected and reproduced through dominant discourses must give some things up. What makes it possible for anyone to give something up? In order to deconstruct dominant discourses, we must look at how they are produced and who produces them. It is my intention here to shift the emphasis away from what is produced, the knowledge itself, to how it is produced. Acknowledging that multiple sources of knowledge production are present within practices of learning allows different perspectives to be seen as valid producers of knowledge. Along with validity, allowing different perspectives—for example different experiences—introduces contestations of dominant discourses as legitimate (Scott, 1992).

It was through a route of hearing voices, like Carty's, contesting dominant knowledge claims, that I began to understand intersecting and conflicting oppressions. And this led me to examine how knowledge production shapes identity formations, which in turn led me to acknowledge sexual orientation as a produced identity. If sexual orientation is a produced identity, it can never be fully stable, coherent or completed. It will continue to be open to changes, nuances and tensions.

I wonder how we look back on our family experiences in which we have a familiarity and re-examine them with an analytic double-take? Is there enough "safety" in those memories? If our families wore the face of hegemony can our “double-take” resist reinscribing those norms? Can we move away from, apart from, what we learned to accept as normalized?

There are many different identities assumed by many different groups and individuals. The normalization of identities is embedded in practices of classism, racism, sexism and more. In reference to this project, the identity, “once married mother-lesbian” balances contradictions
inherent in identities resting outside the normalized version of both "mother" (which reflects heterosexuality, families, and children)\textsuperscript{21} and "lesbian", (which grows out of discourses on homosexuality, female friendships, and patriarchy) and mother-lesbian (which contains histories of heterosexuality, homosexuality and parenthood). Is it possible to hold this tension, which requires resistance to internalized messages of "right" and "normal", and still feel intact as a "right" and "normal" person? There are normalized notions of mother and lesbian contextualized both by hetero and homo sexualities. As we journey from "wedded wife to lesbian life" (Abbott & Farmer, 1995) what do we hold onto and transform into--against the backdrop of notions of "normal" families?

\textsuperscript{21}Each of these categories in parenthesis is meant to stir up thoughts about how each part of the term 'mother-lesbian' contains complimentary AND contradictory concepts that interact with each other. The list is not complete and the words I use are invitations to think around the categories themselves.
CHAPTER FOUR

Normalization of Traditional Familial Discourses

There is much discussion about just what constitutes a family in Canada in the 1990s. Statistics Canada divides family into two categories, "census" and "economic" (Fox & Luxton, 1993:21). A "census family" is a heterosexual couple co-habiting with or without children, or a lone parent living with one or more unmarried children. An "economic family" is a group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage, adoption, and those who share common residence. These definitions restrict state supported family structures to blood or marriage ties and co-residence. Arrangements which include same-sex partners, inter-generational sibling support, or other relationships which provide daily emotional and economic support are excluded. The welfare of individuals and established familial units is threatened when policies built on these restricted notions of "family" are used to establish eligibility for social benefits (Eichler, 1988). Same sex couples who are not recognized as "family" by the state or by legal family members, have had their access to loved ones restricted in times of greatest need such as death or hospitalization (Eichler, 1995:26).

It is an interesting exercise to stop and think about who we include in our own definition of family. Is it your family of origin? Is it a family you have created within Statistics Canada's definition of "census" or "economic" family? If you live in an arrangement that does not fit this definition, what are the grounds for calling it a family? What are your expectations for being supported---socially by your community and economically by your government?

Below are some quotes from people who were involved in a two year study on "unconventional families in the 90's" (Fox & Fumia, 1993:Chapter 29). Though these quotes were not included in
the article cited above, they capture the how families who define themselves as "alternate" do not reproduce a strong heteronormative standard. They were asked, "How do you define 'family'?".

...a nurturing environment, to me, more the environment, one that has love and nurturing, I don't think its so much a mother and a father, a male or female, it's more the environment of people who love each other. (A donor/father of one daughter, co-parent with the lesbian, birth mother.)

I mainly define family as people that are committed to support each other. (Lesbian co-parent of man quoted above.)

I think any group, any collective of people who are supporting a lifestyle together...people who are there not just for the purpose of work but for living as well. [People] living in the same physical space and [who] take responsibility for the well-being in all senses, of one another. To me, that's a family. (A mother who equally shares hours of professional work and domestic work with her male partner.)

I have a more strict definition of family...Family is kids. No kids, no family. A couple yes, but not family.(The male partner of the woman quoted above.)

Two other definitions contribute to complex notions of how family is regarded.

...the smallest, organized, durable network of kin and non-kin who interact daily, providing domestic needs of children and assuring their survival (Stack, 1974:32).

...family is the ideological, normative concept that recruits people to household relations of production, reproduction and consumption (Fox & Luxton, 1993:23).

"Family" seems to be both an ideology and a set of relationships. I would push this even further and say that "family" is a set of ideological constructs embedded in and reinscribed through state policies and sets of relationships. I consider that the particular ways in which we think about "family" are social constructs, and not a pre-determined, "natural" occurrence. Notions of family are formed through discourses and personal experiences within families. Although they are concretely real, they are discursively produced.
Specific to this enquiry is an understanding of what constitutes "family". How is such a construction either legitimized or rejected by the state, those within the immediate and wider community of families, and the individuals I interview?

Normalization, Foucault writes, produces "an average that must be respected...a conformity that must be achieved." As a form of social regulation, normalization defines and limits the choices that are available to us (Adams, 1994:24).

Normalization draws attention to discourses and practices that produce subjects positioned as "normal" and who find it hard to imagine anything different. There is no such thing as a "normal" category unless it is defined as such. State formation and cultural relations are normalized to benefit those represented by the hegemonic norm and harm those who are positioned outside it (Corrigan&Sayer, 1985:4). While trying to distinguish between "normal" and "deviant", Durkheim identified "normal" as "those social conditions that are most generally distributed..." (in Zeitlin, 1987:242). His point was that "deviance" is normal. Zeitlin paraphrases:

It is not the intrinsic quality of the actions themselves that confers a criminal character upon them. It is rather the definition that is placed on those acts by the dominant consensus (p.244).

