SHIFTING BOUNDARIES OF MOTHERHOOD: CHALLENGING THE PARENTAL BINARIES IN SELECT LESBIAN MOTHERHOOD MEMOIRS

Thesis submitted to the

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

by

Ms. Razeena P R

Under the Supervision of

Dr. Praseedha G.

Associate Professor

PG Department of English

Mercy College, Palakkad

Research Centre for Comparative Studies

Post Graduate Department of English

Mercy College, Palakkad

Affiliated to the University of Calicut

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DECLARATION

I, Ms. Razeena P R, hereby declare that the thesis titled, "Shifting Boundaries of Motherhood: Challenging the Parental Binaries in Select Lesbian Motherhood Memoirs" is a bonafide research carried out by me under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Praseedha G., and it has not previously formed the basis for the reward of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Place: PALAKKAD

Ms. Razeena P R

Date: 29/05/24

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis titled, "Shifting Boundaries of Motherhood: Challenging the Parental Binaries in Select Lesbian Motherhood Memoirs" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a work of bonafide research carried out by Ms. Razeena P R, under my supervision and that it has not formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or any other similar title or recognition.

Praseedha. G

Dr. Praseedha G. (Guide)

Associate Professor

Research Centre for Comparative Studies

PG Department of English

Mercy College, Palakkad

Place: Palakkad

Date: 24/05/24

MERCY COLLEGE
Date:.....
PALAKKAD, KERALA

Dr. PRASEEDHA. G
Research Guide,
Research Centre for Comparative Studies
P.G. Department of English,
Mercy College, Palakkad-6.

RESEARCH CENTRE
Dept. of English
Date.....
MERCY COLLEGE, PALAKKAD

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PALAKKAD - 678 006, KERALA, Phone : 0491-2541149, Fax : 0491-2542681
E-mail : mercy.pursuits@gmail.com, sheenagean@yahoo.co.in, trisinalapat@yahoo.com

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the suggestions and modifications putforth by the external examiners have been incorporated in the thesis titled "Shifting Boundaries of Motherhood: Challenging The Parental Binaries in Select Lesbian Motherhood Memoirs" submitted by Ms. Razeena P.R. The contents of the thesis in both hard and soft copies are one and the same.

Palakkad
28.02.2025

Praseedha. G

Dr. Praseedha G (Research Supervisor)
Associate Professor & Research Guide
Research Centre for Comparative Studies
PG Department of English
Mercy College, Palakkad

Dr. PRASEEDHA. G
Research Guide,
Research Centre for Comparative Studies
P.G. Department of English,
Mercy College, Palakkad-6.

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Finally, I thank God, Nature and all forms of latent manifestations of goodness in this Universe.

Razeena P R

for my mother…

and all 'mothers' across time and space…

CONTENTS

Documentation: MLA Handbook (Ninth Edition) has been used to document the thesis.

Preface

Thinking about this thesis over the past six years or so has been a little like the experience of hearing a new word one morning and then finding it on everyone's lips for the rest of the day. It's hard to say exactly when I first perceived that the concept of the lesbian mother was a pervasive, coherent, and meaningful narrative being reiterated in a variety of ways and places

Once, motherhood seemed to be a biological fact, fixed both literally and symbolically within the private, affective sphere. Now, one debates the meaning and practice of motherhood and mothering in many public spaces. A survey of newspapers, bookstores, and academic conference programs yields catchy titles, all ending in question marks. What is said by and about lesbian motherhood is increasingly complicated and divisive. Language is stretched to describe the bewildering fragmentation of a time in which one child may have a genetic mother, a gestational mother, and a custodial mother, each of whom is a different person. Although it seems clear that new, unprecedented pressures have recently called into question the meaning of who a mother is, this assumption nonetheless simplifies the history of the term. Motherhood has meant many different things in the past, just as it means different things in different cultures and subcultures today.

Chapter 1 gives an introduction to gender identity, motherhood and lesbian motherhood in general. It traces the evolution of motherhood and gradually focuses on lesbian motherhood, and gives an introduction to the authors and the works taken for study. It discusses the theoretical framework taken up for analysis in detail, reference and scope of the study. Chapter 2 analyses Cherrie Moraga’s biological motherhood memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood* (1997)

that encapsulates a profound journey chronicled through diary entries spanning from the anticipation of pregnancy to the challenging initial years of her son Rafael's life, when the baby is born premature and had to be hospitalized. The chapter delves into the theoretical framework of queering motherhood, borrowing the theoretical structure, as outlined by Shelley M. Park, Margaret F. Gibson, Nancy J Mezey and Amy Hequembourg. It explores the intersection of maternal memoir writing and identity formation using the theoretical constructs of S Juhasz. The chapter also addresses the theme of queer autoethnography through the lens of Chicana Lesbian motherhood and how the mother writes to heal her pain (scriptotherapy).

Chapter 3 analyses Nancy Abram's *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter* (1999). It delves into her personal journey, marked by the custody removal of Abram's daughter Amelia due to her separation from her lesbian partner Norma and subsequent legal battle for custody of the child. Abrams' memoir critiques monomaternalism, which intersects with patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism, and Eurocentrism, and advocates for resistance within adoptive, blended, lesbian, and queer families. These themes are explored with theoretical help from Adrienne Rich, Amy Hequembourg and Andrea O'Reilly.

Chapter 4 analyses Amie Klempnauer Miller's Non biological Motherhood Memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* (2010) and explores the intersection of narrative and theory in understanding motherhood experiences by constructing a theoretical framework grounded in concepts of polymaternalism, aiming to challenge established dichotomies within motherhood discourse. Various theoretical perspectives, including Adrienne Rich's analysis of matricentric feminism, and Lynn O'Brien's exploration of patriarchal ideologies in motherhood practices, are synthesized to shed light on the complexities

of mothering in contemporary society. Margaret F. Gibson's work on queer mothering, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of mothering desires, and Carol Smart's deconstruction of motherhood as a natural institution contribute to a nuanced understanding of queer motherhood narratives.

Chapter 5 explores Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's biological motherhood memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (2011), where Jimenez employs the memoir genre to delve into her journey as a butch lesbian navigating the realm of artificial insemination to conceive a child. Through her narrative, Jimenez provides a nuanced perspective that transcends a mere clinical portrayal of the pregnancy process by inter connecting individual identities and experiences, challenging the notion of isolated narratives and highlighting the interplay between personal and societal contexts. The theme of motherhood has been explored here with the theoretical support of Brenda O. Daly, Maureen T. Reddy and Marianne Hirsch's critique of feminist avoidance of the maternal, noting its entrenchment in patriarchal ideals. Joanee S. Frye and Andrea O'Reilley's concept of maternal reproduction and the relational self has also been explored in this chapter

Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a comparison of the works taken up for study in terms of the challenges, choices and chances supplied to the lesbian mothers in their journey to motherhood. The characters of various memoirs are grouped together based on their choices of maternal identity: biological or non-biological. Chapter 7 analyses the Limitations and Recommendations for further studies regarding this area of research. Narrative strategies in all the selected works have also been analyzed and added to the end of the core chapters.

സംഗ്രഹം

ലെസ്ബിയൻ അമ്മ എന്ന ആശയം വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന രീതികളിലും സ്ഥലങ്ങളിലും ആവർത്തിക്കപ്പെടുന്ന വ്യാപകവും യുക്തിസഹവും അർത്ഥവത്തായതുമായ ആഖ്യാനമാണെന്ന് ഞാൻ ആദ്യമായി മനസ്സിലാക്കിയത് എപ്പോഴാണെന്ന് കൃത്യമായി പറയാൻ പ്രയാസമാണ്. ഒരിക്കൽ, മാതൃത്വം ഒരു ജീവശാസ്ത്രപരമായ വസ്തുതയായി തോന്നി, അത് അക്ഷരാർത്ഥത്തിലും പ്രതീകാത്മകമായും സ്വകാര്യവും സ്വാധീനാത്മകവുമായ മേഖലയ്ക്കുള്ളിൽ സ്ഥിരീകരിക്കപ്പെട്ടു. ഇപ്പോൾ പല പൊതു ഇടങ്ങളിലും മാതൃത്വത്തിന്റെ അർത്ഥവും പ്രയോഗവും ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നു. ലെസ്ബിയൻ മാതൃത്വത്തെക്കുറിച്ച് പറയുന്നത് കൂടുതൽ സങ്കീർണ്ണവും വിഭജനപരവുമാണ്. ഒരു കുട്ടിക്ക് ഒരു ജനിതക അമ്മ, ഗർഭകാല അമ്മ, ഒരു കസ്റ്റഡി അമ്മ എന്നിവ ഉണ്ടായിരിക്കാവുന്ന ഒരു സമയത്തിന്റെ അമ്പരപ്പിക്കുന്ന വിഭജനത്തെ വിവരിക്കാൻ ഭാഷ നീട്ടുന്നു, അവരിൽ ഓരോരുത്തരും വ്യത്യസ്ത വ്യക്തികളാണ്. പുതിയതും അഭൂതപൂർവവുമായ സമ്മർദ്ദങ്ങൾ അടുത്തിടെ അമ്മയുടെ അർത്ഥത്തെ ചോദ്യം ചെയ്തുവെന്ന് വ്യക്തമാണെങ്കിലും, ഈ അനുമാനം ഈ പദത്തിന്റെ ചരിത്രം ലളിതമാക്കുന്നു. മാതൃത്വം ഇന്ന് വ്യത്യസ്ത സംസ്കാരങ്ങളിലും ഉപസംസ്കാരങ്ങളിലും വ്യത്യസ്ത കാര്യങ്ങൾ അർത്ഥമാക്കുന്നതുപോലെ, മാതൃത്വം മുൻകാലങ്ങളിൽ നിരവധി വ്യത്യസ്ത കാര്യങ്ങൾ അർത്ഥമാക്കുന്നു.

അധ്യായം 1 ലിംഗ സ്വത്വം, മാതൃത്വം, ലെസ്ബിയൻ മാതൃത്വം എന്നിവയെക്കുറിച്ച് ഒരു ആമുഖം നൽകുന്നു. ഇത് മാതൃത്വത്തിന്റെ പരിണാമം കണ്ടെത്തുകയും ക്രമേണ ലെസ്ബിയൻ മാതൃത്വത്തിൽ ശ്രദ്ധ കേന്ദ്രീകരിക്കുകയും രചയിതാക്കൾക്കും ചരിത്രം ലളിതമാക്കുന്നു.പഠനത്തിനായി എടുത്ത കൃതികൾക്കും ഒരു ആമുഖം നൽകുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. വിശകലനത്തിനായി എടുത്ത സൈദ്ധാന്തിക ചട്ടക്കൂട് വിശദമായി, റഫറൻസ്, പഠനത്തിന്റെ വ്യാപ്തി എന്നിവ ഇത് ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുന്നു. അധ്യായം 2 ചെറി മൊറാഗയുടെ ബയോളജിക്കൽ മാതൃത്വ ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പായ "വെയിറ്റിംഗ് ഇൻ ദി വിംഗ്സ്: പോർട്രെയിറ്റ് ഓഫ് എ കംിയർ മദർഹുഡ്" (1997) വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു, ഇത് ഗർഭധാരണത്തിന്റെ പ്രതീക്ഷ മുതൽ മകൻ റാഫേലിന്റെ ജീവിതത്തിലെ വെല്ലുവിളി നിറഞ്ഞ ആദ്യ വർഷങ്ങൾ വരെയുള്ള ഡയറി എൻട്രികളിലൂടെ വിവരിക്കുന്ന അഗാധമായ യാത്ര വിവരിക്കുന്നു. ചിക്കാന ലെസ്ബിയൻ മാതൃത്വത്തിന്റെ ലെൻസിലൂടെ കംിയർ ഓട്ടോഎത്നോഗ്രാഫിയുടെ വിഷയത്തെയും വേദന സുഖപ്പെടുത്താൻ അമ്മ എങ്ങനെ എഴുതുന്നു (സ്ക്രിപ്റ്റോതെറാപ്പി) എന്ന

വിഷയത്തെയും ഈ അധ്യായം അഭിസംബോധന ചെയ്യുന്നു. നാൻസി അബ്രാമിന്റെ "ദി അദർ മദർ: എ ലെസ്ബിയൻസ് ഫൈറ്റ് ഫോർ ഹെർ ഡോട്ടർ" (1999) എന്ന പുസ്തകം മൂന്നാം അധ്യായം വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. ലെസ്ബിയൻ പങ്കാളിയായ നോർമയിൽ നിന്ന് വേർപിരിഞ്ഞതിനാൽ അബ്രാമിന്റെ മകൾ അമേലിയയെ കസ്റ്റഡിയിൽ നിന്ന് നീക്കം ചെയ്തതും തുടർന്ന് കുട്ടിയുടെ സംരക്ഷണത്തിനായുള്ള നിയമപോരാട്ടവും അടയാളപ്പെടുത്തിയ അവളുടെ വ്യക്തിഗത യാത്രയെക്കുറിച്ചാണ് ഇത് പരിശോധിക്കുന്നത്. പുരുഷാധിപത്യം, വൈവിധ്യമാർന്ന സ്വഭാവം, മുതലാളിത്തം, യൂറോസെന്ററിസം എന്നിവയുമായി സംയോജിക്കുന്ന മോണോമെറ്റേണലിസത്തെ അബ്രാംസിന്റെ ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പ് വിമർശിക്കുകയും ദത്തെടുക്കലിനുള്ളിൽ ചെറുത്തുനിൽപ്പിനായി വാദിക്കുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു.

അധ്യായം 4 അമി ക്ലെംപ്നോവർ മില്ലറുടെ നോൺ ബയോളജിക്കൽ മദർഹുഡ് ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പ് "**ഷീലുക്ക്സ് ജസ്റ്റ് ലൈക്ക് യു: എ മെമ്മോയർ ഓഫ് (നോൺബയോളജിക്കൽ ലെസ്ബിയൻ) മദർഹുഡ്**" ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പ് (2010) വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുകയും മാതൃത്വ വ്യവഹാരത്തിനുള്ളിലെ സ്ഥാപിത വിഭജനങ്ങളെ വെല്ലുവിളിക്കാൻ ലക്ഷ്യമിട്ട് പോളിമെറ്റേണലിസത്തിന്റെ ആശയങ്ങളിൽ അധിഷ്ഠിതമായ ഒരു സൈദ്ധാന്തിക ചട്ടക്കൂട് നിർമ്മിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെ മാതൃത്വ അനുഭവങ്ങൾ മനസിലാക്കുന്നതിൽ ആഖ്യാനത്തിന്റെയും സിദ്ധാന്തത്തിന്റെയും വിഭജനം പര്യവേക്ഷണം ചെയ്യുകയും ചെയ്യുന്നു. അഞ്ചാം അധ്യായം കാർലീൻ പെൻഡെൽട്ടൺ ജിമെനെസിന്റെ ബയോളജിക്കൽ മാതൃത്വ ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പായ "ഹൗ ടു ഗെറ്റ് എ ഗേൾ **പ്രെഗ്നന്റ്**" (2011) പര്യവേക്ഷണം ചെയ്യുന്നു, അവിടെ ജിമെനെസ് ഒരു കുട്ടിയെ ഗർഭം ധരിക്കുന്നതിനുള്ള കൃത്രിമ ബീജസങ്കലനത്തിന്റെ മേഖലയിലൂടെ സഞ്ചരിക്കുന്ന ഒരു **ബുച്ച്** ലെസ്ബിയൻ എന്ന നിലയിലുള്ള തന്റെ യാത്രയെക്കുറിച്ച് അന്വേഷിക്കുന്നു. വ്യക്തിഗത ഐഡന്റിറ്റികളെയും അനുഭവങ്ങളെയും പരസ്പരം ബന്ധിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെയും ഒറ്റപ്പെട്ട ആഖ്യാനങ്ങളുടെ ആശയത്തെ വെല്ലുവിളിക്കുന്നതിലൂടെയും വ്യക്തിപരവും സാമൂഹികവുമായ സന്ദർഭങ്ങൾ തമ്മിലുള്ള പരസ്പരബന്ധം ഉയർത്തിക്കാട്ടുന്നതിലൂടെയും ഗർഭധാരണ പ്രക്രിയയുടെ ക്ലിനിക്കൽ ചിത്രീകരണത്തെ മറികടക്കുന്ന സൂക്ഷ്മമായ ഒരു കാഴ്ചപ്പാട് ജിമെനെസ് തന്റെ ആഖ്യാനത്തിലൂടെ നൽകുന്നു.

മാതൃത്വത്തിലേക്കുള്ള യാത്രയിൽ ലെസ്ബിയൻ അമ്മമാർക്ക് നൽകിയ വെല്ലുവിളികൾ, തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പുകൾ, അവസരങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയുടെ അടിസ്ഥാനത്തിൽ പഠനത്തിനായി എടുത്ത കൃതികളുടെ താരതമ്യത്തോടെയാണ് ആറാം അധ്യായം പ്രബന്ധം അവസാനിപ്പിക്കുന്നത്. വിവിധ ഓർമ്മക്കുറിപ്പുകളിലെ കഥാപാത്രങ്ങളെ അവരുടെ മാതൃ ഐഡന്റിറ്റിയുടെ തിരഞ്ഞെടുപ്പുകളെ അടിസ്ഥാനമാക്കി ഒരുമിച്ച് തരംതിരിച്ചിരിക്കുന്നു: ബയോളജിക്കൽ അല്ലെങ്കിൽ നോൺ ബയോളജിക്കൽ. ഈ ഗവേഷണ മേഖലയെക്കുറിച്ചുള്ള കൂടുതൽ പഠനങ്ങൾക്കുള്ള പരിമിതികളും ശുപാർശകളും അധ്യായം 7 വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. തിരഞ്ഞെടുത്ത എല്ലാ കൃതികളിലെയും ആഖ്യാന തന്ത്രങ്ങളും വിശകലനം ചെയ്യുകയും പ്രധാന അധ്യായങ്ങളുടെ അവസാനത്തിൽ ചേർക്കുകയും ചെയ്തിട്ടുണ്ട്.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Identity defines a person in the social sphere. They are classified based on markers like age, ability, caste, class, culture, ethnicity, gender, nationality, religion, race, sexual orientation and socio-economic status. The markers are many and varied. Cultural and gender markers are significant amongst these. Most of these markers are constructed by the normative society, based on the assumption of what is normal and generally accepted. The normative markers of gender and sexuality are termed 'heteronormative' or 'heterosexual.' It is also defined as 'cisnormative'and describes beliefs and systems that presume cisgender identities and relationships to be the norm. The term 'cisgender' has been used in this thesis to refer to people for whom the sex and gender they were assigned at birth aligns neatly with their subsequent sexual and gender identities. 'Heteronormative' describes normative principles and structures that define heterosexual identities and relationships.

At the other end of the spectrum are the terms 'homonormative' or 'homosexual' that deviates from the conventional norms of gender and sexuality. 'Queer' is also used to denote those sexual and gender identities that fall outside of heteronormative and cisnormative categorisations. The traditional binary model that defined gender as a dichotomy between heterosexuality and homosexuality is considered as the perceived 'normal' standard. However, in everyday conversations, there is a growing recognition and acceptance of the vast spectrum of genders and sexualities.

This shift owes much to the activism of LGBTQIA+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and more) communities, whose visibility and advocacy have steadily increased since the early 1990s. Concurrently, the rising academic discipline of queer studies has played a crucial role in driving societal and cultural transformations. Queer studies delve into the intricacies of homonormativity, carving out conceptual and practical spaces for sexualities and genders outside conventional norms. This endeavor involves dismantling the binary structures of gender and sexuality that have long dominated Western thought. Of the deviant sexualities mentioned above, Lesbian and Gay identity construction are explored much in contemporary literary and theoretical discourses. This thesis focuses on how lesbian motherhood identity is constructed.

Lesbian Identity Construction- Butch/ Dyke and Femme

Sociological and psychological research has extensively documented the presence of butch (masculine) and femme (feminine) subcultures within lesbian and bisexual communities. Despite the widespread acknowledgment of these butch–femme identities in both mainstream and literary discourses on lesbian and bisexual women, there remains a lack of consensus regarding their precise definition, suggesting a multidimensional nature rather than a singular construct. Comparative analyses reveal that, in contrast to femmes, butches exhibit less inclination towards childbirth but are open to the idea of raising children. Recent investigations indicate a correlation between sexual orientation and butch–femme identity, with a significant majority of butches identifying as lesbians, while only approximately half of femmes identify solely as lesbians, with the rest identifying as bisexual.

Despite being frequently marginalized and viewed unfavourably by research that leans towards a transformative perspective, which also tends to consider them regressive or unacceptable within lesbian communities, butch- femme couples are simultaneously criticized as epitomizing homonormative ideals. This criticism suggests that lesbians are not necessarily following more egalitarian relationship trajectories than heterosexual couples. However, the dynamics within butch- femme relationships possess the potential to challenge and undermine homonormative norms in nuanced and intricate ways.

Research by Jonathan Bassett, Sharon Pearcey, and Dabbs, regarding Butch and femme identity construction, suggest that butches exhibit partner preferences akin to heterosexual men, while femmes display preferences resembling those of heterosexual women. Butch and femme identities signify distinct expressions of masculinity (butch) or femininity (femme) within lesbian culture, encompassing diverse traits, behaviours, styles, and self-perceptions. These identities serve as frameworks for organizing sexual relationships and navigating the complexities of gender and sexual identity dynamics within the lesbian subculture. The concept of butch–femme culture serves as a means of structuring sexual relationships and negotiating gender and sexual identity complexities. However, it is imperative to recognize that butch–femme dynamics do not constitute the sole model of lesbian relationships, as there are also individuals involved in butch–butch and femme–femme partnerships. Throughout the twentieth century, the manifestation and significance of butch and femme identities among lesbians have undergone significant evolution. Some lesbian feminists have critiqued the butch–femme dynamics, viewing it as a replication of heterosexual relationship norms. Conversely, others argue that while butch–femme dynamics may bear resemblance

to heterosexual patterns, they also serve to challenge and subvert them concurrently. In the memoirs selected for study, the focus is on butch lesbians whose non-normative identity is foreshadowed when they adopt the role of motherhood, both biological and non-biological.

Motherhood

Motherhood is deemed to be a biological fact, fixed both literally and symbolically within affective and symbolic spheres, but over the years, the meaning and practice of motherhood and mothering has metamorphosised. Motherhood has assumed various shades of meaning in the past, just as it means different things in different cultures and subcultures today. Although motherhood is most often described in terms of cultural homogeneity and universal ideals and standards, it is also embedded in specific historical communities and groups. Viewing motherhood from the perspective of different communities and groups, it highlights the ways in which unambiguous norms and hidden assumptions about motherhood are negotiated by various material circumstances, especially in the time of rapid social, cultural and technological changes.

The first sense of mothering is grounded in the sense of its biological meaning, denoting a gendered, bodily, and relational identity. The second sense expands on the idea of nurturing and taking care like a mother. This figurative usage is still rooted either in the sense of a person who gives birth or in the mothers' assumed role of protection that is implied across cultures. The third sense connects mother to a gendered identity, the one who exerts control or is revered as a mother, disengaging the word from any connection to actual gestation and birth, associating

it with femininity and asserts that motherhood relates women to metaphorical mothering and not just biological mothering.

Homonormative families also engage in the concept of parenting. Just like heteronormative parenting that focuses on man -woman- child relationship, homonormative parenting focuses on gay parenting (man-man-child relationship) and lesbian parenting (woman-woman-child relationship). In such non-normative patterns of family construction, due to the marked absence of natural means of child reproduction and conception, such couples resort to the use of artificial means of reproduction like surrogacy or Artificial Insemination (AI). In lesbian parenting relationships, because of the presence of two women, even though one asserts as the butch(masculine) and other as the femme(feminine), most often, one woman is the biological mother of the child and the other the non-biological mother. The non-biological mother is most often termed as the 'other mother' or the 'co-mother'. Unlike in normative parenting methods, where one partner assumes the dominant role of the father and the biological gestational role of the mother, in non-normative lesbian parenting methods, both the partners assume the role of mothers. Studies often reveal that once a child enters the lives of lesbian women, regardless of whether they were butch of femme, the maternal instinct takes over and the non-normative gender identity takes a back stand.

Lesbian Motherhood

Theoretical research on lesbian parent family structures has largely catered around questions of assimilation and resistance and how they adhere to the concept of being either 'ordinary' or 'unique.' Motherhood critics theorise that lesbians have the potential to perform better as parents than heterosexuals, but as lesbian parenting

is often seen as an anomaly in normative parenting cultures, this appears to be a radical claim. Academic work on lesbian parenthood largely concentrates on the children in such families. Lesbian mothers often alter between the pressure to be 'normal' in order to appease homophobic critics, and the subversive imperative of queer theory. Rather than evaluate their relative success in challenging heteronormativity or their assimilative dimensions, this thesis tries to locate and fix lesbian mothers within the domain of assimilation among lesbian families that often oversee the importance of context to understandings of lesbian parents' experiences. This thesis attempts to reveal the methods in which lesbian mother's choices and practices are expressive of their broader sympathies of kinship in relation to family formation, legal and social policies. The method taken in this thesis emphasises on these deviations from the trajectories of conventional parenting that has dominated recent queer theoretical work and instead explores the meanings of parental, both biological and non-biological, that is apparent in lesbian women's narratives of motherhood. Lesbian mother's affinities and practices may be characterised by both assimilative and resistive elements. The point of theoretical analysis in this thesis is not to assess the extent to which they either adhere to or deviate from heteronormativity, but rather to explore how lesbian motherhood opens up new deliberations in mothering practices in the gradually evolving social and familial structures.

Though the term 'lesbian' and 'mother' are often considered to be in oppositional categories, many lesbians are traversing the path of biological/non-biological motherhood, thanks to innovation in reproductive technologies and adoption services. Before acknowledging their sexual orientation, certain lesbians assume the role of mothers within heterosexual relationships. A more recent

phenomenon is that of lesbians who choose to become parents in the context of a visible lesbian lifestyle, by openly acknowledging their sexuality and choice of partners. This has enabled political mobilisation for lesbian mothers that new reproductive technologies and established lesbian communities have made motherhood a more visible option for lesbian women.

The manners in which lesbian couples navigate the journey of parenthood often diverge significantly from the typical experiences of heterosexual couples. Unlike many heterosexual parents who adhere to traditional gendered parenting roles, lesbians embarking on parenting do so within relationships where these rigid roles may be redefined or even absent altogether. This pioneering generation of lesbian parents operates with fewer constraints imposed by societal norms, allowing them to shape novel family structures that challenge traditional ideologies.

Lesbians navigate a complex array of factors when considering their desire for motherhood, including their personal beliefs about motherhood, their integration into lesbian networks and communities, the dynamics of their intimate partner relationships, and their professional aspirations. These decision-making processes differ from those of heterosexual women due to the unique ways in which sexuality shapes the experiences of various groups of women. Moreover, within the lesbian community, intersecting factors such as race and class also play significant roles in shaping individual experiences and perspectives on motherhood.

Lesbian Co-parents

Academic discourses on lesbian motherhood from the 1970s onwards have frequently addressed apprehensions regarding custody rights of children from earlier heterosexual relationships. In many countries, same-sex couples are not granted the

privileges given to married heterosexual couples and, in such places, where they can legally register their union in same sex partnerships, they are often not extended the rights of adoption. While the lack of legal and social definitions concerning the role of co-parents can be a matter of concern, writings by lesbians regarding their choice to have children together explore new ways of thinking about gender and parenting and reconstruct conventional norms of motherhood.

Freudian understanding of sexuality and identity emerges from a complex interplay between the child and its parents. While the mother-child bond is typically seen as primary, the Oedipal dynamics introduce a triangular relationship that shifts the child's focus from the mother to the father, redefining the mother as lacking in comparison to the father. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis in *Between Men* (1985) sheds light on the dynamics of male homoeroticism, suggesting that these relationships often manifest as a complex interplay of rivalry, frequently centred around a woman. In our cultural narratives, male same-sex desire is often portrayed as competitive, with the presence of a woman serving to frame such desires within a heterosexual context. Similarly, female-female desire is often interpreted through the lens of reproduction, with the presence of a child acting as a focal point. This tendency to triangulate same-sex desires around conventional heterosexual or reproductive frameworks serves to normalize and make sense of non-normative desires. For instance, it is commonly assumed that a daughter can only fully comprehend her mother's experiences once she herself becomes a mother, implying a shared understanding rooted in reproductive roles. This assumption extends to all women, who are often presumed to share a collective bond based on their potential for reproduction. Sedgwick's analysis underscores the ways in which societal norms

and expectations shape our understanding of desire and relationships, often through the imposition of homonormative and reproductive paradigms.

