

1-1-2016

Motherhood redefined: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of lesbian mothers and the sociopolitical conflicts that shape their narratives

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Motherhood redefined: An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the lived experiences of lesbian mothers and the sociopolitical conflicts that shape their narratives.

by

Melissa Miller-Muñoz

A Dissertation Presented to the
College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences of Nova Southeastern University
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Nova Southeastern University
2016

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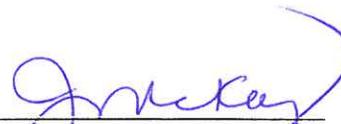
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This dissertation was submitted by Melissa Miller-Muñoz under the direction of the chair of the dissertation committee listed below. It was submitted to the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and approved in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Conflict Analysis and Resolution at Nova Southeastern University.

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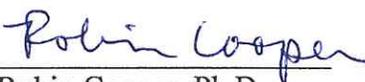
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my spouse without whom I would not have endured endless hours of contemplation, research, and writing. My gratitude for your love and support is as vast as the sea. Throughout this journey you have continuously embraced my passionate ideas with equal intensity; you unconditionally celebrate the countless dimensions that compose my being in its entirety. Together we have fought for our love and our human right to love. I share this accomplishment with you and look forward to many more years of adventure, inspiring conversation, and courageous love.

I wish to honor the brave spirits who lost their lives while celebrating during Pride month at Pulse Nightclub in Orlando, Florida. As a lesbian and an advocate, I will continue to generate awareness about the challenging realities that surround our lives. Our fight has been long and treacherous, but we will prevail in love. This work is dedicated to the LGBTQIA community with the unrelenting hope that our bravery, strength, and incessant efforts will promote even the slightest gleam of unity and peace. The tiniest flicker can ignite a blazing change.

“There is a light and it never goes out.” - Steven Patrick Morrissey

Acknowledgements

I extend my deepest gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Robin Cooper. Your patience and brilliance make this a reality. I value your guidance throughout this dissertation journey. To my committee members, Dr. Judith McKay and Dr. Robert Witheridge, I thank you for allowing me to pursue this research with curiosity and intent. Your distinguished strengths greatly influenced my process. To my entire committee, your expertise served as an instrumental component to this research study and to my life as a novice researcher. I will cherish the knowledge you have shared.

I would like to acknowledge the women who selflessly agreed to participate in this study; your remarkable narratives sculpted its foundation. Your impressive stories of maternal desire and perseverance radiate with inspiration. Thank you kindly for sharing your perspectives with me...and with the world.

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Abstract

This study explored the lives of lesbian mothers with children conceived through insemination or the adoption process in an effort to understand the conflicts they encountered along their journey to motherhood and how they managed those conflicts. The qualitative study included in-depth interviews conducted with six participants. The participants' ages ranged between 25-60 years old. Interview results were analyzed to explore participants' narratives in regards to their experiences, relationships, identities and transformation into motherhood. This research highlights significant ongoing developments in the field of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) studies and seeks to intersect the boundaries between interpersonal and sociopolitical conflicts with the phenomena of lesbian-mothered families. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, this research provides a contribution to the interdisciplinary field of conflict resolution with a focus on the central research question: What is the common experience shared among lesbian mothers in their transformation to motherhood? The key findings of this study interrelate with themes of interpersonal conflict, role conflict, and sociopolitical conflict. The conclusions contribute to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, expand upon recent developments on LGBT family systems, and suggest new areas for further examination from the perspective of conflict analysis scholarship.

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

According to research conducted by The Williams Institute (2013)

“approximately an estimated 3 million LGBT Americans have parented a child; more than 111,000 same-sex couples are raising an estimated 170,000 biological, step, or adopted children; and more than 125,000 same-sex couple households (19%) include nearly 220,000 children under age 18” (Gates, 2013, p. 1). In a society where heteronormativity dictates the marginalization of women, and furthermore lesbian women, lesbian mothers are faced with several challenges in their journey to motherhood in regards to family planning and parenting (Hayman et, al., 2014; Osche, 2011).

Recent petitions brought forth by same-sex couples in Miami-Dade County cite parenting rights as a main reason for seeking legal protection and marriage equality from the courts. The topic of same-sex marriage and same-sex parenting continues to affect the lives of gay and lesbian women and their same-sex family system – the main aspect being the denial of a human civil right: the right to parent equally under the law regardless of sexual orientation. In addition to the political conflicts resulting from individual state laws that prohibit gay marriage and gay adoption, lesbian mothers are also faced with interpersonal conflicts ranging from work-family conflict, role conflict, and relationship conflict.

Given the framework that “sexuality is socially and materially constructed” we can assume that heterosexism remains a significant and central issue within the discussion of lesbian motherhood (Dunne, 2000, p. 13). Dunne (1999) presents a largely valuable study of lesbian parenting in her report titled *The Lesbian Household Project*, which is based on the experiences of 37 lesbian co-parents with children. The concluded

data in this study remains extremely relevant to the examination of gender roles within the household during the 21st century. According to Dunne (2000), lesbians who choose motherhood are challenging gender boundaries, gender scripts, and the gender hierarchy that has been widely and unfairly imposed upon females for centuries. The narratives contained within Dunne's study prove lesbian motherhood to be an empowering and liberating experience for women. The perspective of a lesbian mother defies all that is traditional and conventional; lesbian motherhood in an essence is the nuclear family's largest opponent. For lesbian feminists, lesbian motherhood further strengthens the bond between women and the desire for an end to sexism. Dunne (2000) explains that although lesbian mothers are still active members of society, establishing and maintaining relationships with their child's educator, doctor, and peers' parents, they are creating "a cognitive dissonance that may enable others to evaluate and move beyond the taken-for-grantedness of heterosexuality...they challenge conventional wisdom by showing the viability of parenting beyond the confines of heterosexuality" (p. 33).

Motherhood is a universal phenomenon. The lived experiences of lesbian mothers, however, may involve more complex social, political, and interpersonal conflicts as a result of our heteronormative society. Adrienne Rich (1980) addresses the differences between heterosexual women and lesbian women in her article titled, *Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence*. In the article, Rich highlights the significant aspects of heteronormative culture that directly affect the lives of lesbian women in different ways than their heterosexual female counterparts. Rich (1980) points to the historical deprivation of political existence for lesbian women claiming: "To equate lesbian existence with male homosexuality because each is stigmatized is to erase female

reality once again” (p. 136). Rich continues to argue that while females naturally experience oppressions and conflicts due to a patriarchal social system, lesbian women are in many ways challenged by social stigma as a result of their gender and their sexuality. Motherhood is often considered to be a profoundly female experience. The research presented in this paper serves as a vessel for the narratives of lesbian mothers in an effort to illuminate upon their experiences, their conflicts and challenges, and their transformative journeys towards becoming mothers.

Problem Statement

The 2010 U.S. Census report on same-sex households indicates that 115,000 children are parented by same-sex parents across the United States. This data represents a transformation in the traditional family system from the opposite-sex parenting model to a same-sex parenting model. Recent technological advances have made family planning and conception a viable option for lesbians. That said, lesbian mothers continue to remain an under-represented population. Our society is limited in its exposure to alternative same-sex families, and as a result, there is a social and political divide surrounding the topic of same-sex parenting. A significant population of lesbian mothers with children continue to become affected by conflicts that arise in various areas of their personal lives including, but not limited to, relationship conflict, conflict in the workplace, school-related conflicts and lack of healthcare provisions. Sobocan (2011) posits, “the lack of models of same-sex family life, the roles of both mothers and legal recognition can be especially aggravating for those parents who do not know any other same-sex families” (p. 393).

This qualitative study utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis as the methodology for examining the narratives of lesbian mothers to accurately represent their experiences. There is a considerable need for scientific evidence to cultivate an understanding of the process lesbian mothers experience on their paths to becoming mothers. The results can be used to inform and educate lawmakers, school officials, health-care providers, and ultimately ignite a discourse surrounding the needs of lesbian mothers in their pursuit of motherhood.

Justification

This research was intended to explore the narratives of lesbian mothers within the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) community. The conflict resolution field has produced limited amounts of research examining relationship dynamics, personal narratives, and identity issues experienced by lesbian moms. Inclusion of lesbian mothers (single, married, partnered or divorced) is a necessary component in accurately evaluating the female family systems, the challenges, and the transformations experienced by these women choosing motherhood.

The aim of feminist research is to accurately understand the perspectives, experiences, and lives of females in an attempt to highlight the experiences of those whose situations have otherwise been overlooked and ignored. This research can be used to support feminist objectives and to dispel the myth of woman as inferior, subordinate individuals in the household by providing insight on gender norms and unconventional gender roles, drawing attention to lesbian mothers who occupy roles as ‘head-of-household’. In addition, the theoretical framework used will bring forth an examination of female family systems, further refuting the social argument that the only well-

established, well-adjusted family system is the traditional nuclear family system made up of a husband, wife, and child.

Purpose of Study

This study was designed to analyze narratives and experiences contained within the lives of lesbian mothers in an effort to illuminate their experiences in a social context, with some consideration given to the legal and sociopolitical aspects surrounding their decision-making process. By mapping these narratives, the research can make a solid contribution to the fields of conflict resolution and social psychology. The goal of this research was to provide a voice for lesbian mothers, their experiences and their stories. In addition to engaging readers in a valuable discussion worthy of exploration, this study presents significant findings to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, intersecting prevalent themes of interpersonal conflict, role conflict, and LGBTQ sociopolitical conflict by focusing on the following central research question: What is the common experience shared among lesbian mothers in their transformation to motherhood?

Researcher Context

The concluded research contained in the following chapters aligns with my personal interest as a lesbian woman and my academic objectives as a conflict analysis and resolution scholar. Parenting is a frequent topic in my household. My wife and I have been together since high school, and throughout the years we have occasionally explored our parenting options as a recently married lesbian couple. Recent public policy developments have paved the way for same-sex couples to obtain legal protections and recognition, but conflicts continue to arise in certain aspects of family life as well in varied personal and professional contexts. Various discussions with close friends and

acquaintances have led me to explore the diverse issues surrounding lesbian parenting and the ways in which the conflict has played a significant role in shaping these narratives. The discoveries I have set out to pursue possess a vast meaning and relevance to my life both personally and professionally as a social researcher and a lesbian woman because I, too, will embark upon this journey into motherhood in the near future. My aim in presenting these narratives fulfills both an academic requirement, and most significantly, a keen curiosity into an unconventional process of parenting faced by prospective lesbian mothers.

In the following section, I present a brief introduction on the topic, which is the focus of this study. The introduction reviews information related to adoption, insemination, relationship, legal issues, conflict and narratives, all of which are prevalent subjects that influence the outcome of lesbian family planning and decision-making.

Background for the Study

The Independent Adoption Center (IAC) cites statistics on gay and lesbian adoption stating that according to the 2000 Census, approximately 65,000 children lived with same-sex parents. Over a decade later, recent statistical reports in 2012 show a significant increase to 110,000 for the number of children nationwide now living with same-sex parents. According to The Williams Institute (2009), which analyzed the 2008 U.S. Census figures on sexual orientation: 19 percent of gay households raising children include an adopted child, up from 8 percent in 2000. Research indicates the numbers of gay and lesbian parents adopting children continue to increase. With recent changes in public policy, adoption laws have changed and ban have been lifted in many states across the United States allowing for the opportunity for lesbians (coupled or single) to undergo

the adoption process. A project initiated by the Human Rights Campaign in 2007 titled *All Children – All Families* aims to provide inclusion to prospective gay and lesbian parents by providing resources to families in search of adoption agencies. Over 80 agencies appear on the list produced by *All Children – All Families*, and according to the HRC, these listed agencies “are committed to implementing policies and practices that welcome, affirm and support LGBT youth and families” (Human Rights Campaign, 2014). There are several factors including public policy laws, demographics, socioeconomics and so on that determine whether or not adoption is a suitable option for lesbian mothers. There are many cases in which adoption proves to be a rewarding and fulfilling experience for lesbians. In addition to adoption as a path to parenting, another viable option for many lesbian women is undergoing insemination.

For lesbian women who have chosen insemination as an option, the process involves research, planning and consultations with their doctor. There are typically three paths to alternative means of pregnancy: alternative insemination via intra-cervical insemination (ICI), intra-uterine insemination (IUI), and in vitro fertilization (IVF). The outcome depends on individual overall reproductive health, and factors including age, hormone levels and menstrual cycles are all taken into account in determining the likelihood of a successful pregnancy (Leondires, 2014). The website *It's Conceivable* is dedicated to informing parents within the LGBTQ community about the available paths to parenting. The site's contributors have compiled a resource list of the various costs associated with the insemination process including consultation fees, insemination cycles, monitoring, sperm delivery and fertility drugs. According to RESOLVE (2015), IUI procedures on average cost \$865; full cycles of IVF using fresh embryos (not including

medications) cost on average \$8,158. For lesbians exploring insemination, the search for LGBT-friendly fertility clinics may produce limited results. For instance, fertilityauthority.com and internethealthresources.com (infertility resources) provide contact information for specific clinics that have confirmed they offer conception options for alternative families; however, the resource lists lack in vastness and depth.

This study examined the lives of lesbians who have embarked upon the journey of motherhood and family planning through means of insemination or the adoption process. Research on lesbian households from a conflict perspective is a fairly new subject, and this unique process of “becoming” presents lesbian mothers with changes in their family formation and relationship dynamics. Lesbians are fully capable of forming committed, stable relationships (Lopez, 2011.) Until recently, previous case studies and peer-reviewed literature contained research data based on lesbian mothers whose children had been previously conceived in a heterosexual marriage. Prospective lesbian mothers are faced with a wide spectrum of considerations when in their planning process. Accordingly, most, if not all, of the decision-making and parenting agreements are made prior to conception, or on a step-by-step basis. In many cases, the outcomes that may affect the lesbian-led family system are unpredictable and inevitable. In a research study focused on the transformation of lesbian families since first wave feminism, Johnson (2012) asserts that several factors are present in the lesbian family system that ultimately have a significant affect on the relationships between lesbians and their partners, children or external family members. These factors may result for a number of reasons including parental legal status, biological and non-biological role conflict and/or parent-child relationship conflict. Johnson (2012) posits, “Planned lesbian families, by their very

nature, face challenges that are unique to them. The decision of which member of the couple will be the biological mother, for example, may have ramifications for these families” (p. 49).

According to Riley (1975), American society marginalized lesbian mothers’ existence as a result of the societal perception “that homosexuality is inconsistent with the ability or desire to procreate” (p. 799). Falk (2008) presents research that indicates an increased number of lesbian mothers who have sought legal protection for their lesbian family system. The legal issues surrounding the topic of lesbian motherhood are expansive. There is limited legal protection granted to same-sex couples across the country. For this reason, lesbian mothers deciding to conceive or adopt often take into consideration the co-parenting laws and provisions available to their family. The laws on adoption and second-parent adoption vary from state to state. The ability to obtain full legal recognition under law is challenging for lesbian mothers and requires a lot of research and planning strategy.

Hadley and Stuart (2009) discuss the potential conflicts faced by lesbian mothers and outline the role adjustments associated with undertaking the task of balancing a lesbian-headed household. In circumstances where both females are in the decision-making stages, a considerable amount of attention is given to aspects regarding birthing, nursing, working and household roles. Naturally, interpersonal conflicts and work-family conflicts are expected to arise as each female in the relationship is transitioning to their new role in the family system. According to Hadley and Stuart (2009), research indicates “in all domains (e.g., household and childcare tasks, decision making, and childcare time), lesbian mothers reported that in an ideal situation,

responsibilities would be shared equally; and they reported only minimal deviation from this ideal” (p. 48).