Durkeim makes a distinction between what a society views normal from what constitutes a "norm" in that society. Social control which regulates behaviour is not necessarily based on social practices which are the norm, though they may be normalized. Rather, social control which regulates behaviour may be based on "deviant" practices. Regarding family discourse, the nuclear family is clearly no longer the norm. Statistic Canada reported that in 1986 only 18% of families reflect this model (Fox, 1993:154). Yet the nuclear family continues to be the "normal" standard against which family structures are measured (Ontario Law Reform Commission, 1993:8). Arrangements which differ are termed "non-conventional" or "alternate". Hybridity within family arrangements, crossing borders of cultures, races, classes, and genders, are seen as "abnormal" and
"deviant" from the normalized referent of western, European, white family (Fox, 1993). Language and rituals which reflect practices unfamiliar to dominant discourses are lost in the silences. Opportunities to "speak" them into a place within the mainstream are limited. Often a week, or a month (for example Black History Month), is set aside to share and acknowledge different races, sexualities and cultures which form the multiple positions from which people experience their (family) lives in Canada in the 1990s.

Collective and personal identification make it possible to legitimize some practices and not others (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985). People are identified by the state in both individual and collective ways. The state individualizes people in specific ways, as parents, as taxpayers, and citizens for example. Corrigan and Sayer point out that certain cultural forms are given weight by the very routines and rituals performed by the state apparatus (p.5). For them, moral regulation is the social and political project of rendering "natural" the perspectives and ideologies of hegemonic interests.

Mariana Valverde supports this claim, and says that "[m]oral reform, like moral regulation generally seeks to construct and organize both social relations and individual consciousness in such ways as to legitimate certain institutions and discourse—the patriarchal nuclear family, racist policies—from the point of view of morality" (Valverde, 1993:167).

If behaviours are regulated through a process of normalizing one form while constructing all others as deviant, what are the stakes when we deviate through culture, race, sexual orientation, or class?

It must be remembered that we claim agency through subject positions, however limited our "choices". This course of action does provide responses of resistance, though resistance is limited to historical, political, and social "moments" of opportunity. As Foucault says, power never moves in only one direction. There is room for contesting normalized ideologies.
Discourse transmits and produces power; reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it... (Foucault, 1978:100-2).

When women step outside normalized discourses of "woman", "mother", "wife", and "heterosexuality" they step outside the positions of privilege those discourses offer. Deciding to live as once married mother-lesbians requires risk-taking while holding onto certain aspects of privilege, such as those that come with skin colour and middle-class-ness.

When I set out to create my own family I did not question that my unit would be traditional, heterosexual, and nuclear in form. Though I have managed to maintain an appearance of this "form", the functioning of the family often contradicts the outward appearance. If I speak the contradictions and let them take a form other than the face of the traditional family, I experience varying degrees of resistance from my family of origin and my community. Desiring to push boundaries which constitute "family" within my community rather than re-building an entirely new and different community requires me to hold onto aspects of traditional constructions at the same time that I shift away from them. For myself and the women I interviewed, the desire to hold onto a "traditional" geographic and emotional place where we have raised our children has involved much agony, as we feel ourselves expelled from those spaces. The women have had to reconfigure families and re-identify themselves as mothers and sometimes as partners. The re-configuring and re-identifying are mixtures of both finding new ways to explain our realities and re-claiming old familiar ones. One woman told her husband, her children, her mother, and her sister. Attempting to stay within the confines of what had constituted her "family" was not easy. For the first time in her life, her mother did not phone her on her birthday. Her husband retained the family home, and their children continued to live there. The children were extremely angry and told their mother that her being a lesbian was "the most shameful things in their lives".
...[He] had no intention of making the kids be with me...you know I couldn't believe this, it was awful...

[My sister] got into feeling badly for [my husband] and some of that family stuff. Holiday stuff, she felt badly for him and the kids were with him and ah...she invited them for (Christmas) dinner and not me! ...

Oh god, its very hard because I'm without my kids right now.

The pivotal point seemed to be not that there was a shift in their own experiences of their identities, but rather a realization that they could no longer maintain a life that had defined them and their womanhood as heterosexual mothers and wives. If identifications change and shift, what do we hang onto in the process of transformation? What are the forces that compel us to let go of those things which we are reluctant to be without and what are the risks as we do this? Along with a move away from heterosexual wife, came a personal and political redefining of our identity as mother. This is not to say that what we had was lost forever, but that the change required a different understanding for ourselves, our children, our husbands, and how that "new" definition was met by the community and the legal system.

Families are regulated on the basis of their morality—as normalized by the state—not on the basis of how they function (Eichler, 1995). This restricts the ways in which we might organize our families. Those positioned outside a "normalized" nuclear structure are left vulnerable, often without necessary support (Eichler, 1988; 1995).

Familial discourses can be considered in terms of how families function rather than how they represent a normalized conception. Normalized conceptions place emphases on at least appearing to function, regardless of the variety of ways families dys-function, abuse, mental illness, insufficient economic structures, etc. I will not examine the various ways that families dysfunction, other than to say that if the real experiences of "dysfunctional" families are revealed, the state must take at least partial responsibility. The construction of "dysfunction" itself organizes the "functional" family.
How is it that one construction requires the "other" in order to reproduce itself? Dysfunction only works against a functional backdrop and vice versa. Why is it then, that some families which actually do function are viewed as dysfunctional and families that dysfunction are viewed as functional? One of the women spoke of her relationship with a friend which became a lesbian relationship. For them it was a gradual process. Their transitions included emotionally transporting their children and one of the women's husband along with their own process of understanding their changed identities.