In families with two or more mothers, akin to those in heteronormative nuclear families, the child faces the challenge of not being able to identify solely with one parent. However, unlike in heterosexual families, the recognition of differences between parents in polymaternal families extends beyond sexual differences to encompass factors such as race, class, ability, and age. When a child prioritizes one mother as the 'real' mother, it reflects societal norms favouring certain characteristics associated with motherhood, such as fertility, whiteness, and middle-class status. The term 'polymaternalism' has been used in the sense wherein a child has two mothers, a biological mother that gives birth to the child and a non-biological mother (the partner of the mother) who lives with the duo and takes cares of them.

An exclusive focus on the mother-child dyad in mothering narratives tends to reinforce heteronormative family structures, overlooking the significance of the relationship between mothers themselves. To truly understand queer mothering, it is essential to explore the emotional bonds among the mothers in addition to their connection with the child. Just as male homoerotic relationships are often framed as rivalries triangulated around a woman, female-female desire is frequently contextualized around the child, perpetuating the notion of reproductive desire as the norm for queer relationships.

Biological and Non-Biological Motherhood

Amy Hequembourg and Michael L Farrell's article "Lesbian Motherhood: Negotiating Marginal – Mainstream Identities" cites Ellen Lewin's powerful

statement that, “for lesbian women, ‘motherhood’ becomes a defining characteristic of identity that elides the ‘difference’ of lesbianism” (qtd. in Hequembourg and Farrell 543). Many lesbians construct ties with their child that are not related by blood, where one partner is a biological (therefore the legally recognised) parent and the other is defined by her ‘lack’, as the ‘non-biological (therefore the non-legal) parent. This reinforced an acceptance of the (hetero)norm against which all families were measured, in terms of family practices and configurations. Queer theorists have placed considerable emphasis on the importance of subversion of heteronormative ideals. This binary structure of parenting is associated with heteronormativity and lesbian mothers with children representing the social realisation of these values, whereas the radical queer resists all attempts at ‘normalisation’. Similarly, the existence of non-biological co-parents challenges biological ties as the basis for parenthood. Lesbians who choose parenthood face a new form of criticism from within the LGBTQIA+ community as they appear to conform to heteronormative standards of family structure.

Adopting a Butlerian perspective on gender, which suggests that gender is not inherently tied to a pre-existing biological sex, but rather emerges through repeated social acts, lesbian motherhood offers a framework for analysing gender dynamics within lesbian parenting contexts without undermining the significance of gender. While the assimilationist approach has its merits in political contexts, it poses certain challenges. Not only does it often reinforce traditional, heteronormative family structures, but it also tends to overlook the role of sexuality within the family unit. This is not to dismiss the potential similarities between lesbian and heterosexual motherhood. Rather, the aim in this thesis is to critically examine the reliance on non-normative behaviours in the memoirs taken up for

study. Of these, two are biological (Cherrie Moraga and Karleen Pendleton Jimenez) and the other two are non-biological (Amie Klempnauer Miller and Nancy Abrams). Furthermore, the assimilationist approach in research tends to ignore the potential for these families to challenge heteronormativity through alternative discourses and practices.

Chicana Lesbians

Of the four authors taken for study in this thesis, two belong to the Chicana lesbian community- Cherrie Moraga and Karleen Pendleton Jimenez. Along with their identity construction of motherhood, these authors also assert their Chicana identity throughout the memoir. The process of coming out has historically been intricate, particularly for individuals of colour and ethnic races, as their families are deeply intertwined with broader racial and ethnic communities. For many people, irrespective of their sexual orientation, their racial or ethnic community serves as a crucial anchor, offering refuge from a discriminatory world and providing both economic and emotional support. For lesbians of colour, coming out to their families not only strains intra-family relationships but also jeopardizes their strong connections to their ethnic communities. Consequently, minority lesbians risk feeling displaced within their ethnic identity. Homophobia within communities of colour is often intertwined with both racism and sexism. In Latino communities, especially among the upper class, family honour is closely linked to women's sexual purity, reflecting a fundamental aspect of Hispanic culture. The pioneering generation of lesbian mothers laid the groundwork for contemporary lesbians to embrace motherhood. The challenges faced by these early lesbian mothers, such as legal battles for child custody and proudly asserting their identity as both lesbians

and mothers, continue to influence present-day struggles for adoption rights and recognition of same-sex families through marriage.

Through the voices of queer-identified mothers, one hears stories and insights that might otherwise be drowned out by the din of cisnormative and heteronormative practices of mothering. The thesis also studies how the mothers, in the four memoirs selected for study, mother 'queerly' with different goals, values, and strategies than those found in dominant ideologies of patriarchal motherhood. Throughout the thesis, the term patriarchal motherhood is synonymous of heteronormative motherhood.

Studies on Motherhood and Queer Motherhood

Motherhood offers women sites of power and oppression, areas that are explored in feminist debates about essentialism and exclusion. Many feminist theorists still base their arguments in a maternal body and insist that pregnancy and childbirth cannot simply be ignored as a gender-specific and probably gender-constructing experience. Others perceive mothering as a more metaphorical and social act that is open to anyone. Elaine Tuttle Hansen quotes Sara Ruddick, noted feminist philosopher, in her work *Mother Without Child* : *Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood* (1997), where the latter redefines the concept of mothering, when she states that, "…to be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's working life"; "the concept of 'mother' depends on that of the child"(qtd. in Hansen 4), prompting one to reconstrue the traditional assumptions about maternity in many ways.

Feminist studies of motherhood usually begin in the 1960s with key first-act figures like Simone de Beauvoir, Shulamith Firestone, Kate Millett, and Betty Friedan. They were the early second-wave feminists who pointed out a strong link between women's oppression and women's naturalized position as mothers. The arguments of these early feminists may seem more subtle and ambivalent than they have often been taken to be. Later feminists seek to reclaim and reinterpret motherhood and revalue difference and their work began in the mid-seventies and took a wide variety of forms, in the hands of feminists as Adrienne Rich, Nancy Chodorow, Dorothy Dinnerstein, Sara Ruddick, Mary O'Brien, Juliet Mitchell, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva.

While maternal theory is well-developed, its central texts do not fundamentally challenge heteronormative and cisnormative assumptions. While most recent writers on motherhood have incorporated some queer content in their work, this has largely occurred as an add-on rather than a central refashioning of existing scholarship. Nancy Chodorow's *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1999) talks about the heteronormative family structure as the basis of every mother-child relationship. Even Adrienne Rich, well-known as a lesbian mother and motherhood theorist, does not discuss the relevance of her lesbian perspective in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1976) until the preface of the second edition, where she analyses motherhood as both a refuge from and a site of racist oppression and cultural imperialism that are fundamental to any academic considerations of reproduction and parenting. Patricia Hill Collins, Cherrie Moraga, Dorothy Roberts, bell hooks, and Audre Lorde were representative theorists who incorporated race, culture, class and gender into motherhood theories and practices.

Mother Writing and Memoirs

A memoir is a form of nonfiction narrative literature that draws upon the author's personal memories to recount real-life events. Unlike fiction, the assertions made within a memoir are considered factual, grounded in the author's lived experiences. While traditionally categorized as a subset of biography or autobiography, especially since the late 20th century, memoir distinguishes itself by its focused narrative structure, typically centred around specific periods or events in the author's life rather than encompassing their entire lifespan. Unlike biography or autobiography, which chronicles the entirety of a person's life, a memoir often delves into particular aspects such as significant moments, career highlights, or pivotal events. The individual who writes a memoir is commonly referred to as a memoirist or memorialist, capturing their unique perspective on the events they recount.

The historical and strategic absence of the mother's perspective and the theoretical difficulty of representing the paradoxical perspective of writing as ‘a mother’ in conventional Western literature and the discursive myths of psychoanalysis are represented in the concept of the ‘silent’ mother. The memoir as a genre was open to the silent dialogues between dominant and subversive voices, but it has only recently become a genre in which the mother's voice could be heard.Modernist women writers have also engaged in the interest of feminist critics concerned with narratology, some of which find more departure from the dominant psychoanalytic and discursive models. Elaine Tuttle Hansen quotes Susan Winnett in her book Mother *Without Child: Contemporary Fiction and the Crisis of Motherhood (1997)* with regard to mother writing that, “… the traditional female

experience of birth and breast-feeding has forced women ‘to think forward rather than backward” and that they needed to “stop reading ‘in drag’ in order to see that narratives for women work differently than theories based on male erotic experience have understood.” (qtd. in Hansen 13)

Motherhood has recently entered into literary studies from psychoanalysis through the notion of the play space or potential space, taken primarily from object relations theory. Following key lines of French feminist thought, Claire Kahane has argued that this space is similar to the discursive space the woman writer might occupy and that it is the ideal vehicle for a maternal voice that questions “fixed structures of gender” in postmodernist discourse (qtd. in Hansen 13).

Memoirs, with their insightful work at the level of the symbolic, become indispensable lenses through which maternal subjectivities can be perceived. The mothering ideology that shapes the way these mothers perceive their roles and responsibilities, and their attempts to create meaning out of a disruptive and chaotic situation is illustrated through these narratives. They also attempt to establish a link between motherhood as an ideological system, and mothering as a lived experience wherein real, embodied women struggle to balance precarious existential realities with ponderous cultural rhetoric. Feminists and feminist literary critics have in general assumed that if mothers could speak and write, in contradiction to their earlier silence, they would tell a new and different story. Some would add that only by telling new stories about their lives can women escape the traditional plots that confine them to the roles of wives and mothers. Hansen also quotes Sara Ruddick in her book mentioned earlier that, “Some of the most reflective maternal thinkers have

been moved to think deeply about motherhood precisely because mothering does not come easily to them" (qtd. in Hansen 15).

Lesbian Motherhood Memoirs

Literatures on lesbian motherhood writings has largely overlooked the social and cultural complexities influencing lesbians' decisions to become mothers by failing to address the fundamental question of why lesbians choose motherhood. By neglecting this inquiry, scholars implicitly assume that lesbians, as women, inherently desire motherhood if presented with the opportunity. Furthermore, the focus on intentional decision-making implies that lesbians have full agency over their choices to become mothers, dismissing the external pressures and constraints they face. Lesbians must navigate various obstacles and considerations throughout the process of becoming mothers, including finding a suitable partner or deciding to pursue single motherhood, coming out to family and friends, selecting a method of conception, and acquiring a child. Contrary to the notion of accidental motherhood, lesbians make deliberate decisions within the broader context of social and cultural influences, akin to heterosexual women.

A comprehensive examination of lesbian motherhood memoirs raises critical questions about the extent to which they are influenced by societal norms, financial constraints, ideological beliefs, and personal desires. These questions explore whether lesbians remain childfree due to historical separations between lesbian identity and motherhood, financial barriers to reproductive technologies or adoption, heterosexist ideologies, or personal preferences. Similarly, they inquire into the motivations behind lesbians' choices to become mothers, such as seeking to conceal their sexual identities behind the societal role of motherhood or succumbing to

familial or relational pressures. It perpetuates the notion that motherhood is a 'natural' inclination while assuming that all women, including lesbians, possess unconstrained autonomy in their reproductive choices.

Selected Works for Study

The memoirs chosen for analysis follow a timeline of fourteen years, starting from 1997 to 2011. They have also been categorised as biological and non-biological motherhood memoirs. The first memoir taken for study is Cherrie Moraga's biological motherhood memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood* (1997) that encapsulates a profound journey chronicled through journal entries spanning from the anticipation of pregnancy to the challenging initial years of her son Rafael's life, who was born premature, diagnosed with bradycardia and had to be hospitalised. Moraga also asserts her identity as a Chicana butch lesbian living in a homophobic society. The second non-biological memoir taken for study is Nancy Abram's *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter* (1999). It delves into her personal journey, marked by the custody removal of Abram's daughter Amelia due to her separation from her lesbian partner Norma and subsequent legal battle that ensued for custody of the child. The third memoir that is explored in the thesis is Amie Klempnauer Miller's non-biological motherhood memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood*(2010). Here Miller intricately recounts the conception, birth and early years of her non-biological daughter Hannah, navigating the common challenges inherent in new motherhood. The fourth memoir that is analysed in this thesis is Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's biological motherhood memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (2011). Here Jimenez employs the memoir genre to delve into her journey

as a butch lesbian navigating the realm of artificial insemination to conceive a child, while also giving a vivid and introspective analysis of her Chicana identity.

The memoirs analysed in the thesis feature mothers who identify as butch lesbians and actively pursue or have already achieved motherhood through adoption or assisted reproduction methods. Their decision to become mothers is intentional and not coerced, representing a conscious choice within the context of their lesbian identities. Through this deliberate decision-making process, they challenge traditional gender roles and construct positive narratives of motherhood within the framework of their lesbian relationships. Their individual life experiences significantly influence their mothering choices, as they navigate the intersections of gender, sexuality, race, and class.

Detailed Analysis of the Texts

Cherrie Moraga's biological motherhood memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood* (1997) is written in the form of a journal that documents Moraga's journey as a butch lesbian into pregnancy with the support of her partner Ella , the birth of her son Rafael and her challenges that ensue due to her son's premature birth, a near fatal illness called bradycardia and her lesbian identity in a homophobic world in the 1990s U.S. Alongside these personal reflections are retrospective essays delving into the intricate realms of motherhood, partnership dynamics, gender roles, and the dynamics within Chicana lesbian families. Moraga also explains in great detail the unfavourable legal systems that did not accept lesbian parental and custody rights.

Nancy Abram's *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter* (1999) describes Abrams' legal battle for the custody of her non-biological daughter

Amelia that ensue when she and her partner Norma separate. The narrative dissects the intricate interplay of societal norms, legal frameworks, and political dynamics surrounding LGBTQA+ parenting. At its core, the narrative questions the essence of motherhood, inviting introspection into the diverse manifestations of parental love and identity within contemporary social landscapes. The memoir asks very pertinent questions as when a non- biological mother loses or gives up custody of a child, would she still be regarded as the child's mother? Norma, the biological mother, is later admitted into Rehab centre when she gets addicted to alcohol and sleeping pills and she becomes irregular in her care of Amelia. Abrams goes to court for gaining partial custody of Amelia, but the courts were not partial to her as she was the non-biological mother. She also gives a vivid account of the judicial laws in the 1990s U.S that did not favour lesbian custody rights.

Amie Klempnauer Miller's Non-Biological Motherhood Memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* (2010) gives a narrative description of the conception and birth of her non-biological daughter Hannah, and her amiable relationship with her partner Jane. Despite the anticipated tribulations such as a complex birth, extensive birthing preparations, opting for the role as a full-time caregiver, and handling the typical demands of an infant, Miller's journey diverges from the conventional narrative – she is Hannah's non-biological mother, while her partner, Jane, assumes the role of the birth mother. As a same-sex couple, Miller and Jane grapple with myriad legal and biological complexities seldom encountered by heterosexual parents, including issues like second-parent adoption and sperm donation.

Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's biological motherhood memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (2011) employs the memoir genre to narrate her experiences as a butch lesbian trying to get pregnant, first by natural means of conception (thereby subverting her deviant lesbian identity for a brief period of time) and then by Artificial means of Insemination (AI) to get pregnant. With the support of her partner Hilary, Jimenez establishes her identity first as a non-biological mother (to Hilary's children Joshua and Maya) and then gradually the biological mother.

Literary Review

Cherrie Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood*

1. "Cherrie Moraga on Writing About Queer Motherhood- The Celebrated Author and Activist Revisits her Own Memoir", an online article published in the website of Literary Hub, dated December 7, 2022 by Cherrie Moraga explores the author's personal narration about her physical and emotive experiences on writing the memoir 30 years ago and how she perceives it now, at the present time and space.
2. "Writing the Lesbian Mother: *Waiting in the Wing*s", a chapter in the book *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga* by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano, published by University of Texas Press in 2001, gives a critical analysis of Moraga's lesbian motherhood memoir and gives a new subject position to Moraga's navigation of biological motherhood and Chicana lesbian identity.
3. "Queering the Chicana *familia* in Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*" (2020), an article by Francisco José Cortés Vieco explains how Moraga asserts the notion of lesbian motherhood and Chicana *familia* that is explained in the cultural context of the Latinas.

4. *Waiting in the Wings- Portrait of a Queer Motherhood*- Cherrie Moraga in conversation with Martha Gonzalez, a YouTube video streamed live on 9 Dec. 2022, where Moraga revisits her memoir in its twenty fifth anniversary and talks about her experiences while she wrote the book at that point of time and the changes she perceives in society now.

Nancy Abram's *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter*

Being a comparatively less explored work, not much critical analyses were available on Abram's memoir, save for a book review written by Colette Morrow, published in *Journal of the Association for Research in Mothering* on 23 Nov.1999,where Morrow gives an introspective review of the memoir.

Amie Klempnauer Miller's Non-Biological Motherhood Memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood*

Similar to Abrams' memoir, not much critical analyses were available on Miller's memoir too except for two online articles by the author herself in the website *Beacon Broadside: A Project of Beacon Press*, titled "What Kids Have to Say," dated 29 Oct. 2010, where the daughter Hannah speaks of her experience of having two mothers. The second article is titled, "Amie Klempnauer Miller: A Non-Bio Lesbian Mom's Adoption Story," dated 17 Nov. 2009. Here Miller takes an extract of her memoir that deals with the adoption process of Hannah, along with her partner Jane.

Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's biological motherhood memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*

1. Book review by Samantha Walsh, published in the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Development*, December 2014 issue.

Walsh gives a critical perspective of the memoir and the biological lesbian motherhood aspects.

2. "*How To Get a Girl Pregnant*: An Autoethnography of Chicana Butch Reproduction" by Karleen Pendleton Jiménez (author) published in the *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Development*, Dec. 2014 issue, where the author gives a lucid first-hand narration of her attempts at getting pregnant by means of Artificial Insemination and the assertion of her butch lesbian Chicana identity and a conclusion that offers an analysis of the fertility culture.

Research Gap

On reviewing literature in this area of study, it was found that research had been conducted on the concept of lesbian motherhood, second parent adoption and legal adoption rights exclusively from a sociological and psychological perspectives as case studies in research theses. However, there is a dearth of analysis of memoirs from a literary context, based on the theoretical concepts of lesbian motherhood. The predominance of memoirs by white, middle-class lesbians limit cross-cultural references, while ethical considerations surrounding self-disclosure and anonymity hinder further study. There was also a marked absence of diverse representations, new theoretical frameworks and legal policy implications in existing studies on lesbian motherhood memoirs. Little has been explored in the realm of legal and medical issues like surrogacy from a literary perspective, including disparities in parental rights and healthcare support. Overall, the lack of recognition and representation for lesbian mothers underscores the need for comprehensive studies to deepen understanding and promote acceptance of diverse family structures. The aim of this thesis is to fill these research gaps.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this thesis draws from a synthesis of queer studies, lesbian motherhood studies, and memoir studies. In Cherrie Moraga's memoir, the theoretical framework of queering motherhood through queer methodology in autoethnography has been analysed using Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams concept "Autoethnography as a Queer Method," in the book *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* edited by Kath Browne and Catherine J Nash. Queer motherhood concepts have been outlined, with the theoretical backing of Shelley M. Park's *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood*. The intersection of maternal writing and identity formation, referencing works such as S. Juhasz's *Mother-writing and the Narrative of Maternal Subjectivity* and Margaret F. Gibson's *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives*. Furthermore, it discusses the concept of 'becoming' a lesbian mother, drawing from Amy Hequembourg's theories on identity formulation in *Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming*. The memoir also addresses the notion of 'intensive mothering' and the 'good mommy myth,' referencing Susan J. Douglas and Meredith Michaels' work in *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women*. The concept of lesbian mothering desires and decisions is explored with support from Nancy J. Mezey's *New Choices, New Families: How Lesbians Decide about Motherhood* and K. Gerson's *Hard Choices: How Women Decide about Work, Career, and Motherhood*. Chicana lesbian familia and motherhood has been analysed in *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga* by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano and the article "Queering the Chicana *familia* in Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings,*" by Francisco José Cortés Vieco.

In Nancy Abram's memoir, queer motherhood theorist Shelley M. Park's concept of 'monomaternalism' in the lesbian context has been used as the central theoretical framework, as is evidenced in her work *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood*. Adrienne Rich's essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," challenges normative motherhood by advocating for open adoptive relationships in the memoir. Amy Hequembourg's work on lesbian motherhood explores legal challenges, such as second-parent adoptions. Andrea O'Reilly's matricentric feminism analyzes institutional constraints on motherhood. Michael Warner's concept of 'repro-sexuality' and 'repro-narrativity,' as used in Park's book, has been adopted to shed light on the societal pressure on non-normative bodies to conform to (non)biological reproduction and how lesbian mothers deviate from it.

Amie Klempnauer Miller's memoir's theoretical framework has been constructed around the notion of polymaternalism and alternate mothering practices with support from Park's book *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* analyses motherhood as a refuge from various sites of oppression, those are fundamental to any analysis of reproduction and parenting practices. Andrea O'Reilly's book on motherhood *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* analyses how patriarchal concepts of compulsory heterosexual mothering can affect alternate forms of motherhood. Lynn O'Brien's *Bikini Ready Moms: Celebrity Profiles, Motherhood and the Body* and Margaret F Gibson's *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* have been used to analyse the foundational constructs of queer motherhood. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of

triangulation of maternal desire have been used to study accounts of queer motherhood that rarely focus on the relationship between mothers.

Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's memoir has been explored with the central concept of maternal substitutes. Lisa Baraister's book *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* have been used to describe the maternal transformation. Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, in the 'Introduction' to their edited volume *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* explores the theme of maternal subjectivity. Joanee S Frye's chapter "Narrating Maternal Subjectivity: Memoirs from Motherhood" in the edited volume of *Textual Mothers / Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures* byElizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, talks about maternal subjectivity in motherhood memoirs, which has been explored to understand the theme of subjectivity in Jimenez's memoir. Andrea O'Reilley's book *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* talks about the reproduction of mothering and the maternal relational self.O'Reilley's quotes on Julie Stephens' work *Confronting Post Maternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory, and Care* has also been used in the chapter where the latter analyses the concept of the 'post maternal thinking' in maternal subjectivity and how it affects repeated expressions of anxiety around the naming of certain values as maternal.

Narrative Technique

Employing a narrative and theoretical approach to the task of queering motherhood prompts one to establish connections among the experiential, the representational, and the analytical realms, although without imposing a rigid framework. The memoirs follow a set pattern, entered as journal entries as the

thoughts formulate in the author's minds, with the purpose of writing to heal their pain and angst. This method, termed scriptotherapy, is common to all the memoirs taken for study. The selected memoirs have been scrutinized, focusing on the underlying discourses of 'authentic' motherhood—particularly the binary between biological and non-biological mothers. This approach also seeks to blur the boundaries between heteronormative and homonormative manifestations of mothering. The thesis also delves into the analysis of maternal bodies and practices that are often stigmatized or deemed unacceptable.

Purpose of Study

The thesis titled "Shifting Boundaries of Motherhood: Challenging the Parental Binaries in Select Lesbian Motherhood Memoirs" aims to address an intersectional and interrogative analysis of the discourses and dynamics of gender, sexuality and motherhood that would bring about an understanding of lesbian mothers' narratives in which they are acknowledged by their method of identity construction: sexual, cultural and maternal. This facilitates an examination into the discourses of biology, kinship and gender among lesbian parents whereby their experiences and perceptions are contextualised within established parameters of hegemonic ideals. This thesis also attempts to address the experiences of lesbian parents in diverse maternal contexts, from the perspective of the biological lesbian mother and the non-biological lesbian partner, in an attempt to reconsider notions of resistance and suppression within existing theoretical works. It also aspires to critically interpret the efforts of lesbian parents who strive to create and establish their familial structure in unaccommodating contexts.

This thesis's purpose is not to replace existing definitions of motherhood with a new one, but to focus on one of the comparatively less explored aspect of maternal concept and identity, the notion of lesbian motherhood. The memoirs chosen address these questions and also engage in available narrative patterns, by revising diachronic traditions of heterosexual motherhood. The memoirs selected for study do not dislodge conventional perspectives of a woman who mothers nor do they strive to analyse the inferences of the relational status of maternal identity. It tries to discover the possibilities of novel means of visualizing alternate forms of motherhood, outside of its normative constructions in patriarchy and also to try bring to the forefront, the significant role played by representations of cultural codifications in traditional motherhood patterns. The authors of these memoirs have all considered what it might mean to rethink, reshape, and re-establish notions and practices of motherhood from queer perspectives. These memoirs also move away from experiential accounts to explore the cultural, political, and historical meanings of parenting and motherhood using queer theories and perspectives and also examine how mothering practices may be 'queered' when they do not follow normative scripts. The thesis will be divided into six chapters. Chapter 1 "Introduction," introduces the concept of lesbian identity construction and lesbian motherhood writings. Chapter 2 "Coalescence in Motherhood: Cherrie Moraga' s Biological Lesbian Motherhood Memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood,"* explores Moraga's navigation through motherhood and her Chicana lesbian identity. Chapter 3 "Vulnerable Subjects: Nancy Abrams' Non-Biological Lesbian Motherhood Memoir *the Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter"*, analyses Abrams' experiences of non-biological mothering with Amelia and the angst of separation and hassles of custody battles that follow when Abrams

and her partner Norma separate. Chapter 4 “Alternate Motherhood: Amie Klempnauer Miller’s Memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood,”* studies Miller’s non-biological motherhood experiences when her partner Jane conceives and gives birth to their daughter Hannah. Chapter 5 “Maternal Substitutes: Karleen Pendleton Jimenez' s Biological Lesbian Motherhood Memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant,”* analyses Jimenez’s experiences as a Chicana butch lesbian trying to ‘get pregnant,’ her observations of fertility clinics and methods of artificial means of reproduction and her subsequent pregnancy. Finally, Chapter 6 “Summation” sums up the major findings across the core chapters. Chapter 7 “Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study” explains the research gaps in the area and recommendations for further research.

Addressing these questions, this thesis aims to bridge this gap in the literature by scrutinizing lesbians’ decision-making processes, thereby contributing to the understanding of the social dynamics surrounding lesbian motherhood decisions more broadly. The purpose of this thesis is to explore how lesbian mothering finds out the choices that were available to these mothers, regarding childbearing and child rearing practices. The study intends to focus on the ways in which the mothers in the memoirs dismantle the conventions and restrictions of patriarchal motherhood and traverse new choices that define their homonormative family construction.

Chapter 2

Coalescence in Motherhood: Cherrie Moraga' s Biological Lesbian Motherhood Memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood*

"The hardest loving is what is required of me as a mother: the letting go as the feelings deepen…" (Moraga 126).

Patriarchal motherhood has always gone beyond the conventions of heterogenous motherhood. Cherrie Moraga's motherhood memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* (1997) explores the concept of motherhood that becomes 'otherhood' when it is associated with lesbians as they deviate from the mainstream patriarchal dichotomy of accepted norms of sexual identity and constructions of motherhood. In the conventional scenario, it is always the mother-father duo that make up the concept of perfect parents, never a mother -mother or a father -father. As Andrea O'Reilly asserts in her book *Mother Outlaws* : *Theories and Practices of Empowered Mothering* (2004) and Lynn O'Brien Hallstein quotes in *Bikini Ready Moms: Celebrity Profiles, Motherhood and the Body* (2015*)*, "…patriarchal ideologies of "good" motherhood function as culturally constructed practices, ones that are continuously redesigned in response to changing economic and societal factors…" (Hallstein 16), explaining how and why alternate forms of motherhood that highlight and feature the maternal body in new ways can reveal much about how new forms of motherhood continue to develop as a sophisticated postfeminist ideology. Moraga's memoir explores the universal norms of motherhood, as is explained in the title. 'Coalescence' refers to the process or a state of coming together to form a complete whole. Moraga discusses the many facets of

motherhood that transcends culture and race, the universal lesbian *familia* (Spanish for family) and the motherhood image that permeates throughout her memoir. Motherhood often invoked a sense of power for Moraga, as she sees herself as the life source that sustained their community.

The lesbian mother is fixed in a growing chasm between her idealism and condemnation in modern culture, and her unstipulated position identifying her as both object and subject in the philosophical framework of the Western World. Moraga's deliberate eulogization of the generative potential of lesbian motherhood can be seen as a reactive attempt to celebrate motherhood despite the many profound changes it has created in the structured patterns of heterosexual motherhood. This chapter uses the concept of queer autoethnography to explore the shift from a female subject position (lesbian) to encompass a maternal whole. Moraga navigates through the cultural concepts of 'universal motherhood' and Chicana lesbian *familia* while reconfiguring a queer maternal identity that both realigns and reconstructs existing lines of conventional autoethnography. Queer autoethnography contends with the notion that the essence of motherhood can never be contained in one phrase or sentence, nor can it be bound to traditions and conventions.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical concepts used in this chapter integrates narrative and theory, as is seen in queer motherhood studies. Being a Chicana lesbian, Moraga's memoir intertwines culture and ethnicity with her lesbian biological motherhood experiences. In this regard, the narrative pattern of queer autoethnography has been explored, with the theoretical backing of Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams's chapter titled "Autoethnography as a Queer Method," in the book *Queer Methods*

and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research (2010). Edited by Kath Browne and Catherine J Nash, the book discusses queer methodology in autoethnography and explains that autoethnography and queer theory share conceptual and purposeful affinities. To explain this concept further, the article "Queering the Chicana *familia* in Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*" (2020), by Francisco José Cortés Vieco explains how Moraga asserts the notion of motherhood and *familia* that goes against the social imposition of childlessness and the cult of maternity is enforced against the Latinas. The chapter "Writing the Lesbian Mother: *Waiting in the Wing*s" in the book *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga* by Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano explores the maternal position of Moraga who also assumes the identity of a butch lesbian.