It is not uncommon that a difference in needs, or unmet needs, will arise for lesbian mothers during the process of family planning and parenting. Kurdek (2004) and Ochse (2011) report that oftentimes same-sex couples resolve conflict more productively than heterosexual couples “because they argue more effectively, are less likely to use poor method of conflict resolution, and are more likely to propose solutions and compromises” (p. 15). The theories briefly described in the following paragraph provide a glimpse into the structure of the framework for this proposed research.

Lesbian feminist theory and role theory are the two distinct theories chosen as the theoretical framework for this qualitative study. These theories compliment one another in their own unique way and will be used as a lens for examining the collected stories of lesbian mothers in an effort to understand their roles within a lesbian family system. Lesbian feminist theory is based on the foundation that lesbian women need not succumb to marginalization that ensues as a result of sexual orientation. (Levy, 2007; Garber, 2001). Role theory asserts that as members of society, we subscribe to socially defined categories (Biddle, 1986).

Definition of Key Terms

Alternative Insemination. the injection of semen into the vagina or uterus by means of a syringe or the like rather than by coitus. The term “alternative insemination” is a preferred term used by some health care professionals and fertility clinics in lieu of the more common term known as “artificial insemination”. It is used as a means to replace any implication that the insemination process is “artificial”. (CWHC, 2016)

Androcentric. centered on, emphasizing, or dominated by males or masculine interests

Heterosexism. a prejudiced attitude or discriminatory practices against homosexuals by heterosexuals

Heterosexual. is used to describe the sexual orientation of any individual who is attracted to individuals of the opposite sex

Heteronormative. noting or relating to behavior or attitudes consistent with traditional male or female gender roles and the assumption of heterosexuality as the norm

Homosexual. is used for both men and women whose primary romantic and sexual attraction is toward partners of the same-sex

Inseminate. to inject semen into (the female reproductive tract); impregnate.

Intra-cervical insemination (ICI) . placement of semen directly in the outer part of the cervix (similar to the process that occurs with natural intercourse)

Intra-uterine insemination (IUI) . insemination involves injecting washed sperm directly into the uterus; pregnancy rates with IUI are much higher than with ICI

In vitro fertilization. this insemination process involves using a female partner's (or surrogate's) eggs and their uterus

Second-Parent Adoption. allows a second parent to adopt a child without the "first parent" losing any parental rights

Sexism. attitudes or behavior based on traditional stereotypes of gender roles; discrimination or devaluation based on a person's sex or gender, as in restricted job opportunities, especially such discrimination directed against women

Stepparent Adoption. adoption of a marital partner's child

The following chapter contains a review of the current literature on lesbian motherhood and the relevant topics that have been covered in this section. In addition, the theoretical framework and characteristics of each theory is presented, along with an explanation of the theories' relevance to this qualitative study. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) – the research methodology for this study. The chapter demonstrates the useful tools of IPA for a research study that is focused on a small group of participants. Chapter 4 presents the findings and themes that emerged from the data collection. It begins with a brief summary introducing each participant, followed by a thorough discussion of the four themes. The chapter concludes with a summary of these themes and findings. Chapter 5 presents the correlations between the literature and frameworks used for this study, in addition to the limitations of the research, the recommendations for future research, and the contribution of the findings to the multidisciplinary field of conflict resolution.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The relevant literature for this study spans across several subject areas including public policy issues, relationship issues, legal issues and personal narratives. In gathering supportive existing literature for the topic of lesbian motherhood, I have included the most significant aspects for consideration. Persistent components including heterosexism, discrimination, and oppression tend to circulate the findings within existing studies of lesbian parenting. As such, I have chosen a theoretical framework to include role theory and lesbian feminist theory as the appropriate lenses for examination. Role theory perceives the individual as an “active agent” (Mead, 1934). In this study, the active agents are the selected lesbian women in their pursuit of becoming mothers. The roles occupied by these women will naturally shift and transform throughout their journey into motherhood. Role theory lends to a proper understanding of the transformative dynamics and roles faced by these individuals.

Congruently, lesbian feminist theory is used to highlight the experiences of lesbian mothers in a heterosexist society, where social constructs of oppression, workforce inequality, and lack of familial recognition are prominently related themes. In a study conducted by Ciano-Boyce and Shelley-Sireci (2002), results indicated that the parenting skills of both same-sex and different-sex families examined side by side proved that lesbian couples are more equal in their division of child-care and household roles than heterosexual parents. This study closely examined the children’s needs and explored how each set of parents responds to their child’s needs for nurturing. Research also indicates that lesbian couples’ parenting awareness skills were stronger than those of heterosexual couples (Flaks, Fischer, & Masterpasqua, 1995). As evidence within the

literature suggests, there is an apparent lack of awareness in regards to lesbian families. According to a study titled, *Lesbian Mothers Living Well in the Context of Heterosexism and Discrimination*, Short (2007) concluded that lesbian mothers experienced heterosexism, discrimination, and a lack of relationship recognition of their families as a result of societal oppression and the lack of public policy laws protecting lesbian-led families. Short (2007) asserts, “This creates obstacles and difficulties for mothers, children and extended family members, and presents risks to well-being” (p. 70).

Adoption

Ausbrooks and Russell (2011) assert that parenting among gays and lesbians has increased within the past ten years. In 2006, The Donaldson Adoption Institute estimated that “a minimum of one million American children have at least one gay or lesbian parent” (Ausbrooks & Russell, 2011, p. 201). The study presented by Ausbrooks and Russell (2011) aims to highlight the positive outcomes for children adopted into same-sex parented households. The authors support their findings through the Family Resilience Theory with specific examination of transracial adoptions. The argument proves to support the view that gay and lesbian parents are perfectly capable of effectively raising children. The research is centered on refuting the misperceptions of heteronormativity, a term used to define the reinforced societal assumption that a nuclear family consisting of a husband/father, wife/mother, and child is the most natural and healthy family system (Ausbrooks and Russell, 2011).

In a report presented by Gates et, al. (2007), key findings suggest that there are 500,000 children living in foster care in the U.S. with 100,000 waiting to be adopted. Additional key findings within the report state that there are only 14,100 foster children

living with gay or lesbian parents, and there are approximately 2 million gay, lesbians, and bisexuals who have shown interest in adopting. Several states across the country still prohibit adoption by LGBT parents. According to Gates et, al. (2007), these adoption bans potentially cost \$100,000 to \$27 million yearly. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) reports that currently, as of August 2013, the nationwide laws on adoption are as follows:

States can jointly petition to adopt statewide in 21 states and D.C., including Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont and Washington. Same-sex couples are prohibited from adopting in Mississippi and Utah. State courts in Michigan have ruled that unmarried individuals may not jointly petition to adopt. State courts have ruled that second-parent adoptions are not available under current law in Kentucky, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio and Wisconsin (HRC, 2013).

The National Survey of Family Growth (NSFG) conducted a quantitative survey in 2002 and concluded: “lesbian and women are potential adoptive parents” (Gates et, al., 2007, p. 5). The responses to the questions presented by the NSFG found that 46 percent (46%) of lesbian and bisexual women have at some point in their lives considered adopting a child. Gates et, al. (2007) confirms this statistic, stating the Kaiser Family Foundation survey concluded similar results from a survey conducted on gay and lesbians living in 15 metropolitan areas. The KFF survey found that nearly half of the gay, lesbian, or bisexual people without children consider adoption as an option for their

family (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2000).

Insemination

Bradford et. al. (2013) cite various determining factors for lesbians choosing to conceive or not to conceive children. Within their report, they include examples of answers to both qualitative and quantitative questioning that resulted in responses pointing to career priorities, academic priorities, and financial circumstances, all of which have influenced their decisions to become, or not to become, mothers. Some women mentioned their lack of disclosure to their family regarding their sexuality as a primary reason for not considering children. Several women listed health reasons and an ability to conceive as their reason for being childfree. A 33-year-old woman living in the Northwest part of the U.S. responded that she had been attempting insemination for over a year and had unsuccessful attempts at conceiving (Bradford et, al., 2013).

While the report by Bradford, Ryan, Rothblum and Honnold (2013) indicates some limitations, it is clear that the struggles and challenges for lesbian and bisexual women wanting children remain central to whether they conceive or not. The authors discuss lesbian feminism and the works of Adrienne Rich, who highlighted the conflict of women's liberation and desire for motherhood. During the second-wave of feminism, feminists created a significant and relevant discourse around the subject of motherhood, gender roles, and societal expectations. Adrienne Rich's book titled, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood As Experience and Institution*, examines motherhood and the relationships between mothers and their children within the family system. Bradford et. al. (2013) suggest Rich's book "is an attempt to find collective meaning in motherhood and to distinguish it from each woman's personal experience giving birth and rearing children"

(p. 494). In her text, Rich makes references to multiple identities that limit many females' abilities to pursue motherhood freely and independent of society's patriarchal system.

Rich posits:

Whatever our class or color, the regulation of women's reproductive power by men in every totalitarian system and every socialist revolution, the legal and technical control by men of contraception, fertility, abortion, obstetrics, gynecology, and extra-uterine reproductive experiments—all are essential to the patriarchal system, as is the negative or suspect status of women who are not mothers (p. 15).

Similarly, the females in the study presented by Bradford et. al. (2013) on lesbians, bisexual women, and pregnancy before insemination, supports Rich's argument by highlighting experience and personal factors that limit these women's choices to have children. The fact that the gender wage gap still exists, as of late, is reason enough for lesbians to be cautious and concerned when considering family planning. In a society where women are still struggling and fighting for equal wages and gender equality, motherhood in many ways is a responsibility carrying more of a burden for independent, lesbian and bisexual women who essentially defy the patriarchal system in their attempt to make strides towards recognition of their abilities to maintain a household, a career, and a family.

Relationship

Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) cite Ellen Lewin's research on lesbian motherhood in which she discusses the domination and oppression faced by lesbian mothers. Lewin (1993) distinguishes the routes to pregnancy for lesbian-mothered

families versus different-sex families and highlights the differences surrounding their journeys to conception. In the examination of mothers in either category or population, Lewin's discoveries conclude there are similarities between lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers that have nothing to do with sexual preference, but rather with the universal experiences surrounding motherhood (Hequembourg and Farrell, 1999).

The differences may lie, however, in the marital status of the couple and whether or not the law recognizes their relationship. Some may argue that the validity of a relationship lies solely on the strength of the bond between those two people, but for several same-sex couples, legal issues arise from the lack of legal acknowledgment. This is especially true for same-sex couples with children. There is a certain level of performativity and understanding for lesbian mothers when it comes to marriage. Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) suggest that lesbian-mothered families must often "forge their unique understanding of 'family' that does not rest entirely on legal definitions" (p. 551). The lack of legal rights presents major obstacles in the daily lives of lesbian mothers and their family system in regards to schooling, relationships with teachers, doctors and health workers.

Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) suggest further research areas to include studies among disclosure of lesbian women in the workplace. Again, this is another major significant area of a lesbian mother's daily life, and it presents several issues for her family, her relationship with her partner/spouse, and their child. Studies indicate an unquestionable amount of stress from lesbian moms in relation to workplace issues regarding identity and disclosure of sexual orientation (Hequembourg and Farrell, 1999).

Legal Issues

There have been numerous conflicts and delays in the judicial system and in legislation regarding the issue of same-sex parenting. Bailey et, al. (1995) affirm that custody rights have in many cases been denied by the courts as a result of parents' sexuality. In a study conducted by Flaks, et al. (1995) on lesbian motherhood and gay fatherhood, results indicated the parenting skills of their subjects in many cases prove superior to heterosexual parents in comparison. With a recent change in adoption laws in Florida, a larger number of same-sex couples are opting for adoption and second-parent adoption. Legal issues regarding parenting and co-parenting among lesbian mothers have made recent advancements; however, parental rights remain a source of concern for lesbian moms who have either adopted children, or are seeking a second-parent adoption. Several states continue to deny parental rights to same-sex couples.

Cherguit et, al. (2013) indicate through their study that the legal system has made it challenging for co-mothers' parental identity and parental rights to reach full acknowledgment. According to the authors, co-mothers within the study expressed feelings of exclusion and invisibility and described their parental roles as "unchartered territory" as a result of prejudice and heterosexism in the legal and healthcare system (Cherguit et, al., 2013, p. 1274). Wall (2011) references the discrimination lesbian mothers face and the absence of legal protection in the workplace, in employment and elsewhere. The author points to recent bans on same-sex marriage as an attributing factor to discrimination against gays and lesbians. Wall (2011) defines homophobia as "an irrational fear of gay men and lesbian women" and heterosexism as "institutionalization of homophobia" (p. 95). The lack of support from the government for same-sex couples

with children further encourages homophobia and heterosexism. Patterson (2014) references the ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project in 2002 and points out how the discrimination faced by gay and lesbian families has burdened them in terms of legal rights, adoption and parental custody. According to Herek (1995) and Gillis (1998), the societal beliefs held by the majority about lesbians and gay men are often not based in personal experience but are frequently culturally transmitted.

Conflict

In 1975, the American Psychological Association (APA) removed homosexual orientation from the list of mental disorders after conducting three decades of research that proved that homosexuality is not a psychological illness (Gonsiorek, 1991). The APA refers to the revision of homosexuality as a sexual behavior as opposed to a mental illness (APA, 2003). Lesbian and heterosexual women have not been found to differ markedly either in their overall mental health or in their approaches to child rearing (Patterson et, al. 1998). In the proposal statement made by the board of trustees, the APA (1973) suggests the following,

...the proponents of the view that homosexuality is a normal variant of human sexuality argue for the elimination of any reference to homosexuality in a manual of psychiatric disorders because it is scientifically incorrect, encourages an adversary relationship between psychiatry and the homosexual community, and is misused by some people outside of our profession who wish to deny civil rights to homosexuals (p. 44).

The arguments presented by those opposing gay and lesbian parenting offers no solid evidence of any negative repercussions associated with lesbian parenting.

According to Parks (1998), lesbian mothers have effectively created nurturing, “egalitarian” families. Their children function normally, they are socially tolerant, and they seem to be positively socially adjusted. Similar research by Parks (1998) also reveals that lesbian mothers and their children appear healthy and secure despite their “stigmatized” status. Lesbian-headed households refute the underlying objectives of a patriarchal, androcentric and male-centered social family system. Consequently, lesbian mothers are confronted on a daily basis with social and legal limitations; these limitations propel a whirlwind of conflict in various settings including the workplace, healthcare facilities and other institutional environments.

According to Tuten and August (2006), work-family conflict is defined as “a form of inter-role conflict in which role pressures from the work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects” (Tuten & August, 2006, 580; Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). There is a limited amount of literature presenting evidence of the experiences of work-family conflict faced by lesbian women. In the past, work-family conflict has been examined through a narrow lens of heterosexism and conclusions have been made based on the concept of the nuclear family: husband, wife and children. In more recent studies, the lives of lesbian mothers have been explored in an effort to determine the similarities, differences, and for the simple sake of discovering how conflict in the workplace directly affects the family life of lesbian-headed households. Tuten and August (2006) present findings of extensive discrimination faced by lesbian mothers in the workplace ranging from a lack of health-care benefits to exclusion from family leave in the event of childbirth by their same-sex partners. For lesbian mothers, balancing responsibilities at work, while attempting to maintain childrearing as a constant

priority presents an ongoing challenge in which potential issues involving inter-role conflict are inevitable. Tuten and August (2006) explain that many lesbians consider it a difficult task to produce a delicate balance between work and family. The authors assert, “Efforts to make family life a priority when working are difficult in many circumstances; that would seem to be particularly the case when the family is a non-traditional one involving a lesbian partner and/or children” (p. 579).