When we were together in the beginning it was so new and we didn't know if it was going to last so we kept it quiet. We didn't feel it was abnormal. To us it felt right. And that's why I guess we never [wanted to deceive our children or friends].

Yet it was more complicated when they told their story. Although they struggle to keep their family of two women, one man and six children, perceived by themselves and others as "normal", and although they can explain in detail the conditions of their arrangements to close friends, they censure what they say to other friends, family and work acquaintances who would not view their arrangements as functional. They discussed one of the younger children going to camp. They were concerned that this child understood exactly how his family is different, and that talking freely about it might be misunderstanding by the other campers and counsellors.

First woman: Just a question and answer like, you know, that the three of us are living together now do you have any questions? Do you have any concerns?

Second woman: I still think you should warn him that its very unusual.

First woman: That's what I mean!

Second woman: Unfortunately, I mean, its society that's the problem, its not our relationship. Its hard to tell kids that this is totally normal and this is ok but don't talk about it.

If the emphasis is re-ordered, that is, if the functioning of families is spotlighted rather than the how families appear---mom, dad, and the kids----a space is opened for individuals and communities
to understand families as functioning units rather than measuring them against a prescribed notion of what "functioning family" means. Preconceived concepts of "normal" prevent families from being able to speak their lived realities. One woman I interviewed for another project had this to say about the split between the public face and the private reality of her family.

...my entire children's upbringing has been really crazy and yet I always try to package and present myself as if I have this nice little nuclear family set up, when I couldn't...
It was always arranged so that publicly we could appear as a single unit. If the boys were with either father, there was no difference...I banned words like half brother...

The private, lived reality of this family becomes invisible, while the public face of the "traditional family" remains intact. It addresses this woman's perception of a contradiction between the "normalized" monogamous nuclear family and the "abnormalized" lived reality of serial monogamy. There is a legacy to her thinking. In the mid-twentieth century, Ontario courts redirected its focus on laws pertaining to family matters. They moved away from police courts towards newly established family courts (Chunn, 1992). Statements such as the following indicate how family was "normalized" and morally regulated through the state.

The family is the basic unit of society and out from it flows the renewal of all social and national life.

...[there is an] overriding belief that the monogamous, heterosexual nuclear family unit was the only appropriate environment for children (Chunn, 1992:166).

While intending to unsettle existing hegemony, new forms of hegemonic power-knowledge structures may replace old ones (Gore, 1993:61). Looking for ways to open spaces for considering different forms of family life, without reasserting hegemonic forms, requires an alternative connection between power and knowledge. As I have already discussed, normalized knowledge claims that are "assumed" to be true, claim power and space in dominant discourses which exclude epistemologies and lived experiences outside those power-knowledge structures. If connections
between power and knowledge are deconstructed, named, and spoken, then a point of entry for different epistemologies may become possible. Margrit Eichler comments that unless families can be accurately named, reflecting the realities of how they operate, state policies cannot hope to serve its purpose in offering families needed support.

Our conceptual apparatus has not kept pace with these developments. There are now a multitude of familial relationships for which we have not yet evolved the language to describe them appropriately (Eichler, 1995:2).

...we no longer know what the terms husband and wife, father and mother actually mean (p.3).

One point of entry is through focusing on family as "functioning" units rather than continuing to define and regulate what those functioning units must look like. Implicit in this approach is the imposition of a "uniformity of experience", or what she terms "monolithic bias", within family units (Eichler, 1995:10). She suggests that the assumption of uniformity amongst and between families "severely underrepresents the actual diversity".

This happens if someone argues that any particular type of family—defined by its composition, e.g. two heterosexual adults and their biological or adopted children—is the single "best" family form to deal with whatever problems have been identified, rather than examining in what types of structures the identified problems are actually best handled (Eichler, 1995:10).

Can there be a shift away from family units which are morally and legally regulated as "functional" and therefore acceptable, to units which function in the "best way possible"? A further question becomes evident as soon as such oppositional stances such as "functional/ dysfunctional" are posed. Which families "function the best way possible", and who decides what those ways are? How can different ways of conceptualizing families be legitimized? Can varying forms of family arrangements be explored, taught, and supported through institutions, communities and the state? Of course, my hope is that there are spaces for continual shiftings of different forms of families which reflect lived realities rather than a monolithic notion of what "the family" "should" look like.
Although I want to avoid a romanticized view of just how flexible western society is to changing faces of family forms, the slogans such as: "WE ARE FAMILY" and "I HAVE TWO MOTHERS" used in support of Lesbian and Gay headed families across North America, indicate that there is movement to change how "families" are conceptualized.

Nicola Gavey explains that Foucault helps us to see that "disciplinary power" (Gavey, 1993:96) regulates us through a presence of power, rather than through power itself. "Disciplinary power" works in such a way that we come to be self-regulating. The authoritarian power is lodged within us, and we regulate our own behaviour. For instance, I am afraid to display my love for my same sex partner in case people walking towards us are homophobic. I am disciplined in a heterosexist society not to be openly homosexual. Discipline, like most concepts, is complex, not fixed. There are spaces, limited though they are, where I can let down that guard. When I walk down the lesbian and gay positive Church Street in Toronto I freely hold my partner's hand. I listened to a news broadcast after Lesbian and Gay Pride Day in Toronto in 1996 report that homosexuals walked down the street "enjoying the freedom on this one day a year that heterosexuals enjoy and take for granted everyday". One of the women in this study remarked,

“Well, as I say I've met this woman and we were together for a weekend. Having to go out in public and not being able to touch her or hold her hand...having to be wary, having to worry about who's around. It's sad, and I feel fear as well. ...We sat in the park behind 510 where the AIDS memorial is and we did hold hands and we touched each other. And that did feel safe because of all those apartment buildings around are inhabited by gays..."