Motherhood, and parenting practices, especially lesbian motherhood practices, more generally, is a domain that lies below the flux of mainstream academic and theoretical studies. Patriarchal assumptions of motherhood define the border between theory and experience. The theoretical framework in this chapter is formulated, keeping in focus notions of biological parenting, lesbian motherhood, and sexuality. The combined resources of queer theory and maternal theory provide ample territory for developing new lines of enquiry and new tools of analysis, while fundamentally challenging patriarchal assumptions of heteronormative / cisnormative assumptions of motherhood. While maternal theory formulates major share of the theoretical framework, lesbian identity has also been applied here. The theoretical concept of queer motherhood that Shelley M. Park explores in her much-acclaimed book *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* (2013)

as against the heteronormative limitations of maternal practices is the central thought of this chapter.

S. Juhasz had stated that maternal writing is a site for structuring maternal identity in her book *Mother-writing and the Narrative of Maternal Subjectivity* (2003) that gives credit to the "mother-author who uses writing to navigate a plurality of self-positions" (5). Margaret F Gibson's *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* (2014) theorizes queer motherhood by shaking off the methodological and theoretical formula in existing beliefs and practices to constitute new patterns in academic writing on lesbian motherhood. Lisa Baraister's *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* (2009) talks about how most women experience mothering in a fresh perspective in terms of the extremity of feelings it provokes, and the deep changes it brings about in their character, affiliation, and formation of the individual self.

When analyzing the theme of lesbian motherhood identity and 'becoming' a lesbian mother, the theories of identity formulation by Amy Hequembourg who theorizes the concept of 'becoming' in her book *Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming* (2012) have been used. Hequembourg states that "becoming" (56) is a theoretical construct that can be utilized to understand day to day experiences without resorting to conventional notions of a constant specific subject. The concept of lesbian mothering desires and decisions has been formulated with theoretical support from Nancy J. Mezey's book *New Choices, New Families How Lesbians Decide about Motherhood* (2008), where she explores how lesbians desire to become mothers or remain childfree.

Maternal Subjectivity and the Form of Autoethnography and Memoir

Queer autoethnography represents a distinctive approach within ethnographic research where a researcher intertwines personal experiences with broader cultural, political, and social contexts to derive meaningful insights and understandings. This method is recognized as a qualitative and/or art-based research practice, emphasizing the exploration of subjective experiences in relation to a larger societal dynamic. In queer autoethnography, the researcher becomes both the subject and the analyst, offering a nuanced and introspective viewpoint that contributes to a richer comprehension of the interconnectedness between personal narratives and broader cultural phenomena. Moraga's memoir allows for a deep exploration of lived experiences, fostering a more profound engagement with the multifaceted layers of meaning embedded within her individual stories and their cultural implications.

Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams talks about queer methodology in autoethnography in the chapter titled "Autoethnography as a Queer Method," in the book *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (2010) edited by Kath Browne and Catherine J Nash, where they explain that, "autoethnography and queer theory share conceptual and purposeful affinities" (198). It focuses instead on fluidity, intersubjectivity, and responsiveness to particularities. Queer autoethnography looks to "extract meaning from experience rather than to depict experience exactly as it was lived" and puts the "autobiographical and personal" in conversation with the "cultural and social" (198). They also state how the methodology of queer autoethnography allows a person to document continuous journeys of self-comprehension and inspires the user/writer to think out of the categorisations (207).

In the article "Queering the Chicana *familia* in Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*" (2020), Francisco José Cortés Vieco explains how Moraga asserts the notion of motherhood and queer *familia* that, "goes against the social imposition of childlessness and the cult of maternity enforced against the Latinas"(17), thus bringing about the concept of fluidity in gender and motherhood constructs. Moraga says in the memoir how her family supports her decision to be a mother. Vieco substantiates this point by stating that the social paradigms resulting from patriarchal traditions that dominate Mexican- American communities was evident in Moraga's family too and says how Moraga merges her sexual identity and her Chicana lineage by projecting queer motherhood to create her own *familia*. Moraga describes her resentment that she had to renounce her own female sex because of her homosexuality as heterosexual philosophy firmly asserted that lesbianism and motherhood were exclusive categorizations: "We were women-lovers, a kind of third sex, and most definitely not men. Having babies was something 'real' women did– not butches" (20). Vieco says that Moraga "reconciles her lesbian sexuality and her Chicana/o community and embraces some elements from her Hispanic lineage, such as the importance of family, sisterhood, genetics, and religion when she undertakes the queer project of becoming a lesbian Chicana mother in California during the 1990s." (17)

In an online personal interview with Moraga conducted as part of this thesis work on 28 Mar.2024 via Google Meet, to the question, "How does the lesbian mother navigate the expanding divide between her ideals and societal judgment in contemporary culture, while also grappling with her undefined role as both a partial object and subject within the Western philosophical tradition?" Moraga responds that, "motherhood experiences in every culture were specific, with religion, class

and race relating everything to everything else" and that "queer *familia* counters privileged patriarchal motherhood." Her culture and upbringing defined who she was.

Motherhood Experience and Mother Writing

Motherhood memoirs, especially lesbian motherhood memoirs, could be considered as private histories imbued with trauma and travails of new motherhood rather than the glamour of the newly acquired role of motherhood. Resisting norms of heterosexuality that stated that motherhood was only for 'normal' couples, homosexual couples who went ahead and took the plunge to become mothers often talk about the public trials they had to undergo, both during impregnation and the consequent stages. These could be considered as emotions and experiences that remain private because they are opposed to classification in language, an inherent feature of queer autoethnography. Memoirs about queer motherhood often have this quality.

Lisa Baraister in her book *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* (2009) talks about how lesbian mothers expresses their desire to write about "marked with one's markings … a praxis that does not explore or illustrate the personal, but through which the personal takes place has parallels with the notion that the emergence of maternal subjectivity occurs through the details of maternal praxis" (12). Moraga, as the lesbian maternal subject, reconfigures boundaries of sexuality and the maternal identity to reinvent the 'queer autoethnographic self '. The concept of 'mother-writing' has undergone constant theorizing. S. Juhasz had stated that maternal writing is a site for structuring maternal identity. In her book *Mother-writing and the Narrative of Maternal Subjectivity* (2003) , she states how

maternal subjectivity can be attained by analyzing mother-writing as, "…a creative space that promote recognition for the mother-author who uses writing to navigate a plurality of self-positions, for the reader who also acts as surrogate mother to the mother-writer, and for the text itself" (395). By fusing 'multiple maternal identities' within the same stylistic space, she argues a "grammar" (400) can be determined, and with it, the prospect of feasible relationships among different maternal positions. Moraga traverses through motherhood as a writer- mom. She says that she feels with her writing career as a playwright and as a poet and longs for the extended involvement in her work (43). Though she underlines the importance of diversity, innovation and identification, her narrative rests on a supreme notion of the self that asserts itself in every word as she pens down every thought she thinks aloud, onto which these multiple identities are fastened. She overtly rejects roles that challenge her identity as a Chicana lesbian mother. She argues instead that maternal work consists of the dual responsibilities of nurturing the child and at the same time, organizing diverse aspects of her Chicana culture and rituals so that they appear as a characteristic whole. Memoir writing, Moraga believes, can create a sliver of consistency out of the self, due to the intrinsic contradiction of the maternal.

Moraga's identity as a mother asserts her identity as a writer. Post-delivery, when she works on the memoir and other writings, she says, "…I am trying to be a mother who writes well. I am trying to be a writer who mothers well…" (Moraga 96). She ruminates on the power of creativity further thus:

> *I think about what it is to create – even for a single moment- a thing of beauty, a thing of pure and honest human passion, as these arias. I think of my own task as a writer- a life task- to write anything that comes close, even*

> *for a moment, to the depth of human emotion. At times I question it all. I wonder if I can ever truly create a complete work, something I can stand in the center of and know its wholeness.*
>
> *Metamorphosis. Change. Transformacio'n.* (96 Italics in text)

Moraga's biological motherhood memoir takes us through her experiences in pregnancy and premature delivery of her baby boy, whom she names Rafael (after the Archangel, the Healing Power of God). The book is divided into three sections and the Prologue is very aptly titled "The Long Hard Path." The Prologue starts with the phenomenal sentence "Lesbians don't make babies with our lovers" (15). This statement challenges the existing norms of conventional parenthood, thereby blurring the boundaries and opening up new vistas of queer autoethnographic identity formation. She continues the thought by emphasizing that they make babies with strangers in one-night stands or on the doctor's insemination table, with friends in a "friendly fuck" (15) or a loveless mason jar, with enemies who were their former husbands or boyfriends. They could not make babies with one another as their blood does not mix into creating a third entity by splitting the DNA. Lesbians could co-adopt, co-parent, comrades but could never become "blood mami and papi." (15)

The memoir's entry starts in Section I, titled "City of Angels", referring to Los Angeles where Moraga was at the time. She and her partner Ella seek help from Pablo, her gay Mexican friend, to help Moraga get pregnant. The first entry is on "28 enero/Los Angeles" (26) prior to which Moraga has undergoes AI (Artificial Insemination) at their home using the simple apparatus of a water syringe. Moraga remembers the day as the "feast of epiphany, a good day to start a life" (25) where

she, her lover 'Ella' (the Spanish word for *she*, where the double *ll* is pronounced as *y)* and her friend Pablo had come together to create life. She conceives in the first attempt itself.

Homophobic Discrimination and Heteronormative Expectations

When Moraga decides she wanted a baby at the age of 40, she says that her having a baby as an "avowed lesbian" (16) would have been a radical move, had she lived anywhere else. She says she decided to embark on this journey only because she had full faith in her partner Ella, quoting thus:

> I would not have embarked on this journey alone: I chose motherhood because I knew Ella was that quality of woman who would never just up and leave…I think most people would think it radical to take it upon ones' s lesbian self to make such a proposal first to her partner and then to a gay man, a generation younger. *I'm doing this, Will you help me?* (16 italics in text)

Moraga responded, in the online personal interview, to questions regarding her Chicana lesbian *familia* and her lesbian motherhood experiences, that, "Chicana lesbian mothers were a lot conventional than single mothers of color" as they had partners who stood by them. She also said that "lesbian mothers were 'straighter' than queer couples." In addition to the general lack of awareness about lesbian parenting in society and subsequent prejudice that Moraga and her femme partner Ella encountered, there were numerous instances in which particular spaces were clearly marked out in heteronormative ways. When Moraga's son Rafael was born prematurely, he had to be sustained in a ventilator. Later, the baby was diagnosed with bradycardia (a condition in which the baby forgets to breathe and has to be

placed in a breathing support system) and had to undergo multiple surgeries due to an infection in his intestines. Moraga had to frequently visit the hospital as she was breastfeeding the baby. The hospital staff and nurses were supportive and sympathized with Moraga as she was the biological mother. But Ella, as the co-parent, has a different story to tell. Often, her identity as the co-mother is questioned and she is not granted access to visit the baby. Once the hospital guard stops Ella and questions her identity as immediate family of the baby. He wonders out aloud in mock astonishment "…you say you're both the moms! I didn't know two women could have babies together" (75). Moraga fumes at this instance of "testosterone - driven homophobes with no power acting like they got some…" (75). The hospital hours gave exclusive privileges to the fathers, rather than co-parents. Although Moraga, who gave birth in a hospital, was able to negotiate the same access for the co-parent Ella, the thought of having to do so repeatedly created great anxiety in her. She was concerned that they would face homophobia and resistance as a result of their efforts to ensure that co-parents had similar hospital visiting hours that were inadvertently given to the fathers.

There was no formal acknowledgement of lesbian and gay partnerships earlier, thus all lesbian relationships were exposed to exclusion from the decision-making process regarding their partners in situations such as medical emergencies. Moraga, who had no qualms as to their identity as a lesbian, occasionally faced active criticism of their life choices. While she reported many instances where medical and other staff were supportive and receptive, the fear of confronting homophobic responses in various contexts, including hospitals, was a taxing experience for Moraga and her partner. Even in modern day U.S, as stated by Moraga in the online interview, there was "still instances of homophobia in the

metropolitan areas of U.S, where there is a large right-wing presence and there was still a lot of prejudice about lesbians." Moraga did occasionally experience overt hostility and discrimination. However, encounters with institutions were more generally characterized by a dearth of awareness concerning lesbian familial relationships and patterns. Moraga retorts to the sarcastic comments made by the hospital guards thus, "… That's right, you'd be surprised what two women can do together." (76)

If lesbian motherhood phenomenology strives to explain conscious experience from the point of view of lived experiences, then lesbian maternal subjectivity can be understood as not prevailing in some external space, outside of the lived experience, but as produced by embodied or lived experiences. Queer autoethnography strives to address this very pertinent point. This occurs at the level of lived experiences and shared emotions of lesbian motherhood. Though a post-modern feminist perspective would discard a basic notion of an exclusively female lived experience, there has certainly been a getting back and engaging with an embodied feminine otherness or difference as a site of both assimilation and resistance in lesbian motherhood memoirs, particularly in the memoir by Moraga.

Negotiating the Maternal 'Tie' Among Biological and Non-Biological Lesbian Mothers

The status of the lesbian mother is always questioned and challenged and the parental status of the 'non-biological co-parent' is even more. She is sidelined in mainstream parenting society and her distinctiveness as a parent is often challenged in broader society. In legal terms, there is generally little or no credit of her existence. Memoirs on lesbian motherhood emphasize on families that are not

organized around blood ties. However, scant attention has been paid to the consequences for equal parental status and kinship formation of the differential legal status of lesbian couples with children where only one of them has any parental right. The author gives a variety of reasons for choosing to be/become a 'biological' or 'nonbiological' parent. She asks that if two women decide and bring up a child together, but only one of them is rendered any legal credit, could this difference be understood as a power imbalance? Aside from the legal point of view, there were also other ways by which these couples conveyed their differences, with regard to their biological or non-biological parental status.

Moraga uses the agency of memoir to discuss this issue by subverting the boundaries of motherhood. The most common among them were if lesbian parents and their children could adopt substitute kinship terms for biological and non-biological parents. The multiple potentials for the inscription and re-inscription of heteronormative assumptions regarding the role of biological mothering is explored in Moraga's memoir. Moraga enumerates the experience of separation and negotiating custody that accentuate issues of inequality and liability of the biological and the non-biological mother. In this perspective, the identity formation of queer motherhood in the face of queer autoethnography becomes tantamount here. Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams quotes Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick by stating that in queer autoethnography, "an identity-as-achievement perspective does not imply that biology has nothing to do with interaction, nor does it foreground environmental influences on selfhood; the essence of selves and the processes through which selves are made are not the foci of queer theory. Queer theory not only recognizes that identities are conditioned and constrained by operations of power, but also works,

simultaneously and perpetually, to transgress, alter or call attention to these formative conditions and constraints." (qtd. in Jones and Adams 208)

Moraga mentions how, although complete trust may be a feature of relationships, the realities of separation are a stark reminder of the power difference between co-parents and their former partners. The difference did not solely reside upon the biological mothers who depended upon co-parents to fulfil their obligations in the absence of a legal framework. But after a relationship ended, co-parents became dependent on their former partner to stay in regular contact with their children. Unlike biological mothers, a co-parent's place in a child's life is not continuously justified in society and was therefore susceptible to be displaced. In the memoir, Moraga recounts an experience where her butch friend Maria was a co-parent and narrates an incident where she had raised the son of her partner. The boy addresses her as 'daddy' and Moraga says the boy "…learned how to be a boy from Maria. He learned masculinity from Maria, and she was a wonderful male role model: the best of fathers with a woman's compassion." (15)

Maternal Ethics and Cultural Ethnicity- Mothering

Lisa Baraister in her book *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* (2009) talks about how, "most women find mothering a shocking experience in terms of the extremity of feelings it provokes, and the profound changes it seems to prompt in identity, relationship, and sense of self" (3). Moraga experiences this through the analysis of a series of maternal experiences, registering dominant and subverting moments in the lives of mothers in her family. She uses this to explain the many concerns that have remained resilient to theoretical scrutiny and analyzes the scope for a specific maternal subjectivity, relativity, and ethics. Operating across

present-day philosophies of feminist ethics from a psychological and social point of view, the "maternal subject", in Baraister's account, becomes an, "emblematic and enigmatic formation of a subjectivity 'called into being' through a relation to another that the mother comes to name and claim as her child" (3). As Moraga steers through the uniqueness of lesbian maternal experience, she talks about the instances where the mother emerges as a subject of otherness, transgression, and affection.

Moraga says how her culture is saturated with the 'mother' image in its varied guises, and yet theoretically remains an obscure figure who seems to disappear from the many discourses that explicitly try to account for her. She feels blessed to be born into a huge extended *familia* (Spanish for family), a large family in which aunts and uncles were surrogate parents, where her grandmother Dolores, presided matriarchally over the lives of more than hundred relatives. She says: "Growing up, the *we* of my life was always defined by blood relations. *We* meant family. We were my mother's children, my abuela's grandchildren, my tio's nieces and nephews. To this day, most of my cousins still hold onto a similar understanding of *we*. Not I" (17 italics in text).

Later, she says that when she came out as a lesbian and when she decided to become a mother, she searched for a '*we'* that could embrace all parts of herself that took her beyond the confines of heterosexual family ties. She talks about how her sense of family extended into the community. Her extended community was "…strictly women, then strictly lesbian, then strictly women of color, then strictly Chicana/o, then strictly Latina lesbian". Moraga asserts that in each of these worlds, she found "abrazo y rechazo… *a common cause,*" (19 italics in text) thus reiterating

her use of queer autoethnography in her memoir. She extends this sense of kinship into her concept of motherhood too. This is recounted in the following lines:

> *What is sex or prayer (I don't know which) is the springs sunlight descending into the cooling goldenrod hills. I watch it retreat, starting my bath in the evening light, finishing in darkness. I watch my womb grow, watch the sudden transformation of my body like some holy miracle. I try to reach somewhere wounded and orphaned inside of me and bring this sudden image of my queer womanhood into view: I, the object of my own desirous, lesbian, woman-hungry eyes. I, a mama, too, like all the mamas I have longed for and loved*. (19 italics in text)

Moraga talks about the mother image that permeates everywhere. Her mother and grandmother, Ella's mother and *la Virgin* (the Holy Virgin) are constant companions in Moraga's journey through pregnancy and afterwards. When the baby is born prematurely with several health conditions, Moraga prays primarily to *la Virgin*. She asserts that her delivery had enabled her to share a special bond with her mother, a concept of shared motherhood, "the gift of this child that has finally opened my eyes." (71).

Lesbian Identity and 'becoming' a Lesbian Mother

Amy Hequembourg theorizes the concept of 'becoming' in her book *Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming* (2012). Amy states that "becoming" (56) is a theoretical construct that can be utilized to understand day to day experiences without resorting to conventional notions of a constant specific subject. She implies that:

> … we constantly seek to attain a certain condition but we never quite achieve that state and, thus, are always becoming. Becoming a lesbian mother is not a structure or product and aim should be on the process by which lesbian mothers become constituted through molar and molecular movements. Becoming is not about moving from one fixed identity position to a different fixed position. It is not about resisting or assimilating into existing categories. Becoming does not have an ultimate endpoint or a goal that is outside itself. (56)

Moraga proudly asserts the fact that it was she, a butch lesbian who chose to have the baby, rather than Ella, her femme lesbian partner. Society expected the femme to bear children and not the butches. Coming out as a lesbian at the age of twenty-two, she says she assumed she would never have children because she would never marry a man. At the age of forty, however, the thought strikes her with the impact of a physical blow that because she was a woman, she was potentially capable of having children. Moraga recounts in her interview that her mother was literally fixated on her having a baby. In her memoir, she says she had maintained the rigid conviction that lesbians, especially those on "the masculine side of the spectrum" (20) were not really women. They were "women- lovers" (20), the third sex category and definitely not men. So, having babies were for real women, not butches. Butches were defenders of women and children, children whom they could never call their own. This again subverts the heteronormative pattern of mothering practices.

In the chapter "Writing the Lesbian Mother: *Waiting in the Wing*s" in the book *The Wounded Heart: Writing on Cherrie Moraga* by Yvonne Yarbro-

Bejarano, the author gives a critical perspective to the subject position of motherhood and butch identity that Moraga assumes in the memoir. She says that, "the construction through writing of Moraga's "queer motherhood" enables her to see herself as both queer and mother, subverting binary divisions that police the border between 'gay' and 'straight' 'butch' and 'femme,' active and passive. While the need to "map" unknown territory discussed above has to do with learning how to occupy the subject position of mother for which her life as a butch lesbian has left her unprepared, Moraga also infuses the experiences of conception, pregnancy, and birth with a lesbian sensibility that profoundly alters the traditional representation of these privileged markers of heterosexual womanhood." (136)

Post-delivery, when Moraga and Ella take the baby out for a stroll through the streets, their very picture of non-heteronormativity drew side long glances from the crowd. Ella observes the reaction and says how "different" the dynamics would be as Moraga was then pushing the baby in the stroller and Ella was walking with her mother. Ella observes, "…the butch mom and her kid, the femme strolling with her mother" (110). However, when they change positions, Moraga is struck by the sudden absence of lingering glances from the other dykes along the crowded main drag. Moraga revels in Ella's delight at their lesbianism, the style they generated from each other after many years of being together. The style that is "hard won through great opposition…that mutual commitment to the rebellion of female loving, even into their forties…we are not domesticated loving. I want the freedom of this unpredictable desire…" (111)

In a sense, this chapter explores notions of sameness and difference in relation to lesbian parent families. Earlier research on non-heterosexual families had

been directed on the children of lesbian and gay parents. These studies have concluded that there is little or no difference between the children raised in LGBTQ-headed families and children raised by heterosexuals, paving way to counteract homophobic myths about these families. Moraga strongly believes in the power of fate and *familia*, as is expounded in normal autoethnographic narratives, where the self is explained by its relation to its culture. When she gives birth to her son Rafael, she feels blessed to have been there at that time and place. She says it was the most natural thing in the world to give birth in Los Angeles, among her "blood *familia*" (54). She further elaborates thus:

> I knew as I held my lover's and my sister's hands in the grip of labour that this was what I understood as hogar, sustenance; that this is how a woman should always give birth, surrounded by women. And how lucky was I to be a lesbian, to have it all-mother, sister, lover- family of women to see me into motherhood. I couldn't help but think I had willed it in some way, to give birth to Rafael Angel in the City of Angels. (54)

The culture is foregrounded, replacing the 'bio' in autobiography with 'ethno' in autoethnography. Through her memoir, Moraga becomes the voice of her culture, by using native words, like *familia* and hogar in its cultural context and translating the same into English for the uninitiated reader. She does the same with her Chicana traditions and customs, thus substantiating the autoethnographic narrative pattern. In her book *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010* (2011) she talks about the Chicana community and its consciousness that is deeply rooted and intertwined with the history of the land. She says:

> They must love the full range of their community, including their lesbian mothers and aunties and queer fathers and cousins. They must develop a living critical consciousness about their land- based history (outside of the White Man's fiction), a history that remains undocumented by mainstream culture and is ignored by the queer, feminist, and "Hispanic" communities. They must remember they were here first and are always Xicano, Diné, Apache, Yaqui, or Choctaw; for that memory can alter consciousness, and consciousness can alter institutionalized self- loathing that serves cultural genocide. (7-8)

Normative parenting and Cultural ideologies of parenting

Amy Hequembourg brings in the theoretical dictums of Deleuze and Guattari in her book *Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming* as she dwells on the twin concepts of "Assimilation and Resistance" while exploring the power relations in lesbian motherhood narratives (61). She asserts that legal efforts are futile in demolishing lesbian-headed families because dominant ideologies of such families are constituted within the structure of what make up a family (the ties and bonds of love, trust, and resilience) and would not exist without them. "Lesbian-headed families do not exist outside the molar structure called 'family' but exist internal to it" (61) and says that there are no boundaries around the structure of family. The two-mother concept is very detrimental in defining power structures in lesbian families. A "resistance perspective" (63) would assert that the family practices challenge hegemonic ideologies about motherhood and gender, because they are two women who are adopting gendered parenting styles of the mother and the father. Other lesbian motherhood scholars have argued that the normal lives of lesbian

mothers uncover instances of sedition and resistance to patriarchal patterns of family.

Hequembourg's theory of assimilation and resistance, when extended to lesbian motherhood practices in Moraga's memoir, reiterate the idea that "…resistance suggests the possibility of moving outside a structure, while assimilation suggests adapting difference into sameness within the structure…" (66). Moraga's memoir, when analyzed from this perspective of assimilation and resistance, attempts to capture the fluidity and multiplicity of lesbian maternal identity. Moraga appropriates dominant narratives of gender but reconstructs them with her own meanings by both assimilating and resisting the conventional norms. She subverts her butch identity by emphasizing how she transgresses it because of her relationship with a femme Ella, but also by taking the initiative to be the biological mother, rather than Ella, the femme, whom society expects to be the biological mother.

The experience of being lesbian or gay requires a significant re-evaluation of gender identity because much of what constitutes appropriate gender behavior is intricately bound up with heterosexuality. Moraga is aware that gender roles are reinforced by social norms and expectations and is of the view that her child was far more likely to be conventionally gendered than not, regardless of home environment, as he (Rafael) will inevitably be raised in a predominantly heteronormative society. She says lesbian mothers, especially butch lesbians, were under the burden to perform well, as they experience extra scrutiny by a society which challenges their very presence. She confesses to feeling especially vulnerable as she identifies a butch lesbian.

The motherhood techniques that Moraga uses throughout her memoir signify that her experiences cannot be reduced and restricted to set patterns and controlled accumulations of experiences. Instead, lesbian mothers are patterns of practices and experiences that are always in the process of being and becoming, a constant state of metamorphosis and a folding and unfolding of experiences. As Moraga's narrative illustrates, lesbian mothers cannot be understood as independent beings that are either assimilating or resisting the structures that surround them. Instead, they are part of a complex multitude of unfolding that result in transient imageries of fixity that can only be temporarily captured for scrutiny and contemplation. Quoting Judith Butler's words from her book *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997) in this regard, they are "a structure in formation" (Butler 10). Butler elaborates that, '… all subjects, including lesbian mothers, are both enabled and constrained by the workings of power by which they are constituted …a power exerted on a subject, subjection is nevertheless a power assumed by the subject, an assumption that constitutes the instrument of that subject's becoming" (11). Lesbian mothers thus become products of power and the process by which they come into existence create the opportunity or space for movement within the process of maternal subjectification.

Moraga's memoir views dominant parental norms as encouraging certain gender segregations that she experiences while she raises her baby Rafael. Having a partner of the same gender, she was able to move out of the stereotype of tasks that were essentially branded as traditionally 'female'. Being a 'butch' she asserts her identity even when she was pregnant with Rafael. In the entry made on 18 June, Moraga narrates an incident where she had seen a show on transgenders. The show started on a male-to-female heterosexual conversation and Moraga suggests that the woman's sexuality would remain the same after her operation and she would

become a lesbian. Ella's mother intervenes incredulously by asking how the woman could still want to be with a woman as she was created with a vagina that had feeling. Moraga is appalled and says, "I have a vagina with feeling, and I want to be with a woman" (45). Ella and Moraga argue about what relation sexuality has to do with transgenderism and Ella blames Moraga of having a "man-hating dick - centered resentment(envy)" (45). Moraga says Ella would not understand because she is a femme. Relieved of the demands associated with traditional gender roles in relationships, Moraga muses on the fluidity in gender roles.

Moraga expresses the belief that gender is entirely socially constructed, but it was also seen as largely socially determined. She also asserts later in the online personal interview that "gender and sexuality are not necessarily related. Sexuality is about desire. It could be on any spectrum. One could be a butch lesbian and still be attracted to men." The focus was on a more universal approach to development and awareness of diversity, rather than the procurement of traditional gender roles. The potential outcome of these practices and ideologies may be very similar to those of non-sexist parenting in heterosexual families. It must also be accepted that it is perfectly possible for lesbian families to retain normative discourses and practices, in which lesbian mothers are constituted as the new normative paradigm.