Sobocan (2011) discusses the continuum, experiences, and outcomes of lesbian parenting. The author posits, “The family pattern is reinvented on more levels: it entails defining and claiming public roles, roles in the newly created family, roles in the couple, and personal roles, whereby all of these roles and identities are strongly interrelated” (p. 391). Sobocan (2011) highlights conflicts faced by lesbian women in their pursuit of motherhood that include characteristics of personal identity, interpersonal partner conflict, and public role identity. The challenges are a result of the mothers’ efforts to defy conventional family norms and recreate a parenting model that is distinctly different from the traditional father-mother-child matrix. Interpersonal conflicts between lesbian parenting partners typically arise as a result of unmet needs or a lack of recognition from external family members. It is often the case in which family members – either purposefully or unintentionally – disregard one of the mothers as a parent. For instance, in a situation where one partner is the biological mother and the other partner is the non-biological mother, it is common for family members and friends to perceive only the biological mother as the active parent; this creates stress for both female mothers in the relationship as they learn to navigate their current roles as mothers, along with the societal perceptions and expectations of traditional parenting.

Narratives

Wilson (2000) asserts that lesbian co-mothers being denied the equal rights as second parents presents a lack of security for both the co-mother and the child. The inability for the non-biological mother to gain parental rights equal to those of the biological mother “reinforces and promotes the perception that there can be only one mother, the biological one” (Wilson, 2000, p. 28; Kenney & Tash, 1993; Pies, 1988; Rohrbaugh, 1989; Zicklin, 1995). This further encourages and supports heteronormative views and isolates non-biological lesbian mothers. The exclusion of lesbian co-mothers is an additional burden to lesbian-mothered families living in a society where marginalization and oppression of women continues to exist. A multi-year study presented by Powell and colleagues (2010) indicates that the conventional family systems have been the center of most family studies in the research fields. More recently, however, the excluded non-traditional families are being considered and explored by many researchers. Becker & Todd (2013) posit, “the lack of a *perceived threat* may also be influencing issue opinions as more Americans become increasingly open to and accepting of a diverse array of family arrangements that they no longer envision as having a negative influence on their own families and livelihoods” (Becker & Todd, 2013, p. 432; Barth & Overby, 2003; Barth, Overby, & Huffmon, 2009).

While there exists some literature and studies on lesbian parenting within the fields and subfields of sociology and psychology, there is still a vast amount of unexplored research regarding alternative, lesbian-led families. I propose to utilize the literature contained in this review as a guide to my research on lesbian motherhood and the transformations, challenges, and relationships within the lesbian-mothered family

system. In the following section, I present two theories that exist exclusive to one another, yet they creatively intersect within this study to provide a unique theoretical framework for examining the transformative roles of lesbian mothers.

Theoretical Framework

Lesbian Feminist Theory. According to Levy (2007), the earliest lesbian feminist theory movement initiated in the 1970's by lesbian women who felt underrepresented within the feminist community and overshadowed by the agenda set out by their heterosexual female allies (Levy, 2007; Saulnier, 2008; Stein, 1997). Sheila Jeffreys (2003), a well-known lesbian feminist scholar outlines *Seven Key Themes of Lesbian Feminism* in the text titled, *Unpacking Queer Politics*. The seven key themes are as follows: 1.) emphasis on women's love for one another; 2.) separatist organizations 3.) community and ideas; 4.) idea that lesbianism is about choice and resistance; 5.) idea that the personal is political; 6.) rejection of social hierarchy; 7.) critique of male-supremacy (which eroticizes inequality) (Jeffreys, 2003).

Lesbian feminist theory can be used to "create support and networks of underrepresented individuals" (Levy, 2007, p. 326). Levy (2007) expands upon the discussion of lesbian feminism by asserting the following:

Lesbian feminist theory is based on multiple assumptions, including one that makes this theory distinct from other feminist perspectives: eliminating patriarchy in our society will not necessarily produce an end to heterosexism (Saulnier, 2008). In addition, lesbian feminists assumed that sexuality would be the most important part of a lesbian's identity (Stein, 1997). They believed that a separate movement was needed in order for lesbians to find their rightful place in

feminism (p. 324).

Calhoun (1994) suggests that there are evident differences between heterosexual women and lesbian women in regards to the obstacles and conflicts faced each group. While the argument that women in general are faced with the challenges of a patriarchal societal system by default, Calhoun explains that the feat faced by lesbian women is one that goes beyond patriarchy into the oppressive system known as heterosexualism. Calhoun describes the distinct characteristics of lesbian politics and asserts:

Within heterosexual society, the experience between women of sexual fulfillment, of falling in love, of marrying, of creating a home, of starting a family have no social reality. Unlike the heterosexual feminist, the lesbian has no socially supported private sphere...(Calhoun, 1994, p. 581).

The lack of societal recognition for lesbian mothers ignites a discourse on feminism, motherhood, and the ways in which related social problems are a result of a heterosexist society. The compiled narratives of the women within this study lend a specific perspective to the experience of lesbians as mothers. Jackson and Jones (1998) posit that lesbian feminist theory is based on experience, supporting the framework for this study as an effective scope for examination.

Role Theory. According to Biddle (1986), role theory regards our daily lives and its most significant aspects. The basis for role theory is an explanation for the social roles, behaviors, and patterns within the social life of a given individual. In examining the role of lesbian mothers, specific consideration is being given to their roles of “becoming”. In addition, particular focus will be placed on the transformative roles surrounding their experiences throughout their journey into motherhood, their previous

roles, and their present roles as mothers. Biddle (1986) discusses the inception of role theory, which began with the work of Linton in 1936, and the formalization of literature on role theory published by Parsons and Shils in 1951. Biddle (1986) asserts: "...role theory has focused on the characteristic behaviors of persons who occupy social positions within a stable social system" (p. 70).

Mead (1934), a prominent role theorist known for his contributions to the concept of symbolic interactionist role theory, outlines the characteristics of role theory describing that it focuses on "the roles of individual actors, the evolution of roles through social interactions, and various cognitive concepts through which social actors understand and interpret their own and others' conduct" (Biddle, 1986; Mead 1934).

Hindin (2007) defines role theory as being established upon the foundation of observing individuals and their behavior in a specific context, primarily in regards to their social circumstance. According to the Merriam-Webster definition, the term *role* is defined in a social context as "the part that someone has in a family, society, or other group" (Merriam-Webster, 2014). As members of a society, individuals occupy particular roles and subscribe to certain patterns within the home, workplace, or other social settings. The unique characteristic of role theory and its focus on an individual's "script for social conduct" (Hindin, 2007) serves as the lens for this research study. To gain a more accurate account of the lived experiences of lesbian mothers, the use of role theory as a framework allows the researcher to examine the mothers' roles in various arenas of their lives at home, at work, and within the context of their social life.

Contribution to the Research Literature

While published research exists regarding broader topics of same-sex parenting,

including psychosocial adjustments of children, child development and gay families in a general context, there are very few published research studies focusing solely on the lived experiences of lesbian mothers. This qualitative study illuminates the perspectives of lesbian mothers by providing a voice for participants to share their unique narratives of their journey into motherhood. It highlights the sociopolitical conflicts and interpersonal conflicts surrounding the experiences of lesbian mothers and provide a significant contribution to the field of conflict resolution and conflict resolution specialists, in addition to medical practitioners, mediators, educators, legal advisors and court authorities in the community.

Several social and political conflicts involving health care issues, child care, parental rights and marriage are currently being petitioned in court by same-sex families across the country who have been denied legal protection and recognition for their families. According to the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), as of 2014, 2 million lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender adults are currently exploring adoption as the means to parenting. For couples that have conceived via insemination, seeking second-parent adoption is merely the next crucial step in securing parental rights and protection for the non-biological parent and child.

By positively enhancing the existing parallels of conflict analysis and LGBTQ issues, and broadening the scope of examination on an otherwise underrepresented population, this dissertation research brings a unique contribution to the vast field of conflict resolution and its surrounding disciplines. Interpretative phenomenological analysis has been chosen as the research method for this qualitative study in an effort to focus on the shared experiences of lesbian mothers. The following chapter outlines and

explains the characteristics of IPA.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Cooper (2014) describes the characteristics of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) in the text titled, *Peace and Conflict Studies Research: A Qualitative Perspective*. According to Cooper (2014), the IPA approach centers on the lived experiences and meanings of significant life events, using an interpretive and hermeneutic approach. This research method is extremely effective in providing a deeper understanding of individuals' experiences and how they have come to understand those experiences, and it is especially well suited for in-depth studies that include a small number of participants due to the idiographic approach of IPA, in contrast with some other models of phenomenology (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). For this study, IPA allowed the researcher to analyze the narratives and transformations within the participants' family system from a personal and intimate perspective.

According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), research based on interpretative phenomenological analysis seeks to make sense of a transition in a person's life. The central focus of this research study is to carefully examine individual experiences. Husserl suggests that phenomenological inquiry is based on "careful examination of human experience" (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 12). The following quote highlights Husserl's perspective on reflection and its importance within phenomenological analysis:

Focusing our experiencing gaze on our own psychic life, necessarily takes place as reflection, as a turning about of a glance, which had previously been directed elsewhere. Every experience can be subject to such reflection, as can indeed every manner in which we occupy ourselves with any real or ideal objects - for instance,

thinking, or in the modes of feeling and will, valuing and striving. So when we are fully engaged conscious is activity, we focus exclusively on the specific thing, thoughts, values, goals, or means involved, but not on the physical experience as such, in which these things are known as such. Only reflection reveals this to us. Through reflection, instead of grasping simply the matter straight out - the values, goals, and instrumentalities - we grasp the corresponding subjective experiences 'conscious' of them, in which "in the broadest sense" they appear. For this reason, they are called "phenomena", and their most general essential character is to exist as the 'conscious-of' or 'appearance-of' the specific things, thoughts "judged states of affairs, grounds, conclusions", plans, decisions, hopes and so forth (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 12; Husserl, 1927).

According to Creswell (2013), phenomenological research compares and contrast participants' experiences and serves as a vehicle from which to describe events, daily life occurrences, and ongoing issues in the lives of several individuals. This study serves as a means to represent and interpret the human lived experiences of the selected lesbian mothers, who have either adopted or conceived children via insemination, and their transformation into "becoming". I used interpretative phenomenological qualitative research methods as the approach to uncovering meaning within the context of the participants' lived experiences and their shared narratives. Eatough & Smith (2008) describe Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a guiding method for qualitative studies intended on making sense of participants' major and transformative life experiences. The choice for qualitative research for this topic stems from relevance and interest in the experience and family development of lesbian mothers. According to

Kidder and Fine (1997), a researcher's motivation for examining a particular topic is usually linked to their objective to ignite change. Using IPA as the selected approach for this study allowed an opportunity for detailed examination and sense-making in a concerted effort to illuminate shared personal meaning of the participants' individual journeys into motherhood.

While based more profoundly in transcendental phenomenology, Moustakas (1994) presented the relevant following qualitative characteristics that can be useful components of phenomenology within this study: 1.) seeking to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience; 2.) seeking to uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behavior and experience; 3.) engaging the total self of the research participant, and sustaining personal and passionate involvement; 4.) not seeking to predict or to determine causal relationships; 5.) illuminating through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings, or scores.

To simply reiterate, IPA is defined as a phenomenological approach focusing on the lived experiences of individuals and the personal meanings they produce as a result of the experience. Smith (2011) explains that Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis requires a high level of commitment on behalf of the researcher, in regards to the process of interpretation, in order to draw accurate conclusions from the participants' narratives and in hopes to uncover a fundamental phenomenon. Considering the responsibility to accurately make sense of individual narratives, IPA study sample sizes typically remain small in design.

I analyzed the participants' individual stories and perspectives using the above-

mentioned methodology in order to bring the conducted study to the forefront of scientific inquiry among the fields of conflict resolution and LGBTQ studies. The research provides important insights into the process of lesbian-led families and lesbian mothered family planning, whether through the legal adoption system or via insemination, together with the significant events associated with childrearing.

Sampling

The study includes a small, homogenous sample size of six with participants' ages ranging from 25-60. Requirements for participation included being a mother, who identifies as a lesbian, either single or in a co-parenting relationship. Participants' children's ages varied from newborn to adult. Participants were recruited through referrals from the Aqua Foundation for Women (AFW), a non-profit organization that supports lesbian, bisexual and transgender women.

The participants were chosen using a matching selection process and purposive sampling to find respondents for whom the research questions are relevant. Respondents were provided anonymity throughout the study and access to all research materials conducted (recorded interviews, notes, etc.) As the research took place, I structured the analysis of the gathered data to compile an accurately designed result.

Bracketing

According to Tufford and Newman (2012), bracketing in qualitative research assists the researcher's efforts in examining research material free from personal bias and preconceptions. Because the research topic and process can often be closely linked to personal interest, the bracketing process aims to produce a body of research rich in context, stemming from a broad, open perspective, reducing the researcher's findings to

actual participants' results as opposed to researcher's own assumptions of the outcome.

The bracketing method chosen for this study was reflexive journaling, through which any preconceptions are noted during the data collection stage and prior to the final written results. Keeping a steady journal containing the research questions for the study, alongside the researcher's objectives, allows for consistency throughout the data collection and data analysis stage. Tufford and Newman (2012) posit, "The maintenance of a journal can enhance researchers' ability to sustain a reflexive stance" (p. 87).

Utilizing reflexive journaling as a bracketing method helps to uncover any hidden biases, feelings, and emotions. Tufford and Newman (2012) describe this as *preconceptions*. For this study, maintaining a reflexive journal on a daily basis aided in achieving awareness and suspending preconceived notions. According to Tufford and Newman (2012), solely adhering to a particular bracketing method does not guarantee success in meeting research objectives. As the authors point out, "bracketing is neither a mechanized nor a manualized process that ensures if a researcher does X, he or she will obtain Y" (Tufford and Newman, 2012, p. 92). Moreover, the authors suggest that bracketing can be a useful tool prior to and during the research process to ensure a richer, genuine and more accurate account of the participants' lived experiences.

As part of the journaling process, I made several notes following each interview to reflect upon the participants' responses and sustain a non-biased perspective regarding the research content. In between scheduled interviews and throughout the data collection stage, the journal supported my efforts to suspend any pre-conceived notions I had concerning the participants' lived experiences. By doing so, I ascertained a richer awareness of the participants' realities.

Towards the beginning of the data collection process, I felt eager to recruit participants with whom I could conduct the interview face-to-face. Much to my surprise, five out of six participants opted to participate in telephonic interviews versus in-person interviews. Reflecting on the experience of conducting one face-to-face interview and five telephone interviews, I deduce that the participants who elected telephone interviews likely felt a sense of familiarity with their surroundings and the location from which they dialed in. It can further be presumed that the telephone interview appealed to the participants favorably. Furthermore, it could be estimated that any feelings of ease and anonymity on behalf of the participants produced a profound dialogue, free of external distractions and noise from a public setting that may have otherwise interfered with the interview process. Interestingly, while face-to-face interaction provided visual reference, the telephonic interviews provided a distinct characteristic of interconnectedness resulting in powerful uninhibited storytelling.

Data Collection

Recruited lesbian mothers participated in one-on-one, open-ended interviews. The participating mothers were asked several interview questions regarding their decision-making process, their transition into motherhood, and the interpersonal conflicts experienced. Relevant questions were asked in order to determine the ongoing and potential issues or conflicts affecting each participant, and to identify their commonly shared experiences. Example interview questions are as follows: How would you describe your experience with conceiving or adopting? Which factors determined your process for parenting? Were there economic, legal, or personal reasons involved in your

decision(s)? What are your feelings about the socio-political conflicts surrounding lesbian motherhood?