The discipline does not come from a place inside me that knows it is "right" or "wrong" to be a lesbian, but I am regulated to understand that it is wrong. In Toronto in 1996, there are a few places, and one a day year when I experience the safety of not feeling “deviant” from heterosexual discourses which regulate my lesbian identity. Yet at most times it is like a sixth sense. If walking down most streets in Toronto I forget and drop my geographical vigilance and reach out to touch my
partner or hold her hand, the contact with her skin reminds me with a jolt of adrenaline to be careful, someone who is not safe might be watching. We may sometimes choose to ignore these knee-jerk warnings, but the warnings are experienced as constant.

Can women who become lesbians after having lived in heterosexual relationships and had children with a man expect to find a safe place in this society? As well, how is that a woman who is an adequate, loving mother can be denied the opportunity to raise her children, because she declares she is a lesbian?

**Hate is not a family word.**

In 1995 in Ontario there was (and it is still ongoing) a debate about the rights of same sex couples. Though this is not quite the focus of this project, I raise it here because it becomes part of where the women travel to in their migration. Issues dealing with same sex rights highlight different forms of functioning family units. Heterosexual and homosexual relationships amongst couples are more complex than the sexuality shared between them. Yet words like "sado-masochism", "paedophilia" and others are used to discuss same sex relationships. The language available and used in Ontario (in Canada and in states such as Oregon, the "No on 9" campaign for social security benefits for same sex couples in the workplace) when discussing homosexuality reflect ways that dominant discourses are positioned as normal while alternate discourses are positioned as "deviant". The alternate family's "deviance" is in relation to the normalized traditional nuclear family.

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22 A slogan for Foundation for Equal Families, a group formed in 1994 to fight for lesbian and gay rights after the Ontario Legislature defeated Bill 167, which aimed to extend benefits to same sex partners.

23 Video taped from television program, shown in class (Dehli, 3975), April 1995.
One of Toronto's major newspapers, The Globe and Mail, ran a front page story about four lesbian couples who were granted permission to legally adopt their partner's biological children, children they had been raising as a couple, in a "family" (May 11, 1995). This report was not accompanied by photographs. The changing face of family, including lesbian couples, was represented in a limited, faceless way. I do not think it was coincidence that on Monday, May 15, 1995 The Globe and Mail ran a story written by a man about the dangers of unsafe sex in bath houses, "Close the Doors of the Bathhouses". This article was accompanied by a drawing of a naked man, standing with his eyes closed in a room dimly lit with shadows all around. He is being embraced from behind by the arms of a skeleton. There is an angel at his left side, kneeling and praying atop a gravestone. There is much to deconstruct in this picture but the dangers of homosexuality are explicit, ultimately ending in death. It is unusual for such an explicit account of a certain aspect of homosexual life to appear in such a prominent position in this conservative paper. It appeared on the back page in the feature section "Facts and Arguments". In the context of the previous week's news, The Globe and Mail's normative viewpoint was re-established. Homosexuality was put back in its "deviant" place. It belongs in the bath house where people transmit AIDS. The author signed the piece as a "former hedonist who learned safer sex and self-regulation". A call for the closure of the bath houses suggests that AIDS does not provide the "disciplinary power" to prevent unsafe sex, therefore the state must intervene to regulate sexual activity.

At the moment when a different form of family was being spoken into existence, the discursive space was shut, at least temporarily, by reasserting the fear of "immoral" behaviour.

The following quote is from a woman who is living with both her children and her same sex lover/partner and husband/partner under the same roof. When the women first discovered their love for each other and began to spend time with each other and each other's children, they balanced the
tensions amongst heterosexual identities as wives and mothers and how people would “read” them, and their identities as homosexual women. They shun the term “lesbian” throughout the interview, though the term slips in and out of usage throughout the two-hour long interview.

_We found it not too difficult because we did go away...together...with the kids...you see, when you see two women and as long as its not too grossly sexual in front of anybody, nobody really questions it._

The “normal” behaviour would be not to exhibit overt sexual expression between two women, though an amount of sexualized “affection” is tolerated. They could “pass” for “normal” mothers vacationing without their husbands, and it would not be assumed that they were lesbians. Later on in the interview one of the women comments:

_We didn’t feel it [the relationship] was abnormal. To us it felt right._

She goes on to say that they told "just about everybody", but upon further questioning her partner had told all her family but not her parents or her deceased husband’s parents. She had told her own parents "everything we're doing except for the fact that we sleep in the same room. I told them we consider ourselves one family." Contradictions within the above statements about who they tell and do not tell reflects their need to conform.

_Normalization, Foucault writes, produces "an average that must be respected...a conformity that must be achieved" (Adams, 1994)._

_Though hegemonic discourses are difficult to unsettle, it is not impossible to do so. While I employ a trope "mother-lesbian" in order to unsettle hegemonic discourses of family, I risk reinstating "mother-lesbian" as a category which has its own rules of membership. Is it possible to partially borrow ideologies and mix various discourses? For instance, are the two women who live with a man and maintain both same sex and opposite sex intimate relations excluded from lesbianism and heterosexuality, or included in both? Or do they fall under another category altogether, say bi-


sexual. Does it matter? If they do not name themselves, can I name them? Yet, I continue to include them in my discussion of mother-lesbian. Discourses are limited and cannot contain identities which both exceed or never fit the categories shaped by them. The words of the women I interviewed provide an avenue for exploring how it is that discourses both shape, and are shaped by, the lives we lead.
CHAPTER FIVE

Identity (trans)Formations

Interviewing provides a method for trying to understand the everyday, lived experiences of women whose identities are shifting dramatically. In order to keep buoyant the tensions between how "we" think and how we act, I want to contextualize experience through an interrogation into paradigmatic structures which inform identities. Frames of references developed within specific paradigms, such as compulsory heterosexuality, become lenses through which we, as members of a group, interpret how we come to know and embody an identity. I suggest that there are at least two parts in the

24 I am conscious of employing a generic "we". I am not sure how to use the language available to me to indicate that I am speaking from my own social and political location on the one hand, yet am referring to other women who intersect with that location. I am not representing an all-inclusive standpoint from a homogenized category of "woman". To use the pronoun "I" is inadequate, as is the pronoun "we", but at least the word "we" indicates more than one, isolated, individual perspective.