Rather than constructing gender as a fixed binary, Moraga's memoir explores the multitude of gendered practices based on desire and faith rather than social norms. The discourse of motherhood runs deep in the memoir and are seen to incorporate a broader range of skills as was significant in her articulation as the mother. This was irrespective of whether Moraga and Ella viewed gender as entirely socially constructed or expressed a conscious desire to non-sexist parenting. Their

motherhood practices ensued from their gendered sites as lesbians, for whom gender was experienced from the perspective of a lesbian lifestyle. The rampant social assumption that sex and gender are mutually determined was therefore continually disrupted. Men who were involved in the children's lives, whether they were donors, friends, or other kin, were chosen based on the qualities they possessed as individuals, rather than as examples of hegemonic masculinities. Moraga chose Pablo to be the donor of the sperm, not just because he was Mexican and gay, but also, he, as Moraga describes is, "a decent young man". She tells Pablo, "What you are giving us is all I want from you. It's enough." (37). She says she picked Pablo because, "…I knew he loved me without wanting me. A gay man. A queer contract." (39). She also constantly refers to the concept of homophobia which permeates society. She openly admits that there were days when she was afraid of life hurting them, "…the homophobia, the racism." (37). Moraga also alludes to this homophobia in the online personal interview conducted.

This awareness of Moraga's own established outlook shows how lesbian parenting practices can be linked to homophobic myths and that these assumptions must be challenged on a multilevel basis. Returning to the debates about assimilative versus resistance approaches to mothering that were earlier discussed in this chapter, Moraga's memoir prove that it is important to address the complexity of her experience and acknowledge how powerful gender binary norms can make it difficult for those who transgress them, particularly in child bearing and rearing. In the case of Moraga, her awareness was also based on her own history as a butch lesbian and as a result, of the prejudice, that she encounters throughout her adult life. This further indicates the importance of discursive interventions that challenge

gender norms. Lesbian mothers may find themselves in a difficult position while negotiating motherhood in a homophobic and sexist world.

Healing the Wounds Within

Moraga asserts her identity as a writer -mother. With fellow writer Dorothy Allison, who was also a good friend of hers, they talk about the travails of writing during motherhood. In the entry on 30 May, she says she could not write sitting up in bed anymore as her belly was too big. She says when Rafael was in the ICN, she did not write when the days were bad. The memoir's entries are therefore irregular. But for Moraga, writing was therapeutic. She wrote to ease her pain. When the writer experiences traumatic events and grapples with its aftermath, it can profoundly impact an individual's life, prompting them to seek solace and healing through the act of writing. This method, known as 'Scriptotherapy,' was coined by Suzette A. Henke in her work *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (1999) and refers to the therapeutic practice of re-visiting and re-enacting psychological wounds within the written word, with the ultimate aim of fostering healing and resilience.

In the 2022 edition of *Waiting in the Wings*, Moraga says in the 'Preface' that the book offers a "queer view of motherhood and mothering from an era preceding national legalization of same -sex marriage and gay adoption" (ix). She also adds that since the original publication in 1997, the memoir has come a long way and circumstances of lesbian mothering and same-sex marriages have changed. She mentions how the memoir started as a series of erratic journal entries, "the writing became something unanticipated, something I had only witnessed in dreams, anxiously recorded on the page… a meditation on death and dying." (x)

As baby Rafael was born prematurely, he had to be shifted to the ventilator. He also contracts NEC, an infection that literally ate up the intestine and was considered deadly among premature babies. The journals entries are not regular and with Rafael taking up much attention of the author, Moraga feels equally guilty of not being able to write freely as she used to before. She also feels somehow responsible for Rafael's premature birth as she had travelled to meet her parents in the sixth month of her pregnancy. She says:

> What is hardest to write about is the loss I feel not having brought Rafael to full term. At times, I think it is loss, then wonder if it's really guilt, I feel that my son had to go through so much suffering outside the womb because I couldn't protect him inside. There's no one to blame really, no matter how many times I run all the events through my mind. (98)

Moraga thinks of how she refused the seat in the subway train, even as her feet were swollen, how she walked across the sand dunes in search of Ella's mother on the Cape Cod sand and the Southern California beach with her brother -in -law and the Southern California malls with her sister. All in her sixth month of pregnancy. She further muses:

> Maybe it was vanity that got in the way of thinking sensibly about my health. Six months pregnant and I never felt more beautiful, more "in shape," the round in my belly making me feel more woman, more lush, more fine and female. I walked and walked to keep that healthy rounding shape. I told myself that soon I will return home, stick my feet up on a lawn chair, and do nothing all San Francisco summer long but devote myself full-time to the task of growing larger with life. I had scheduled my work accordingly,

> canceled all travel by the seventh month (as recommended by the nurse), but the seventh month never came. (98)

Moraga was also the non-biological mother to Joel, the child in an earlier relationship. She says how she enjoyed nurturing him and states that it was he who awakened the 'maternal desire' in her. When the relationship ended, Moraga laments on the void in her life, left behind by her partner and Joel. She remembers, "… the touching, the awakening that will always be remembered by that name, even when the same place is touched by another. That is who Joel is to me, my first (almost) son. And the mother he called forth in me made my hunger for Rafael Angel all the more urgent: *a child that would never be taken from me, a child to raise from scratch*… (21-22 italics in text).

Moraga's association with Joel and later with Rafael makes her realize her ardent desire for a child, even it meant going against the norms of her butch identity. She says that one thing that Joel's presence had taught her in life was that she had grown up to be woman enough, in her own terms, to mother a child. She says:

> The child grew inside me, the loss of the child, the discovery of mother, the recognition that I had nursed dozens of hungry women throughout my life as I had my own mother, from the time I could remember, and in that resided my lesbian conviction, my lesbian loving. I am a daughter and have always loved the daughters in all our beauty and brokenness. *But what of children?* …I wanted a child. I was forty years old. (22 italics in text)

During her pregnancy, the desire for a girl child manifests itself in Moraga's dreams. Once she has a dream of her baby being born. She dreams two images of her baby. One image is of an already grown boy, like her student Pedro. The other

image is of a “tiny beautiful dark-haired Mexican girl” (28). She remembers the rapture she experienced then, even though a dream, and describes it as being in heaven. When she looks at the baby’s genitalia and realizes the swollen round vagina is not balls, but a vagina, her joy is endless. She recounts further, “…she is transparent. Her skin a see-through casing holding in muscle and bone. I know in the dream that the skin will take on the appearance of flesh later…” (29). Later in the memoir, she confesses that the news of a baby boy came as a shock to both her and Ella when the results of the CVS tests came in and the genetic specialist announces the gender of the foetus.

Moraga describes beautifully the changes in her body during pregnancy and post-delivery. She talks about the “smell of the baby that grew sweet with the rise of milk inside my breasts, that grew sweet with woman-sex…” (67). Moraga’s sister also refers to that smell, having given birth four times. Moraga says her sister was not referring to the smell of the baby wrapped in the newborn warmth of a receiving blanket, but meant, “birth smell, the thick membraned blood-smell passing out between a woman’s legs at birth and for a full moon’s cycle following.” (67). The smell that Moraga refers to as the “mother-smell.”

Iris Marion Young in her established essay “Throwing Like a Girl: A Phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment, Motility, and Spatiality”, applies the phenomenological method of Merleau-Ponty to the medium of examining the female bodily experience, based on the fact that the experience of living in a biologically female body has its own essentially different features, such as the experience of menstruation, pregnancy and breast feeding. She explains not just the position of a feminist critique of phenomenology for its phallocentricity, but also

offers a theoretical description of the position of women. Young underlines that femininity is not a basic characteristic, instead it is "…a set of structures and conditions that delimit the typical situation of being a woman in a particular society, as well as the typical way in which this situation is lived by the women themselves" (5). At the nucleus of this situation is the female body itself, which is "the first locus of intentionality, as pure presence to the world and openness upon its possibilities", that is, a lived body (6). The lived body challenges the world of limitations and threats explicit to the female experience, "the threat of invasion of her body space" (7). These threats form the background for the woman to live her body—the background of objectification that bases its experience in its totality and sequence that affects the bodily dynamics inherent to most women, like pregnancy and breast feeding.

Young further states that "the border between motherhood and sexuality is lived out in the way women experience their breasts and in the cultural marking of breasts. To be understood as sexual, the feeding function of the breasts must be suppressed, and when the breasts are nursing, they are desexualized" (11). Reiterating Julia Kristeva, she emphasizes the prominence of women accepting their breasts by experiencing its dynamics and fluidity. According to Young, however, breastfeeding carries with it a source of perhaps even greater pleasure for the mother—the pleasure of bodily connection with the baby, the feeling of comfort and relief when the mother breastfeeds her offspring. Moraga's baby boy was born prematurely, and he was placed in a ventilator in the ICN (Intensive Care Nursery). This meant that she was not able to feed him like 'normal mothers' and the breast milk was fed through a tube down his throat. She pumps and labels the milk in the hospital freezer and transports it each day in small ice chests to the ICN. She tells

him as she watches the soft white liquid descend through the tube into his pursed mouth, “One day, hijo, te dare’ elpecho. Ten paciencia” (60). She says it was more for herself than the baby. A few weeks later, she was able to nurse him properly. Moraga narrates the experience thus: “I put him to my breast, and he lives complete as a life’s lesson in the moment of that suck-and-pull-and -rush of liquid filling his mouth and throat, settling full and sweet at the base of his hunger. His hunger, for now, can be satisfied” (70).

Lesbian Motherhood and Chicana Lesbian Motherhood

Lesbian motherhood can however be one thing to desire; quite another to achieve. Nancy J.Mezey, in her book *New Choice, New Families: How Lesbians Decide About Motherhood* (2008), asserts that with lesbians, mothering desires did not determine mothering decisions and continues the line of thought by stating that, “…regardless of what the lesbians wanted in terms of motherhood or remaining childfree, as they moved through adult lives, there were four main factors—beliefs about motherhood, access to lesbian support networks, intimate partners, and work—that they weighed in ultimately converting their mothering desires into mothering decisions” (66). Moraga says she was fortunate enough to have the support of both Ella and Pablo to help her get pregnant. The support of her immediate *familia* and her Moraga clan also counted. She also mentions the support systems in Province Town where she goes after Rafael recuperates from her surgery. She says, “…it is a comfort even as white as P-town is, to walk the streets here unafraid with the baby on the back and Ella in hand. It is a comfort after the queer wasteland of the rest of the Cape” (102). Moraga remembers the day of her insemination, also the day Tede, her gay friend, died of AIDS. She asks, “Is there a

kind of queer balance to this birthing and dying…lesbians giving life to sons, our brothers passing? He is the child of queers, our queer and blessed family." (62)

Moraga avoids medical intervention in her attempts to get pregnant, despite the possibility of one-night stand with casual lovers or artificial insemination. She transcends the limits of biological fatherhood by choosing Pablo, her Mexican Gay friend, and his parents to become part of her queer *familia*, substantiating queer autoethnographic elements where the culture fuses into the consciousness of the narrator and influences their decision making. In the article "Queering the Chicana *familia* in Cherríe Moraga's *Waiting in the Wings*" (2020), Francisco José Cortés Vieco explains how Moraga upholds her identity and her values in traditional conception and conventional motherhood by refusing to do anything that "deflates the purity of maternity while strengthening the queerness of motherhood and her personal need to re-create her role as a mother" (21). Moraga narrates how she and Pablo engage in a ritual of parental desire by addressing him as her "sweet twin lover" (25). Moraga says:

> …one way or another that sperm has just gotta get inside you. Very simple... and unromantic. Yet I did feel made love to. And whether pregnant or not, I knew I would never forget what that softness felt like, my legs up and open to receive whatever destiny had decided for me. I close my eyes and dream Pablo as a sweet twin lover. (25)

Vieco also adds that "…Moraga cherishes a victory against the lesbian dependence on reproductive medicine when she confronts her already occupied womb with her incredulous doctor: she is a forty-year-old homosexual, but she became pregnant at home in one single attempt with casual lovers or medical

intervention. Nevertheless, the involvement of Moraga's inseminator transcends the expected limits of biological fatherhood" (23). Moraga chooses Pablo to be the father of her child, while maintaining the sanctity of her relationship to Ella.

Beliefs about motherhood cover a broad range of ideas that are modified, depending on race, class, gender, and sexuality. Mezey also talks about how the definition of motherhood varies across race in her book. She says it was one thing for the White woman and another for the Black, defined as it is by specific class positions. If for the White woman, the process of identifying as a mother is through the process of having a child and becoming a mother, then for the Blacks, it extends beyond the White definition of biological mother to include the 'other mothers' (68). The other mothers could be grandmothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, or close friends, like in Moraga's clan. Motherhood often invoked a sense of power for the Chicana woman, as she sees herself as the life source that sustained her community, ensuring the physical and emotional survival of her children. For this reason, the Chicana community in general, perceived lesbians as a threat to the continuity of their race. Moraga mentions how she had to face antagonism from her brother when she announces her pregnancy as a butch lesbian. He asks their other sister, "*Was it artificial insemination or did she just get together with some guy*?" (37 italics in text). The harsh tone with which he asks the question chills Moraga, and she says, "*…Is it anger/ Fear? What he wants to know is: Who is the father? Where is the man in the picture? The chasm I would have to traverse to have my brother understand who I am in this is too daunting"* (37 italics in text).

In keeping with queer autoethnographic narrative patterns, Mezey opines that as with Whites and Blacks, history, race and class relations also shape Latino beliefs

about motherhood, as is seen in Moraga's memoir. She theorizes thus, "…looking specifically at Chicano/a (e.g., Mexican American) families that points to specific beliefs about motherhood. While Chicano/as see motherhood and household chores as a primary responsibility and role of women, Chicanas often work as both mothers and paid laborers…" (68). Moraga also reiterates this fact in the online personal interview. She mentions how her upbringing had shaped her identity and beliefs, hailing from a working-class family. The *familia* was also very important to Chicanas, as is evident from Moraga's memoir. She says how blessed she was to be born into a huge extended Mexican family, "…a family in which aunts and uncles acted as surrogate parents, and cousins were counted among siblings, and where my grandmother, Dolores, who died at the age of ninety-six, presided matriarchal *y* mandona over the lives of some one hundred -plus relatives…" (17 'y' italicized in text). Moraga is also very proud of her nation and nationality. She says, "…I am to be the mother of a Mexican baby. I am the worst and best of those macho Chicano nationalists. I picked a man for his brains and dark beauty. And the race continues" (39). In the 2022 edition of Moraga's memoir, Rafael, now a 28-year-old, mentions in the 'Afterword', about how his, "life was cultivated with the fortitude of Chicana familial consciousness, forged by our ancestors from the deserts of Sonora and the mountains of Durango." (124)

Mezey continues her earlier line of thought by stating that, like Black women, Chicanas often see motherhood as a shared undertaking where other women help mothers with childcare. The inference of this type of mothering was that Chicano children grow up with many mother figures, thus emphasizing the concept of universal motherhood. Mezey echoes the idea stated by D A Segura and J L Pierce in their book *Chicana/o Family Structure and Gender Personality:*

Chodorow, Familism, and Psychoanalytic Sociology Revisited (1993) that this not only presents the idea that children can be raised by multiple women, but it also exposes them to a greater range of "gender-related cultural behaviors" and role models (76). The same concept is reiterated in the 2022 edition of Moraga's memoir, where Rafael says in the 'Afterword', about how "a mix of cultures and identities" (124) that passed through his childhood home had defined himself, his eagerness for exploration. This reveals that while one tries to understand beliefs about motherhood that raises questions about how lesbians from various race and class backgrounds adopt and negotiate differing beliefs about motherhood, it also invites us to think how these internalization and negotiation affects lesbians' mothering decisions. This foregrounds queer autoethnographic elements on how a culture is infused deeply into a person's consciousness and narrative.

Queer Chicana Metropolis

Moraga's reference to the community in which she lived speaks volumes of the general stand people took towards gender and sexuality at the time. In 1997, when Moraga's memoir was written, she talks about the urban environment and their stance regarding her sexual orientation, making special reference to Los Angeles and San Francisco. Living in Los Angeles in the 1960s, she says of her 'coming out' thus:

> …although I did not keep my sexuality secret from the closest members of my family, I knew it could never be fully expressed there. So, the search for a *we* that could embrace all parts of myself took me far beyond the confines of heterosexual family ties. I soon found myself spinning outside the orbit of

> that familial embrace, separated by thousands of miles of geography and experience…. (17-18)

Moraga says that her search for *familia* dominated every relationship with her partners, be it of any age, race or cultural background. She says, "…for surely, we were at war, trying to make a place for lesbian love in a woman-hating world. And as I tried to "save" each one of my lovers, and all her children (those incarnate and those invisible), the invisible wreaked havoc on our loving: the rapes, the incest, the battering, the betrayals, the alcoholism, the orphan hood" (19). She mentions Rosie (name changed by the author to protect privacy), who was a member of a writing-for-performance theater troupe called 'Drama Divas', which Moraga was directing at the time. Rosie's childhood was filled with abuse, the white rapist father, and the silent Latino mother. Moraga says Rosie was her daughter. Moraga states that she had always experienced her lesbianism as radically different from most white or black lesbians. She had always longed for more in her relationships- "…something woman centered, something cross generational, something extended, something sensual, something humilde ante la credora. In short, something Mexican and familial but without all the cultural constraints." (18)

Moraga's culture played a very important role in formulating her lesbian identity and motherhood in later years. She mentions in the online personal interview that, coming from a working-class background, one was expected to work and for women, it was mandatory to be a mother. In the memoir, Moraga refers to the "Ceremony" (40) at Bear Camp, which she explains in a foot note in the same page. The Ceremony was a Native American sacred ritual that involved a number of days of "fasting, sweats, prayer, and medicine" (40). She explains that many

Chicana/os regularly attended the Ceremony as part of their religious observance. During the *la ceremonia,* she says, as others faced separation around her, she did not feel alone. “Holding my womb, I rocked and rocked, and my son and I spoke secrets to each other in the circle of fire…I prayed that I would learn how to raise a male child well, that the wounds men have inflicted on me, even in their absence, will not poison me against my son” (41). Moraga also refers to the political climes of her time and the leaders and writers who have influenced her. She refers to Cesar Chavez (a Latino American Labor leader and Civil Rights Activist) and Audre Lorde. She says between them the story of her own political history as a Chicana and as a lesbian has been told. When Audre and Moraga left New York and drifted apart, Moraga returned to her homeland in California, the land of Cesar’s movement and Audre had returned to her island in the Caribbean. She mentions in the memoir entry made on 27 April that the week before, Chavez had passed on (died) and also refers to Audre’s passing. She quotes:

> Since Audre’s passing, I’ve begun to try and speak to her again. It is easier now, the geographical distance no longer of consequence. It is also easier, I think, because the living always presumes the wisdom of those who have passed on, their infinite capacity for understanding, their generosity of spirit. Audre: the first ancestor of my own-colored lesbian tradition. Talk to me about freedom now, sister -poet. Teach me. (42)

Moraga, in her book *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010* (2011) talks about how the community becomes a dominant marker of identity formulation. She says how, for the “queer people of colour” (179), the heteronormative pattern of family was not “the family of our herencia” (179). She

asks, "…What do our families really look like and is that model deficient or might it not proffer less privatized, more interdependent alternatives to sustaining community?" (179). She says that non-urban queer identities may present a more challenging locale from which to question critical notions of queer and hegemonic power structures. As a lesbian mother, she was able to establish her identity as an individual rather than just representative of a minority group and render outside compulsory normative categorizations and standards. From a lesbian perspective, the sense of community she experienced with her heterosexual companions made her acutely aware of the assimilation and resistance that she had faced as a result of identity negotiation. She also refers to her Chicana communal bonding among the women folk that they share based on their culture and ethnicity. She recounts the day baby Rafael was undergoing surgery, she thinks about how her family had "*held me in her lion arms*" (64 italics in text). Moraga, Ella, Deborah, Ester and Rene'e, all Moraga's friends pray together, holding hands. Deborah creates an altar on the small lamp table in the hospital with the holy cards and healing stones. They place the sage next to the burning candle that enflames the face of *la Virgen* (65). Here too, Moraga experiences the same power of *familia* and race that she had experienced during the 'Bear Ceremony'.The nurses at the hospital also share a bond with Moraga over Rafael, who was their baby too. She talks about Tede, the queer ancestor, who was watching guard over baby Rafael while he was in the ICN like a guardian angel. The bond she shared with her mother and her *abuelita* (65)reveal the concept of reproductive consciousness that can be used to describe culturally specific and locally unpredictable ways in which both social and biological experiences shape female identity. The reproductive consciousness is defined by convention and evolves constantly.

The voice of the foetus underscores the ethical and epistemological authority of the expecting mother. Moraga often refers to the baby when he was in the womb. She says, "…*he is a fish inside me, flapping his tail, gulping down the waters of my womb. He is pure animal, nothing human about these sensations. They are the animal I am when I make love, am hungry, move my bowels, fall into a deep unconscious sleep*…" (43 italics in text). When Moraga experiences heavy bleeding in between, she fears miscarriage and is rushed to the hospital. But later, she says that it was only she who remained fragile, "…at each threat to my pregnancy, the baby remains so'lido, intacto. His heartbeat growing in resonance, conviction, full human-beingness" (40). She quotes another beautiful thought that conveys the deep spirituality with which she receives the baby in her womb. She says it's hard to want something so much and to feel that this destiny of mother and child is truly out of her hands, truly a gift from the cosmos. "I am here to receive it, but I cannot cling to it any more than I can predict the nature of the son I will have" (40). Moraga refers to the baby as warrior, who was fighting to stay alive. When her water breaks when the foetus was just 37 weeks, she is rushed to the hospital. All through the ride, she feels her mouth has dropped somewhere into her womb and she was singing only one real song: "Hang *on, mijito. Stay inside me, please stay inside me*" (49 italics in text). Even as Moraga emerges into the position of a mother with power and responsibility, the memoir undermines any notion that maternal agency always or consistently works either to clarify or serve the interest of the expecting mother.

Moraga's memoir is an apt example of how the narratives of lesbian identified mothers speak out to world of their mothering experiences, experiences that might otherwise have been just a feeble whisper in the clamor of heteronormative traditions. It expands our perceptions of what is possible and what

is not and creates ties between people across time and space. Moraga refers to the bond she shares with Cesar Chavez, Ronnie Burke, and Audre Lorde. She refers to Tede, the Irish poet, as her "queer ancestor" (64). These queer autoethnographic perspectives in the memoir enable us to see how the existing socio-cultural hierarchy is structured in society.

This chapter states how lesbian motherhood experience extends beyond individual identity. When projected definitions of motherhood are challenged, queering motherhood starts from the space where dominant ideologies of gender and sexuality are challenged, exploring experiences and ideas that function outside the main institutional forms of motherhood. It would be apt to quote Dorothy Allison's (Moraga's friend) lines on motherhood, from her work *Two or Three Things I know for Sure*, as quoted in Moraga's memoir, in this regard: "Babies change things/ open doors you thought were shut,/close others/ Make you into something you never been,/You the mama now,/you're gonna think different" (Moraga 84).

Narrative Technique

The memoir's tone is that of first-person narration and is divided into three sections- 'City of the Angels,' 'Waiting in the Wings' and 'Dream of a Desert.' Narrative is the central feature of Moraga's memoir. Bringing narrative and theory to the fore while explaining the concept of queering motherhood at the level of experience, connections between the experiential, the representational, and the analytical planes in motherhood studies have been explored here. At the outset, Moraga states that she had changed names to respect the privacy of certain individuals and also to acknowledge the fact that this writing was her personal 'fiction. 'She says that throughout the text, she does not distinguish Spanish from

English with a different type face, as she wanted to reveal how this more closely reflected the fluid bilingual Chicana/o voice.

Moraga's shift between her matrilineal tongue, Spanish, and the linguistic instructions of her American fatherland, English, augments the subjectivity reflected in her autobiographical account. Analyzing the memoir from a queer autoethnographic perspective, Moraga, at times dons the garb of the translator of her ethnic community whenever she provides an English version of her culture specific ideas and at times, however, she leaves it open-ended for the interpretation of the reader. Nevertheless, this language shifting represents an advantage for the narrative circularity in the memoir because the nucleus of the narrative is Moraga's building of her new identity as a Chicana lesbian mother. She also says how she has referred to her close friends as 'comrades,' a Mexican term denoting an intimacy similar to that of a family member. She adds that she has, at times, reconfigured the chronology of events depicted in the memoir in favor of the requirements of story - telling.

Moraga's memoir is a poignant narrative of a mother who battles the social norms of imposed gender and sexual categorizations. Moraga says in the 2022 edition of the memoir that as she returned to the passages written in the 1997 edition, especially in Chapters I and II, she found herself "too immersed and utterly wordless in the living of them to describe."(xiv).Written in the form a journal entry, with proper dates and months entered in Spanish, the memoir recounts Moraga's experiences during pregnancy and post-partum. For Moraga, writing was a therapy, as is asserted in the concept of 'scriptotherapy', where she mentions that she wrote to ease the pain and anguish of her post-partum experiences and her new born

baby's illness. The language typography deliberately shifts between her thoughts and emotions during these experiences. The ones she records in italics refer to her thoughts and emotional turmoil, while the regular typo stands for concrete incidents and actual conversations she has with those around her. The entries are erratic as Moraga herself admits that she did not write regularly, especially the time when Rafael was sick in the hospital and she recounts the incidents later on. The entries are italicized in places that shows they were original entries and the others were added or modified later. The 'Prologue' is dated San Francisco, 1996 and the 'Epilogue' ends in "19 abril, Di'a del indio, 1997" (127). It is interesting how Moraga has managed to interweave race, religion, and culture into her personal thread of narrative. At an individual level, she also interweaves her merged identities of being a butch lesbian, a mother and a Chicana. The Prologue titled "The Long Hard Path" starts with the phenomenal sentence, "Lesbians don't make babies with our lovers" (13), that sums up the entire memoir in one single sentence. The epilogue ends with the philosophical line "This, too, will pass" (127) and nothing could sum up more beautifully the deep tone of spirituality that runs throughout the narrative.

Moraga writes, about how she accepted everything stoically, thus in an online article titled "Cherrie Moraga on Writing about Queer Motherhood" dated December 7, 2022 in Literary Hub: "Suddenly the *what happened?* of the journal writing was eclipsed by *what will become of us?* I very quickly learned what it meant to carry *susto* in the body; to no longer trust the universe to be on one's side. To pray for the best and ready yourself for the worst. I also learned the daily gift of survival, its necessary faith, and the willingness to accept loss." (Moraga)

Conclusion

Moraga asserts throughout the memoir that, being part of the Chicana *familia*, motherhood was a dominant identity marker for her and a basic component of social and cultural ideology. She was able to assert her lesbian identity along with her maternal identity through the lens of queer autoethnography that supported and at the same time subverted normative mothering practices. It also analyses how queer autoethnography influences mother-writing through the medium of the memoir. The fluid nature of queer autoethnography is suited to explain this faint transgression from one sphere to another, exploring identities that navigate across time and space and across cultures.

At times, the narrator shifts from being the individual mother to being the 'Universal Mother'. Moraga's choice of diction and tone as she narrates what it might mean to re-think, re-shape, and re-establish notions and practices of motherhood from queer perspectives. She has focused on the experiences of mothers in her *familia* and also on herself who identify as queer due to her butch lesbian identity, thus making it a queer autoethnographic narrative. She also narrates the experiences of motherhood, both biological and non-biological. She moves away from experiential accounts to explore the cultural, political, and historical meanings of parenting and motherhood using the lens of queer identity and perspectives. This establishes how mothering practices may be queered even when they do not follow normative scripts. Queering motherhood invites questions that precede the birth, or even the conception of a child, contemplating on the cosmic intervention that brings a child to its mother. In the 2022 edition of the memoir, Moraga mentions that, "…just as Rafael, who was "waiting in the wings" to be born … in retrospect, I see

this book as a kind of poet's memoir, for even giving birth does not satisfy the artist's desire to create." (xv)

Moraga's memoir asserts that there is no singular universal mothering identity, although there are hegemonic discourses which can be attained or renounced, thus bringing about a coalescence of motherhood. Moraga states that in addition to gaining heterosexual privilege when a lesbian becomes a mother, she also examines the fervent principles surrounding lesbian motherhood and believes that ultimately lesbian mothers were just like heterosexual mothers. This is because lesbians create equal partnerships as their relationships are not dictated by historical gender-based divisions of child care. In collaborating the social regulation of mothering bond and the biological 'tie,' lesbian mothers highlight the socially constructed nature of these categorizations. In this chapter, discourses of gender and sexuality as a butch lesbian/ mother in Moraga's memoir have been explored. Moraga stresses the flexibility of gender and undermined hegemonic discourses about subverted gender roles through the pedagogical practices of gender in their families. In this way, heteronormative ideologies are continually contested. This equates the norm of the universal motherhood, unifying different elements of mothering into one universal *familia*. She talks about the cosmos that had willed her to have the baby and that a lesbian mother has more power than history or heterosexual society would admit. The power that connects them to the universe is 'shared motherhood,' where one can mother to protect others who depend on them. Moraga sums up the whole idea in one beautiful line when she says that a mother never dies, she just passes on.