Each face-to-face interview with the subjects lasted approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Phone interviews were conducted for those selected participants who were not able to meet in person; these phone interviews also lasted anywhere from 60-90 minutes. A total of five phone interviews were conducted, and one face-to-face interview was conducted. Participants were offered the option of completing the interview in two separate sessions if their time was limited; however, all but one of six interview sessions were completed at once, minus one interview that required a brief follow-up session. Consent forms were obtained prior to the start of all interviews. The telephone sessions were audio-recorded using services provided by freeconferencecall.com with the consent of each participant, and in-person interviews were recorded using a Sony audio recorder. The audiotaped sessions were used for transcription, and the transcripts were distributed to the respondents upon request for their review and approval.

As part of the semi-structured interview, I proceeded with the following experience-related questions: 1.) How would you describe your process for planning a family? 2.) What were the determining factors for conception/adoption? 3.) What hardships, if any, did you face in pursuing motherhood?

In addition, I included the following sense-making questions in the interview: 1.) What does this experience of motherhood mean to you 2.) How do you make sense of your decision-making process? 3.) What are your feelings about the sociopolitical conflicts surrounding lesbian motherhood?

Data Analysis

Reading and Re-reading. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), *reading and re-reading* is the first step of IPA data analysis. In this step, the researcher begins the data analysis process by “entering into the participants’ world” (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 82). An important component of this step is to become fully acquainted with the chronology of the interview in order to identify patterns, thoughts, and feeling pertinent to the examination of the study. By reading and re-reading interview transcripts, the researcher can engross oneself into the most detailed and significant parts of the dialogue that took place. I reviewed each interview transcript four times on average. The reading and re-reading allowed me to familiarize myself with the details of each participant’s experience. Consequently, I developed an enriched sense of the psychological world of each participant and their narratives.

Initial Noting. The second step of IPA data analysis is *initial noting*. According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), this step is used to magnify language and content. In the step, the researcher is searching for phenomenological content, sense-making, and meaning. It is a crucial step in identifying the significant elements of importance to the participant. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), assert that using a keen awareness for discussion regarding participants’ “relationships, processes, places, events, values and principles” mentioned in the interview will facilitate in the researcher’s aim to uncover meaning within a particular life story (p. 83).

In addition, the researcher may use subcategories or focuses to categorize the analysis. For example, during the review of a transcript, a researcher may find connections within a participant’s story that prove imminent to presenting an accurate

account of their lived experience. For this reason, it is imperative to produce a commentary, albeit simple and concise, in order to reveal prevalent or recurring themes. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) suggest writing notes in a wide margin on the hard copy of a transcript. This stage involving “exploratory commenting” can be divided into categories to distinguish between content, language, and narrative flow (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 91). For each narrative, I created a chart dividing the dialogue and responses on the left-hand side, and the comments (descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual) on the right-hand side. This allowed me to organize the comments in a way that would facilitate the subsequent stages of analysis.

Descriptive Comments. As Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) outline in their text, descriptive commenting is an exploratory process; it allows the researcher to identify unspoken emotions and nonverbal dialogue. Descriptive comments serve as notes and references made by the researcher about the detailed responses of the participant throughout the interview. Making descriptive comments during the initial noting stage adds depth to the recollection of the interview for accurate transcription and analysis. For instance, in analyzing a response by a participant, the researcher may notice hesitation in the participant’s response, in which case the researcher may make a descriptive comment about the participant’s apprehension and note that as a clue into the participant’s feeling about that particular topic, event or circumstance.

Each transcript paragraph was analyzed separately, with attention given to each comment type. The descriptive comments were highlighted in a distinct color and written alongside the margin of the document. The descriptive comments were produced first, followed by the linguistic comments and conceptual comments using the same method.

Linguistic Comments. Taking notice of emotions, voice tone, pauses in response, or other signals assists the researcher in uncovering deeper meaning within the narrative (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Illuminating the linguistic elements of the interview can produce a compelling analysis. Acknowledging metaphor, word repetition, articulation and hesitancy proves useful in uncovering symbolic language (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), closely analyzing the participants' use of language creates a spotlight for "the ways in which the content and meaning were presented" (p. 88).

The linguistic comments were the most interesting to analyze as a novice IPA researcher. The process required careful intent to interpret the meaning of the verbal and non-verbal communication from the participants. Each pause, sigh, laugh and up-speak was accurately noted as possessing significance in meaning. Analyzing the linguistic comments provided a unique glance into the participants' psychological world. Some of the most noteworthy discoveries to emerge from the interviews were made throughout this noting stage. The non-verbal cues were just as important, if not more telling, than the verbal narratives.

Conceptual Comments. Conceptual comments contribute to the deepening of meaning. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe conceptual commenting as being interpretative. It is a complex step because it is based on the participant's understanding of the narrative they are presenting in the interview coupled with the researcher's ability to use "oneself to help make sense of the participant" (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 90). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), this stage requires effort and time on behalf of the analyst for proper reflection, interpretative analysis, intention and sense-

making. The authors posit, “the potential for this type of reflective engagement will differ from analyst to analyst and from project to project” (p. 90).

The conceptual comments expanded upon the descriptive and linguistic comments that were otherwise apparent within the delivered narratives. This process of the noting stage required observation from a distinct perspective; it demanded my personal participation and interpretation as the researcher. I carefully analyzed the participants’ responses several times over to create an understanding of their stories from a broader angle. This propelled me to consider aspects of the mothers’ experiences and the reasons for those occurrences. For example, when one participant mentioned her conflicts with homophobia in the workplace, it prompted me to question the environment at her workplace and the interpersonal conflicts with co-workers as a result of a more extensive problem: workplace discrimination laws and policies. Developing these conceptual comments provided insight and meaning to the isolated experiences by begging the questions how? and why?

Deconstruction. Deconstructing provides the researcher with an emphasis of importance in regards to the interview context (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). According to Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), a way of deconstructing the narrative is by “reading [a paragraph] backwards, a sentence at a time, to get a feel for the use of particular words” (p. 90). This unique form of analysis utilizes a varied approach in the effort to analyze the dialogue from multiple perspectives.

Overview of Writing Initial Notes. The fundamental IPA approaches to data analysis mentioned clearly are distinct. The objective is to engage with the transcribed text in as much detail as possible in order to encounter any meaning within the narrative

that may emerge from the recorded dialogue. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) assert that doing so advances the analyses “to a more interpretative level” (p. 91).

Developing Emergent Themes. The development of emerging themes serves to make connections of recurring themes or patterns in the transcript and can be used to map the narrative succinctly. By establishing emergent themes, the researcher acquires an awareness and deeper understanding of the participants’ stories. At this stage of the data analysis, the researcher will be met with an introspective cognizance of the participants’ experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). To develop the emergent themes, I began by creating a chart outlining each participant’s name and listing the most prominent details of their narrative. The outcome resulted in a culmination of experiences that were easily identifiable as a whole.

Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) describe this step in two parts. The authors explain that this step may or not apply to the research study; however, if applicable, this level in the analysis process is simply an organization of the previous step and the culmination of the emerging themes. The two suggested ways of connecting emerging themes are as follows: 1). Compile themes into chronological order; 2.) Print the typed list of themes, and cut out relating themes to organize on a larger separate piece of paper (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p. 96).

Moving to the Next Case. This step in the IPA data analysis process requires researchers to repeat the previous steps for each individual interview. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) caution researchers to remain free of bias from previous transcriptions and the outcomes in order to produce an accurate analysis.

Looking for patterns across cases. The next and last stage of IPA data analysis outlined by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) is associated with linking each individual case reviewed throughout the data analysis stage to identify similarities or phenomena. Through careful examination, I made connections between the similar patterns of each interview and produced four themes from the data collection. Each theme was present in at least four or more cases.

Ethical Framework

Diane Wolf (1996) explains that most feminist scholars have committed to conducting research in an ethical manner. Meaning, they are mostly concerned with analyzing the experiences of women with a caring, empathic attitude. By assuming a position of caring within the framework of feminist research ethics, the researcher assumes a compassionate role, one in which the participant is valued and given the freedom to share their experiences and express their emotions through a narrative dialogue. The ethics of *care* requires a significant amount of empathy between feminist researchers and their research participants, thus creating a trustworthy relationship between two individuals while building on a solid foundation for the exchange of knowledge (Scantlebury, 2005). Feminist ethicists interpret their participants' stories with a deep understanding of the necessity for societal recognition. The philosophy behind lesbian ethics is the belief that there is a deep, broad experience in the lives of lesbian women that often goes unnoticed.

Tong and Williams (2011) regard the feminist research ethic approach as one that is not limited to a single standard, but rather an approach that provides several ways of understanding the female perspective in various contexts. Tong (1993) reiterates that the

goal of feminist ethics is mainly to “create a gender-equal ethic that is based on nonsexist moral principles” (p. 40). Lesbian research ethics possesses a unique ethical approach in that it goes beyond feminism and includes the relationships and struggles that lesbian women face within their female-led family system. In some ways, lesbian women struggle with different forms of oppression than their heterosexual female counterparts. For this reason, lesbian ethicists consider it extremely necessary to highlight the experiences faced by this specific group of women.

Knigh (2000) outlines five components of feminist ethics that serve as a continuum in the qualitative research process: (a) situating one's identities; (b) informing one's daily lived experiences; (c) addressing inequalities; (d) representing one's research; and (e) reflecting on new possibilities. Situating one's identity allows the researcher to understand the power, oppression, and interpersonal relationships of the research subject (Gilligan 1977; Noddings, 1995). Expanding your knowledge and acknowledging your daily life experiences assists in validating one's role as a feminist researcher. The benefit of this approach is the ability to step outside of oneself as a researcher and gain a better understanding of multiple realities. According to Knigh (2000), an expanded view of the value of experience in the lives of women can provide opportunities for new insights and theoretical approaches. This framework provides an opportunity for feedback between the researcher and participant; it broadens the scope of ethics to redefine authority; it encourages self-reflection; and it presents an unambiguous positioned experience.

Gluck and Patai (1991a) describe feminist ethics research as a systematic model for reciprocity between researchers and their research participants. Derived by the idea that feminist researchers can gather qualitative data while connecting with participants

and ultimately achieving empowerment throughout the process, it appeals to the feminist researchers who possess a spirit of consciousness-raising and the pursuit for equality. This type of feminist scholarship seeks to cultivate a special bond between the women involved in the research process. It is meant to eliminate the hierarchal relationship between the researcher and participant and lead to what Barbara Du Bois (1979) has termed as “passionate scholarship” within female social science.

As mentioned previously, feminist research is centered on the issues of women, subordination, and the challenges facing females in our androcentric society. A significant distinction between feminist and non-feminist research is the dedication of feminists to pursue the feminist agenda, highlight the inequalities and challenge social norms through their research. Feminist research ethics involves a deep concern with women and their position in the world. At the center of the feminist ethics framework is the pursuit of reframing traditional ethics by evaluating women’s roles in society and highlighting women’s interests. Jaggar (1992) believes that the feminist ethics approach requires a commitment to acknowledging women as objects of ethical concern, while aiming to improve the overall conditions in the lives of women and other disadvantaged, marginalized minority groups. In addition, feminist ethics seeks to purge the notions of conventional gender roles, generating an idea of female morality and autonomy that discards the preconceived standards of a male-dominated societal structure. Subsequently, feminist’s passionate commitments often produce ethical dilemmas because they are met with the imbalance between genders and the “inherent power hierarchies that perpetuate women...” (Wolf, 1996, p. 2).

In keeping with traditional ethics, all participants’ identities were kept

confidential. A numbering system was used to organize each participant's data; this data was kept in a secure, locked filing cabinet. In an effort to employ feminist ethics throughout the data collection, analysis, and concluding stages, I followed protocol outlined by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). All potential subjects were preliminarily screened prior to the scheduling of interviews to determine eligibility. The preliminary questions were relevant to the study and research participant criteria. During the interviews, the semi-structured non-biased questions asked by the researcher were relevant to the participants' experiences and the ways each participant made sense of their realities as lesbian mothers.

Interviews conducted were held at a neutral location. The one in-person interview was held at a mutually agreed upon location; the five phone interviews were conducted using a secure, confidential phone line. All interviews were audio recorded, and the recordings were made available to the participants upon request. In remaining devoted to the characteristics of feminist ethics, I maintained reciprocity with participants to ensure they felt the freedom to freely share their feelings and emotions with me as the researcher. I approached the dialogue with empathy and care, entering their psychological worlds with sensitivity and gratitude.

The following chapter presents the research findings, emergent themes, and the interview excerpts that coincide with, and serve to support, the four emergent themes of the research study. Participant summaries briefly introduce each participant, followed by a detailed presentation of each theme. Pseudonyms have been chosen to conceal the participants' identities.

Chapter 4: Findings

The following section outlines the findings that resulted from the collected data and interpretative phenomenological analysis of the research study. The participants' narratives support the themes that have emerged from the collected data and highlight their significance to the participants' experiences. In addition, I have provided a brief description of each participant's background information including age, number of children adopted or conceived through alternative insemination (AI), and relationship status.

Participant Summaries

According to Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) interpretative phenomenological analysis is best conducted by examining each interview transcript carefully, while devoting close attention to the participants' perceptions and meaning making. It is a model of idiographic inquiry that aims to explore an individual's unique experience in detail. The qualities of a successful IPA researcher are described to include "open-mindedness; flexibility; patience; empathy; and the willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant's world" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 55). The participant summaries that follow serve as an introduction to the individuals who participated in this study in an effort to provide readers with a glimpse into their worlds and lived experiences as they relate to each of the relevant common themes. Pseudonyms were chosen to replace the participants' real names.

Padma (Participant #1). 32 years old, partnered (not legally married) with a 2 year-old daughter conceived through alternative insemination. Her partner is their daughter's birth mother. Her narrative contains concerns and experiences with a lack in

healthcare coverage and denied employment benefits including paid time off at the time of her daughter's birth; her employer claimed her relationship with her partner was not lawfully recognized, and therefore refused to extend employment benefits. She experienced external family conflict and relationship conflict prior to and after her daughter's birth in regards to role dynamics and familial systemic shifts.

Magdalena (Participant #2). 54 years old and legally married. She adopted her daughter internationally, and shortly thereafter her wife completed the second-parent adoption process in the U.S. The couple legally hyphenated their last names and the name of their daughter following the adoption to further validate and secure their parental rights as mothers.

Claire (Participant #3). 55 years old, non-biological mother to an infant daughter conceived through alternative insemination. She and her wife are legally married, but have experienced issues obtaining full legal parental rights. Following the birth of their daughter, the couple sued the county in which they reside for recognition of their relationship and equal status as mothers. They are seeking equal parental rights to include both their names on their daughter's birth certificate. Because they are legally married, they are seeking recognition and parental equality as a married couple and insist that they should not be required to complete a second-parent adoption.

Rosa (Participant #4). 42 years old, legally married birth mother to twins conceived through alternative insemination. She and her wife sought legal advice and protection through step-parent adoption and estate planning throughout the process of insemination leading up to the birth of their children in order to secure legal protection at

the hospital including hospital visitations, decision-making, and acquiring their daughter's birth certificate.

Audrey (Participant #5). 51 years old, adoptive mother of a child adopted from Jamaica with her partner at the time. She could not legally adopt in the United States; therefore, she and her partner prepared a co-parenting agreement that unofficially outlined her parental rights in addition to custody details should the couple separate in the future. In addition, they legally hyphenated their son's name in an effort to validate their relationship as a family. Her narrative includes experiences of discrimination and homophobia in the workplace and adoption challenges as a result of the adoption laws in the U.S.