25 For a more complete discussion of how "experience" can interrupt hegemonic knowledge claims and at the same time render an authorial, narrative position unquestionable, see Joan Scott's, "Experience" (Scott, 1992:22-40). The problem becomes that while attempting to unsettle one knowledge claim, another is put in its place as "settled". A more useful method would be to continually work back and forth across/amongst multiple positions in order to interrupt notions of fixed positions or ultimate truths.

26 I am using very broad strokes in order to focus my discussion on specific ways in which identities are constituted. For this purpose I do not include the multiplicity of positions within each "membership". I will attend to that in the chapter on subject positions. I want to mark here that the differences are extremely relevant and important.
process of identifying. One is identification of/with a politically codified cohort, say, "mothers"—my role as a mother. In this instance, "mother" is embedded in normalized, state-regulated discourses of heterosexuality, womanhood, whiteness, and more. The other is identifying as a mother within the "mother" cohort—I am a mother. This position also signals to how I exercise my agency within motherhood, and that my performance of "mother" is not fixed by motherhood discourses. Diana Fuss argues that there has been a drive by feminist academics to integrate the "personal" with the "political" (Fuss, 1989: Chapter 6). Though this might achieve the goal of unsettling hegemonic forms, there are costs when the process travels too quickly over the territory of developing identities.

What is missing in many of the treatises on lesbian identity is a recognition of the precarious status of identity and a full awareness of the complicated processes of identity formation, both psychical and social. What is missing is...an investigation of the shifting grounds marked not only by the slippery notion of identity but by the elusive status of politics as well. (Fuss, 1989:100)

This is how I am using this:

There are ways of examining how day-to-day lived experiences intersect with the "elusive status of politics" through regulated structures of language and codes of behaviour. Codes and signs, though not fixed and unchangeable in themselves, nevertheless have certain prescribed forms which inform both the performance of identities and how those identities are politically located. The ways in which an individual exercises her own agency to either comply or resist codes of behaviours or moral regulation reflect or deny parts of her "identity" (Butler, 1990:136-41). An individual who is in the process of "performing" or "representing" an identity, does so within the wider political framing of that identity. Both the performance of that identity and the political framework are mediated by each other and therefore infinitely (re)negotiable. For example, the following is a quote from a woman in the study who performed her "woman identity" in accordance with heteronormative expectations of her father and later women with whom she associated.
...[My father who was an educated man, when we were talking about college, his comment to me, and this was only what thirty years ago, "the boys need the education, you don't because you will get married and someone will look after you".]

( ) He was only saying what I already knew because that's the way I'd been brought up. ( ) I worked...and when I got pregnant with my first child I stopped working, and that's the way it was, women in the circles that I moved in didn't have a job.

When her children were grown, this woman began to see that her life view was "narrow".

I've done a lot of group work, a lot of moving outside the sort of rather narrow life and expectations that I had of seeing different sorts of people. ( ) I think it gave me a grasp of the possibilities that were out there. That the way in which I lived wasn't the only "right" way.

The woman quoted above re-negotiated her "woman identity" over a thirty-year period. The "political" framework is a combination of how she experiences the normative family and how she is positioned within that normative construct. She explored her identity further as she exercised her agency to comply and resist aspects of her "woman identity" within that framework.

In the following quote a woman speaks about shifting away from heterosexual "friendships". Her need is to have her lesbian identity acknowledged and affirmed. Her participation in heterosexual relationships prevented her from disclosing significant aspects of herself. She felt herself negated as a "good" person because she could no longer "perform" heterosexual wife and mother.

I totally shifted friends and all the people that I used to see because so many of those friends were friends that we had as a couple. Ummm, once I learned what it really was like to be friends with people, I realized how shallow many of these friendships were. ...I don't think I ever sat down and said, "I'm going to change my life", it happened... ...I think that I spent my whole life doing what I was supposed to do. I was a good wife, a good mother, a good daughter, and suddenly I wasn't playing by the rules any more. So I wasn't so nice in everybody's eyes. You know, which makes you feel that you count only because of what you did rather than who you are and what your journey is and what your pain is, you know? ...Coming out at the age of fifty is hard!

I don't know how to answer, "How does it happen?". It's a gradual process of knowing.

Her ambivalent identity as heterosexual wife and mother was more comfortable and acceptable to those around her than her identity as a lesbian. Her understanding of what was expected of her was that the first was "good" and the second was "bad".
She adds,

_You were talking about the theme of duality earlier, I found it very interesting. "Good girl, bad girl...I feel that really strongly I use to be a god girl and now I'm a bad girl. ....Depending) on who's asking. You don't think I'm a bad girl, my family thinks I'm a bad girl._