Chapter 3

Vulnerable Subjects: Nancy Abrams' Non-Biological Lesbian Motherhood Memoir *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter*

"Finally, I could accept, not only that I am a mother-had always been a mother-but, more precisely, what kind of a mother I had been…I was a mother on a different plane" (Abrams 268).

Within queer families, the non-biological mother is frequently reduced to a secondary status due to lack of blood ties. Often addressed as the 'co-mother' or the 'other' mother, these were all variants of the term 'mother.' Such lesbian co-mothers often encounter a similar phenomenon, thus becoming 'vulnerable subjects,' wherein the status of their relationship to the child borne of their partner is contested and they find themselves named as something other than mother. Likewise, the status of the non-biological mothers as 'real' mothers is frequently questioned by those who insist that a real mother is a biological mother. When one equates 'real' mother with biological mother, one renders polymaternal families invisible by representing them as monomaternal / normal families, where the child can have only one 'real' mother.

Nancy Abram's non-biological lesbian motherhood memoir *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter* (1999) derives from and elucidates a broad spectrum of experience, ranging from the literal circumstances of a woman who loses or relinquishes custody of her non- biological child to the psychological condition of a woman whose child/children dies, a woman who miscarries or a woman who never becomes pregnant. Norma, the biological mother, steps aside

from the primary role of mothering as she was an impulsive and unpredictable character. She decides that she wants a baby one day. The next day she says all the stress and anxiety of child rearing (after having the baby) was making her tired and she was going to put her child up for adoption. Abrams steps in to fit into the role of the adoptive mother in this circumstance to their daughter Amelia.The memoir focuses on maternal confrontations with difference. It critically examines notions of home and family and develops an account of love as a practice of solidarity that holds homes and families together. It begins by critically interrogating the notion of 'normal' families and redraws boundaries between self and the other that result in a child's abjection of its mother(s). This is painful both for the mother who is 'othered' and for the child who is subjected to practices of abjection and separation. The memoir also explores the dichotomy of the good mother and the bad/mad mother in the context of motherhood studies.

Theoretical Framework

Queer motherhood theorists draw methodologically from lesbian and queer theory, most notably from the work of Marilyn Frye, Shelley M Park and Michel Foucault. Like feminists of color and postcolonial theorists, lesbian feminists and queer theorists such as Frye and Sedgwick have argued for an epistemology that values the epistemic position of those who are marginalized by their sexual and affectional identities and practices. Frye, in her work *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (1983), argues that as lesbians are rendered impossible beings within a phallocratic, heterosexist conceptual framework, lesbians are uniquely positioned to assess and disrupt the reality that excludes them. Like the term 'lesbian,' the term 'adoptive non-biological' mother is oxymoronic. Just as a mother

is defined as a procreative being, ‘other’ mothers are defined as non-procreative beings.

Shelley M. Park introduces the concept of “monomaternalism” (4) in her book *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*(2013). The idea of “monomaternalism” refers to the ideological assumption that a child can have only one ‘real’ mother (4). This ideology originates from a combination of beliefs about the socially normative and biologically imperative claims about ‘real’ men and ‘real’ women that gender is performed in socially circumscribed ways. As such, claims about real men and women are intended to keep them in line with gendered binaries and to bring those who might deviate from proscribed norms of masculinity and femininity back into line with normative ideals. Assertions about who is or is not a ‘real’ mother often carry normative weight similarly intended to discipline those who deviate from norms of femininity (5).

In the memoir, Abrams refers to power as producing ‘adoptive’ maternal bodies and adds that the ways in which power produces adoptive non-biological ‘maternal’ bodies are similar to the ways in which power produces biological maternal bodies. In this regard, Park’s reference to Michel Foucault’s theory of power and sexuality helps bring to the forefront the power structures influencing maternal bodies. Adrienne Rich’s essay “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” undermines the rationale for both compulsory motherhood and heterosexuality in open adoptive mothering relationships. She explains that adoptive mothers challenge the paradigms of real motherhood and the heterosexual nuclear family by the deliberate inclusion of more than one mother in a child’s life.

Amy Hequembourg's Lesbian *Motherhood: Stories of Becoming* talks about second parent adoptions and custody disputes between lesbian co-mothers. She explains how because many States in the U.S did not allow same-sex marriage, lesbian couples had to seek other legal means to protect their parental rights. Second-parent adoptions have become the norm for non-biological mothers to protect their parental rights and differ from traditional adoption in that it allowed the biological mother to retain legal custody while creating a legally recognized (and sometimes contested) parental status for the second mother.

In *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice,* Andrea O'Reilly defines who a mother is. O'Reilley states that a matricentric mode of feminism is the mandate if one were to analyse how institutional restrictions shape the experiences of mothers. Lesbian theorist Baba Copper upholds exclusive female mothering as a transgressive and transformative mode of mothering, as developed in the chapter "The Radical Potential in Lesbian Mothering of Daughters" and compiled in the book *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* by Andrea O'Reilley, where she elaborates on how many lesbians continue to view motherhood as rooted in tradition. Rosi Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects* as well as Sara Ahmed's critique of queer motherhood theories explains the theoretical concept of domestinormativity, a concept that explains how the child has little choice in determining how their home is configured as it explores and rejects different metaphorical understandings of the post-divorce family, including the notions of "broken" homes and "blended" homes, as well as the notion of "nomadic" families.

Abrams' memoir examines the politics of love in its practical, epistemological and phenomenological dimensions, arguing for an understanding of

maternal love as a practice of queer solidarity. Such a practice of solidarity with children and 'other' mothers embody a resistance to the politics of monomaternalism. This ideological doctrine resides at the intersection of patriarchy, heteronormativity, capitalism and Eurocentrism. Patriarchy insists that women bear responsibility for biological and social reproduction, heteronormativity stresses that a woman must pair with a man, rather than other women, in order to raise children successfully, capitalism focuses in its conception of children as private property, and Eurocentrism advocates the erasure of polymaternalism in other cultures and historical periods. Monomaternalism is normative in the contemporary world—as well as in some postcolonial cultures that have adopted these contemporary Eurocentric values. This chapter also highlights the limits of monomaternal child rearing policies and practices and explores ways in which adoptive, blended, lesbian, and other queer families can be seen as sites of resistance.

In addition to revealing the ways in which all maternal bodies are discursively mediated and socially regulated, exploring motherhood through the lens of adoption reveals the assumptions of heteronormativity, repro-sexuality and repro-narrativity. Michael Warner describes in the Introduction to his work *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1991) terms "repro-sexuality" and "repro-narrativity". "Repro-sexuality," as defined by Warner, is an "interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity" (qtd. in Park 76). Repro-sexuality is closely associated with "repro-narrativity" or the notion that "our lives are somehow made more meaningful by being embedded in a narrative of generational succession" (qtd. in Park 76) and family homogeneity that typically frame our view of the biological family. By focusing on adoptive maternal bodies as re-envisioning motherhood and family practices, it opens up numerous possibilities

for novel practices in which biological as well as adoptive mothers may engage in. These themes concern what adoptive maternal bodies lack that 'real' maternal bodies possess. A pronatalist perspective on maternal bodies defines motherhood as a natural, biological phenomenon including both a gestational and a genetic connection to one's child. From this perspective, there is something queer about any adoptive maternal body-a body that poses as 'real,' yet is not a 'real' mother.

Non-normative Maternal Issues of Power and Sexuality

Shelley M. Park elaborates how mothers, both biological and adoptive, perform according to dominant scripts of narratology, as prescribed by patriarchal institutions. In the memoir, Abrams' and Norma's lives and experiences of motherhood are dictated by these dominant power structures. But when the biological mothers are bound by tradition and convention, says Park, adoptive mothers realize that such role-playing is dictated by leading convictions of motherhood and that, "…all mothers are playing a role as mandated by this script or, if refusing to conform to such a role, are still subject to its imposition by those who are gatekeepers to motherhood" (70). As Margaret Homans' asserts in her book *Adoption and Essentialism: Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (2002) that,"…even biological parents must make an active choice to keep and bear the children they bear. There is no purely natural or physical parenthood or even maternity." (qtd. in Park 70)

Abrams' memoir clearly implicates that while the decision to bear/nurture a child for a heterosexual is profoundly influenced by existing social norms, discourses and practices, and all of this privilege biological motherhood, the homosexual mother is free to choose between biological and non-biological norms

of motherhood (even if there is nothing wrong with her body) and she can deviate slightly from the patriarchal institutional structures. This point is further substantiated by Park, who elaborates on the different epistemological perspectives followed by adoptive and biological mothers and quotes from Marilyn Frye's work *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory (1983),* with regard to social scripts of motherhood that parallels the epistemological standpoints on 'role playing' inhabited by straights and queers as described by Marilyn Frye :

> [H]omosexuals and lesbians are mocked and judged for "playing butch-femme roles" and for dressing in "butch femme drag," [but] nobody goes about in full public view as thoroughly decked out in butch and femme drag as respectable heterosexuals when they are dressed up to go out in the evening, or to go to church, or to go to the office. Heterosexual[s] . . . ought to look at themselves in the mirror on their way out for a night on the town to see who's in drag. The answer is, everybody is. Perhaps the main difference between heterosexuals and queers is that when queers go forth in drag, they know they are engaged in theater—they are playing and they know they are playing. Heterosexuals usually are taking it all perfectly seriously, thinking they are in the real world, thinking they are the real world. (qtd. in Park 69)

Continuing the thought, Abrams states that non-biological mothers constantly think of themselves as 'real,' implying that adoptive mothers were just role-playing and reiterated the social script for good mothering that designated what biological mothers did. She says that when walking with Norma, while the latter was pregnant and after the baby was born, society seemed to accept them into their midst. Earlier referred to as 'dykes' and frowned at, passers-by now smiled at them and enquired

or commented about the baby. Park explains that, quoting Marilyn Frye, heterosexuals are not merely pretending to be "the real world"; their behavior "has a function in the construction of the real world" (qtd. in Park 70). She further explains that adoptive maternal bodies are distinct from biological maternal bodies as the former are facilitated by cultural expectations and norms for mothering.

Powering Maternal bodies

Park speaks of the power that the maternal bodies exert, both adoptive and biological, by citing Foucault, who spoke of power as "reaching right into our bodies, permeating posture, gesture, speech, relationships, and ways of living" (68). Echoing Foucault, Abrams speaks of the power that defined and differentiated the non-biological maternal body from the biological maternal body. This has everything to do with gender and is largely unaffected by one's status as an adoptive or a biological parent. Adoptive maternal bodies also are produced in ways that are distinct from biological maternal bodies. However, Abrams' legal battle to gain custody of Amelia is challenged by the fact that she was her non-biological mother. Most notably, judicial laws, social service organizations and legal regulations play a specific and dominant role in the creation of adoptive mothers. The methods of social surveillance, like courts and society, to which Abrams is subjected to, reveal the ways in which biological motherhood is controlled through normalizing discourses of parenting. Park says that adoptive maternal bodies are bodies that proclaim themselves as 'normal,' even as they are marked as 'abnormal.' Adoptive mothers share certain affinities with the dominant script of mothering just as 'closeted' lesbians or gays know how to perform within the script of heterosexuality. (63-64)

Can there be a Non-Biological Maternal Body?

It is presumed in the heteronormative context that there is a distinction between adoptive maternal bodies and biological maternal bodies. Margaret Homans's book *Adoption and Essentialism: Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* (2002) narrates the experiences of parenting that included all models of parenthood, "the same pleasures of plump baby-flesh, almost the same number of diapers to change and sleepless nights. There are the same joys of and responsibilities for bathing, feeding, singing lullabies, and reciting stories to one's child. Adoptive mothers carry infants in our arms and potty train our toddlers. As the mothers of infants, toddlers, and/or teens, we too are familiar with the tears, screams, laughter and smiles that "enter one's bones" (266). Abrams associates herself as Amelia's mother, if not the biological mother, but definitely her mother. She too, along with Norma, experiences the anxieties and changes during the gestation period, is ecstatic when she listens to the first heart beat during the ultrasound scan, sings lullabies to the baby in the womb every night and even tries her hand at breastfeeding the baby. This happens when Norma announces that she would not be breastfeeding the baby. Norma says that her mother did not breastfeed her when she was a baby and so she also would not. She feels that she has shared her body with the baby for nine months, which was "long enough" (70) and so she would not devote any more time for the baby after it was born. Though she changes her mind later, Abrams goes through the trouble of finding if she could lactate. They consult their midwife Rhetta and she responds that she had heard about "adoptive mothers who nursed their new born as a way of bonding with them. They used a device with a plastic pouch full of formula and a tiny tube that could be placed against the nipple for the baby to drink through. The contraption encouraged the baby to keep sucking at the dry breast"

(71). She then gives the number of a local 'La Leche League' representative so that Abrams could order the necessary equipment. Abrams had wanted to produce breast milk so she could actually suckle their baby and she asks the woman from the La Leche if it was possible to do so. The woman then explains that "You might produce a small amount of milk, but the main emphasis for adoptive mothers is the nurturing that breast-feeding can offer" (71). She then directs Abrams to another midwife Peg who responds positively and says that she was quite sure it would be possible for Abrams to lactate. Peg gives instructions on how to prepare her breasts for lactation and some recipes of "herbal tinctures" that stimulated lactation. Abrams was all thrilled with the idea. She says "As strange as the plan seemed, I became fascinated by the possibility that I could actually nurse the baby" (72). This gradually paves way for the monomaternal practice by Abrams.

The narrative patterns and threads of experience and meaning that run through most contemporary narratives of adoptive mothering, as in Abrams' memoir, distinguish these experiences from those of the biological mother. She says that biological reproduction provides a sense of personal distinctiveness derived from submerging into a narrative that described the process of witnessing the body undergo metamorphosis during pregnancy, establishing emotional bond with the baby and giving birth that are unique to biological parents.

The symbolic significance of biological motherhood is understood in the memoir as the creation of a unique and special bond between the mother and her child during gestation. Because an adoptive maternal body lacks the visible bodily connections to her child as it is grounded in traditional concepts of motherhood based on a natural bond, adoptive mothers are considered as alternate mothers. The

experience of adoptive mothering, thus, differs both phenomenologically and narratively from that of biological mothers, as inferred in the memoir.

Challenging Heteronormative Monomaternalism and the 'Real Mother' Concept: Gender Flexibility and Lesbian Parenting

Abrams' memoir talks of the privilege of biological motherhood, where the law and society has always sided with the former. In the initial stages of their relationship, Abrams and Norma start off with a few bumps and pitfalls of a 'lesbian' couple. Norma was an erratic character, with mood swings and prone to hysteria and panic attacks. Abrams worked part-time at a grocery store and Norma had been sending applications for graduation programs, and so having a baby was the last thing on Abrams' mind. One day, Norma announces that she has been accepted to Yale graduate school under the Law program and so she would be moving away from Abrams. But soon she announces that she had sent a letter declining the offer and got into a teaching program at U Mass instead. The earlier one did not fit into her plans because it took 'so long' and also because she had decided to have a baby. Abrams was quite taken aback by this blatant announcement. More due to the fact that they were lesbians and lesbians can't just have babies like 'normal' couples. To Norma's statement that she wanted a baby, Abrams responds that, "I thought that was a fantasy. You're a lesbian. You can't just decide you're having a baby" (18). To Abrams, one thing that she cherished about being a lesbian was the freedom it offered, but having a baby would prove otherwise. She says, "…our friends were mostly women around our own age who seemed to relish their independence. Now, suddenly there was a baby among the lesbians. It seemed horribly out of place to me to see a woman with a crew cut, in

work boots and jeans, with a cloth diaper slung over her shoulder, a baby bottle in one hand and a rattle in the other" (18).

This resistance to the normative discourses of patriarchal constructs of gender and maternal identity is seen in several instances in the initial parts of the memoir. When Norma tries to convince Abrams that she too could be a mommy (the Other Mother), she says that the thought sounded absurd on many levels. Abrams also muses about how the world was not safe anymore and why they should bring a child into the uncertain future. She also associated having babies to "sticky jelly prints on the refrigerator and frustrated aspirations" (28). Abrams remembers her early experience of shock when she had her first periods. She says, how despite her mother's preparatory talk, womanhood had caught her off guard. She tries to lean away as much as she could from womanhood, because it meant ultimately, she would have to be a mother. She did not want to be identified just as a "…Wife, Mother, or Secretary. I wanted to be something as yet undefined, but definitely different" (28). She further adds that by the time she fell in love with a woman at college, she learned, "that women could be more than just wives. I admired female writers such as Virginia Woolf, the Bronte sisters, and Emily Dickinson. None, I discovered, had ever had children. The trade-off seemed implicit." (28)

When Abrams later comes out as a lesbian, her mother laments the fact that she would not have babies as no one expects lesbians to have one. She says, "But my mother wasn't all smiles over my newly found sexuality…The only thing that makes me uncomfortable about this," she said after some thought, "is that you'll miss out on having children. I didn't tell her just then that this was a relief to me…" (31). Abrams, who grew up thinking she would never have to deal with babies, finds

herself forced to be the ‘Other Mother’ to their daughter Amelia. Her partner Norma, in order to initiate Abrams to motherhood, decides to give her some training in this regard. They ask the help of a friend who had a baby as a single woman through artificial insemination. They decide to help her in nurturing the baby and experience motherhood by volunteering to baby-sit for the friend’s baby Ava, on Sunday afternoons. Abrams says that “Operation Mommy” (31) was ongoing and recalls how the baby endeared itself to them, with her smiles and cooing sounds. This also provides with the first step to learning how to take care of the baby, changing diapers, giving the bottle and strapping the baby onto a backpack for walks. As was expected, Abrams says she softened up a bit and was soon asking friends if they knew a man who could donate sperm for them. She goes to meetings of lesbians who were considering motherhood, along with Norma.

‘What’s in a Name?’ Of ‘Other’ Mothering

The terminology of kinship and of adoption has recently become available to lesbian couples in a registered relationship, whereby a co-parent can obtain legal recognition in relation to the child. The ambiguous nature of the ‘other’ mother is illustrated by the variety of jargon used to refer to her. Although strongly identified as a parent, the term ‘mother’ most often referred to the birth mother. This was to differentiate as to who carried out the physical aspect of childbearing, rather than to signify one who had just a differential caregiving role. In Abrams’ memoir, she clearly distinguishes between herself and her partner Norma. She describes herself as a ‘parent’ and her partner as a ‘mother. ‘Although Abrams identifies as a parent, rather than a mother, she rejects the role of a normative male parent. Corinne P. Hayden, in her book *Gender, Genetics, and Generation: Reformulating Biology in*

Lesbian Kinship (1995), argues that, "For women with a clear and gendered agenda for lesbian motherhood, its promise is deeply bound to the existence of a second female parent, who is neither downplayed nor de-gendered. She is not a father substitute, nor is she a gender-neutral parent; she is clearly another mother." (46-47) Abrams' statement about motherhood supports Hayden's claim that lesbian co-parents challenge heteronormative constructions of the family by not claiming a male space. Abrams clearly differentiates her role as the non-biological mother as being different from that of the 'father.' She says that a 'mother' is someone who gives birth. But this is a complicated claim, as it seems likely she would support a heterosexual adoptive woman's status as 'mother, 'rather than 'parent.' So perhaps the claim to a motherhood identity also rests on the number of mothers a child can have, both biological and non-biological.

Abrams' memoir asks the very pertinent question as to whether her relationship with the baby and its biological mother, Norma, was setting a new trend, a new culture of relation. In Abram's interaction with the general public and family, she clearly presents herself as a parent and introduces their child as her 'daughter'. She also emphasizes the importance of making things 'as easy as possible' for their daughter Amelia, whose way of describing their family might be misunderstood or ridiculed. Abrams and Norma decide that the child would initially call the birth mother 'mom' or 'mamma' and the co-mother by her first name or some variation of it. They decided that the child could make her own decision about this as she got older, but in the meantime, it was considered easiest for the child to use terms that fitted into the dominant discourse of one mother and one father.

Abrams and Norma, because they did not belong to heteronormative patterns of parenting, they decide to search hard and long for an apt name for the 'other' mother in Greek, Indian and Latin languages. They were especially inspired by the various interpretations of how the non-biological mother would define her relationship to the baby -to-be, after they join a discussion group for lesbians who wanted to become parents. In the discussion group, there were many who were not sure about their role in parenting. One considered herself as the baby's aunt. Another woman came to the meetings only occasionally and did not seem to care what her role would be. Abrams talks about how most women thought of themselves as the 'other' mother, a mother as much as the biological partner- on equal footing. Finally, they chance upon the word Ima (pronounced *ee-mah*) which meant 'mother' in Hebrew, since they were both Jews. Abrams says:

> I loved the idea. Ima was a label that would let me be mother both in word and in deed. Ima was foreign word but still familiar. Others in our family and community would understand it. Yet it acknowledged our difference as a family-my distinction as a mother-without feeling alienating. It signified that while I was to be a female parent, I would not be the same kind of mother as Norma would be. (81)

Abrams says that when birth mothers could claim the term 'mother' unproblematically, for co-mothers, this was a more complex negotiation. Even when a 'special bond' during breastfeeding and infancy was endorsed, this was viewed as something that faded over time. But one could argue that it was not simply the abandonment of categories that was of interest in a context where lesbian parents

were struggling for legal rights. Rather, it was the creative reformulation of these categories that had much to reveal about contemporary relatedness.

Culture and Science in Motherhood Practices

Abrams mentions how, had they been in another culture, time or circumstance, they would have readied themselves for motherhood by starting with offerings and prayers to “Cybele, Dagon, Fortuna or any other god or goddess of fertility” (41). She explains further thus:

> We might have carved a statue of Aku'aba and rubbed her high stone forehead with our thumbs. We might have planted myrtle, cypress, or pine as offerings to Astarte, or lit candles or even Beltane fires. But I doubt those gods and goddesses had powers over women who didn't also worship the phallus, or at least employ one. Besides, ours were more pragmatic times. And despite the Virgin Mary's good fortune to conceive, there's only one God now, and we didn't expect His help. (41)

But what made all the difference was that they were not like normal heterosexual women and they lived in the modern times. And so, science was the only thing they could rely on. Norma uses basal body thermometer to record the minute changes in temperature of her body to show the activity of her “luteinizing hormones” (41). Abrams says while Norma was preparing her ovulation graph, she too should have put a chart that would track her emotional readiness to become a parent. They test with syringes and turkey basters, whom Abrams calls as the “insemination tool of lesbian lore” (45). Finding a sperm donor, however, was the hardest part. Abrams talks about the “moral reservations” many men had while “parting with a secretion they would otherwise wash down the shower drain without a thought” (46). They

were also wary about the potential hazards of “untested fluids” and so wanted the “Mr. Right” to be heterosexual and not into casual sex with multiple partners and intravenous drugs. Even though they were not very particular about the physical features of the ‘absent’ father, Abrams confesses she preferred a donor who was Jewish, dark haired and green-eyed, (so that the baby would look a bit like her) but was equally thrilled when a donor, a Christian, monogamous, heterosexual, blond and blue-eyed stranger, cooperated. They were perfectly happy with the arrangement as their baby would grow up in a family where she would be complete and loved. Abrams explains thus:

> What would it be like for a child to grow up in a home with no father? they wanted to know. Well, we reasoned, that happens all the time. Fathers have been known to abandon their children. Or they die. The tragedy is the abandonment or the loss, the sense that the family is no longer complete. Our child would be born into a whole family unit complete according to our needs and desires. This would be a two-parent family, we explained again and again. The fact that we were both women would simply be a given in our child's life. (51)

After Norma conceives, when they go to the medical centre and meet the nurse-midwife Rhetta to discuss about her morning sickness, Norma introduces themselves as lesbians and when Rhetta muses on Abrams’ role in the baby’s life.

> “So, you'll be, like, the father?” Rhetta asked me.
>
> “I'll be the baby's other mother.”
>
> “How interesting. How nice. Two mothers.” (53 quotes in text)

Abrams muses on how much freedom a woman would have to sacrifice to “tote this little bundle around with them to brunches, to the park, and to anywhere else they might want to go,” (56) but she says she would not have it otherwise, just like her close buddy Beth, who, like Abrams, was a butch lesbian and had always thought that she would not have kids because she was a lesbian. Beth says, “I think I sort of unconsciously thought I won't have kids because I'm a lesbian,” she said. “I remember I saw this talk show on TV and there were these lesbians talking about being parents. I was just staring at the screen thinking; you can't do that. If you're a lesbian you can't have kids” (56). But then her partner Robin, like Norma, wanted to have a baby and so Beth had to give in, just like Abrams. Beth narrates her experience of how once when she had gone to a therapy session for Emily, (Beth and Robin’s daughter) regarding a discipline problem and the therapist just bluntly looked at Beth and told her that Emily was not her child. When society very clearly draws the line between biological mothers and the ‘other’ mother, Beth says there was nothing more she could do. This was in response to Abram’s question “How do you handle not being exactly the mother, and not being exactly the father?” (57). Abrams says she is neither, but the ‘Other’ mother.

Co-mothers and ‘Other’ Mothers

Abrams was averse to the term ‘co-mother’ although it was accepted in most spheres of the society. But then she could not be called the ‘father,’ as in a heterosexual relationship, because it would be too confusing for the child as she grew up. Abram says, “Co-mother, a term accepted in most liberal circles, sounded too much like co-pilot to me. I was more than just an assistant” (81). Both Norma and Abram’s would sometimes jokingly refer to the latter as “the other mother” (81).

Abrams says she was initially quite satisfactory with it as it was descriptive and aptly suited to her role, but soon she admits she begins to feel slightly awkward, a feeling that she equates thus, “I began to feel that referring to myself glibly as “the other mother” was a little like a man's mistress appearing at a social function on his arm, and introducing herself as “the other woman” (81).

Abrams also makes reference to the quiet war waging in the lesbian community against lesbians having babies. This becomes very poignant in the research question of this thesis as to whether the lesbian identity would change when they had babies, wanting to adopt heterosexual privileges of society accepting lesbians only when they became mothers. She says that, “… some women argued that lesbians having babies was counter revolutionary. Lesbians, they argued, were trying on heterosexual privilege: Once they became pregnant, people stopped seeing them as lesbians and admitted them to the hallowed halls of Motherhood” (90). Both Abrams, the non-biological mother and Norma, the biological mother, desired to be seen with their daughter Amelia in public, as if to ascertain their identity of womanhood through their association with the baby. Abrams once wrote a letter to the local feminist newspaper in response to the opinion piece by an anonymous writer who had stated that lesbians were “trying on heterosexual privilege” and that “staying home and caring for babies drained energy from the women’s community” (90). Abrams, very vehemently, opposes the notion and writes an “equally strident letter” in response. She says, “…having a child who, once she reaches a certain age, can and will come out for you at any time, demands a new level of lesbian visibility…” (90). But she admits that, ever since Amelia was born, she misses out on gay and lesbian pride marches and now she was more engrossed in “grinding carrots and pears into baby food” than politics. She says, “After all, wasn't “the right

to choose" something that we feminist lesbians believed in?" (91). She says how she basked in the glory of this 'new mommy hood' as random strangers stopped by to comment on Amelia's eyes, when earlier they were hissed at as 'dykes' by strangers. But Abrams admits to being the 'other' mother during baby swim class at YMCA, when her fellow classmates remark on the visibly taut skin of her abdomen, in sharp contrast to the sagging flesh of post pregnancy abdomen of the other biological mothers who had come there. Abrams says that she could sense the charade of normalcy cracking with these words.

Abrams asks why was it so hard for society to accept that a baby could have two mothers. She narrates the incident with her boss Jerry, whom she meets once at the playground while she was with Amelia. Abrams says she was not ready to 'come out' to her boss, unsure of his reaction, and so had not told him of her sexual orientation. But when Amelia starts crying, Abrams takes the baby to Norma, who was sitting across the park, to nurse. Abrams was apprehensive that her boss had to see Norma nursing the baby publicly, but when he waves to them, she is relieved. But later, when he asks about the 'baby -sitter,' mistaking Norma for a wet nurse, Abrams is aghast. She says she couldn't bear the thought of Jerry not accepting Norma to be part of her family and so she persists, "Jerry, didn't you notice she was breastfeeding our baby?"(105). She elaborates further thus:

> That situation stuck with me. It demonstrated how hard people try to fit what they observe into the corset of their rigid version of reality. Every child has one and only one mother, our mythology goes. The space for Mother had already been filled in my boss's mind. Therefore, even seeing Norma nursing Amelia didn't alter his picture. Instead, unconsciously I'm sure, he glossed

> over the piece that didn't fit. This misunderstanding, and many more like it, taught me that if I wanted to be sure people understood who our family was, I had to be painstakingly diligent in my explanations. I also learned how strong was people's need to believe in One Mother, with the same fervour that they believe in One God, or One Nation. (105)

Biological Mothering practices: The ‘Bad/Mad’ Mother Dichotomy

Shelley M. Park says how because of the romanticization of biological motherhood—combined with a belief in childhood innocence, biological mothers who do not share or cannot live up to these romantic ideals of motherhood, may be deemed ‘unfit’. The only exceptions to the normative equation of ‘real’ mother with biological mother occur when biological mothers are publicly judged as being neglectful or abusive (the dichotomy of the ‘bad’ and ‘mad’ mother), as theorized earlier by Adrienne Rich in her work *Of Woman Born*. Park extends the same ideology in the lesbian motherhood context. She reflects on how the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ mother dichotomies are drawn from the key distinction that she makes between motherhood and mothering practices as discussed earlier in this chapter. She further elaborates that, in patriarchal culture, women who mother within the institution of motherhood are regarded as ‘good’ mothers, whereas women who mother outside or against the institution of motherhood are viewed as ‘bad’ mothers.