Laurel (Participant #6). 60 years old, mother of two children – her son was conceived through alternative insemination, and her daughter was adopted domestically. She raised both children as a single mother for most of their lives. Her narrative contains experiences involving struggles with workplace homophobia and discrimination as a result of her sexuality, and an explanation of the adoption challenges she met as a lesbian mother.

Themes

The following section contains detailed descriptions of the emergent themes derived and extracted from the participants' interview responses in support of each categorized theme. The themes were discovered by organizing the data abstractly and by searching for connections between the narratives that emerged with commonalities in experiences. All participants mentioned unique obstacles and significant events that occurred throughout their journeys leading up to becoming mothers and during

motherhood. The themes presented serve as a representation of the participants' most prominent experiences. As suggested by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009), the following themes map "the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes" (p. 91).

Theme 1. The process of becoming a mother in a lesbian family system leads to challenges in securing parental rights.

The data collected indicated that all participants experienced a certain degree of conflict in obtaining their full parental rights as homosexual women, whether they were single, partnered, or married at the time of conception, birth or adoption of their child. All participants disclosed instances in which the security of their parental rights was challenged. In various arenas of their lives, including travelling with their children, at the hospital or pediatrician's office and at their child's school, lesbian mothers – biological, non-biological, and adoptive – are often questioned and asked to prove the legal connection between them and their child.

The following excerpt from an interview describes a mother's experience at the workplace when she requested paid time off from her employer at the time of her daughter's birth; she was denied because her employer does not recognize domestic partnerships, nor do they extend domestic partnership benefits to employees. She could not provide paperwork to validate her relationship to her daughter as the non-biological mother. The paid time off she was hoping to receive would have permitted her to spend one week at home after her daughter's birth. She expresses her feelings of disappointment regarding the situation:

Padma. “And I had um an experience at my workplace um because at work my employer does not recognize um domestic partnerships and but they do have a benefit for um employees where you know if you have a child that you can get a one free week you know of paid time off you know to help you I guess you know to give you a free week off so you can be with your kid. So I had applied for that free week off and um they denied me, they said I couldn’t have it because I was not you know the biological – because I wasn’t on the birth certificate basically. Because you have to be either on the birth—either the one actually giving the birth or on the birth certificate or adopting a child you know you would have those types of paper works and things like that. Um, and so since none of those things had occurred, they didn’t allow me to have that free week of time off, but, so that was something that was I-I was disappointed about, I mean not that I, I mean I took the time off that I needed you know, but I guess I felt a little bit discriminated against because they didn’t allow me to take the time off because at this time you know we had the baby there was no you know marriage or anything like that, so even if I wanted to be married to her I couldn’t be and um you know by the time an adoption would’ve happened that would’ve been way after the baby was born and the free week off would not have been available then.”

The quote above illustrates the theme by presenting Padma’s feelings of disappointment and discouragement. She mentioned feeling discriminated against by her employer because she was denied the paid time off she had requested in order to spend time with her newborn daughter. Padma repeated the words “free week off” several times as to express a strong desire for a paid leave to be with her child.

When Magdalena's wife brought up her feelings of desire to become a mother, the couple discussed their options to conceive. They decided to try alternative insemination as a means of conception, but after a few unsuccessful attempts they decided to explore other options such as adoption. At that time, there was a ban in Florida that prevented same-sex couples from adopting children. The participant mentioned that had she and her wife applied for domestic adoption, they would have been denied by the State of Florida following the required home study. For that reason, the couple chose international adoption as a means to start a family:

Magdalena. "There was not enough protection for adoptive mothers...maybe that person would come back into your life and come knocking on your door and we didn't want that to happen. I was ahead of everything the whole time, and I wasn't going to let anyone get in my way of the adoption. Once we got back here on June 5th, we had to go through the re-adoption process and that's when our lawyer, Elizabeth Schwartz, came into play. The thing is—the child becomes a U.S. citizen as soon as you go to visit. The first time you go to visit your child, your child automatically becomes a U.S. citizen. And so then we changed her name, that is something else that I needed to change because her name on her citizenship was different."

Magdalena chose an international adoption in fear that a domestic adoption would result in her parental rights being revoked if anyone were to realize that she is a lesbian. She chose a lawyer whom she trusted to advise her how to best protect her family from discriminatory anti-gay adoption laws.

The following interview excerpt presents the challenge faced by a participant and her wife, whom although legally married, are not allowed to acquire their daughter's birth certificate with both women listed as mothers or parents. The couple sued the county to obtain rights for both women to appear on the birth certificate as legal mothers of their daughter. Under state law, marriage equality does not provide the mothers with guaranteed equal parental rights. In lieu of a birth certificate, the participant carries court documents in her possession at all times to prove her relationship to child:

Claire. "...my rights associated with the child were tenuous from day one...I have to ride around with the court papers in my car, you know I mean, I have to have them on me cause that's the only, you know, that I have from the court and that should you know give the state the, all the—if I was a man and had a similar court document the state of Florida would've issued a birth certificate months ago. We've been waiting since last January, this past January. We're still waiting, and we call every week, and they tell me 'we don't know, we're working on it'... we didn't want to go through an adoption because it's not an adoption. I'm not adopting Chris' child; this is, this is our child...But what the statute says is that if you have a similar situation, and it's a man, and you have a court document then you can send that on and they'll just simply add you to the birth certificate, and they do this all the time for straight couples. They actually even have an expedited service. So, this is not something new for them; they just don't want to do it."

Claire presents an analogy and comparison to heterosexual parents and different-sex families to illustrate the discrimination faced by lesbian mothers and the barriers between their efforts to obtain parental equality. Although these women are legally

married, and the court recognizes their marriage, Claire is refused full parental rights and a birth certificate that includes her name on it to confirm her relationship as the mother of her daughter. It seems like the marriage equality law fails to include an added level of parental inclusion for lesbian mothers with children.

The following excerpt is from an interview in which the participant explained the course of action she experienced in order to obtain legal paperwork prior to the birth of her children. She sought legal advice from her lawyer who suggested a stepparent adoption would be the most viable option as a means to secure both mothers' rights as parents. The participant describes the process as lengthy and timely. In the end, her lawyer produced paperwork outlining the provisions and powers that she and her wife would possess over their estate and two children:

Rosa. "We did everything ahead of time, all the paperwork, and showed up at the hospital the day of the birth with papers that provided my wife with full decision-making capability over the babies if something were to happen to me...I don't know what they would've done if we didn't have those papers..."

"...the step-parent adoption cannot occur until after the babies are born it doesn't matter how pregnant I am, until the babies are out of me there's no ability to move forward on the step-parent adoption. So what happened you know because these kinds of processes aren't instantaneous you have this gap of time from the time of the birth to the time when your step-parent is finalized where you would be in the legal limbo unless you had these certain estate planning documents. So that's why we did the two-pronged approach. And it was the estate planning documents that allowed [my partner] the decision-making capability in the hospital and from that

period of time made her not a parent in quote marks but made her legally have certain legal rights and responsibilities with the children before the adoption was finalized. ”

Rosa expressed that she approached her situation fully prepared and is uncertain as to how differently things may have gone if the legal paperwork and legal protection had not been in place. This was the first instance that I had heard of in which a lesbian couple chose to pursue a stepparent adoption as opposed to a second-parent adoption. Rosa’s experience piqued my interest and in comparing her story with others, I notice there are several loopholes lesbian mothers must leap through to secure their rights. In many ways they are left with no other option than to imitate different-sex couples to secure their parental and decision-making rights.

The ban on gay and lesbian adoption in the state of Florida made it difficult for the following participant to legally adopt a child. She and her partner explored other options and eventually pursued an international adoption in Jamaica. The participant explained to me that shortly after initiating the adoption, she decided it would be best for her partner to be the legal adoptive parent:

***Audrey.** “Well, we had lots of issues. You know in the state of Florida it was illegal to adopt as a lesbian at that time, so that was one issue, two, we were adopting from Jamaica, which is a very homophobic country. So, we never actually came out to my son’s birth mother, although I think she figured stuff out became immigration also played a role in that I was not a legal US citizen at that time. I wasn’t a US citizen, I was here legally, but I wasn’t a US citizen. And as we got into the adoption process, we realized that it made more sense for my partner*

to be the legal adoptive parent than for me to be the legal adoptive parent so that we could expedite the adoption and the visa internationally. So, she became the legal adoptive parent; I was the unrecorded parent. So, you know the challenge of adopting when the law expressly forbids you to adopt, was huge. Legally it was very challenging because we really had to um I had to go to great lengths to protect my legal right in the event that our relationship ended, which it did. And so I had to constantly document my contribution to my son's life, you know, and my role as a parent. And I had to make sure that I had the right paperwork with me all the time in case there was a medical emergency, and to travel with him was I guess no harder, but I guess I was always concerned. And so, he had a hyphenated last name and so it made it a little bit easier for me to navigate those legal challenges of every day life, like doctor's visits and travelling and school and things like that."

At some point the couple ended their relationship. During the course of their time together, they had created a co-parenting agreement – an unofficial informal document outlining the custody arrangements. This agreement between both mothers was meant to informally secure their parental rights. As the participant mentioned:

Audrey. *"...there was no legal protection for me and my son at that time...and even the lawyers who were gay, gay friendly, lgbt advocates still deferred to this oh well she doesn't have to give you anything because it's her legal right, and I was like whoa, wait, what are you talking about? So I had to fight for my son, I really had to fight for my son, I had to fight for shared custody for him, I had to fight, I had to legally fight, you know to be able to be his parent."*

Audrey reiterates her lack of legal protection as the mother to her son. It appears that her separation from her partner caused conflict and struggle, and she repeats the following words “*I had to fight...*” several times throughout the excerpt. Although she and her partner had created a mutually agreed upon co-parenting agreement, the laws prohibited her from having legal custody of her son.

Laurel adopted her daughter in the 1990’s, at which time adoption was legal for heterosexual individuals and couples only. In the following excerpt, the participant describes her experience with adopting as a ‘fortunate’ one because she was able to maintain her sexuality private and was ultimately granted the adoption of her daughter:

Laurel. “Well, yeah I mean it wasn’t legal as a lesbian to adopt when I adopted, but my son was really pushing me for he wanted a sibling...I’m a social worker, and I was working for a funding organization, and we funded a program at an adoption agency, so I applied there to adopt and I was just extremely fortunate that the social worker that came out to do the home study happened to be a gay man. Yeah, so he didn’t ask questions, and I didn’t have to lie about anything...and the process went smooth and you know and then I got my daughter...”

While conducting the analysis of Laurel’s response and her quoted excerpt above, I could not help but wonder: How would the circumstances have differed if the home study was conducted by someone else? Would the adoption have been approved? It seems as though Laurel’s ability to adopt was at the mercy of another person’s bias or non-bias. Without the legal protection of gay and lesbian adoption, the decision for her to become a mother is contingent on another individual’s authority.

In some way or another all participants were confronted with challenges during their journey to motherhood, and afterwards, in regards to securing their positions, rights, and desired responsibilities as mothers. The participants described their experiences with challenges involving legislation, or lack thereof, that impeded on their abilities to attain legal and social recognition as mothers of their children.

Throughout my analysis, I continued to come across circumstances within their narratives that resulted from the shared experiences of events and processes that require an intentional safeguarding of their lesbian family system. In other words, whether the participant adopted or conceived their child through alternative insemination, the process of motherhood for lesbian women involves a deliberate, calculated plan in which the legislation is their principal challenger.

Theme 2. Lesbian mothers subjected to discrimination experience feelings of exclusion.

All participants were questioned about their social experiences in the workplace with co-workers and employers, with external family members and friends, and interactions with individuals in their social circles, along with those individuals with whom they interacted on behalf of their children including, but not limited to, teachers, doctors, nurses, and social workers. Participants were asked to disclose any conflicts they had faced with individuals as a result of being mothers who identifying as lesbian and mothers raising children in a lesbian family system. The answers ranged and produced indications of homophobia and familial status discrimination.

The following participant describes the way her parents perceive her relationship (and theirs) to her daughter. Because she is the non-biological mother of her child, her parents do not consider themselves to be her daughter's grandparents:

***Padma.** “Yeah, so, with my family um you know my my parents are Jehovah’s witnesses, so obviously this is not a lifestyle that they agree with let alone bringing a child into the world into this type of relationship, um, so my parents were not supportive and at this point are quasi-supportive, but you know they were not supportive in the sense that like they didn’t come to the baby shower you know, so and I knew that they weren’t that they wouldn’t come to the baby shower because they wouldn’t want to seem as they’re approving of the relationship or of the whatever you know. But they did come to the hospital after the baby was born, so there was that support in whatever way that they showed, but they definitely don’t see my daughter as their granddaughter.”*

Padma assimilates her parent’s lack of support and attributes it to their religious beliefs. Her parents believe biology makes a family. This begs the consideration as to how their perspective influences Padma’s feelings about motherhood, her role in family system, and her interaction with her daughter.

International law in many countries prohibits lesbian women, either single or coupled, from adopting. Magdalena chose not to disclose the truth about her sexuality and lesbian relationship for fear that her adoption application would be denied:

***Magdalena.** “Oh yes, many months into the process I had to sign and have it notarized that I was a heterosexual.”*

After hearing her story and the predicaments she faced, I soon realized that Magdalena's maternal desire was met with sacrifice – a less obvious sacrifice than most would expect; in order to become a mother, she would have to conceal her sexual identity.

When asked about issues or conflicts with discrimination, I sensed nervousness in Claire's response while she explained that the decision to acknowledge herself as the mother of her child ultimately lies in the hands of the officials or authorities with whom she interacts in day-to-day situations. For instance, when travelling with her daughter, airport and/or employees and authorities are permitted to make crucial decisions regarding her legal connection to her daughter because she is not listed on her daughter's birth certificate. This means that she is not legally protected and could be subject to discrimination or homophobia from individuals who are not required to accept her court documents as proof of her parental status. If she is travelling with her daughter, or takes her daughter to a doctor's appointment, there is a likely possibility that the individual(s) with whom she comes in contact with could make a decision based on personal bias and prejudice; there is no assurance that the individual(s) will make a fair decision regarding her relationship to her daughter and role as mother:

Claire. "Yeah, and a birth certificate is a clean document. Everyone recognizes it whether it's a hospital, school, wherever you go. Pulling out a court document and having them have to read through a decision and then make a determination can go either way. And sometimes, like in the case of emergency, there's not time for somebody in the hospital in the administrator's office to make a determination

about it. So, you know, we still have a lot of concerns about how this is gonna operate.”

From what I gathered in her response, the thought of someone making the final decision about her parental status at any moment in her daily life creates uncertainty for Claire. Their choice to forego the second-parent adoption seems like a deliberate refusal to accommodate the failures, or lack of protection offered by the court to same-sex parents. Typically, a second-parent adoption secures rights, but it can become a frustrating loophole in the family court system for lesbian mothers. Claire expressed her need for the court to legitimately and genuinely recognize her relationship to her wife, their daughter and their family system.

During our interview, Audrey expressed the difficulties she faced as a black lesbian mother and briefly described a situation in the workplace in which a co-worker makes a discriminatory homophobic comment about lesbians raising children:

***Audrey.** “Well, there were quite a few, I mean you know at my job while we were going through the adoption process...so, my son was born and he was born in Jamaica and um and we went down and his birth mother gave him to us at the hospital um but we weren’t able to bring him to the states until about seven months...before he got here. So during that process, I was very out at work, and I worked at a very large American company in sales, and my being out and adopting was met with disdain I could say and criticism from many of my co-workers. Some people were supportive, but most people were not supportive, and I heard things that – about me – that...the harshest thing I heard someone said he would rather be adopted by a drunk than two lesbians...and that was really, really hard. It was a*

bitter pill to swallow because I guess race also plays into it, you know I'm black and this person was black so it was like a double whammy, that was hard."