Contradictions are an integral aspect of understanding identities because they are shifting and because they are constituted by and through a combination of political and personal experiences. For the women I interviewed, some of the political debates and struggles in Toronto in 1995-96 have prepared fertile ground for contesting compulsory heterosexuality. Some of these come out of The Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedom, which states in Section 15(1): "Every individual is equal before and under the law..." and cannot be discriminated against on the bases of sex. The very existence of groups such as The Coalition of Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario creates spaces and a discourse for lesbians, and potential lesbians, to name their experience and to act politically in that name. The political interventions of this group, and others engaged in similar projects, (e.g. NDP Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Caucus, Campaign for Equal Families) to seek legislated legal rights for lesbians and gays open the space even further (Ursel, 1995). Human rights laws intended to protect lesbians and gays are not always effective (Rosenbloom (ed.), 1995). The intervention of politically organized groups of lesbians and gays brings formerly invisible positions into existence. Lesbians have been less visible in (male) homosexual discourses. A key aspect of political movements fighting for homosexual rights is thus to position lesbians in gay male discourses. This again broadens the spaces in which women can explore lesbian, bisexual and transgendered identities.
When I am listening to a national morning talk show while sitting with my children over breakfast and stories about lesbian rights or same-sex marriage are repeatedly broadcast, it opens a space for me as a lesbian and my children as the children of a lesbian, to feel acknowledged, if not always approved, by the society in which we are immersed. When the front page of a national newspaper highlights two lesbian couples in Ontario who are given the right to adopt the children they have raised from birth (Globe and Mail, May 11, 1995) the subject positions of lesbians are made available, and perhaps more acceptable, in this society. Political movements bring language and conversations into homes and open social and discursive spaces for "normalizing" social positions that were once seen as deviant.27

Identities, though differently constructed and experienced, require spaces to be made available in order to be explored. Political identities are constituted by and through personal experiences of identities; as well, personal identities are constituted by and through political identities (Fuss, 1989: p.100). Judith Butler writes about the temptation to neatly package discourses on identities.

27Just this morning before I turned on my computer, I listened, with my fifteen year old son to CBC Metro Morning report the "win" by lesbians and gays gained this week. Although same sex benefits were extended to workers in the public sector, this right was revoked. The right has now been re-instated. October 6, 1996, CBC Morning Radio.

28As I write this section I am questioning that I am implicitly centering a white, middle class lesbian identity. Who listens to the CBC morning radio and has time to eat breakfast with their children and discuss the issues broadcast? This re-inscription of my social position is both an attempt to acknowledge who I am and work within those restrictions, and examine how my position of dominance in western (white supremacy) patriarchy allows me to continually center this position. The national radio program might reflect a "deviant" position of lesbian and gay realities, but parts of MY identity are reinforced within hegemonic constructs of women and mothers.
If identity is asserted through a process of signification, if identity is always already signified, and yet continues to signify as it circulates within various interlocking discourses, then the question of agency is not to be answered through recourse to an "I" that preexists signification. In other words, the enabling conditions for an assertion of "I" are provided by the structure of signification, the rules that regulate the legitimate and illegitimate invocation of that pronoun. ... Language is not an exterior medium or instrument into which I pour a self and from which I glean reflection of that self (Butler, 1990:143).

This quote pin points what I am struggling to achieve, through the words of the women I interviewed. It shows me how difficult it is to sustain the dynamics between "subjects" and "discourses". My attempts to open discursive spaces for once married mother-lesbians have the danger of defining a category which limits the possibilities for individuals who live that experience. In the interview with the women who refuse the label "lesbian", and continue to live with one of the husbands, the structure of signification I have called upon limits their spaces. I have concentrated on the transition away from heterosexuality to lesbianism. Where do women who continue to engage in both discourses fit? There will be many situations where women do not fit into my desire to frame once married mother-lesbians through language by which "I glean a reflection of myself".

The whole of our subjectivities as white middle-class women coupled with the whole of the political and social worlds we encounter signify the spaces we (can)(desire to) inhabit. Any attempts to cling to a notion of a "whole" will fail, since there will always be something which exceeds the construct. Even as I try to write of multiple subjectivities, it is "exhausting" to acknowledge all the possibilities. Butler attributes this "exhaustion" to the impossibility to "posit identity once and for all" (p. 143).
Language cannot be reduced to a process of signification separate from its social construction. No form of representation can be so reduced. Several examples of this are offered in the words of the women I interviewed. Most of the women (re)presented themselves at one point in their lives as heterosexual wives through the donning of skirts and dresses and "uncomfortable shoes". When they began to identify as lesbians and were no longer entirely within heterosexual paradigms, they relinquished certain styles of dress and replaced them with others that represented them differently. The way in which the woman in the following quote speaks, explicates the kinds of contradictions actions and speech create.

*I stopped wearing skirts and dresses and uncomfortable shoes...gave all my dresses away! ...I'm not dressing to have a certain look at all of any sort, like I really am comfortable. Lots of women dress like lesbians these days, really short hair, white T-shirts and jeans, right? I bought myself a jean jacket that was 'dykey'.*

The denial of a "certain look", is inconsistent with her actively discarding skirts and dresses which codify her feminine heterosexuality. This is not to say that all heterosexual women wear dresses, nor that no lesbian women do, simply that this woman's changing identity found an aspect of representation through the mapping of clothes on her body. Bodily representations can be used to send messages which avoid drawing attention to sexual orientation or gender on the part of those who look. Bodily representations also provide forms to unsettle fixed identities, confusing the onlooker. And during times of identity shifts and negotiations, these forms become grounds for experimentation.

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29I employ the much-reduced term "social construction" in order to unencumber otherwise bulky language. It should be noted, however, that my use of this term signals multifaceted dimensions of "social construction", eg. race, class, gender, ability, within specifically defined time periods of political histories.
Dressing to have a “certain look” allows the wearer to send a message through clothing and fashion. As Butler cautions, I want to signal a difference between representing an identity and performing one. Though I am giving examples of how the women represent their sexual orientations, how they experience and perform that identity is a different aspect of identity formation. Performing "mother-lesbian" refers to how the women in the study have formed a mother identity in the context of heterosexual relations then deviated from that to forming an mother identity in the context of lesbian relations. Previously formed heterosexual relations do not necessarily vanish so as to create oppositional aspects to identities and lived experiences (though they may). Having conceived children with men with whom we co-parent means that heterosexually defined relationships continue to be part of our lives and our identities. Many of our children are heterosexual and the context of their shifting identities as children of mother-lesbians might broaden, for them, their capacity to resist fixing heterosexuality as separate from homosexuality.