Norma’s addiction to alcohol, her fits of hysteria and panic attacks and her constant attempts at suicide, combined with her inability to handle stress in her own life make her a ‘bad/mad’ mother. After separating from Abrams, Norma was also not keen on feeding Amelia, their daughter, nutritious food but feeds her junk food like cookies and doughnuts, which shocks Abrams when she comes to learn of it. In

such cases, the secondary mother would be promoted to the status of the 'real' mother, and therefore the 'good' mother. Her promotion to this status hinges on the first mother's simultaneous relegation, however, that once again demonstrates the ideological force of the notion that children can have one and only one mother. Amelia too shows signs of depression and anger when she is with Norma and calms down instantly when she goes to live with Abrams. These were also the reasons that Abrams cites in court when she files a case for partial custody of the child.

Non-biological Mothering Practices: The 'Good' Mom Dichotomy

In *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice,* Andrea O'Reilly defines who a mother is. She says, "… When I use the term "mothers," I refer to individuals who engage in mother work or, as Sara Ruddick theorized, maternal practice. Such a term is not limited to biological mothers but to all people who do the work of mothering as a central part of their life" (1). Abrams' mothering experiences and the way she treats their baby Amelia show her to be a good mother even though she is the non-biological mother. Abrams mothering experiences states that the shift in focus is not to suggest that "matricentric feminism" (1) should replace conventional feminist thought, but to emphasize that the categorization of a mother is different from that of the woman. O'Reilley states that a matricentric mode of feminism is the mandate if one were to analyse how institutional restrictions shape the experiences of mothers. She says that:

> …this mode of mother-focused feminism—what I have termed matricentric feminism—which has emerged as a result of and in response to women's specific identities and work as mothers. I use the term "matricentric" to define and describe a mother-centered mode of feminism. Feminist literary

> critic Elaine Showalter uses the term "gynocentric" to signify a woman-centered perspective ("Toward a Feminist Poetics"); similarly, I use matricentric to convey a mother-centered perspective. The choice to use the word matricentric over maternal and to use the term matricentric feminism instead of maternal feminism is done to distinguish a mother-focused feminism from the theory and politic of maternalism. (3)

In sharp contrast to this explanation for mother's oppression in patriarchal motherhood, lesbian theorist Baba Copper upholds exclusive female mothering as a transgressive and transformative mode of mothering. Copper, in the chapter "The Radical Potential in Lesbian Mothering of Daughters," compiled in the book *Maternal Theory Essential Readings* (2007) by Andrea O'Reilley, elaborates how many lesbians continue to view motherhood as conserved in tradition. It could be said without exception that lesbian mothers are products of "hetero mothering" (190). Lesbians bring up their children within the institution of patriarchy, just like other women. But, as Copper points out, they were free to make choices as to how much they can assimilate their children into patriarchy, the choices that were not available to the hetero-mother (190).

'Monomaternalism' in Lesbian Mothering Practices

Lesbian mothering illustrates the possibility of mothering as a cooperative practice, one that highlights intimacy between women while challenging the ideology of heteronormative concept of mothering. Eve Kosofsky Sedgewick elaborates on the triangulation of maternal desire (the woman-woman-child concept), where the mother's attention is focused on the child. In Abrams memoir, this is evident only till Abrams and Norma stay together, when Amelia was about 3

years old. But after this point of time, they separate and Amelia literally has only 'one' mother at a time, asserting the monomaternal motherhood concept. Shelley M. Park extends Sedgewick's "affective triangulation of maternal desire" to a new dimension that resists the heteronormative principle of "one and only one mother per child" (257). Abrams' monomaternal mothering practice adds a new dimension to (because Norma is absent from the role of active mothering), the concept of queer motherhood. Park feels that lesbian mothers reclaim a distinct identity in the absence of their partners to establish monomaternal instincts. She asks further thus:

> Can heterosexual breeders be portrayed as queer without marginalizing those with non-normative sexual identities? Might my inclusion of (heterosexual) divorce-extended, adoptive, and polygamous families under the umbrella of "queer" families further the divide between those sexual minorities who argue that "they are just like everyone else" and those who claim difference because of their sexual practices?" (257)

Abrams talks about how their family structure undermines a primary rationale for both compulsory motherhood and heterosexuality. After Norma separates from her, Amelia is also taken away from Abrams. Society sides with Norma because she is the biological mother.

Adrienne Rich mentions in her phenomenal essay "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," (1980) the dictates of compulsory motherhood and compulsory heterosexuality. She asks, "why women's intimate connections to one another have been hidden, disguised, marginalized, and excluded in a wide range of writings, including feminist scholarship?" (632). She argues that it was not enough that feminism acknowledges lesbian existence as a matter of

sexual preference. Rich argues for recognition of a "lesbian continuum" that recognizes diverse forms of "primary intensity between and among women," including "the sharing of a rich inner life" and the "giving and receiving of practical and political support" (658–49). Rich also attempts to respond to the exclusion and marginalization of women's intimate relations with one another within feminist scholarship on motherhood. Most of the feminist theorizing about motherhood has implied that mothering takes place within the contexts of nuclear, heteronormative families.

"So, Who Gets to Keep the Baby?"

Amy Hequembourg in her work *Lesbian Motherhood: Stories of Becoming* talks about second parent adoptions and custody disputes between lesbian co-mothers (22). Courts also faced with an increasingly complex array of lesbian family formation issues. Early court cases primarily involved lesbian women who were fighting ex-husbands for custody of their children. In the contemporary society, courts are forced to consider the implications of biology on family relationships as more women were having children together as a couple using Alternative/Artificial Insemination (AI). However, as more cases involving AI couples reached the courts, the definition of the term 'parent' has been gradually evolving across various cultural contexts across the globe. Abrams points out in her memoir that, because many States in the U.S do not allow same-sex marriage, lesbian couples had to seek other legal means to protect their parenting rights. Second-parent adoptions became the norm for non-biological mothers to protect their parental rights and so deviated from traditional adoption in that it allows the biological mother to retain legal custody while creating a second, legally recognized parental status for the non-

biological mother. However, not all countries currently recognized non-biological lesbian mother's rights to seek second-parent adoption. Abrams mentions the travails of legal custody rights of Amelia in the early twenty-first century U.S.

Hequembourg also says how ignorance about lesbian and gay family rights among lawyers were common, leaving many lesbians unaware that second-parent adoption rights existed. This became a point of contention when Abrams and Norma separate and litigation for custody of Amelia ensues. Abrams also reiterates in her memoir, from her experiences, that most non-biological mothers do not have legally recognized parental relationships with their children. Unlike the present-day U.S, the legal framework of the early 1990s period were not conducive for second-parent adoptions, especially in cases where the couples were not legally married or were separated / divorced. They were at the mercy of their ex-partners, the biological mothers, when they separated.

Non-Biological Lesbian Parenting Rights

Abrams says how Massachusetts did not allow lesbians and gay couples to become foster parents and she quotes her butch friend Beth. Beth associates herself as the 'dyke dad' (the typical father role in the heterosexual relationship). Abrams, though asserts herself as the butch in her relationship with Norma, was more inclined to be the 'other mother' to their baby, than 'dyke dad' or 'co-mother.' Beth adds that what makes their role as the 'other' mother in the bond with the baby is that they have to have the power of attorney that gave them rights, including medical rights, over the baby. Beth compares herself to the heteronormative father and says thus, as she pulls out the paper officiating her as Emily's legal guardian, out of her billfold, "I guess dads don't have to carry this around" (56). Beth, the dyke dad,

always felt left out of the baby Emily's life. For one, she rants that the baby always wants her biological mother Robin and not her. Secondly, though she paid for half the expenses for the child's upbringing, she could not claim tax exemption because she was not the biological mother. This is expressed in her words, "I hate this. I hate being a dyke and trying to be a mother" (68). Abrams talks about the legal precautions they take before the birth of the baby, like Norma's will and their powers of attorney in case of Norma's death or if Abram's right over the baby were to be challenged by any hospital or school. They even discuss what would happen to the baby if they were to separate. Norma had vehemently vouched against this then, saying, "I'd never deny your right to see our child… Whatever becomes of us, you'll always be the other mother" (66). Norma's will also state that she would want Abrams to be the guardian of the baby if anything were to happen to her and the powers of attorney gave Abrams the right to make decisions for Norma or if the child needed medical treatment. Even though this did not guarantee Abram's legal status as a parent, these documents would help establish her legal right over Amelia. Unfortunately, the circumstances change when Abrams and Norma separate.

Courage was one attribute that always drove Abrams forward, despite the many doubts that nagged her. To Abrams, the one quality that she would however put first in the list of necessary characteristics for the potential non-biological lesbian mother, was faith (64). Also, when baby Amelia falls off the cart in the supermarket and lands headfirst on the floor, Norma freaks out and starts wailing, agitating the baby. Amelia and Norma rush to the hospital in an ambulance, while Abrams follows in a car behind. At the hospital, she realises that she did not have the power of attorney recognising her as the legal guardian of Amelia, one that gave her control in case of medical emergencies. She says that, "I'd had enough

experience by then to know that I might not have any luck getting past the reception area at the hospital. I was entitled, by my power of attorney, to be admitted. But by now I knew all too well that it wasn't enough to say you possessed such a document at home, and once again I didn't have it with me." (100)

But the ambulance driver, who was a lesbian, makes provisions for Abrams to go into the emergency room and Abrams feels gratified that the driver considered her to be Amelia's family.

Abrams had to fight hard to retain partial ownership of her daughter Amelia. She goes to Attorney Barbara Kaplan to discuss about custodial rights. Norma, as was mentioned earlier in this chapter, was prone to panic attacks and hysteria and she was seeking the help of a psychiatrist and was prescribed sleeping pills and anti-depressants. Initially when Abrams talks about going to court for Amelia's custody rights, her mother was concerned about the lawyer's fee and her father suggests that she go to any gay or lesbian advocacy group for help. Abrams says that "This isn't the kind of case they want. They want lesbians versus the system. Not lesbian versus lesbian" (138). Attorney Kaplan states that if Abrams was not able to prove her point in court, she would not only lose custodianship of her daughter but there was also the possibility that, given Norma's condition, Amelia would become a ward of the state and be placed in foster care. Kaplan further states that the judges in Massachusetts "had no track record with lesbian custody cases" and so were unlikely to "give a child to a lesbian co-parent" (141). Kaplan comforts Abrams by saying that they could nevertheless try. Abrams voices her concerns that if a blood relative were to lay claim to Amelia, then her chances were slim. She says, "She (Kaplan) didn't think that my being a lesbian would be a detriment to the case per se,

but if a blood relative of Amelia's contested my claim, he or she would have a far better chance than I to win custody. The thought of Amelia being placed with Norma's parents terrified me because Norma traced her own problems to her childhood" (141).

In *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*, Shelly M Park also elaborates on lesbian custody issues. Park quotes Kate Harrison in this regard and says that, "the law has traditionally recognized only one type of mother— the person who either gave birth to or adopted the child" (qtd in Park 78). Park says that if, for example, two women co-parent a child with an involved sperm donor acting as the 'absent' father, "the existence of three people acting in a variety of parenting relationships to the child presents the courts with an unrecognized family structure."(78) Prior to the twenty-first century, the courts were reluctant to grant custody to those in "*loco parentis"* standing for fear of "jeopardizing the nuclear, heterosexual family as the accepted child-raising unit" (78). She mentions in her book, a court case *Nancy Sv Michele D* (1991) (italics in text), a case attempting to resolve a child custody dispute between a separating lesbian couple.

Park talks in detail of the parental rights of lesbian couples in the U.S. Prior to the 1990s, this sexual family was interpreted specifically as a heterosexual family, making second parent adoption by lesbian or gay parents a near impossibility and placing the parental status of lesbian mothers at considerable risk, even where such mothers had biological connections to their children. During the 1990s, most states ceased revoking the parental rights of lesbian mothers biologically related to their children and some states began allowing for second parent adoptions through the

"step-parent" exception to the rule against recognizing two parents of the same sex (79). Yet, in many states, second-parent adoptions were permitted only in circumstances where the second parent is related to the child through a biological connection (an aunt or uncle) or through being legally married to the child's biological parent. This has left non-biological lesbian mothers with no legal maternal status when lesbian unions dissolve (79).

Abrams says in her memoir how much her lesbian identity has caused a stigma in society, so much that she feels totally frustrated and helpless that she cannot change nor would society accept them as they are. Be it marriage or motherhood, it appeared as if society had set aside a different set of rules for them. She says:

> Lesbians can't really get married, I thought. Not any more than we can really have children together. We can do it, as I had done, but without the protection or privileges afforded by society to straight people, we were really on our own, unprotected and unrecognized. I was tired of being different. Tired of inventing rituals and names for things and tired of trying to convince the world that I was just like them. (130)

When Norma goes into Rehab over sleeping pill and alcohol addiction, Abrams takes temporary charge of Amelia. Abram's mother raises concern over Amelia's safety, having to live with an addicted mother. Abrams retorts that she did not have any legal right to demand anything and she did not wish the media to gloat over their misfortunes with the news headlines "Lesbians Fight in Bizarre Custody Case" (138).

Like Norma, Abrams also goes through a series of mood swings. She is ecstatic just before she gets to see Amelia and then her mood slides, dips down to the level of being toxic and being so irritant that she picks up fights with Whit, her new partner. She says:

> The loss settled in slowly. The distance, the stretch of emptiness, the square footage of air between us, became more and more real. The baby I chose to have. The one whose kicking I felt through Norma's belly. The baby who I held on my lap while I made phone calls and chopped vegetables. She was far away. I missed her racket. Her mess. Her sweet observations. Her constant chatter. I missed being her Ima, day to day. I kept thinking; I had this baby. And now I'm losing her. I couldn't seem to get past that. To suddenly be a childless mother is so strange, I told Whit. “It's like I was in the middle of this peak experience that the whole world is always talking about, and then, boom, it's gone.” (158 quotes in text)

Abrams’ battle with Norma over the legal custody over their daughter Amelia has its share of ups and downs. While it was not Abrams’ intention to separate Norma from her daughter, Norma’s addiction to alcohol and sleeping pills and her neurotic behavior raises alarms in Abram’s mind about the safety of their daughter. She decides to go to court to fight the battle the legal way. She gathers all the evidence that had earlier connected her to her daughter, papers that made so much sense then but now rendered insignificant at Norma’s insistence,

> …a copy of the will we signed before Norma took my name out as Amelia's guardian in the case of Norma's death; letters to me from Norma and her mother; Amelia's original birth certificate which gave her last name as mine

> and Norma's joined with a hyphen, and most important, the power of attorney, which clearly stated I was to make decisions on behalf of Amelia if Norma was unable to do so. I even took the baby book I had made for Amelia; which Norma had recently let me have. (170)

Norma's frequent mood swings have its toll on Amelia's mental health too and she also displays signs of juvenile depression. She starts biting and kicking Norma and, out of desperation, Norma admits Amelia into the Children's Unit in the psychiatric hospital where she too was admitted. When Norma calls Abrams and tells her the news, the thoughts and questions that run through Abrams' mind could be summed up thus:

> How am I going to get Amelia out of there? I wondered. What will it take to fix this mess? And what about Amelia? What explanation had she been given? How was she being treated, and how could I undo what Norma had done to our child?" (161). Abrams was enraged and says that "It was worse than wrong. It was indelible. A child can't just enter a mental hospital and come out the same kid. She'd been stamped with the word "patient." "Problem." Now she would have a history. A record." (173 quotes in text)

Abrams feels that she has to file for guardianship immediately when she recollects how things had gone with Amelia in the past two years. She knew she had to make a choice. She could either forget the court hearing and go back to everything as both she and Norma had been doing for the past two years, put up with her tantrums and mood swings or go to a judge. She knew that if she chose the latter, she would infuriate Norma and may lose her daughter forever. She says that when she considered that possibility, she could see only a "colorless void" (211). But she

decides to go ahead with filing the case for custodianship because “in the end, the only possibility that I truly couldn't live with was that one day a call might come telling me Amelia had been hurt because Norma had taken too many pills and had caused some grave accident, or perhaps hurt Amelia in a rage that she meant to direct at herself” (211).

Non-Biological Maternal Bodies as Sites of Choice and Resistance

Park says that however much discourse, surveillance, and regulations affect social constructions of motherhood, non-biological maternal bodies also had the potential to resist both the notions of compulsory motherhood and adherence to the basic definitions of motherhood. This scope for resistance may be more readily visible from a different perspective of the sidelined maternal bodies. She says that, “Adoptive maternal bodies provide a unique perspective for subversion of the dominant script that governs motherhood because of their ambiguous status as maternal bodies” (70-71).non-biological mothers cannot be equated with the notion of “nonprocreative adult,” especially if “procreation” (70) is read in an entirely biological sense. As Abram’s memoir suggests, there is a difference between those who purposefully defy social norms of childbearing and refuse to give birth and those who are unable to have children. These bodies choose motherhood and make conscious choices whether to become a mother and how to become one.

Abrams’ memoir often reminds the reader how non-biological maternal bodies are often defined in terms of the bodily experiences that they lack. They are frequently portrayed as infertile and inadequate bodies and adoption was considered to be the alternative for not having a child. The memoir narrates about the many non-genetic and non-gestational bonds between mothers and children that serve to

connect parent and child that could be both fleeting and permanent. Abrams says that the difficulty with defining herself, the non-biological adoptive body, in terms of her relation to her daughter is that, non-biological maternal bodies appear to have no basic difference from the biological maternal body. This was especially true during the trial and Norma's stay at the rehab center. As a co- mother, Abrams says she also bore primary responsibility for Amelia's upbringing, and thereby the cultural reproduction of a new generation of cultural and family values.

Queer Dis-identifications with Repro- narrativity and Repro-sexuality

Park, in her book *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families*, refers to the new adoptive practices that resist dominant patterns in mothering institution and quotes Michael Warner in this regard. Warner describes in the 'Introduction' to his work *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1991) the terms "repro-sexuality" and "repro-narrativity" (qtd. in Park 76). "Repro-sexuality," as defined by Warner, is an "interweaving of heterosexuality, biological reproduction, cultural reproduction, and personal identity….and involves more than reproducing, more even than compulsory heterosexuality: it involves a relation to self that finds its proper temporality and fulfillment in generational transmission" (qtd. in Park 76). Repro-sexuality is closely associated with "repro-narrativity" or the notion that "our lives are somehow made more meaningful by being embedded in a narrative of generational succession." (qtd. in Park 76)

Park, in her article "Adoptive Maternal Bodies: A Queer Paradigm for Rethinking Mothering" explains how adoptive mothers "queer our notions of normal mothering and normalize our notions of queer mothering" by resisting repro-

sexuality (reproduction of heterosexual notion of sexuality) and repro-narrativity (reproduction of heterosexual notion of narrativity) in dominant patriarchal discourses of motherhood. Abrams was apprehensive about her legal battle and custody rights over Amelia as the courts, most of the time, decided that the non-biological mother was a "legal stranger" to the child by virtue of the fact that she had no natural or legal link to the child.

Park asserts that lesbian mothers facing a heterosexual ex-spouse in court, were much less likely to be deprived of custody, than normative mothers. But this could not be understood as indicative of a general trend toward lesbian and gay parents' rights. She says that the legal status of lesbian mothers at the turn of the twenty-first century was improved "only to the extent that these rights overlapped with their biological status as parents and therefore fit with heteronormative understandings of family structure" (79). Park further adds that by denying any necessary connection between child upbringing, pregnancy and childbirth, lesbian motherhood refuse "repro-narrativity," by complicating the narrative of generational succession. This means that the notion of reproduction must itself be reconceptualized to address the issues of lesbian mothers.

Re-configuring the 'Broken' Family in Queer Maternal Relationship

Abrams' memoir explores the pain that both the 'other' mother and the child, who are separated from each other, undergo when they lived in different configurations of space. This is explained with the concept of domestic normativity by Park where she says that "… "home" becomes enmeshed in queer geographies of space and time for those who live outside of domestinormativity" (27). Park draws on Rosi Braidotti's *Nomadic Subjects* as well as Sara Ahmed's and Jasbir Puar's

critique of queer motherhood theories to explain the displaced /broken 'home' that lacked a fixed geographical space. This "lack of fixity may be liberating for some, but traumatic for others"(27)—especially for children like Abram's daughter Amelia who may have little choice in determining how their home is configured as it explores and rejects different metaphorical understandings of the post-divorce family, including the notions of "broken" homes and "blended" homes. (27)

Park explains how technology assists in mother-child bond in "queer mothering. In the latter part of the memoir, Abrams, as a part-time custodial parent, devises a method of continuing her relationship with her separated daughter Amelia. As a part of this practice, she telephones her daughter regularly and extends her mothering practice into the realm of technology. She resorts to this method because Norma does not permit Abrams to see her on a regular basis and also her custodial rights to the child were contested in court. These communication technologies helped to extend and modify the relationship between Amelia and Abrams. Making a distinction between techno mothering as a potentially liberatory practice, communication technologies create new familial social spaces, thus expanding opportunities for daily meaningful contact among mother and child who are not in physical proximity to one another. Abrams feels that such opportunities that engage in queer forms of mothering transforms the meaning and experience of maternal love and uses these spaces to extend her practices of monomaternal mothering.

Healing through Scriptotherapy

For Abrams, the pain of being separated from Amelia was long and deep, almost like a scar on the heart. As each memory of her daughter resurfaces from time to time, like when she chances upon Amelia's things in the house, the pain

returns. She equates this pain to the pain of a mother whose child had died and says that no one and nothing could replace the void that follows. She says, "*These stories tell themselves over and over in my sleep. They are the stories that live in the short silence I hope you never have to hear, between the question "Do you have children?" and my answer: sometimes "yes" and sometimes "no." (*4 italics in text)

In one instance, Abrams comes across Amelia's ring (a silver ring with the turquoise stone in the centre) in the bathroom, where the girl, on her last visit, had removed it for her bath and had forgotten to take it back. Abrams wore the ring on a chain round her neck to constantly remind her of what she had lost. She wore it next to a sterling silver symbol meaning fulfilment. She says, "I wear that necklace, and I hope. Fulfilment of this desire seems a simple wish" (4). Then she realises that fulfilment was not easily achieved, but the 'emptiness of longing' was.

Abrams asks how she would deal with the pain. She says she should approach it step by step, as she had done earlier, while combing the tangles out of her daughter's windblown hair. She would start where there is some order and then gradually drag the comb through the smooth and easy part. She would stop at the knots, for fear of hurting the fragile hair of her four-year-old daughter and then start again. Abrams says that she wrote to help her cope with the pain and that Amelia might read this later, when she was grown up. This process of writing to heal the pain, using "scriptotherapy," a term used by Suzette A. Henke in her work *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing* (1999), is adopted by Abrams, largely in terms of imageries, to vent out the pain and to heal.

The author also recounts her sense of loss and pain in having missed five of her birthdays and this contrasts sharply with her earlier experience of how she used

to count the days and weeks before her daughter's birth and after she was born. She even corrects one of her friends (who had no children) when the latter tells someone the baby was "about two" and tells her that a baby's age, until she was twenty-four months old, is counted in months. But she, now separated from her daughter for over five years, recounts the pain and angst she feels. She says, "*Now six months or six years makes no difference to me. You are someplace else. I can't see you or speak with you, so why bother counting? If I really try, I can come up with this statistic: I have missed five of your birthdays, and all of the seconds, minutes, and hours in between."* (3 italics in text)

In the chapter titled 'Things that Stay,' Abrams narrates how she felt like a boat that had raised its anchor and was floating. "The house was empty not only of her toys, but of her voice, her footsteps, the movement of air that followed her, like waves from a motorboat crossing a quiet sea" (236). She says she started writing the journal to express "…about what I do and how I feel" (237). When Amelia sees the journal during one of her visits to Abrams, she was fascinated with 'the picture of the angel on the sun-orange cover', and asks if she could open it. The conversation that ensues was important to Abrams as she feels that someday Amelia would be grown up enough to understand what she has written. She says:

"What is it?" she asked. "A book you write in?"

"Yes," I said. I watched as she flipped past the pages of confession and confusion to the plain white ones in the back. "That's where I'm up to."

"What does it say?" she asked, going back to the scribbled-on parts.

"I write about ..."

"About your life?"

"Exactly. About what I do and how I feel." (237 quotes in text)

Abrams says that these conversations were very important to her because Amelia also takes part in it actively and she feels that this was a way of sharing things with her daughter, that she might never be able to do otherwise.

Narrative Technique

Abram's non-biological lesbian motherhood memoir *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter* is dedicated to her daughter, her 'Little Goose.' Abrams narrates the memoir to her daughter who is separated from her, the whole first-person narration being in italics.

> *The story I am about to tell you is one I wish I never had to recount. I'd rather fill these pages with tales of your childish antics; running just for the sake of it, turning things over to find out what's on the bottom, spilling things just so they could be refilled, bringing rocks, weeds, and blueberries home in your pockets as presents. But there is more that you must know and I must say. The way that I came to be your other mother is an unusual tale. The way I lost you, more so.* (3 italics in text)

A notable feature in the conception of her memoir was that Abrams begins each chapter with an introductory paragraph, addressing her daughter using the first-person narrative form, in italics. This was structured in the form of a monologue to her daughter. Abrams was also trying to re-create herself through these writings, constructing an identity that would explain herself to her daughter when she would get a chance to read it later, when she grew up. The symbols that she uses to

compare herself to, like that of a boat adrift and the process of 'untangling,' the image of the angel that symbolised hope and good faith etc., were very poignant identity markers in her narrative pattern.

The deliberate strategy adopted by Abrams in her narration by which she places the narrative (in italics) to her daughter alongside the narrative to the reader (in regular font), helps accentuate her loss of coping with the pain of separation. This division in the narrative pattern, that does not follow a clear chronological order, disrupts the linear progress of time and space.

Each prologue sets the mood for the chapter that follows, most often referring to the angst that the author felt at the moment of writing and then shifts to the events that culminated in this loss. By choosing instances, emotional, psychological and physically constraining, Abrams also tries to evoke the stigma and pain of non-biological lesbian mothers like herself, caught in the quagmire of legal and psychological issues that arises when the former is denied the custody of her child.

Conclusion

Abram's memoir asks a lot of legitimate questions, but what dominates is the story of the mother who has lost custody of the child, of the mother who stubbornly resists short, straightforward answers to either-or inquiries and hopes of full explanation, final reconciliation and a total understanding. What is most interesting about the image of the 'mother without child' throughout this memoir is the way it can hold and foreground the real contradictions of non-biological lesbian motherhood as a relational identity. Abrams also aligns herself to the trajectory of queer maternal bodies by asserting her identity as a butch, yet deviates from it when Amelia is born

as she does not want to become the “dyke-dad”, and frames her own narrative pattern that moves away from conventional mothering narratives.

In Abrams’ memoir, the dominant question remains whether one could contest motherhood up against queer theory without relegating the latter in ways that make it lose its critical edge and thus making them vulnerable subjects. Abrams’ experiences in non-biological mothering show how lesbian adoptive families and divorce-extended families are frequently considered as homonormative. She embodies the various phases of the non-procreative mother- as the mother who ‘gestates,’ ‘gives birth,’ ‘lactates’ and ‘nurtures,’ along with the biological mother, thus travelling through the path of motherhood from conception of the child to birth. The notion of mothering queerly (rather than of queer mothers) in order to avoid the politics of identity focus on specific maternal practices that resist the heteronormative standards of “good” mothering and, in so doing, provide a model for queering motherhood.

In this sense, the memoir by Abrams reinforces the most fundamental insight and difficulty of the limits and constraints of the feminist critique of lesbian motherhood, one that revalues the function and status of non-biological mothers. Abrams seeks to dislodge motherhood and gender from old, essentializing definitions, while she lays claim to a place for women as mothers who choose to transgress the boundaries of patriarchal constructions.