The topic of discrimination and homophobia was prevalent and consistent in this study. Several of the mothers experienced discrimination in different facets, some circumstances of which jeopardized the livelihood of their family system. The following interview excerpt highlights the rejection one participant faced as a result of adopting a multi-ethnic child:

***Laurel.** "I think the hardest probably the hardest part was dealing with the rejection from my biological family at first. I mean, they were horrified when I came out to my mother one of the first things she said is no I'm not going to be a grandmother and I said oh yes you will and she looked at me like oh no that's even worse. So and um I had a lot my daughter is multi-racial. She's Haitian, Bahamian, Czechoslovakian, and Brazilian, and the racism was really hard... I lost two jobs, two major jobs for being a lesbian...and one of the jobs I was the director of a social service agency for eleven years, and I not only lost my job, they went to the governor and tried to have the adoption of my daughter overturned...I mean it was the homophobia was like the basis of it all...I mean the hardest stuff has been the employment discrimination for me as a lesbian it's been the number one biggest issue because it impacts your ability to be able to um feed your kids you know. I mean it's devastating when you lose a job, but um, I think as they've I, I was frightened to be really out when they were growing up because I was especially more so with my daughter because she was adopted and it was illegal to adopt, so I felt a lot more threatened and became a lot more closeted."*

Laurel expressed feelings of rejection and exclusion, and she described the hardships she experienced as a result of her sexuality. She suffered discrimination at the workplace and non-acceptance from some family members when her identity as a lesbian mother was revealed. The lack of acceptance from her family and the discrimination she faced at her workplace ultimately jeopardized her livelihood and the livelihood of her children.

Theme 3. Role changes transform the family dynamics of a lesbian-led household.

The data analysis suggests that all six participants indicated a transformative shift in their assumed roles as mothers after the birth or adoption of their child. The role changes they experienced ranged from work-family balancing to inter-relationship dynamics. The third theme to emerge from the research supports the foundations of role theory and the ways in which a change to the family system ignites a shift of roles, responsibilities, patterns and behaviors in the mothers' daily lives.

The interview excerpt below reveals the feelings of a participant in regards to the changes she and her partner experienced in their relationship after the birth of their daughter. She describes how the inability to travel and maintain a schedule independent of their daughter's needs caused, as she describes it, 'strife' in her relationship:

Padma. "Well, we're definitely not able to travel you know we used to travel a lot you know recreationally and um obviously we don't do that now or at least not in the same manner, so instead of you know going to Europe for two weeks, now we're going to like Orlando for like a week you know so our, our travel has changed significantly you know since the baby or before she was born...um and you know our relationship has has changed and you know and I guess I wasn't

gun-ho about this whole having a baby thing so you know it just caused a lot of um I guess strife in our relationship...um...and then you know coupled with the fact of course as a new parent you don't sleep very much and you know thankfully the baby is healthy but you know you have all those things that happen with the baby and you know they get sick and you wind up getting sick from them and you know that whole thing that goes along with it, so um there has been a lot of like stress in our relationship because of the baby."

Padma described her experience with the change she and her partner faced, which resulted in relationship conflict and stress in their relationship. It appears that the shift in role dynamics altered the ways she and her partner would approach traveling and the daily routine of their lives.

In the following interview excerpt, the participant asserts that the family dynamics in her household changed and explains that the relationship with her wife 'deepened' after her daughter was born. She describes the shift in her family dynamic:

Claire. Um, it's definitely been a different dynamic, you know, our relationship I think has deepened in ways. I mean obviously because we have an infant, it's about Satori. So, that's the significant change because it was only Chris and I so prior to that it was about us, and now we have this little human being who's completely dependent upon us. And, um, you know, we both take our roles very seriously in terms of contributing to her and making sure she has everything she needs mind, body, spirit, so um you know that's been a shift of focus to her from I think both of us. So, that's different just by virtue of the fact that it's different.

The couple prioritizes their responsibilities, work schedules, and household duties by putting the baby at the center of their focus. It seems like Claire and her wife made a collaborative effort to plan their shared responsibilities as new moms.

The women I interviewed balanced work and family life prior to after the arrival of their children. For some, it meant taking a hiatus from work for a short period of time to care for their babies; for others, it meant assuming new roles as working mothers. I found that some of the women expressed a desire and eagerness to return to work after staying home for a while, and others preferred the role of full-time mom. In terms of roles and dynamics, these mothers were faced at one point in time or another with the decision to plan for their household including finances, workload, and household chores, which led to shifts in their family dynamics and transformed daily roles. Through my examination of the lived experiences of these six women, I realize that the process of becoming a mother in a lesbian-led household requires an intentional determined strategy prior to and after conception or adoption that centers on family planning, financial planning, and the scheduling of daily responsibilities. In the following excerpt, the participant mentions that she and her spouse experienced conflict in their relationship as a result the overwhelming amount of work involved with caring for their twins. She also describes the shift she experienced as a full-time attorney to a stay-at-home mom:

Rosa. "Nothing, absolutely nothing is the same...even where we're living is different, um my desire to excel at work has completely gone up in smoke. Um, I'm also a new attorney, so I've done a lot of things...I didn't become an attorney until I was 40, so even though I'm not young, I'm a young attorney, and this is the time when I should be trying to get ahead in my career. And you know, I kind of stopped

caring too much about that, um, there is no no time for um personal or couple relaxation, you know. Almost all of our conversations are about the babies and what we're gonna do um... Yeah, your whole schedule, like how are we going to have five minutes to have dinner, how is that going to work and their routines and their incessant need to breast-feed in the late afternoon and you know I think some of that is compounded because there's two. I guess because of the breast-feeding—it's a collaboration but because there's so much to do in the house you know there's laundry and there's feeding—feeding mainly, my job is feeding the babies, and her job is feeding me; I've never been so hungry in my life. So, unfortunately, and I'd like to find some way to make this different is that she had to take on the running of the house because I don't do any of that. I haven't done dishes in I don't know how long. I do the babies' laundry, but I haven't done our laundry. You know all of that, all the shopping, you know I haven't been to the grocery store since I was pregnant...there was definitely conflict in the relationship in dealing with the amount of work that has to be done.”

The changes in the social lives of the mothers I interviewed seemed to possess a similar shift: a decline in socializing with friends, attending social gatherings, events or parties. One participant opines that parents in same-sex and opposite-sex family systems alike mutually experience many changes in their daily lives as a result of becoming a parent. She expressed feelings of joy and happiness about motherhood and also considers her career as equally fulfilling and necessary to her occupational well-being:

Audrey. *“I think you know my life definitely changed; I was less active politically after I became a parent. Um, my social life changed in that I didn't hang out with*

as many single people as I did before, or partying people, you know I started hanging out with other parents. But I think my life changed in many ways that are similar to traditional hetero-normative families, so you know, we were tired all the time, we were broke, we were you know everything revolved around our son...Well, I will tell you this, after being home for six weeks with my son I knew I wasn't a stay at home mom. There was no way that I would stay at home, and there's no way that my partner would've stayed at home. So we decided that we would rather work and work harder to afford a nanny than to stay home with our son—not because we didn't love him, but because our work was really important to us as people, right?"

Role changes occurred in different areas of the mothers' lives including, but not limited to, political, social, and occupational capacities. One participant described the transformation in her role as a political advocate after becoming a mother:

Laurel. *"I mean my whole life changed when I became a mother, my priorities changed everything I mean I don't know, I mean it's such a huge thing, I mean the biggest thing I felt you know with both my kids was the need to do advocacy was like major thing, you know but they were both facing you know different kinds of challenges. I stayed on their committees for many many many years was on their boundaries committee to make sure at that point that the schools were racially balanced but also on their exceptional student educational committees to have them restructure..."*

She had been politically active prior to becoming a mother, but her political objectives transformed in accordance to her children's needs. Her son's downs syndrome ignited her desire to change laws and limitations in schools; she advocated for civil rights through most of his childhood. She participated in committees to advocate for racial equality at her daughter's school. It seems like her roles as advocate and mother became immediately entwined.

Theme 4. Lesbian mothers make meaning of their experience by redefining the societal definitions of motherhood.

From the participants' narratives I identified perspectives that indicated societal perceptions of motherhood that seemed to directly and indirectly influence the relationships or bonds formed between the mothers and their children. This diverse group of six women provided insight to the rigid and limited ways in which our society views the concept of motherhood and to whom society grants the desired role without limitations. The principle of lesbian feminist theory is based on experience (Jackson and Jones, 1998). For each mother, making sense of their experience is initiated by the expansive bond and connection to their child, whether they are the child's biological, non-biological or adoptive mother. Regardless of the positive feelings accompanied with motherhood, current social norms continue to dictate these mothers' roles, their legal relationships to their children, and in some ways their legitimacy. During the data analysis stage, I became increasingly intrigued as to how the challenges of a patriarchal social system and the rejection that stems from a heterosexist society has affected, and ultimately shaped, the mothers' experiences throughout their journeys to motherhood.

During our interview, one participant explained that she relates differently to her daughter because she is not the biological mother. I asked her to elaborate on what she meant, all the while wondering if her feelings have more to do with how society perceives her role than how she perceives her role as mother. She had apprehensions about the baby not loving her and expressed that rejection from her daughter would have made identifying as a mother more difficult:

***Padma.** “Well, the whole mom word is very, it’s still like, I’m still learning to accept that word or to identify with the word because yeah I know I have a kid, but I don’t wanna say that I don’t feel like a mom because if anything she likes me more than her other mother, but I feel like I guess maybe because I didn’t you know give birth to her that sometimes it’s hard for to say that yeah, I’m her mom, um, so that dynamic is a little weird for me, you know, like even though I say yeah, I’m her mom, but you know, she has another mom, too. You know so that’s kind of weird for me to be like ok, well, we’re both the moms but you know I guess my my my bond to her is obviously different than with you know her biological mother...um, which is very strange because I, I, I feel like the baby like I don’t want to say likes me more, but is like drawn to me more you know and comes to me more than to her biological mother, which I would’ve thought it would’ve been the opposite you know so before the baby was born I thought oh, she, not that she’s not gonna want me, but babies want their biological mother they know their smell and their heartbeat and all that kind of stuff, so I thought that’s what was gonna happen, but that’s kind of like the opposite of what happened. Um, which I guess kind of took me aback and I think that it was a good thing for me because I think*

that if I would've felt like...not rejection but just not that, that motherly bonding thing that it would've made it a lot more difficult for me to feel that yeah, I am the mom as well."

When asked about her feelings about motherhood and planning, Magdalena revealed that she has always felt a maternal instinct:

Magdalena. *"...I always knew I wanted to have family. When I was younger I always knew that if the opportunity presented itself when I got older and got involved with somebody and we were going to be together it was always going to be my option to do it... It's the motherly instinct—I have always been a caretaker..."*

Claire expressed contentment and fulfillment in response to the interview question. She describes her experience of being a mother as the greatest thing she has ever embarked upon in her life:

Claire. *"I mean, we, we have the most amazing child on the planet. So, um you know from that standpoint, we're just so blessed...it's incredible, um, experience and I wouldn't trade it for the world; it's been the best thing I've ever done in my life...it's incredibly joyful...and yeah, I wouldn't change it for the world...best thing I've ever done in my entire life."*

Despite the obstacles to secure her legal right as the mother to her child, which are still to this present day unresolved, from what I gather, it seems she has made a purposeful choice to become a mother and makes sense of her experience by relating it to her life prior to motherhood

When I asked Rosa about her feelings about motherhood, she indicated that becoming a mother came naturally to her and that the decision has led to a positive meaningful experience. She describes her decision as the “right” decision and perceives the series of events leading up to the birth of her babies as a blessing:

Rosa. “Absolutely the right decision and in fact I believe that I mean it’s a little trite to say that everything happens for a reason, I’m not sure that’s always true, especially when negative happens nobody says everything happens for a reason when something tragic happens in your life, but I do feel when these babies came like I have two, a boy and a girl; they were born on June 26th, which is the day the Supreme Court granted the decision of same-sex marriage...the house that I’m living in is across from my grandmother’s house where my mother grew up. There are just things that happened on this journey that seem like this is where I was meant at this time, and it’s a very strong feeling. So I you know even when things seem very desperately difficult, you know I look around and I’m incredibly, incredibly blessed with how things turned out and it just you know, these babies were meant to be here, and I was meant to be their mom, and we were meant to live across from my grandma’s house it’s just we’re meant to be right here.”

In considering motherhood as a universal experience, I consciously made connections with the feelings expressed by the mothers I interviewed, and I examined the reoccurrences and repetition of their emotions associated with motherhood: desire, fear, concern, joy, love, and the presence of selflessness. The following participant describes motherhood as a “tremendous responsibility”, in which a mother selflessly puts the needs of her child at the forefront:

***Audrey.** “I think being a mother means you are charged with this tremendous responsibility, I mean it feels like a really big responsibility to guide and help and nurture and support and create really in many ways a productive semi-happy human being, you know. You have to do everything to make sure this child that you are charged with parenting grows up to be self-sufficient and grows up to take care of himself, and that to me is what being a mother is all about. It means that you are—you can’t put yourself first anymore; the child comes first always in life. And sometimes that’s really hard, you know.”*

Audrey stresses that the selfless aspect of motherhood is challenging. It seems like she makes sense of motherhood and its meaning as a selfless responsibility, one that requires nurturing and guidance.

The following interview excerpt is from a lesbian mother who conceived her son through alternative insemination in the 1980’s, and later adopted her daughter in the 1990’s. Her son was born with downs syndrome, and her daughter experienced behavioral issues throughout her childhood. She describes both experiences with conceiving and adopting as rewarding:

***Laurel.** “I think every person’s experience is different and you know I don’t know, I mean I really feel that being a lesbian and choosing to have a child that the kids that it’s a real benefit for the children. You know I think kids need that and they need to see independence I mean they need to be you know I really feel that whoever raises children that they just need to be raised in the feminist environment more than anything...It’s exciting, though. It’s so incredibly exciting... When you*

see that kid when that kid smiles and that kid learns you know certain things when you see joy in their faces I mean it's just absolutely incredible."

Despite the challenges, Laurel overcame the struggles she experienced as a single lesbian mother, and by the same token, she taught her children to excel regardless of their differences. At the present time, both of her children are extremely successful adults. I found her narrative remarkably inspiring. She considers that being a lesbian mother involves making a conscious choice to have children, and for this reason, the children benefit in the end.

Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the thematic findings resulting from the interpretative phenomenological analyses conducted on the compiled research data. The responses contained in the narratives led to four emerging themes that illuminate upon the participants' shared experiences. Material in form of interview excerpts was presented to support each of the following four themes: theme 1.) The process of becoming a mother in a lesbian family system leads to challenges in securing parental rights; theme 2). Lesbian mothers subjected to discrimination experience feelings of exclusion; theme 3.) Role changes transform the family dynamics of a lesbian-led household; theme 4.) Lesbian mothers make meaning of their experience by redefining the societal definitions of motherhood.

The following chapter will discuss the research findings in relation to the research questions and literature presented in the previous chapters. In addition, Chapter 5 will introduce recommendations for comparable future research in the field of conflict resolution.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusion

The previous chapters of this dissertation outlined the purpose of this study, presented the literature review and theoretical framework chosen to support the study, and discussed the research methodology and research findings. This chapter will include a thorough discussion of the findings, an examination of the correlation between the emerging themes and the theories that were chosen to support this research study, accompanied by an explanation of the relevant literature and its connection to the research findings presented in the previous chapter. In addition, it contains recommendations for future research in the field of conflict analysis and resolution.