Sexuality, sexual orientation, class, profession, and many other signs, can be what we perform and map onto our bodies. The "audience" is not controlled by us. Depending on what the viewer's subject position is, a “body message” sent by the wearer can be interpreted as intended—or not. Would I know that the jean jacket was “dykey”? Is the representation displayed for a stranger, a person known to us, our own reflection in the mirror—or all of these? What are the stakes if another “reads” us in an unintended way? What are the consequences if we are “read” in the intended way? These readings are racialized and gendered, as well as coded in sexualized terms (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992:96-131).

One of the women discusses the first time she kissed a woman to whom she was sexually attracted. She discussed what she was wearing, as representative of "lady-like" dress. She had been invited to the home of the woman.
I knew I was very in love with her, and then she identified herself as a bi-sexual! I thought, "OH! (hearty laughter), MY! I'm so lucky". (.)I was wearing a cotton dress and string of pearls and some sensible lady-like shoes. I jumped up and started to kiss her. And I remember, I knew that my life was turning 360 degrees.

The woman quoted above has saved her pearls, but has not worn them since. The aggression she displayed was not what would be termed "lady-like", according to normative discourses on womanhood. Discarding her pearls and "lady-like" shoes contributed to her "performance" of a different identification with womanhood.

Do we as once-married mother lesbians dress differently when we bring our children to our parents house for dinner, from when we go out dancing with our lesbian lover/partner? Do we use different representations to ensure less threatening "readings" by others? Do we have the material resources to provide our bodies with more than one, constant representation? And what are the costs to us, psychically, when political formations of identity representations conflict with a personal, private experience of that identity? Some women can fly in the face of what others would expect of her and ignore or avoid judgement and regulation. Others are less able to.

One woman I interviewed and another woman who was not part of this study commented that just after coming out to their husbands and just before they separated, the men became agitated when the women began to wear unmatched earrings. Both women said that they had previously worn unmatched earrings and it had gone unnoticed. The husbands now "read" lesbian on their wives' earlobes. This threatened the heterosexual norm of "intact" families. The women's earlobes became signifiers of "deviation" from "normal" families, compulsory heterosexuality and dominant notions of femininity. Though I did not interview the men, I would suggest that unmatched earrings also threatened how they would be seen by themselves and others as a man/husband by their association to their now "deviant" wives.
All but two of the women mentioned that their resolve to leave the marriage was tempered by a fear of their husband's anger. One woman left her husband but did not tell him she is a lesbian. She said that she told a lot of people, but not her husband.

*I haven't been honest with my husband. He knows that I've had this relationship with this woman and, ah...I haven't been able to...I don't want to tell him. I want the whole world to know but I don't want him to. ( ) He's disgusted. I was afraid there would be a custody fight for the children if he found out [and] that he'd degrade me to the children.

There are many examples in the interviews of how identities are represented. Yet questions abound as to how it is that people know an identity in particular ways in order to know that they need or want to change. How do they enact those changes?

The women spoke about how changes took place in their lives. One woman commented, repeatedly, that for her the act of changing and claiming a lesbian identity was not a “choice”. After years of living in a strained, heterosexual relationship and during unsuccessful “treatment” for the couple's problematic sexual relationship, the woman fell in love with a woman. Identifying romantic and sexual feelings for another woman created a momentum that she says could not be redirected or stopped.

*So I suggested that we go see someone, he was very resistant for a long time. We eventually did go and it was awful. ..And I found it very, very hard. It was behaviour therapy, you don't talk about your feelings or how you ended up where you are, you just do what you're told to do. And we'd go and watch videos and he would give us homework to do. And umm, once I came to understand that I don't really like men much then no wonder I found that experience so awful. It all happened around the same time. Well, I got hit with a bolt of lightening. I fell in love with a woman. ...Well, once I realized I had feelings for other women I talked to him about...yeah...that was really, really, really hard. ..That was the first thing that made me question being a heterosexual.*

Shifting identities become problematic when friends and family (and perhaps ourselves), want to be able to fix identities in order to avoid confusion about how to understand another and ourselves.

When trying to understand identities which are ambivalent, mixed messages confuse our efforts to
“fix” identities. If we encounter someone who strongly display her identities, say for example a heterosexual mother, a construct is in place to “know” something about her role in western patriarchy and her relationship to us. These, of course, are stereotypical assumptions that we make. However, I maintain that there being a “place” in society for a person who displays, or performs, heterosexual “mother”, allows for a “comfortable” reading, in so far as it is constructed and normalized in western heterosexuality. This “comfort” allows us to perceive “mother-identity” as fixed and stable. Conversely, if a “mother-identity” is inconsistent with our (stereotypical) assumptions, for example if a mother dresses “out of character”, she then raises gender confusion, or confusion about whether or not she will be nurturing (Steedman, 1991) then we are unclear about how to relate to her. We might discriminate, ignore or engage in a process of trying to understand how she fits into the (our) social schema.

In the following quote the woman does not recognize herself when she begins to identify as a lesbian.

*When I started meeting other people I started just thinking other thoughts. ...I realized that there were a lot of years when [my husband and I] were locked in a really dead relationship. ...and when I "came out" to him he was very supportive. In fact it was almost a relief to him that there was a reason outside of him that I was no longer interested. When it first happened [falling in love with a woman] it was really shocking. And it went against all the things that I knew about myself. At that point I didn't know myself. I mean I knew myself as a heterosexual mother with three children. I didn't know at that point that you could do both.*

It became apparent when reading the transcripts that some of the details the women described were contradictory. Available speech used to articulate their experiences of change was circulatory,

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30Even if this “role” is multi-dimensional because of race and class factors. Again, I am not trying to tease out how various positions of motherhood are constructed, rather that they are constructed. Depending on how each of us intersects with the various categories complicating a singular notion of “mother”, influences our biases and interpretations upon meeting a “mother”. 
making it hard to fix points of beginnings and endings. This again reinforces how identities do not simply re-adjust and change in a linear process moving from one static position to another. Rather, that there are movements back and forth amongst formerly dominant identities to newly constructed ones.