Chapter 4

Alternate Motherhood: Amie Klempnauer Miller's Memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood*

"What is my role here as the non-birth mother? And what is my role as a non-birth mother who tried to be a birth mother?" - (Miller 55).

Within the institution of the non- normative family, queer non-biological motherhood deserves particular focus. Non-gendered parents, who are neither fathers nor mothers, are therefore not considered as parents. This leads to the assumption that institutions of non-normative motherhood are associated to ideas that deviate from heterosexual and social constructions of motherhood. Amie Klempnauer Miller's non-biological motherhood memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* (2010) studies mothering that blends polymaternalism into homonormative family structures and affective relations. A queer account of mothering in Miller's memoir also explores the mother–mother–child triangle and the relationship between the mothers. The ideology of polymaternalism, introduced by Shelly M Park, promote practices that advocate the homonormative concepts of mothering, asserting the idea of more than one mother for a child. This goes against the advocates of ethical, cultural, and legal norms of 'one mother per child,' as dictated by heteronormative motherhood institutions. This frequently undermines the values determined by biological dictates of monomaternalism.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework in this chapter is constructed keeping in focus institutional dictums of polymaternalism and alternate mothering practices. Park's book *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* (2013), explains the concept of polymaternalism, that has been used as a central structure in this chapter. Adrienne Rich's *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1986) analyses motherhood as a refuge from various sites of oppression that are fundamental to any analysis of reproduction and parenting practices. Andrea O'Reilly's book on motherhood *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (2016) analyses how patriarchal concepts of compulsory heterosexual mothering can affect alternate forms of motherhood.

Lynn O'Brien, in her book *Bikini Ready Moms: Celebrity Profiles, Motherhood and the Body* (2015), asserts that patriarchal ideologies of motherhood function as culturally constructed practices that are modified in response to changing economic and societal needs, refashioning the maternal body and setting new parameters for who all could be categorized as mothers. Baba Copper's chapter, "The Radical Potential in Lesbian Mothering of Daughters", compiled in the book *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* (2007) by Andrea O'Reilley upholds exclusive female mothering as a transgressive and transformative mode of mothering where Copper elaborates how lesbians continue to view motherhood as steeped in tradition. Nancy D Polikoff, in the chapter "Lesbians Choosing Children: The Personal is Political Revisited" in Andrea O'Reilley's book *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* (2007) asks whether lesbians are immune to a culture of

compulsory motherhood. A brief mention has been made in this chapter regarding the gendered restructuring of mothering practices as a natural identity, the twenty-first-century manifestation of this ideology as the "new momism," is taken from *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (2004) by Susan J Douglas and Meredith Michael. Margaret F Gibson's phenomenal book *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* (2014) talks about the foundational constructs of queer motherhood. In understanding why accounts of queer motherhood rarely focus on the relationship between mothers, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of triangulation of maternal desire is crucial in this aspect.

Of Mothering and Motherhood Institutions

Amie Klempnauer Miller's motherhood memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Non-Biological Lesbian) Motherhood talks* about Miller's journey through multiple attempts at unsuccessful inseminations and her experiences of non-biological motherhood when her partner Jane becomes pregnant. Miller experiences the physiological albeit the physical changes that pregnancy can bring, even to a non-normative lesbian family. Miller asks this question, more to the readers than to herself 'How do you decide to have a baby?" (4). Miller and her partner Jane, who were "fully endowed with the lesbian love of process," (4) had considered the prospect of whether or not to have a baby for a long period of ten years. Finally, they were able to arrive at a concrete decision to have a baby. She says that, "…having a baby would pave way for one path and not having a baby would pave way to another path" (4). They attend a "Maybe Baby" class intended for lesbians at 'Chrysalis- A Centre for Women'. Miller says she signed up for the class hoping that it would

assist them to decide whether or not to have a baby. “We were looking for some guidance in deciding whether to turn down the Babies “R” Us aisle of life. We wanted to hear discussion of how other couples were making their decisions—to understand if our hopes were naive, our fears excessive, or if we were listening too much to our heads and ignoring our hearts.” (5) But what awaited them in the class was a fusillade of information on how to make or acquire a baby, being given handouts on the “mechanics and logistics of “alternative insemination” (5).

When Miller finally decides to have the baby, she was definite that she would play by the rules of the book of parenting. Jane, on the other hand, was apprehensive about losing her independence and her sense of self. But when Miller considers the prospect of becoming ‘the mother,’ she too was worried about the new sets of rules, foreign to her, to which she would need to comply. She says, “I was less afraid of what I would lose than of what I might have to become…Would I know how to be nurturing enough? Would I need to become someone or something that I’m not? Could I become a mother? What if I failed?” (8). She elaborates further thus:

> I distrust maternal instinct, particularly my own. I am not sure what it feels like, what it means to mother instinctively. Do other women have a maternal compass guiding them? If so, mine seems to point north on some days and south on others, with a good deal of east in between. The truth is that I have never thought of myself as particularly maternal. Other people have often seen me as a little aloof, a little cold, perhaps slightly withdrawn. Granted, there are plenty of aloof and cold mothers in the world, but that’s not what I want to be. Do I have the emotional generosity to mother a child? I don’t

> know. Can I fall in love with a child? The only way I know how to find out is to try, but it strikes me as a particularly perilous experiment. (9)

Patriarchal motherhood hinders the advent of alternative practices of mothering. As a normative discourse, it regulates women's mothering and results in the marginalization of those women who do not or cannot perform 'normative' motherhood. It confines women's power to challenge and change the oppressiveness of their motherhood experience. When Miller's attempts at pregnancy becomes futile and her partner Jane, who had initially been apprehensive about being a mother, decides to give it a try and becomes pregnant in the first attempt, the roles of mothering are reversed for Miller. Being lesbians, they were not pressurized by society or family's demands of 'forced motherhood,' so Miller says they were free to make a choice. To have a baby or not to have a baby.

During the disturbing experiences of attempting to be pregnant, Miller says, "Pregnancy is always hypothetical until it happens" (1). She recalls how she had gone to the clinic with Jane for her insemination, the very same clinic Miller had gone to for the past one year and a half year, month after month. She remembers the magazines that she used to read to while away the time at the clinic, the, "…same magazines with the same articles about safe exercise during pregnancy and the virtues of breastfeeding lay on the end tables in the waiting room. The same nurse who had repeatedly inserted one man's sperm after another's into me now inseminated Jane. Everything, in fact, was the same except that, this time, I sat in a chair and watched as my partner lay on the exam table…" (2). Miller says that after ten or twelve inseminations of her own, the whole process was starting to feel like a routine. Miller recounts her own harrowing experiences of trying to get pregnant and

the pain and frustration that ensued when each attempt failed and says how it takes a subtle turn when her partner gets pregnant.

Miller recalls the excitement she felt when Jane becomes pregnant, the rush of happiness on seeing the "two blue lines" in the pregnancy testing strip and narrates it thus "… the line on her stick turned blue immediately, a bird's egg, summer sky blue that left no room for doubt. She's not only pregnant, she is decisively pregnant. After eighteen years of just the two of us, we are going to become three" (1). Miller moves queer motherhood beyond sexual orientation and gender variants that challenge the gender binary, and more broadly, the institution of heterosexual motherhood. In Miller's memoir, the dynamics of queer motherhood contests heteronormative assumptions that structure mothering roles, starting with conception and ending with birth, and destabilizes norms that maintain all social institutions of motherhood.

Miller says it's a "mixed blessing" to make an overt decision about parenthood. She says:

> While straight people often assume future parenthood in the same way that they might assume the certainty of a spring wedding, the default option for gay men and lesbians traditionally has been not to have children. Accidental pregnancies are not a big problem in our community. We generally have to seek out parenthood if we want it to happen. On the plus side, we are almost never harassed by eager grandparents about whether we have started "trying," wink, wink. As with adoptive parents or infertile couples, our children must be chosen and pursued. There's a certain smugness that often goes with this: we worked for our children; they didn't just happen. (11)

Andrea O'Reilly's book *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* analyses how patriarchal concepts of compulsory heterosexual mothering can affect alternate forms of motherhood, as is seen in Miller's experiences of non-biological mothering. Patriarchal heterosexual motherhood must therefore be distinguished from the possibility or potentiality of empowered non-heterosexual mothering and quoting Adrienne Rich in this regard, O'Reilly elaborates that, "To destroy the institution is not to abolish motherhood …it is to release the creation and sustenance of life into the same realm of decision, struggle, surprise, imagination and conscious intelligence, as any difficult, but freely chosen work …[F]or most of what we know as the 'mainstream' of recorded history," Rich states, "motherhood as institution has ghettoized and degraded female potentialities" (qtd. in O'Reilley 33). One could infer that motherhood is primarily not a natural or biological function; rather, it is explicitly a cultural practice that constantly evolves in response to changing societal and cultural factors. As a cultural construction, it has spatial and temporal connotations that states that there is no essential or universal institutionalizing of motherhood. And since patriarchal institution is socially constructed, just like gender, it can be challenged and transformed.

Polymaternal Lesbian Families

Miller's memoir challenges the ideologies of motherhood that dictate that a child can have only 'one mother 'and that was its biological mother. Normative culture and society dictated that only biological mothers can be 'good' mothers. When lesbian relationships challenge the dichotomies of monomaternalism, the role

of the non-biological mother becomes equally worth speculation. The 'other, non-biological mother' asserts her mothering self-hood and establishes her maternal agency that regulates her own experiences of mothering. In the second chapter of the memoir, 'No Waiting, Womb Two', Miller explains how Jane decides to try and become pregnant after Miller's repeated unsuccessive attempts at pregnancy. And when Jane does actually become pregnant, Miller, obsessive as she is, makes the list of things they have to do before the baby arrives, like choosing the hospital, where to take childbirth classes, choosing the crib, learning how to put the diaper and most important of all, meeting a lawyer and confirming about second parent adoption rights. Miller was also apprehensive about informing their parents. She muses about the fact that most parents of lesbian couples were not too happy about their daughters getting pregnant, unlike parents of heterosexual couples. Miller explains their predicament by stating that, "…It's a reality that not all parents are excited to hear that their lesbian daughter is pregnant. We know a depressing number of people whose parents have been upset by the news, feeling that their future grandchild will be too vulnerable, too stigmatized, too influenced" (36). She narrates an instance where one of her friends announces to her parents that she and her partner were planning to have a baby and the fathers' reaction was, "Do you know of anyone else who has ever done anything like that?" (36).

Medically Assisted Conception and the 'Gayby' Boom

The memoir is symbolically divided into three parts: Miller trying to get pregnant and failing to conceive, Jane's pregnancy and delivery and Miller's (non-biological) mothering experiences. At the outset, Miller describes her experiences as she braves the emotional and physical turbulences of medically assisted

reproduction at the clinic. She wonders what makes her do this, despite being a staunch 'butch' lesbian. She says that she just knew she wanted to be a mother, "…We were part of intersecting modern phenomena: medically assisted conception and the so-called gayby boom. But we were also part of a timeless tradition: two people coming together in love, hoping to make a new life" (18). Miller opines that it was "a mixed blessing to have to make an explicit decision about parenthood." Being a lesbian couple, they were traditionally not expected to have children. "Accidental pregnancies" (11) did not just happen in their community. "As with adoptive parents or infertile couples, our children must be chosen and pursued. There's a certain smugness that often goes with this: we worked for our children; they didn't just happen" (11). Miller elaborates on how motherhood must be consciously embraced for lesbian couples. And as to why they chose to do it, she says they, "searched for a reasoned answer about parenthood, or even an instinctive one, and came up empty. We could choose this path—or not. And so, in the end, we decided to "put ourselves in the path of pregnancy." We would let the fates decide, but first, we would hand the fates a catheter and a vial of sperm" (11).

Miller makes reference to the "gayby boom" (36) while she recounts the statistics of the babies born during 'baby revolution' by lesbian and gay parents, where non -heterosexual couples braved the rigid dichotomies set by institutions of patriarchy:

> According to people who spend time researching these things, there is a "gayby boom" going on. Estimates of the number of kids being raised by gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender parents range widely. On the low end, the U.S. Census, which arrives at its number by tracking self-reporting

> "unmarried partner" households, estimated in 2000 that these households included about 270,000 children nationwide. But census counts of the gay community are notoriously low and also overlook families with bisexual, transgender, or even single gay or lesbian parents. On the high end, the American Academy of Pediatrics estimates that between one million and nine million children under the age of eighteen live with gay or lesbian parents. Certainly, many of these kids were born through heterosexual relationships, and others were adopted. But an increasing number are the result of some form of assisted reproduction. People in the gay community—especially lesbians, but increasingly also gay men—are assuming that they can have children. This is a sea change. Just twenty or so years earlier, coming out generally meant letting go of expectations of parenthood. There have always been gay men and lesbians who didn't want children, of course, just as there have always been straight men and women (some of them parents) who don't. But there have always been others who have wanted it, sometimes deeply and desperately. (36)

Adrienne Rich's comment in this regard would be noteworthy. She mentions in *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* that, "the institution of motherhood is not identical with bearing and caring for children, any more than the institution of heterosexuality is identical with intimacy and sexual love. Both create the prescriptions and the conditions in which choices are made or blocked; they are not 'reality' but they have shaped the circumstances of our lives." (42)

Lesbian Sexuality and Lesbian Desire for the Child

Miller says that the lesbian community has always been defined by their 'sexuality'. Their desire to have children was viewed with apprehension or suspicion by society at large, because they held the prejudiced notion that when queers breed, it would lead to more queers in the world. She says, "We have been defined by our sexuality and have often played to type, building a culture—with all its camp and art, its politics and pathos—that emphasizes sex. We spend our money on travel and cars and home renovations. We devote ourselves to our jobs, to our gardens, to volunteer work, to our pets. Only recently has the focus begun to shift to marriage and, for a subset of the community, to kids." (37)

When Miller is to become the non-biological mom to their baby, she asks what role she would have to play. During Jane's pregnancy, she says about her 'inner guy' coming out. She felt protective of Jane and wanted to protect her from the possible "threats in the world, like worry, bacteria-laden soft cheese, and cat litter" (48). She sums up her thoughts eloquently thus:

> Is this the role of the nonbiological lesbian mom—to be a faux dad? Am I becoming a "DH," the "dear husband"—or designated hitter, for all I know—that all the straight women write about on the Internet discussion boards I visit? I don't feel like I somehow need to mimic the paternal role, but yet it seems to be finding and claiming me. I am a little worried that I am somehow fueling the stereotypes of right-wing complementarians who argue that every woman needs a man, every man a woman, and every child one of each, to have proper balance in the universe. Maybe major change inherently promotes traditionalism, a grasping for the models most familiar, if not

> necessarily the most fitting. Or maybe the experience of the unpregnant partner, whatever the gender, follows a predictable pattern. It's just that most of the unpregnant partners in the world are men" (48-49)

Miller speculates that after the birth of the baby, she (the non-biological mom) might quit her job and look after the baby. The book they buy at the bookstore for stay -at -home dads offer a lot of information in this regard and says that most of her questions were also those of the stay-at -home dads. She says, "Should I quit my job or work part-time? How will I feel about not earning money? Will it affect my self-esteem? How about my virility? How will I feel about being the principal caregiver of our child, but not the (biological) mom? How will Jane feel about going back to work and leaving our baby with me?" (50) . Miller says that when she compares herself with the other dads, she feels positively at advantage. She says that being a female, she knows about the "earth shattering power of the female hormone" (50). Knowledge about the female anatomy and the fact that she knows how to run the dishwasher, oven, the washing machine and the help with the grocery shopping make Miller a 'better dad' than her male counterparts.

Non- maternal bodies were not normal bodies, marked as damaged (infertile), bodies that were marked abnormal, even though they were normal and thus undesirable. The identity of a mother is constructed in relation to the child, as it is only through conception and child birth that a woman is accepted in the traditional heterosexual society. These non- maternal mothers share certain affinities with maternal mothers who perform the script for patriarchal norms of motherhood just as lesbians who perform the script for heterosexuality. Biological maternal bodies may escape this segregation, but do not escape this institutional surveillance by

heterosexual society. When Miller fails to conceive, the couple consider adoption ‘quarter -heartedly’. They attend introductory sessions at two adoption agencies but decide to back out when one of the agencies tells them that the board of directors were yet “unresolved” about lesbian parenthood (33). Jane’s preference for giving birth over adopting is revealed in the sentence, “I’ve realized that I want a baby and I want one who is biologically related” (35). She initially shies away from it because of the uniquely female experiences, yet harrowing realities of pregnancy and childbirth like sciatica and nausea and was not willing to let unknown forces control her body for nine months. But one day, she makes up her mind and says she was willing to try getting pregnant.

After their daughter Hannah was born, Miller talks about how ‘normative’ each of them becomes, depending on who was holding the baby. And as Miller was the one who held her most of the time in public, she says people looked at her and assumed that she was, naturally, the birth mother. She says, “… This is what some women mean when they say that parenthood erases lesbians. Even those who look stereotypically butch are suddenly seen as apple-pie moms when carrying a baby” (151). Miller talks about the power that was vested in the non-maternal body, much akin to the power of the biological mother in a lesbian relationship.

When non-biological mothers step into the role of child care, the process is queered by a proliferation of non-biological polymaternal lesbian families who resist normative familial patterns and normative domestic patterns. Non-normative forms of mothering are always chosen or practiced as deliberate indicators of queer subjectivities. In adoptive, lesbian and polygamous families, practices of shared motherhood provide alternative models of mothering that display resistance to

gendered norms of polymaternal families and allow formation of queer subjectivities.

Feminist psychoanalytic theory and queer theoretical approaches to family and pregnancy, together with feminist theories that analyses dominant discourses of romanticized motherhood, figure prominently in non-biological lesbian motherhood memoirs, as in Miller's. Miller elaborates in her memoir that when she was trying get pregnant, she was worried whether her 'lesbian egg' would refuse the herd of sperm swimming towards it. She says, "…I worried that my egg was a separatist lesbian egg that would herd all the little swimmers back to the cervical opening and spit them out while delivering a little lecture on patriarchal hegemony…" (51). Queerness involves a separation of sex and reproduction and the aspect of queering motherhood stands to gain much from following the perspectives of parents with 'queer' sexual and gender identities. Through the narratives of queer-identified mothers, they share experiences that might otherwise be drowned out by the voices of cisnormative and heteronormative dominant ideologies. The perspectives of queer-identified mothers reveal how existing sociocultural norms are constructed.

Miller reveals that, six months after Hannah's birth, she still feels confused as to her identity. She says she feels like a "dad in drag" (167). She admits that she was not outwardly evident as the butch mom as she was not athletic looking and was a "disaster with power tools" (167), but neither was she femme enough and did not want to "put myself in the same category as heterosexual moms" (168). She further adds, "In the world of moms, I still feel like I am passing. I am using Mommy English as a Second Language, always trying to think about what clause is supposed

to come next and trying to remember my idioms. It's a real bucket of monkeys." (168)

Miller talks about how family is both "devalued and hyper valued in the gay community" (69). While some families accept gay and lesbian couples, some don't. Losing one's family is the price they pay for "coming out of the closet." (69) She mentions how in every Gay Pride march, she sees, "the contingent of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, populated by gray-haired moms and dads carrying signs reading, "I love my gay son" or "I am proud of my lesbian daughter"—and, increasingly, by kids with signs saying "I love my Moms" or "I love my gay Dads"—receives a surge of heart-rending cheers"(69-70).Miller explains when one finds family in the lesbian community, it was a "precious feeling" (70). The heterosexual world viewed their relationships as "just friends." (70) She says:

> We are unrelated, untied to each other. Our families do not technically exist until they are documented on paper. There is no marker when our relationships end. We even struggle with language. Our spouses are "partners" or "girlfriends" or "boyfriends" or "lovers" or "significant others," all terms that are ultimately insufficient in one way or another. In the broader world, no one moves to be closer to their friends. No one quits a job to spend more time with their friends. It is the ties of family, the ties of blood and marriage, that are seen as irreversible, supposedly inescapable. But in our world, the lines between friend and family are blurred, making both simultaneously essential and extraneous. (70)

The Universal Myth of Biological Relation, Social Parenting and Artificial Reproduction

The desire to be a parent is articulated in Miller's memoir in terms of becoming the non-biological mother to their daughter Hannah, rather than having a bio-genetic relation to a child. Power, fertility, and choice are interconnected in complex ways that determines whether the mother is a biological or non-biological one. A diversity of factors could influence the symbolic role of biology in parenting. Miller experiences fertility problems and this devastated her, because for her, becoming pregnant and giving birth represented confirmation of her desire to be a mother and so fertility issues were particularly difficult to accept. In contrast, her partner Jane conceived easily and quickly, literally in her first attempt. Co-parents who were unable to conceive often referred to their delight at becoming a parent and feelings of ecstasy that this was possible because of having a female partner. Miller says that the decision to change over to a partner for insemination was not initially easy to accept. Even though both Miller and Jane come to the consensus that it was important to be a social, rather than a biological parent, the decision for one partner to abandon the prospect of being a biological mother and for her partner to begin inseminating instead required some persuasion. Miller had been trying to become pregnant for some time but no pregnancy was forthcoming. They then decided that they would simply swap places and that Jane would begin inseminating immediately. Miller explains her emotions in being the non-biological mother as Jane approaches the end of her pregnancy. She narrates thus:

> I, on the other hand, feel a disconnection from the impending birth and certainly from the pains and bothers that accompany it. And completely

> unlike Jane, I feel disconnected from the baby. I think of Hannah more as Jane's baby. Jane's body enfolds her. I am experiencing pregnancy only secondhand. I imagine the moments after birth, when the nurse will give the baby to Jane and say, "Here is your daughter." Intellectually, I know that she will be my daughter, too, but emotionally, my attachment still needs to be knitted. Jane's bond is already woven tight. Is this how fathers feel? I feel like maternal instinct, whatever that is, should apply to me too, should already have bound me to this baby, but the truth is that she is still a stranger to me. (105)

The medical language of fertility and infertility creates subjects who are describes in terms of their procreative capacity, as Miller and Jane experiences. These mothering practices in certain women point towards a need that is to be resolved by the practices and technologies of modern medicine. Miller says both of them identified as parents, regardless of biological relationship of Jane to their daughter. Although both of them were equally involved in parenting, Miller says that she could perceive the special mother-child relationship Jane had with Hannah. This notion of a particular physical connection between a birth mother and child was often presented as a positive concept which was to be acknowledged, rather than viewed as undermining of the co-parent. In this way, co-parents emphasized their personal sense of security in their role as a parent and brings about a hegemonic kinship discourse that legitimizes the lesbian co-parents' idea of relatedness.

The biological status of the mother is the pervasive symbol of parenthood. While a birth mother's parental status was assured by virtue of giving birth, that of the co-parent was even more contested. This tries to amend power imbalance

relating to variance in legal and biological status that expands the symbolic distribution of biology on various levels. The credit of biological status to co-parents restructures the supremacy of biology to interpretations of maternal relatedness, but biology was also quoted by co-parents in complex narrative discourses to support their position as the 'other mother'.

The changing perceptions of non-biological mothering in Miller's memoir is reflected in the increasing acceptance of their motherhood status, if not by the community in general, at least by their immediate families. In the introduction to her edited book *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood*, Elizabeth Bortolaia Silva says that mothering has long occupied a pivotal position in discourses regarding women's positions in society. Feminist perspectives assert that motherhood and mothering are historically, culturally and socially constructed. A distinction between motherhood and mothering appears pertinent to interpretations of the changing roles of women, both historically and culturally. While a legal connection between mother and child is related to motherhood, mothering remains mostly tied to the caring activity after the birth of the baby. Miller's experiences of motherhood with her daughter Hannah is not biological, but a social construction. A significant aspect that can be explored in Miller's memoir is the exploration of ties between heterosexual mothers and non-heterosexual mothers as the constructions of lesbian motherhood across cultures that bear similarities to the constructions of normative motherhood.

Miller also narrates how motherhood and mothering can increasingly be done without men, as in the case of a non-heterosexual relationship and women get to choose when and how often to have a baby. With the advent of new reproductive

technologies, women have given birth with artificially implanted sperms. Reproductive technologies have progressively confronted the social construction of biological motherhood. When Miller initially decides to have a baby, she and Jane search around, looking for a "man, a semi -fictional guy, hidden behind a scrim of anonymity" (Miller 11). Initially they consider asking gay friends for sperm, but when they hear about legal battles ensuing from custody rights over the baby between the gay donor and the lesbian couples, Miller and Jane decide against it. She says:

> But more than that, we wanted to ensure that we would be our child's real parents. We wanted each of us to be seen as a parent— not one of us as a parent and one of us as something else, not quite named. We knew that our parenthood would be out of the ordinary simply because our child would have two mothers. But we wanted to create a family that would be as normal as possible, even if it would be abnormal by definition. Choosing an anonymous donor made us feel that our family would be (mostly, kind of) a normal American nuclear family, with a twist. Despite the fact that the "typical" American family—with its married mother and father and its two cherubic kids—is becoming more atypical every year, it is still accepted as the norm. So long as there is a father—or even just a father figure—around somewhere, it becomes extremely challenging for most people to recognize two legitimate, full- fledged, equal mothers. In the shadow of the 'real' parents—the mother and the father—the second mother is just that: second. She is other, mom's lesbian partner, a friend. Jane and I knew that if we were going to be parents, we were damned well both going to be parents. If one of us was going down, by God, so was the other. (12)

So, Miller decides to go shopping for sperm. She ponders over the online catalogue of sperm donors and comes across sites like Sperm Bank of California, the lesbian-owned Pacific Reproductive Services in San Francisco, Cryogenic Laboratories and finally decides upon Roseville sperm bank, partly because it was near their home. She reads through the history of donors, "donor #4356 is outgoing, friendly and athletic, but his family has a history of cancer. Donor #642 was raised Lutheran and is now agnostic. His mother has high blood pressure; his uncle had a stroke. Donor #574 is a six-foot college student with blond hair and hay fever who likes to work on cars, enjoys jazz music, and wants to travel to Tibet. Which one of these could be Dad?" (14). Miller refers to the shopping for sperm as 'a bizarre roll of the dice, this business of shopping for sperm. I was picking genes based on a paragraph of personal description and a short family medical history" (15).

Miller starts out with a series of tests to ensure that everything was alright with her body before the ovulation to make sure her FSH, estradiol, prolactin, and progesterone were functioning. The other procedures and tests that the doctor dictated were as follows:

> The various tests that he recommended had to be conducted on specific days of my menstrual cycle. The doctor rattled off instructions. "Call the clinic on day one of your next cycle. We'll do a blood test on day three. We need to check the progesterone eight days after your next LH surge." The LH surge, I knew from my reading, is the body's release of luteinizing hormone that occurs about a day before ovulation. He also wanted me to do two ultrasounds a few days apart to make sure that my eggs were developing and releasing on schedule. "Go to the drugstore and get yourself a Clear Plan

> Easy kit," he went on. Clear Plan Easy is an over-the-counter package of urine tests that would tell me if my LH had, in fact, surged. "You can get a generic brand," he added, "but it won't be as good. Then start testing your urine on day eight of your cycle. Don't use the first urine of the day. Use the second, but be sure it's before noon". (17)

Miller analyses the tirade of instructions that the doctor gives with this one single thought in her head, "Good Lord. And to think other people just have sex." (17)

The non- biological ties of lesbian women to the child they welcome into their families have universally given acceptance to the status of non-normative motherhood. In the edited book *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood* (1996), Elizabeth Bortolaia Silva elaborates that, "… in virtually all societies, motherhood is an institution with social recognition, rules and legal status. But motherhood can be given up. Mothering can either be attached to motherhood, shared between the mother and other persons, or done in the place of the mother. Motherhood is female, mothering need not be. A framework that distinguishes between motherhood and mothering is helpful because each refers to a basic set of issues despite their common basis and intermeshed elements" (12). She asks why mothering has been so closely identified with motherhood? They have both been associated with women in the framework of a predominantly patriarchal society. This inherently points to two aspects; how patriarchal institution control mothering, and how it devalues and discourages independent mothering, thus re-defining gender identities. (12)

Carol Smart in the chapter "Deconstructing Motherhood", in Silva's book, says that motherhood was not a natural condition. She says:

> It is an institution that presents itself as a natural outcome of biologically given gender differences, as a natural consequence of (hetero) sexual activity, and as a natural manifestation of an innate female characteristic, namely the maternal instinct. The existence of an institution of motherhood, as opposed to an acknowledgement that there are simply mothers, is rarely questioned even though the proper qualities of motherhood are often the subject of debate. Motherhood is still largely treated as a given and as a self-evident fact rather than as the possible outcome of specific social processes that have a historical and cultural location which can be mapped. (30)

Smart goes on to say that because motherhood has been perceived through a realist lens, the institution of motherhood has been given a special status by both feminists and non-feminists. It has been subjected to social constructionist analysis, while parts have been critically deconstructed.