Findings

The narratives presented in the previous chapter were gathered in an effort to explore and document the lived experiences of lesbian mothers. Using interpretative phenomenological analysis, the shared experiences were categorized into emerging themes, all of which correspond to the central research question of this study: What is the common experience shared among lesbian mothers in their transformation to motherhood?

The analysis conducted has demonstrated that the transformation to lesbian motherhood possesses a complex and unique dynamic. By creating an alternative family system, these women powerfully redefine the significance of maternal desire. The narratives shared by the participants in this study led to the revelation of mutual experiences encountered as a result of social and political conflict, current public policy laws, workplace conflict, family conflict and role transformations. This research maps an under-represented population of mothers identifying as lesbian women, all of whom have

expressed difficulties with securing their parental rights, enduring feelings of discrimination, adapting to shifts in their family dynamic and reframing society's perspective on motherhood. Hence, the thematic findings presented in Chapter 4, which serve as prevalent interpretations of the participants' lived accounts.

Theoretical Framework Connections to Research Findings

The theoretical framework for this study consists of two theories: role theory and lesbian feminist theory. These theories function as lenses for examining and understanding the phenomena that exists among lesbian-mothered families. Role theory is used to explain the transformative dynamics that exist within the lesbian family system. Motherhood naturally influences a change in the patterns and behaviors of these mothers' daily lives. When considering the process of "becoming", role theory aligns with the experiences of these mothers, whose roles shifted beginning with the decision-making stage of their journey to the birth or final adoption of their child.

Lesbian feminist theory is used to highlight the experiences of lesbian mothers living in a heterosexist society and a patriarchal social system constructed by oppression. Calhoun (1994) asserts that there are significant differences between the experiences of lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers. While some experiences possess commonalities and a mutual understanding in nature, lesbian mothers belong to an underrepresented population of females living in a society in which public policy laws do not offer the same advantages to them as their heterosexual female counterparts. Because lesbian feminist theory is based on personal experience (Jackson and Jones, 1998), purposeful attention and a necessary awareness must be extended when analyzing these stories through the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis. Moreover, both

theories intersect with the field of conflict analysis and provide a narrow scope of examination to better understand the lived experiences of the participants in an effort to lift the veil on important matters of sociopolitical conflict, work conflict, relationship conflict and interpersonal conflict, all of which are accounted for and present in the gathered narratives. Throughout this study, specific emphasis is placed upon the process of “becoming” a mother—how the transformation is influenced by the mothers’ sexual identity together with their previous and present roles. The following section discusses the correlation between the theoretical framework and the emerging themes.

According to Calhoun (1994), lesbian women face obstacles in their lives as a result of heterosexualism. The first theme to emerge from the data reports the challenges involved with the process of becoming a mother in a lesbian family system—the most prominent of challenges remaining persistent with the struggle to secure parental rights. The research data for this study concluded that all participants, either biological, non-biological, or adoptive, experienced difficulty securing automatic parental rights prior to or following the birth or final adoption of their child. Whereas a heterosexual couple would be undoubtedly granted equal parental rights in the same circumstances, the participants indicated challenges that required legal advice, legal documentation, or alternative means sought to protect their maternal rights. That said, regardless of the course taken to seek and obtain legal protection, many of the women as of late are not yet guaranteed full legal authority as their child’s mother.

Heterosexist public policy laws yield to discrimination in the legal system, thus influencing society as a whole. As a result of the systemic bias leaning towards heterosexual couples and heterosexual co-parents, lesbian mothers are left to procure

protection through legal loopholes including second-parent adoption, stepparent adoption or appropriate estate planning. The same public policies set in place to prevent lesbian mothers from acquiring privileges, further propel discrimination and homophobia in external settings including, but not limited to, the workplace, schools, airports and hospitals, which in turn directly affects the livelihood of these mothers and their families.

The second theme to emerge from the data points to the feelings of exclusion felt by participants as a result of discrimination. As lesbian feminist theory proposes, the circumstantial discrimination experienced by the participants in this study greatly affected the mothers' lives in peculiar ways. The experiences surfaced from various contexts of the participants' lives, both personal and external, including homophobia in the workplace, interpersonal conflict, and other innumerable aspects met on a regular basis. As Calhoun (1994) explains it, women face challenges in our society by default; however, lesbian women face distinctive obstacles as a result of societal discrimination and homophobia. Participant interviews cited encounters with discrimination in various settings including conflicts with employers and co-workers in the workplace, conflicts with family members, challenges with airport personnel, school authorities and healthcare professionals. One participant (Padma) described a situation at her workplace when she requested time off following the birth of her daughter. The paid time off had been granted to heterosexual co-workers in similar circumstances, yet her employer denied her request because she could not provide legal documentation to prove her relationship as her daughter's non-biological mother. Another participant (Audrey) mentioned an experience with discrimination and homophobia from a co-worker who made discriminatory comments about her because she is a lesbian mom. And similarly, a participant's (Laurel)

job security was jeopardized as a result of her sexuality. Public policy law does not protect her from employer discrimination, and as such, her job and financial security is contingent upon her employer's discretion.

The third theme to emerge focuses on the role transformations and family dynamics of a lesbian-led household. The participant interview excerpts presented in Chapter 4 support the parallels between role theory and the transformation to lesbian motherhood. Participant transcripts clearly present the shift in role dynamics that most, if not all, mothers experienced. For some mothers, the decision to become a mother resulted in role changes in the workplace. Some moms chose to forego a full-time or half-time career and raise their child full-time, hence a role shift from employee to stay-at-home mom. For others the role transformation required work-family balancing, in which a time-divide was implemented along with a change in family care patterns involving nannies, childcare, etc. Participants cited role changes in family dynamics that interfered with previous roles. For instance, previous roles within their social circles and the social lives of the participants changed after they became mothers. Their ability to attend social events, parties, dinners and traveling was interrupted by motherhood. In addition, new household responsibilities arose with the addition of a new family member; in some cases the overwhelming responsibility of child-rearing and running a household led to tension and relationship conflict. For some moms, a shift in personal objectives ensued; a need for political advocacy and community participation resulted from assuming the new role as mother.

The final theme of this study corresponds with lesbian feminist theory by demonstrating how the participants have broadened the societal definition of motherhood.

The research data notably regards the definition of motherhood and the ways in which lesbian mothers are altering the definition. Lesbian feminist theory provides a framework in which the participants' shared narratives serve as evidence of this underrepresented population, while allowing the opportunity to compare the dissimilarities between women in a heterosexual family system and a lesbian family system. The data analysis led to examination of the patriarchal social system that markedly influences and dictates significant aspect of the lives of lesbian moms. The definition of "mother" is given a substantial amount of consideration, more specifically considering the ways our heteronormative society has constructed its definition—how "mother" is defined, and better yet, by whom.

Several researchers and authors were cited in the literature review contained in Chapter 2, which outlined prominent components of lesbian motherhood including insemination, relationship, legal issues and conflict. The following section will discuss the connection between the research findings and the literature review previously presented in Chapter 2.

Literature Review Connections to Research Findings

The research findings coincide with the literature presented by Ausbrooks and Russell (2011) on adoption and the growing numbers of gay and lesbian parents within the last decade. Gates et, al. (2007) is cited in support of relevant literature that provides evidence of the extensive efforts made by lesbian mothers to achieve adoption despite laws prohibiting them to do so. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) maintains recent public policy law information on their website regarding adoption laws in each state across the United States. As laws change, the HRC updates their website to reflect the

public policy that allows (or denies) the freedoms to lesbian families to adopt in their current state. On July 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in favor of granting same-sex couples the right to marriage equality. Marriage licenses were extended to same-sex couples shortly thereafter in courts across the United States. The revision of adoption laws and birth certificate restrictions have yet to follow suit. Since the historical SCOTUS ruling, legally married same-sex couples are still battling for their legal privileges as parents. The research findings indicated that participants (Magdalena and Laurel) concealed their sexual identity during their adoption application because state laws that banned same-sex couples, and those identifying as homosexual, prohibited them from adopting children. In other situations, participants and their partners pursued stepparent and second-parent adoptions in order to secure full parental rights under the law. For those participants whose state did not legally permit lesbian adoption, they searched for alternative routes to motherhood. Regardless of the recent changes in the law permitting same-sex couples to marry, there remains a disparity in the legislation extending parental entitlement to lesbian mothers. The literature outlines the inference presented by Cherguit et, al. (2013) in respects to the challenges faced by lesbian mothers and co-mothers on account of existing laws.

The literature review presents a brief discussion of the determining factors involved with lesbian family planning. Research findings from this study point to various determining factors for those participants who chose alternative insemination as a means to become a mother. Some participants referred to the innate desire to bear a child and create a biological offspring; others indicated that fertility issues and health conditions resulted in setbacks with pregnancy planning, and thus, adoption was the next option by

default. Similar reports from research cited by Bradford et, al. (2013) correspond to the research findings in this study in cases where lesbian mothers made the decision to pursue adoption after unsuccessful attempts to conceive via alternative insemination.

Cherguit et, al. (2013) asserts that the legal system has made the pursuit of motherhood for lesbian families an arduous battle. The social constructs of prejudice towards LGBT families has ignited a trickle affect and created an impediment on lesbian mothers' efforts to create a family. Research cited by Lewin (1993) relates to the research findings in its discussion of the contrasting experiences between lesbian mothers and heterosexual mothers. The journey to lesbian motherhood is highly influenced by government and current public policy law—its permissions and limitations. For that reason, the experience for lesbian mothers differs significantly from a legal standpoint to mothers who identify as a heterosexual. The resources available to lesbian families are contingent upon the laws that either protect or deny their rights as a family. Governmental law and societal perceptions regarding the validity of familial status and familial legitimacy directly and indirectly influence the possibilities for family planning. Research by Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) cited in the literature review is strengthened by participants' accounts of obstacles faced in numerous contexts of their social lives. There is profound evidence in the narratives presented in Chapter 4 in which participants expressed conflicts with the legal system in their quest for parental rights. Furthermore, the participants' daily lives were often disrupted as a result of discrimination and homophobia in the workplace, at their children's schools, from healthcare professionals and by their immediate or extended family members.

Tuten and August (2006) define work-family conflict and suggest that research examining inter-role conflict faced by lesbian women is limited. The research findings contained in Chapter 4 serve as evidence of conflict encountered by participants first-hand. The findings expand upon the examination of interpersonal conflict between lesbian mothers in social and personal contexts. Sobocan (2011) posits that the experiences of inter-conflict met by lesbian mothers are attributed to the defiance of a conventional family norm. One participant (Padma) specifically mentioned an experience with interpersonal conflict upon the birth of her daughter; her parents rejected their roles as grandparents because the participant is the child's non-biological mother.

A direct connection can be made between the literature reviewed and the findings in this study. The thematic findings can be used to expand upon previous reports and studies in the effort to provide a deeper understanding of a homogenous sample of the lesbian mothers living in our present day. Societal perceptions of LGBT families can tremendously impact and ultimately influence the conditions in which said families live within the context of their daily lives. The research findings presented in this study unequivocally support the literature and research previously presented. The thematic findings strengthen the implication that the security and protection of LGBT families are decidedly persuaded by our current legal system and the transmittal of discriminating perceptions that arise as a result of those implementations. This section presented the correlations between the literature review and the thematic findings. The following section will present recommendations for future research on LGBT families from the lens of conflict analysis and resolution.

Recommendations

This research provides insight on some of the lived realities of the lesbian mothers with children living amidst a society whose lack of exposure to alternative family systems has altered societal perceptions and inhibited lesbian mothers from living with the same equal privileges as their different-sex family counterparts. In general, research in the field of conflict analysis and resolution is limited in its examination of alternative family systems. Moreover, the examination of lesbian mothers with children is a fairly new area of research given more recent methods for conception (IVF, donor-egg in-vitro, surrogacy) and means of adoption (domestic and international). For this reason, research on the conflicts and obstacles experienced by lesbian families is not only significant, it is necessary for understanding the similarities and dissimilarities of an otherwise underrepresented population whose stories and narratives must be identified from a conflict resolution perspective. A thoughtful approach to the inclusivity of lesbian mothers in the external settings of their social lives can ignite an informative discourse among professionals in the interdisciplinary fields of conflict resolution. By educating individuals including doctors, mediators, teachers and healthcare professionals who come in contact with lesbian families on a regular basis, the wellbeing of lesbian mothers and their children can be safeguarded.

Participants in this study described the experiences they had from the moment they began family planning. For the mothers who opted to conceive through alternative insemination, their family planning stage naturally involved recurrent visits to their physicians, both a general practitioner and gynecologist. Furthermore, regular doctor's appointments meant interacting with nurse practitioners and several personnel in the

healthcare field. Similarly, for the participants who chose to adopt, the family planning process required interaction with adoption agency personnel, social workers, and psychologists, to name a few. All the mothers participating in this study indicated that they had been in contact with lawyers, judges, mediators, court clerks or an individual working within the legal system at some point throughout their journey. As such, the recommendation for an implementation of education about lesbian mothers and their family planning process can better facilitate those inevitable interactions.

As lesbian feminist theory proposes, the detailed facets of the lives of lesbian women are often overlooked in general, and more often in the above-mentioned settings. There is a prevalent need for inclusivity of all women in our society who choose to pursue motherhood. Women embarking upon the sacred journey to motherhood deserve security for themselves and their families regardless of sexual orientation. Assuming motherhood is a universal experience, an understanding of lesbian family systems is imperative, and in many ways a social obligation, especially for the individuals who have been granted positions of authority to make decisions that can ultimately determine positive or negative outcomes for lesbian mothers and their children.

The following section explains the contributions of this study to the field of conflict resolution. In the conflict resolution field for instance, human resource professionals, mediators, facilitators, therapists and other professionals alike must foster an awareness of lesbian-led families and broaden their perspective of lesbian family dynamics in order to effectively resolve the conflicts similar to those presented in the thematic findings of this study that eventually affect the daily lives of lesbian mothers.

Contributions to the Conflict Analysis and Resolution Field

The thematic findings of this study contribute to the existing literature on conflict resolution and its relevance in queer contexts. Furthermore, in the field of conflict resolution, conflict resolution practitioners can benefit from the results of this study and apply an understanding of its outcomes to their roles as human resource personnel, management personnel, social workers, mediators and dispute resolution specialists by considering the narratives presented and their applicability within the conflict analysis and resolution field. An acquired knowledge and familiarity by conflict resolution specialists concerning the conflicts experienced by lesbian mothers may assist in the efforts to achieve an effective resolution. For instance, in mediation, when conflict resolution specialists are informed of potential issues affecting lesbian mothers in regards to relationship, family, and interpersonal conflict, mediators with a vital understanding of lesbian family dynamics can establish appropriate communication norms and apply pertinent models for successful resolution.

In many ways public policy law has influenced the marginalization of lesbian women. As feminist theory purports, lesbian mothers are often unacknowledged within the scope of feminist issues. The field of conflict analysis and resolution is vast and possesses interdisciplinary characteristics; it intersects with disciplines and subfields of sociology and social psychology including women and gender studies, which in turn impacts the framework used to examine lesbian families. When evaluating the components of conflict resolution and the models applied to achieve resolution in particular situations, whether through mediation, dispute resolution or social work,

conflict resolution practitioners can utilize the thematic findings presented in this study to equip an awareness of the realities and lived experiences of the lesbian mothers.