The once married mother-lesbians I interviewed knew how they had been framed as heterosexual mothers and wives and know how it is they now "deviate" from those normalized positions. They are acquainted with their own internalized homophobia after years of living in a heterosexist society (Groves, 1985:18-9). They are aware of the implications which give rise to anger, isolation, and disconnection as they deviate from identities framed by hegemonic norms.
(IN)CONCLUSION

The Thesis Unframed, Lives (re)Framed

I was warned that writing in academic form something which is deeply personal can be difficult. It is true that I wrote “better” on those days when my domestic life felt more ordered. There were periods when day-to-day routines became so complex with legal arrangements and logistical manoeuvres with four children, that I never even sat at my desk. The "emotional work" with each person present in our lives has required strength we did not know we had. The importance of "identity" is reflected in our lives, as we choose to meet our difficulties manifested by the changes we have made, rather than reject identities not normalized in the society in which we live.

Identity transformation from heterosexual to lesbian has required the women in this study, including myself, to understand new subject positions, and that those subject positions were/are available to us. The words and thoughts which came from the women in formal interviews taught me to listen more attentively to the complexities of identity transformations.

For Jane, who is now retired and has been living as a lesbian longer than the other women, life is more settled. She continues to worry about her grown children. Her partner who never had children has had to learn to "share Jane" when they visit. Since the children do not live with them the conflict is not constant. Jane's story compels me to think about political movements which have influenced her history. The period of her (lesbian)identity transformation makes her story sound similar to her younger counterparts, yet I think more research applied to the years in which she lived as a young heterosexual wife and mother would show her experiences to be quite different.
Vicky continues to take one day at a time, enjoying her new friendships which offer her emotional connection and intensity she did not know until she stepped away from relationships defined within heterosexuality. She continues to help one of her grown children with her inability to accept the changes. She is gradually re-establishing her life so that she can be honest with the people close to her about her lesbian identity.

Kathy has faced the challenge of securing a career in her fifties, in a tight economic climate. She has helped herself, her husband and her three children cope with the rapid life transitions mobilized through her identity transformation. Within a matter of months, they went from all living in the (heterosexual)family home to each living separately. Her husband moved in with a woman while Kathy moved in with her partner. Kathy is currently planning a new phase of life leading up to retirement.

As I thought through the stories of the older women the following questions emerged: Were the women (all of them in this study) more open to considering this particular life transition because they were no longer contemplating bearing children? Did this account for their ability to consider an "alternate" lifestyle? I was not able to explore this, but feel it is important to understand how age and stage of life influence our ability to understand the multiplicity of subject positions available. Conducting follow-up interviews with the women would add a retrospective impression of what the "costs" were for them. Referring back to my question raised in the Introduction, interviewing women well past the actual period of transition would inform us more about how once married mother-lesbians understand what the stakes are in claiming identities which separate them from their perceived safety of heterosexual homes? Would we have done it differently if we had been aware of the subject position, mother-lesbian, earlier in life?
Leslie, who I learned on the morning of writing this conclusion moved back to the family home, is the least settled. Her oldest child was especially disturbed by the news. Before the separation he had encouraged his mother to move out. When she did, he was upset that the family was separated. Now he is devastated that she has moved back with his father. Leslie has had a more difficult time financially than the rest of the women. Her long work hours have left her more isolated socially. She has moved back in with an abusive husband who she has not entirely stopped loving. Heterosexual sex was not as problematic for her as it was for many of the other women. Without knowing the details at this level of her personal story, I cannot separate what is operating in her identity transformation from what might be operating in the practical, material reality of her living circumstances. Her story signals to the fluidity of identity and the urge to "move back home". The "comforts of home" are not necessarily comfortable. Leslie's story reminds me that the stories I have told, though complex and difficult, do not address the concerns some women face within a violent household, living in poverty, or women expelled from their support system because of cultural, racial or religious factors. The multiplicity of subjectivities is immense, and a larger, diverse study group would reflect more of this complexity.

Kerry's story, for me, centers on the consequences of "losing" our children. It is a fear I heard from each of the women, whether the children were grown and living apart from them, or younger and living with them. The children, husbands, extended family members, and friends have been silenced in this study. Their voices would be important for understanding how identity transformations are powerfully experienced by many people, not just the individual who is "changing".

Finally, Josie and Simone. It has been hard for me to do their story justice. Despite my efforts not to reify the category "mother-lesbian"---and their story refuses this category---I unconsciously do. For this reason I am both grateful and frustrated that their story came to me. I want to end with them
in mind, as a reminder that identities are dynamic and fluid. I have had my own reaction to Josie and Simone speculating that they are only living with Josie's husband because they are in transition. I dishonour the struggle, differently made, to configure a supportive, nurturing family unit—even if it is not reflected by me and the society in which I move.

I have been aware as I move in and out of heterosexual and lesbian communities that people expect clarity about my identity. For myself, and for some of the women I spoke with, our (lesbian and heterosexual) friends and families were least tolerant of our actions while we were in the midst of deciding to and then making a change. Once it became clear what we were changing to, it was easier for people to either accept it(us) or reject it(us).

This study, because of its focus, risks framing "mother-lesbian" through the lens of white middle class feminism. It is my hope, though, that these stories explain ways in which subject positions outside heteronormativity are available, and are "normal"—if not normalized. To this end, I wish to unframe this thesis and open a challenge for future work to continue to unsettle the normalization of traditional familial ideology.