Moreover, the research findings herein contribute the field of conflict resolution and play a significant role in the area of cross-cultural mediation specifically in regards to intersectionality – the overlap of various social identities including race, gender, sexuality, and class. Adopting awareness of cultural differences grants a deeper understanding of lived experience and its influence in shaping individual narratives. By applying a focus on cultural differences within the context of conflict resolution, practitioners become aware of the distinct experiences of the individuals with whom they interact in a mediation or dispute resolution setting. Using a lens of cross-cultural awareness can provide a broader scope of effective resolution in cases where linguistics and cultural tradition are prominent components of an individual's identity.

Limitations

While the thematic findings contribute to the conflict analysis and resolution field by providing an expanded understanding of the lived experiences of lesbian mothers, the research conducted is not absent of limitation in its design. Participants were recruited with the assistance of a South Florida based non-profit organization; therefore, all six participants were South Florida residents, providing a narrow demographic scope in terms of geographic location. The presented findings include narratives from lesbian mothers ranging from ages 25-60; however, demographics including race, ethnicity, and the mothers' socioeconomic statuses remain a significant and relevant component to the examination of lesbian motherhood in future research, specifically in its role as a determining factor for family planning.

Furthermore, the literature review presented research findings that are limited in their examination of lesbian mothers who have conceived children through insemination or adoption processes in a single or co-parenting lesbian relationship. A significant amount of data gathered on the topic of lesbian motherhood prior to this study is inclusive of women who identify as lesbian, raising children conceived in a previous heterosexual relationship. Moreover, the topic of lesbian motherhood has been previously analyzed in comparative studies to highlight the psychosocial affects of lesbian parenting, with a specific focus on the experiences of children as opposed to the lived experiences of their mothers.

Directions for Future Research within the Conflict Analysis and Resolution Field

According to Tourini and Coyle (2002), the experience of family planning for lesbian mothers involves “a range of subsequent decisions” (p. 195). The socioeconomic factors that influence the decision-making process for lesbian mothers is worthy of continued examination. An analysis of those factors can be used to evaluate gaps in public policy laws and healthcare provisions, or the lack thereof, directly affecting the outcomes of lesbian family planning. The findings produced from this study suggest that existing gaps in public policy have affected, and continue to affect, the livelihood of lesbian mothers and their children. Moreover, the lack of legal protection for lesbian families leads to conflicts in numerous areas of their lives. For this reason, research can be extended to examine how the sociopolitical conflicts impeding upon lesbian families results in additional conflicts experienced by lesbian mothers including interpersonal conflict, work-family conflict, financial conflict, all of which are pivotal issues in determining the possibility of family planning. When considering role theory and lesbian

feminist theory as a framework for the study of lesbian motherhood, socioeconomics play a central role in determining the attainment of the “mother” role – a role that is otherwise granted permissive parental privileges to heterosexual women – and in obtaining provisions depending on familial status and its validity according to the legal system in its non-permissive heterosexist disposition.

Throughout the study, some participants indicated that their decision to conceive or adopt was determined by their financial circumstances. A prospective lesbian mother considering alternative insemination may not receive coverage under her – or her partner’s – insurance policy in order to proceed with the insemination process. Assuming her financial circumstance permits her the luxury to do so, she would be forced to cover the out-of-pocket expenses involved with the process. In contrast, if a prospective lesbian mother is not able to afford the insemination or adoption expenses as a result of her financial circumstance, her pursuit of motherhood is thus conflicted with economic inabilities. It can be determined that a calculated focus on income and economic status will permit analysis pertaining to the ways lesbian mothers compensate for gaps in healthcare policy during the family planning stage.

The demographics including race, ethnicity, and the mothers’ socioeconomic statuses remain a significant and relevant component to the examination of lesbian motherhood, specifically in its role as a determining factor for family planning. Because public policy law limits the healthcare privileges extended to lesbian families, future research on the subject of socioeconomics and its prominent role within the LGBTQ community can expand upon the examination of the determining factors involved with lesbians choosing to become mothers.

This section outlined the directions for future research within the field of conflict analysis and resolution. Conducting this research as a conflict analysis and resolution scholar using the chosen methodological framework commanded a peculiar approach. The following section concludes this study with a brief reflection describing the researcher's introspective role in the process.

Conclusion

Smith & Osborn (2008) describe qualitative analysis as being an “inevitably personal process” (p. 67). Qualitative psychology intrinsically involves interpretation – interpretation of the past, the present, how the two influence and shape one another, and how an individual makes sense of its meaning. In many ways this research runs parallel with my own personal growth and sense of self as a novice qualitative researcher. Because the methodology of this research study is interpretative in design, I incidentally began a search for meaning within myself throughout the research process. In making sense of my own experiences and my role as researcher, I was encouraged to observe my surroundings with an intuitive commitment. I applied this sensitivity and empathy to each stage of the research process. I remained actively engaged; I felt attuned. I developed a profound understanding about myself while conducting this research, and consequently, I was capable of comprehending the participants' lived experiences to a greater extent. In doing so, particles of my inner self began to emerge, much like the emergent themes I discovered during the research analysis stage. I was harmoniously engaged in a heightened self-awareness throughout the course of this study – a self-awareness that ultimately aided in my research objectives and my endeavors to enter these participants' psychological world. The engagement I experienced with my “self” proved helpful for

my engagement with the lesbian mothers who willingly shared stories about their lived experiences in an effort to furnish an otherwise overlooked insight into their realities and the intricacies of their roles as mothers.

The research findings contained in this study empower the need for societal inclusion of lesbian-led families. From its inception, this research set out to gather and present evidence about the lived experiences of lesbian mothers in a concerted effort to promote an understanding of lesbian family systems and accurately represent an underrepresented population of women. Participants were asked experience-related and sense-making questions regarding their experiences in an effort to illuminate upon the ways they themselves make meaning of their experiences as mothers. It is concluded through the examination of lesbian-led households that the prominent conflicts surrounding lesbian mothers threaten the survival and function of the alternative family system. Furthermore, the research indicates that the inimitable struggles experienced by this diverse group of participants were largely due to sociopolitical conflicts and societal prejudices that interfere, limit, and discriminate against lesbian women who choose motherhood.

A noteworthy contribution to the field of conflict resolution has been made with the research findings brought forth within this study. The evidence herein will acquaint researchers and professionals with the dynamics of a lesbian-led family system in an attempt to reduce the conflicts and societal challenges experienced by lesbian mothers. This dissertation research presents evidence that the process of “becoming” a mother more than likely incites a taxing feat for lesbian women. While each mother expressed their unique narrative, the thematic findings exposed the similar experiences shared

among these six participants whose strong maternal desire launched a sacred journey to motherhood with prodigious obstacles arising along the way.

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Appendix A: Research Flyer



**PARTICIPANTS WANTED
FOR A RESEARCH STUDY**

Dissertation Research Study

Title: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Journey to Lesbian Motherhood.

Description of the study: This study examines the lives of lesbian mothers with children conceived via insemination or through the adoption process. This research aims to explore the narratives, experiences, and transformations of lesbian women and their journey into motherhood.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE?

- Mothers who identify as lesbian women
- Ages ranging from 25-60
- Single or in a co-parenting lesbian relationship
- Lesbian mothers with children conceived via insemination or through the adoption process.

WHAT WILL YOU BE ASKED TO DO?

Eligible participants will be invited to participate in a voluntary research study that explores participants' narratives in regards to their experiences, relationships, identities and transformation into motherhood. Your participation requires an interview with the principal investigator, Melissa Miller-Muñoz, conducted in person or over the telephone, which is estimated to last approximately 60-90 minutes in total. The interview can be completed in one or two sessions and will take place at a mutually acceptable time and location. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences as a lesbian mother and your decision-making process. All participants will be granted anonymity throughout the study. Participants' identities will not be revealed and all data and transcripts collected will remain confidential.

If you have any questions about this research study or are interested in participating, please contact:

Melissa Miller-Muñoz, M.A., Ph.D. Candidate

Phone number: (305) 609-8622

Email: mm1914@nova.edu

The College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences
 Department of Conflict Resolution Studies
 3301 College Ave.
 Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314

Appendix B: Consent Form

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
Institutional Review Board

Approval Date: JUN 26 2015

Continuing Review Date: JUN 25 2016



Consent Form for Participation in the Research Study Entitled:
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Journey to Lesbian Motherhood.

Funding Source: None.

IRB protocol #: 06231538Exp

Melissa Miller-Muñoz, M.A.
500 SW 101st Terrace, Unit 206
Pembroke Pines, FL 33025
(305) 609-8622

Robin Cooper, PhD
NSU - SHSS
3301 College Ave, Maltz Bldg
Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33314-7796

For questions/concerns about your research rights, contact:
Human Research Oversight Board (Institutional Review Board or IRB)
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information: Private location of your selection

What is the study about?

You are invited to participate in a research study. The goal of this study is to analyze narratives and experiences contained within the lives of lesbian mothers in an effort to illuminate their experiences in a social context, with some consideration given to the legal and socio-political aspects surrounding their decision-making process. This research aims to provide a voice for lesbian mothers, their experiences and their stories. The outcome of this research study will present significant findings to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, intersecting prevalent themes of inter-personal conflict, role conflict, and LGBTQ socio-political conflict. The researcher or principal investigator, Melissa Miller-Muñoz, a doctoral candidate at Nova Southeastern University, will conduct this study.

Why are you asking me?

You are being asked to participate because you meet the criteria for this research study. All research participants are lesbian mothers ranging from ages 25-60. The research study will include the participation of approximately 12 participants.

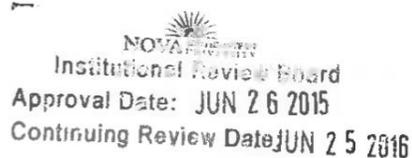
What will I be doing if I agree to be in the study?

If you decide to participate in this study, you are agreeing to be interviewed by the researcher, Melissa Miller-Muñoz. Ms. Miller-Muñoz will ask you questions regarding your experience(s) as a mother who identifies as a lesbian and the decision-making process involved in becoming a mother.

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Page 1 of 3

College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences
3301 College Avenue · Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314-7796
(954) 262-3000 · 800-262-7978 · Fax: (954) 262-3968
Email: chass@nsu.nova.edu · <http://chass.nova.edu>



Interviews will be arranged at a time and place that meets both your schedule and Ms. Miller-Muñoz's. The interview will take place in a location chosen by you (the participant). You may also choose to be interviewed over the phone, in which case Ms. Miller-Muñoz will wear headphones to protect your privacy during the interview. The interview, whether in person or over the telephone, will last no more than 90 minutes in total. A follow-up interview may be requested by the researcher in order to clarify or explore specific areas of the original interview; the follow-up interview will last no longer than 45 minutes.

Is there any audio or video recording?

This research project will include audio recording of the interview. This audio recording will be available to be heard by the researcher, Ms. Melissa Miller-Muñoz, personnel from the Nova Southeastern University IRB, and the researcher's dissertation chair, Dr. Robin Cooper. The recording will be transcribed by the researcher, Ms. Melissa Miller-Muñoz. The recording will be kept securely in Ms. Miller-Muñoz's home office in a locked safe and on an encrypted external hard drive. The recording will be kept for 36 months and destroyed after that time by deleting the files from the encrypted external hard drive.

What are the dangers to me?

The risks involved in participating in this study are minimal. The researcher has established the procedures outlined above to keep your recording as private as possible. Please be aware that because the study involves having your interview recorded, it means that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. The procedures or activities in this study may have unknown or unforeseeable risks.

If you have any questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact Ms. Melissa Miller-Muñoz at (305) 609-8622. You may also contact the IRB at the numbers indicated above with questions as to your research rights.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits for participating in this study.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you or payments made for participating in this study.

Initials: _____ Date: _____


 NOVA UNIVERSITY
 Institutional Review Board
 Approval Date: JUN 26 2015
 Continuing Review Date: JUN 25 2016

How will you keep my information private?

Your personal name will not be used in this research study unless you give the researcher, Melissa Miller-Muñoz, permission to use it. If you do not consent to having your name used in the study then no identifying information linking you to this study will be used and your identity will be kept anonymous by the use of pseudonyms (made-up names). All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless the law requires disclosure. The IRB, regulatory agencies, and Dr. Cooper may review research records.

What if I do not want to participate or I want to leave the study?

You have the right to leave this study at any time or refuse to participate. If you choose to withdraw, any information collected about you before the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the conclusion of the study and may be used as a part of the research.

Other Considerations:

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you by Ms. Melissa Miller-Muñoz.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing below, you indicate that

- this study has been explained to you
- you have read this document or it has been read to you
- your questions about this research study have been answered
- you have been told that you may ask the researchers any study related questions in the future or contact them in the event of a research-related injury
- you have been told that you may ask Institutional Review Board (IRB) personnel questions about your study rights
- you are entitled to a copy of this form after you have read and signed it
- you voluntarily agree to participate in the study entitled "XYZ" [FILL IN TITLE OF STUDY]

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Participant's Name: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent: _____

Date: _____

Initials: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C: Invitation to Participate

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: JUN 26 2015
Continuing Review Date: JUN 25 2016



Invitation to Participate in a Research Study entitled
An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Journey to Lesbian Motherhood.

Principal investigator(s)
Melissa Miller-Muñoz, M.A.
500 SW 101st Terrace, Unit 206
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Co-investigator(s)
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Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
Office of Grants and Contracts
(954) 262-5369/Toll Free: 866-499-0790
IRB@nsu.nova.edu

Site Information
Private mutually agreed location

Description of Study: Melissa Miller-Muñoz is a doctoral student at Nova Southeastern University engaged in research for the purpose of satisfying a requirement for a Doctor of Philosophy degree. The purpose of this study is to analyze narratives and experiences contained within the lives of lesbian mothers in an effort to illuminate their experiences in a social context, with some consideration given to the legal and socio-political aspects surrounding their decision-making process. This research aims to provide a voice for lesbian mothers, their experiences and their stories. The outcome of this research study will present significant findings to the field of conflict analysis and resolution, intersecting prevalent themes of inter-personal conflict, role conflict, and LGBTQ socio-political conflict

Risks/Benefits to the Participant: There may be minimal risk involved in participating in this study. There are no direct benefits to for agreeing to be in this study.

Cost and Payments to the Participant: There is no cost for participation in this study. Participation is completely voluntary and no payment will be provided.

Confidentiality: Maintaining your confidentiality is of utmost importance to this study. Information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless the law requires disclosure. All data will be secured in a locked filing cabinet. Your name will not be used in the reporting of information in publications or conference presentations. Information about confidentiality and the limits of confidentiality will be described to you if you decide to participate in this study.

Participant's Right to Withdraw from the Study: You have the right to refuse to participate in this study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Please be assured that absolutely no intrusive questions will be asked of you. No record of your participation will be kept except in my personal research notes and files, which will remain permanently confidential. This project has also been thoroughly reviewed, critiqued, and approved by the Nova Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, whose sole purpose is to ensure the safety of all research participants.

I appreciate your consideration! If you are interested in participating in this study, please contact me via email confirming your willingness to participate. You may also contact me at the number below should you have any questions.

Melissa Miller-Muñoz, M.A.
Email: mm1914@nova.edu
Telephone: (305) 609-8622

If you choose to participate, I will contact you to discuss the research study. Prior to the interview, you will be asked to sign a voluntary consent form that fully explains your right to discontinue participation at any time without repercussions.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

Melissa Miller-Muñoz, M.A.
Doctoral Candidate
Nova Southeastern University
Graduate School of Humanities & Social Sciences
Department of Conflict Analysis & Resolution
3301 College Avenue
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33314


NOVA SOUTHEASTERN UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Approval Date: JUN 26 2015
Continuing Review Date: JUN 25 2016