Shelley M. Park's work *Mothering Queerly, Queering Motherhood: Resisting Monomaternalism in Adoptive, Lesbian, Blended, and Polygamous Families* talks about the adoptive maternal body. Park mentions Amalia Ziv in this regard. In the article, "What's Queer About Queer Breeders?" Ziv examines "the contradictory implications of queer parenting," arguing that gay and lesbian parenting "subverts key elements of the heteronormative ideology of the family and revolutionizes kinship" at the same time as it succumbs, perhaps, to the pressures of "normalization and assimilation." (qtd. in Park 57) Park asks what would happen when the practice of mothering was queered and that what these queer forms of motherhood taught about normative forms of mothering. She continues that many feminist critiques of motherhood, like queer motherhood, assume that biological

archetypes of motherhood accompanied conventional idealisms of motherhood. Doing so, they erase the possibility of unconventional forms of motherhood that resist conservative practices of mothering. The focus shifts on the adoptive maternal body; stepmothers and lesbian co-mothers who deviate from the biocentric norms of motherhood whether they are legally recognized as adoptive parents.

When society advocates the practice of encouraging people to have children, this perspective on maternal bodies defines motherhood as a natural, biological phenomenon including both biological and non-biological connection to the child. Park says that "from this perspective, there is something queer about any adoptive maternal body—a body that poses as, yet is not a "real" mother; a body that presumes, yet is considered unfit for procreation, a body that is marked as imperfect, yet is designated for the 'divine duty' (57). This positions the adoptive maternal body on the border lines of critical perspectives of dominant scripts of motherhood.

The Two Mother Concept of 'Mama' and 'Mommy'

In the memoir, Miller wonders as to what category she would formally belong to. She frankly admits that she wanted to be perceived as the 'real mom' and not the 'proxy mom'. She elaborates this feeling thus:

> I am somewhere in between, in a category still undefined but increasingly shared by second moms and second dads across the country. I have heard some lesbians talk about "mom" and "co-mom," which sounds to me like pilot and co-pilot. Which sounds to me like First and Second, Real and Almost Real. I don't want to be a co-mom. I don't want to be the second-in-command. I want to be seen as a real mom and, far more important than that, I want to be a real mom. (168)

All throughout Jane's pregnancy, Miller was asked by straight friends, colleagues and family members what they would call themselves once the baby was born. It was as if having two parents of the "same gender" (169) was a formidable issue that they just may have to give up the idea of parenthood. Miller says that "…the most common choice among the lesbian couples is to use Mom and Mama. We know a few other couples who have been more creatively courageous, using Maya, Mimi, Mama Bear, and Mama Sue" (169). Miller even considered finding a term from the German culture to which both Miller and Jane had a strong connection, but decides against it as she was not comfortable being called "Mutter" for the rest of her life by Hannah. She says she was trying to find a space between the "the worlds of Mommy and Daddy where I can fit." (169)

Miller teaches and sings to Hannah, referring to herself as "Mama". She wants to be clear that she was 'Mama' and Jane was 'Mommy" and would get exasperated when Jane confused the terms. She says that she wanted to be clear as to who was who as "other lesbian parents have told me that their kids learn quickly who is Mama and who is Mommy. They draw a clear distinction and they learn to work it, specifying that they want to be put to bed by Mommy, not Mama, or dressed by Mama, not Mommy" (170).

Miller talks about her relationship with her Hannah and says how the baby has defined her mothering instincts. As Miller states in her expostulation of queer relations in their lesbian community, Miller's dilemma in her role as the non-biological mother is clearly expressed in the following lines. She says:

> I don't know who I am right now, nor where I live. I am in transit between two worlds. I am a mother, but I barely know what that means. I hold my

> child, but I barely know her. Mostly, I feel stunned. I stand at the border of a new world, but I am still outside, peering through the keyhole. (127)

Miller was the 'stay-at-home' mother, having given up her job looking after the baby. The travails of a 'new' mother affect her too. She talks about her sleepless nights changing diapers and constant exhaustion, but she also waxes eloquent about her gushing love for the baby.

> I am half-listening to the music. I am exhausted and overwhelmed and, without realizing it, I have started to cry. I wipe my eyes on my shirtsleeve. And there, I smell Hannah. Her baby scent clings to me. Somewhere between changing a diaper and swaddling her in a flannel blanket and attempting to burp her and trying to soothe her while she wails, Hannah has rubbed off on me. I hold my sleeve against my face and breathe in her scent. I need to return to her. I need to hold her close to me. My tears magnify her smell. I am still working on absorbing the reality that Hannah is my daughter and I am her mother, but I have begun to fall in love. (127)

When Miller and Jane take Hannah out for a stroll, everyone assumes that Miller was the 'real' mom as she was holding the baby. She was surprised that it never occurred to people around her that she might not be the real mother and that her 'presence' might be harmful to the baby. Having two moms in the house was be a blessing, as several 'straight' women had indicated to Miller. She says that she did have a lot in common with other mothers and cherished baby keeping chores like changing diapers, cleaning up baby food, doing the dishes and singing baby songs. But she says that she also, "…continue to feel just a little apart, as though we live in two worlds that speak the same language but are divided by dialect." (168)

Lynn O'Brien quotes Andrea O'Reilly from the latter's book *Mother Outlaws* in her book *Bikini Ready Moms: Celebrity Profiles, Motherhood and the Body* (2015) that there was a tendency for patriarchal ideologies of motherhood to function as culturally constructed practices, being unceasingly restructured in response to changing economic and societal factors. This modifies the maternal body and sets new parameters for who all can be categorized as mothers (qtd. in O' Brien 201). She continues that if we were, "…to acknowledge that caregiving requires much energy and time, then doing so will encourage both the resurgence of the notion that maternity is women's destiny and give professional institutions' "ammunition" to continue to penalize women for their difficulty meeting ideal worker norms in professional institutions" (201). She says that larger cultural dictates have equated femininity to maternity, and it was possible to dissociate femininity and maternal choice by redefining maternal desire and maternal agency within the context of empowered mothering. Miller was worried that both herself and Jane would merge into one big maternal figure, neither Mommy or Mama, and was worried what would be her position, "…I'll be neither Mommy nor Mama. Jane will be both. I'll be the other. The live-in. The friend. The "aunt." The nanny." (171) The culmination point of it all comes when Hannah one day, out of the blue when Jane was preparing her for her bath, looks at Miller and calls her "Da-da." (171)

Maternal agency, Maternal Authenticity and Non-Normative Mothering

Miller talks about the unique bond she shared with her daughter Hannah. Both Jane and Miller revel when it was revealed that their baby was a 'girl'. Miller says that she was 'reeling 'with happiness, "…Suddenly, there is a person in this baby: a girl, a daughter. There is a difference of vast magnitude between having "a

baby" and having "a daughter." I stare at the murky picture projected on the screen. I feel protective in a way that I have never felt before. This is our daughter. I want to wrap my arms around her, guard her from danger, protect her from harm" (Miller 76). When Hannah was born, she revels in the baby's birth and feels strangely transported into a different world of motherhood. Later when Jane leaves for work, Miller becomes the stay-at-home mom and looks after the baby. This also reiterates the dominant pattern of mothering that the biological mothers (most of the time) should stay home and take care of the baby, while the father/ non-biological partner goes off to work. In Miller's case, things were also favorable for her to stay home (as she was working as a free-lance writer, without any spatial and temporal constraints of the job), and Jane could not afford to take days off from work anymore. Miller, the non-biological mother, gradually slips into the role of the biological mother, providing all the nurture and care. This leads to creation of a very special bond between the non-biological mother and the child. She narrates how Hannah has changed their lives, very eloquently expressed in the following lines:

> What is the shape of parenthood? It is linear, building daily on itself. Experience grows with the child. Skills build sequentially, one mastery laying the foundation for the next. The child rolls over, sits up, stands, walks, runs. The child grows physically, mentally, emotionally. The parent learns to read emotions and cries, learns to store extra diapers in the glove compartment of the car, learns to scan each new environment for potential hazards. The child's body gains inches. The mind grows synapses. Hearts gain strength. Life is measured initially in weeks, then months, then years. Tripping and stumbling, reaching out for balance, parent and child go forward, marching into the future. At the same time, parenthood is circular.

> The days cycle indistinguishably: wake, diaper change, play, eat, bottle, sleep, wake, diaper change, play, eat, bottle, sleep, wake, diaper change, play, eat, bottle, sleep. I often don't know what day it is; just that it is naptime or lunchtime or playtime. (186-178).

Miller's emotions on non-normative mothering are echoed by theorist Nancy D Polikoff, in the chapter "Lesbians Choosing Children: The Personal is Political Revisited" in Andrea O'Reilley's book *Maternal Theory: Essential Readings* (2007), where she asks, "Are lesbians immune to a culture of compulsory motherhood? Of course, not." (195) When Polikoff, as part of a survey, asked some lesbian mothers and mother-to-be on what made them decide to have babies, they replied that they were, "… challenged by some who say that having a child forced them out of the closet, thereby making them less normal, especially when two women raise a child co-equally and the child calls them both mommies. There is certainly truth to this, although I believe it is limited to situations involving equal co-mothering." (199) The biological mother, and even the non-biological co-mother, will be, "… put to the test of explicitly disclosing her lesbianism or accepting the presumption of heterosexuality that makes the "deviant" choices of lesbianism and child freeness less possible for others" (199). This echoes Miller's statement that they (Jane and herself) were lesbians and so their babies did not just 'happen'. She says, "…We are two lesbians who chose to have a baby; not two parents who just "happen" to be lesbian, in the same way that we happen to have brown hair. But here, there are no questions about what our families are like, or what it means to be a second mom or second dad, or how our children will fare. Here, we are just who we are" (211). Polikoff asserts that motherhood was an institution and it functioned as an important part of patriarchal society to preserve and endorse patriarchy.

Lesbianism did not negate or transform the institution of motherhood as it was rooted deeply in patriarchal history to function as an independent phenomenon. When lesbians mothered, they, "…embrace not only the personal experience of mothering but the institution of motherhood as well." (199)

Miller felt very protective of Hannah and also wished to experience what it would to be like to nurse Hannah. She says, "What's my role here as the non-birth mother? And what is my role as a non-birth mother who tried to be a birth mother?" (54). When the nurse, who had inseminated Miller several times earlier, asked her if she was jealous that Jane was pregnant, she says she was genuinely surprised at the question. "I didn't feel jealous or angry or betrayed or any of the things that I could have been feeling about the fact that Jane was the one housing our zygote. But then again, maybe just a little" (54). She, however, tells the nurse that she would have liked to nurse. And the nurse suggests the La Leche League and asks Miller to consult a lactation consultant. The nurse says that some women will be able to stimulate milk flow, given that they follow certain medication and stimulation. Or they could also wear the tube that the non-mothers can wear so that the baby could have the formula while nursing at the breast. Miller reveals that she was overwhelmed at the prospect but was not really sure if she should go ahead with it. She narrates her experiences thus:

> Maybe, but then maybe not. I feel overwhelmed just thinking about it, as though it throws me ever deeper into a liminal space. I could be a semi-mom, non-dad who nurses. Gays and lesbians often say that we spend much of our lives making our own road maps. This feels to me a little too much like making the road. I don't know how other lesbian, nonbiological mothers-to-

> be, who tried to get pregnant and could not, might experience their partners' pregnancy"(55).After Hannah was born, Miller admits that she was jealous of Jane who was nursing their baby, " I wanted to know what it felt like, to have the chance to feel milk flowing from my body into a baby. I wanted to experience the intimacy of nursing. I wanted to feel my baby cuddled against my chest, drawing food from inside me. (173-174).

O'Reilley states in her book *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* that "non-normative childrearing imprints on the political-social dimension of motherhood to emphasize how traditional practices of gender and sexual identities may be challenged and modified to raise children." (69) O'Reilley continues that "the attributes of agency, authority, and authenticity as well as the practices of other mothering, co-mothering, and alternative maternal identities and practices enables mothers to challenge and change patriarchal motherhood from various cultural perspectives. Empowered mothering makes motherhood more rewarding for women by enduring the dictum of maternal agency and authority and by opening new maternal practices and identities. Such mothering allows a woman selfhood outside of motherhood and affords her power within motherhood." (69)

O'Reilley also explains the concept of non-normative mothering in her book where she says that non-normative mothers—whether they are defined and categorized as such by age, race, sexuality, or biology—can never be the "good" mothers of normative motherhood, so they must "rely on and develop nonpatriarchal practices of mothering to raise their children" (75). Whether it be shared parenting, co-mothering or communal-other mothering, such non-normative mothering

practices contested and altered the various ways that the lived experiences of patriarchal motherhood limited the boundaries of mothering.

Both Miller and her partner Jane had devoted ten years of conversation to deciding whether or not to have a baby as they both were "lesbians and fully endowed with the lesbian process of love" (Miller 4). Miller also mentions attending a "Maybe Baby" class conducted at Chrysalis- A Center for Women, which Miller and her partner Jane attended with thirty-one other lesbians. She says she had signed up for the class in the hope that it would help them decide whether to have a baby or not, looking for "some guidance in deciding whether to turn down the Babies "R" Us aisle of life" (5). But she says what they got instead was a tirade of information on how to "make or acquire" a baby (5) and about non biological mothering and foster parenting at the class. She elaborates:

> There were lots of handouts on the mechanics and logistics of "alternative" insemination. ("There's nothing 'artificial' about it," the instructor reminded us.) We learned about the many legal issues faced by same-sex parents. Because parental rights are largely tied to marriage and biology, the law typically recognizes only one member of a same-sex couple—the biological parent—as the legal parent of a child. If there is a breakup, the unrecognized parent can be denied the right to custody. If the legal parent dies, a child can be placed with blood relatives or even become a ward of the state. The wobbly legal status of the unrecognized parent also means that he or she may not be permitted to give consent for medical treatment, provide health insurance for the child, or in some cases, even visit that child in the hospital. A child would be ineligible for Social Security benefits if the unrecognized

> parent should die and would have no legal claim to an inheritance, should there be one. The reality is that the laws governing same-sex families vary from state to state and even county to county. We learned that pretty much everything was being decided on a case-by-case basis. The strength of the legal bond that could be forged between a child and a non-birth parent depended largely on where the family lived and the mood and political inclinations of the presiding judge. (5)

Radical Motherhood, Feminist Mothering and Queer Motherhood

Miller's memoir examines her and Jane's lives and purports how they chose to mother in ways that were defined and identified by their lesbianism. The memoir centers on these interrelated issues: how lesbianism informs their understanding of mothering practices and the institution of motherhood, how lesbian mothering may be understood as a form or an act of feminist pedagogy and how parenting informs the lesbian feminism of mothers. In examining these pertinent issues, Miller identifies how she and her partner Jane were able to understand motherhood experiences by practicing exclusive female mothering. Susan J Douglas and Meredith Michael tries to construct this gendered restructuring of mothering practices in their book *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and How It Has Undermined Women* (2004), where they discuss mothering as being "the natural identity and purpose of women" and term the twenty-first-century manifestation of this ideology as the "new momism"(34).

Margaret F. Gibson's phenomenal book on queer mothering *Queering Motherhood: Narrative and Theoretical Perspectives* (2014) talks about the foundational constructs of motherhood. She explains thus:

> … "motherhood" is invoked whenever we take parenting and reproduction seriously, regardless of whether or not the individuals involve dare seen as, or believe themselves to be, "mothers." Even when we consider the practices and perspectives of queer fathers, transgender and transsexual parents, genderqueer parents, intersex parents, or even of queer people who did not ultimately become parents, we grapple with the institution of motherhood. Parenthood, fatherhood, family, and other social constructs may very well be simultaneously queered as we "queer motherhood." (6)

Gibson quotes Adrienne Rich's statement "motherhood as an institution" (qtd. in Gibson 6) that signifies alternative versions of motherhood as irrelevant and out of place in dominant narratives of motherhood. Such re-assertions of traditional mothering (patriarchal, restrictive, cisnormative and heteronormative motherhood) can be seen in individual narratives of dyke daddies and butch mommies. Miller narrates an incident when Hannah gets sick with flu and has to be hospitalized, where a nurse at the hospital offers to hold the baby so both Miller and Jane could have some sleep. Miller was too tired and grateful to wonder whether that nurse might be a lesbian and guesses that she might be. She says that she has had previous experiences of gay people openly welcoming "children of two moms or two dads as belonging to the whole community" (208-209). "I have seen this before, when gay men or lesbians' step in, usually informally and unofficially, and surround one child or another with an extra circle of protection and friendship and support" (209). Later, during the Gay Pride in the Twin Cities, Miller and Jane participate in the Gay parade. They revel in being part of the large procession with a gathering of about four hundred thousand, making it the third largest Gay Pride event in the nation. Miller recounts how she cheered for "the dykes on their motorcycles, the

"princesses" in their elaborate gowns, the gay marching band, the gay and lesbian teachers and flight attendants and the teenagers from District 202, a community center for queer youth" (210). The people lined along the sidewalk cheer as Hannah, Miller and Jane participate in the parade, and Miller feels they were cheering just for them. She says, "I want to breathe this in, to hold on to the waves of applause." (211)

Miller asserts that their family and neighbors were supportive of the fact that Hannah had two mothers. But she always felt a difference between her family and straight families. She says that, "Our daily life is much like that of any family with a young child, but I can never wholly escape the sense that there is a kind of scrim between us. Sometimes, it manifests as a sense of vulnerability; more often, for me anyway, it's a vague but persistent sense of separateness. But here, surrounded by gay and lesbian and bisexual and transgender families, that sense of separation evaporates" (211). Miller experiences the sense of freedom in the parade, a sense of "Here, we are just who we are" (211), two lesbians who decide and chose to have a baby and not just two parents who happened to be lesbians.

How Political Conditions Influenced Legal Adoption in Lesbian Families

Miller's memoir raises a very appropriate question as to why people were so scared of lesbian mothers. A key reason may be that they are out of the control of men and are therefore perceived as "unfeminine." Miller reads the mother- child relationship as both a product of the patriarchal society in which it was created and an attachment pattern that redefines this social structure. The mothering experience in which Miller wrote her memoir likely motivated her to prove that motherhood is a social construction and not a natural condition. Furthermore, despite the significance

of Miller's deconstruction of patriarchal motherhood, her experience ultimately does not extend into the deconstruction of sexuality, gender, and bodies.

Miller also talks about the legal issues that may stem from same-sex parenting, that "the law typically recognizes only one member of a same sex couple- the biological parent- as the legal parent of a child."(5) as parental rights were mainly recognized and accepted on the grounds of marital and biological ties. She elaborates on the nature of the 'other' mother in this regard thus:

> The wobbly legal status of the unrecognized parent also means that he or she may not be permitted to give consent for medical treatment, provide health insurance for the child, or in some cases, even visit that child in the hospital. A child would be ineligible for Social Security benefits if the unrecognized parent should die and would have no legal claim to an inheritance, should there be one. The reality is that the laws governing same-sex families vary from state to state and even county to county. We learned that pretty much everything was being decided on a case-by-case basis. The strength of the legal bond that could be forged between a child and a non-birth parent depended largely on where the family lived and the mood and political inclinations of the presiding judge. (5)

In the U.S, the judicial laws varied across the states. Miller talks about their decision to have their baby in Minnesota as the conditions were favorable for people of sexual minority to live in a state like Minnesota. She also narrates very poignantly about how she adopted Hannah. The ties between Jane and Miller now run formally through Hannah because they are not married. Miller says that, "…their connection to each other is beyond the paper trail was now forged through wills and powers of

attorney" (138). Miller could complete the procedure to adopt Hannah only after the latter was born and was later designated as the "Standby Custodian" (139). This gave her the power to make medical decisions regarding Hannah if Jane were to be "incapacitated" or something were to happen to Jane afterward. They complete the procedures with the help of their lawyer Ann and Miller explains the process thus:

> Our lawyer, Ann, has diligently navigated us through the various required forms and procedures. She has petitioned the Minnesota Department of Human Services, requesting an Order and Decree of Adoption. She has requested a waiver of the home study, based on the facts that Jane and I have lived together since 1987 and Hannah has lived with us since she popped out into the world. Jane and I have filed an affidavit spelling out our reasons for wanting the adoption. Jane is the birth parent, it notes. Amie was present when Hannah was born. (I was in the hallway, but close enough.) The decision to have Hannah was mutual. Amie is equally involved in the care and nurture of Hannah, "including feeding, bathing, grooming, and dressing; purchasing, cleaning, and caring for her clothes; arranging for medical care, arranging for child care as needed, putting her to bed at night, attending to her during the night, waking her in the morning, and teaching elementary skills." I don't know what those elementary skills might be at this point, other than maybe lying on a blanket, but it hardly seems appropriate to quibble. The affidavit goes on to promise, "When she is old enough to understand, we will share the nature of our relationship with her and our respective relationships to her." It points out that "Hannah needs and deserves the legal protection resulting from adoption," including not having to go through guardianship and custodianship proceedings in the event of

> Jane's death. The adoption will ensure my capacity to make decisions about medical care or carry Hannah on an insurance policy. It will enable Hannah to claim survivor benefits from Social Security and it protects her right to claim continuing financial support from me should I decide to become a dead-beat mom. The affidavit notes that the Court might decide that Jane's parental rights must be terminated for me to adopt Hannah, meaning that Jane would then have to adopt her as well. (139-140)

Narrative Technique

The dominant patterns of narration and threads of experience and meaning that run through most narratives of non-biological mothering distinguish these experiences from those of biological mothers. Miller's memoir focuses on maternal confrontations and critically examines notions of home and family. She narrates how non-normative maternal bodies navigate the world as conception and birth hampered one's mobility in the maternal world. Without denying important differences between non-biological and biological maternal bodies, the memoir aims to explore how the representational figure of the adoptive mothering body as produced by disciplinary discourses and practices gave rise to the epistemological experience of polymaternalism, thus making the adoptive maternal body a site of potential resistance to dominant patriarchal discourses on motherhood institutions.

The memoir is divided into twelve chapters, with sub sections each. It starts with "Baby Making" and a major share of the first chapter was about Miller's attempts to become pregnant by Artificial Insemination. "No Waiting, Womb Two" narrates how Jane decides that she was "willing to try getting pregnant" (32) and Miller guides Jane through all the procedures, like shopping for the 'right sperm'

and the doctor's appointments. As Jane gets pregnant, the narrative shifts from Miller' body that had been trying to get pregnant to Jane's body that gets pregnant. The earlier tone of frustration and helplessness gradually pave way to euphoria and sense of fulfillment. Miller describes the changes in Jane's body during pregnancy and addresses the pertinent theme that runs dominant throughout the memoir: her role as the non -biological mother. When Jane was in her last trimester, Miller narrates her new found maternal emotions she experiences during the birth of the baby and when she was handed the baby, she describes the moment as "hanging in a sort of limbo, suspended between one life and another." (114)

Miller's narrative pattern in the memoir can be classified as two: before the birth of Hannah and after. The changes that the maternal body undergoes is explained beautifully with the olfactory senses, when she refers to the mother smell that engulfs Jane. The same metaphor of smell has been used to describe her experiences after Hannah's birth, where she refers to the smell of the baby that clings to her clothes. Miller's experiences in mothering Hannah is a crucial part in the memoir, the part where Miller metamorphosizes into a mother. The memoir's significance starts from this chapter onwards where Miller, the non-biological mother, mothers Hannah and bonds with her. She also narrates how the essence of lesbianism is erased by motherhood, the songs she sings to Hannah during her sleep time gradually shift to the hymns Miller had learnt as a child. She says how "the stories and assurances that she learnt as a child comes flooding back …the memory of my eight-year-old self still clings to these…." (160)

The non-biological motherhood experiences of Miller shift between linear and circular patterns; the linear patterns of parenthood, as when "experience grows

with the child and skills build sequentially, one mastery laying the foundation for the next" (186) and circular at times when the days cycle indistinguishably into feeding, diaper change and nap time for the baby. Mothering images and symbols dominate the second part of the book and Hannah becomes the focal point of attraction in Miller's and Jane's lives. The memoir does not follow the conventional form of journal entry, with each event documented with the date and the month as in the other memoirs taken for study. But the events are narrated in the chronological order of their happening, gradually paving way for new identity formation for both Miller and Jane. Miller also gives a poignant picture of the political conditions that existed in the U.S at the time, referring to the 9/11 attack and the subsequent fear that engulfed the people. She also mentioned the legal conditions in the U.S that determined custody rights of non-biological lesbian mothers, making references to the various laws that existed in different states of the U.S. The memoir winds up with a short 'Epilogue' that describes Hannah aged six and Miller and Jane working towards fostering their relationship. Without denying important differences between non- biological and biological maternal bodies, Miller's narrative strategy explores how the representational figure of the adoptive mothering body as produced by disciplinary discourses and practices gives rise to epistemological experiences of dual consciousness, thus making the non-biological maternal body a site of potential resistance to dominant discourses on motherhood institutions

Conclusion

Miller's non-biological motherhood memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* explores mothering experiences by blending polymaternalism into homonormative family structures and affective

relations. In a polymaternal family structure, the mother-child-mother triangle dominates the family hierarchy and Miller's memoir explains this concept when her partner Jane becomes the mother and Miller becomes the second mother. The central argument in this chapter is that Miller, the non-biological mother is as powerful and influential, if not more, as the biological mother Jane. The child Amelia bonds strongly with both of them. This subverts the dominance of monomaternalism dictated by patriarchal conventions of motherhood.

Motherhood has always been a site of contested meanings and values. Miller's memoir challenges the dichotomies between biological and non-biological mothering that has been responsible for the gap in feminist theories of motherhood and queer theory. Miller's memoir explores how non-normative maternal bodies presented themselves in a world that were determined by dominant markers of identity construction, controlled by a heterosexual patriarchal society that was averse to any deviations that disrupted the existing order. Miller views the non-biological maternal body as a potentially queer body from which one might gain a perspective on queer mothering in general.

Despite the obvious deviance from the pronatalist script of mothering, Miller asserts that the heteronormative techniques of surveillance assert the fact there was a hypothetical situation that if heterosexual motherhood functioned as a patriarchal institution that controlled, delimited, and subjugated women's mothering instincts, then lesbian mothers' experiences of biological or non-biological mothering can be considered as sites of empowerment. The memoir argues that the non-biological mother differs from biological mother, in part, by their heightened awareness of being under this constant surveillance by the heterosexual society,

acting upon their choice to choose the way of conception despite their sexual deviations. In Miller's instance, the role of motherhood shifts from Miller to Jane, making her the non-biological mother and Jane the biological mother, when she had earlier intended otherwise. Unlike this shift in maternal roles, which is not available to couples in a heterosexual relationship, lesbian couples seem to be blessed with this added advantage of having a 'backup plan'. Miller also talks about the added advantage of having 'two mothers' to take care of the child and to participate in the domestic responsibilities.

Miller wishes to shift our focus to the ways in which the impervious nature of the non -biological mother subverts the dominant script of mothering as the 'actual 'maternal body. Though Miller tries to get pregnant and so could not be said to resist reproduction, the adoptive maternal body chooses when and how to become a mother. These choices, like the choices of the homonormative queer, represent subjugation by dominant scripts of normative mothering. They may also, however, and sometimes do, openly resist domestication. Biological maternal bodies, like adoptive maternal bodies, are always exemplified in social, cultural, economic, and political situations that are marked by heterosexism. In most cases, motherhood is spoken of as a status that may be withheld or given in processes involving the potential intervention of family and society.

Chapter 5

Maternal Substitutes: Karleen Pendleton Jimenez' s Biological Lesbian Motherhood Memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant*

"For me, there is no stronger bond than that between mother and child. If I could no longer have a mother, then I needed to become one" (Jimenez 9).

The concept that lesbian mothers are a deviant 'Other' whose parenting must be constantly subjected to analysis based on their sexuality, has been challenged on various grounds. More recently, researchers have turned their attention to more productive aspects of lesbian mothering experience.Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's memoir, *How to Get A Girl Pregnant* (2011), delves into her personal experience as a butch lesbian undergoing artificial insemination to conceive a child. Jimenez who has identified as a true 'butch' in all sense of the word, is happy with being a non-biological mother to her partner Hilary's children Joshua and Maya. The essence of her queer identification is embodied in her appearance, her thoughts and her decisions. But the death of her mother leaves a void in her heart, which she feels, can only be filled with a child that she has to conceive and give birth to. She tries to substitute the mother she has lost by being a mother herself, hence the phrase in the title 'Maternal Substitutes'. This decision leads to a paradigm shift in her queer identification as a butch (who are not conventionally into pregnancy and childbirth) and adopts more of the characteristics of a femme and starts dressing like one so she can attract men. This memoir employs a unique format to present a multi-dimensional perspective, steering away from a clinical and medicalized account of the pregnancy process, starts from her attempt at getting pregnant through natural and artificial means and ends with the live statement of her baby girl's birth.

Motherhood and fatherhood roles exist as the foundation of the idealized, heterosexual family that establishes dominant ideologies of family life. Parenting roles within the ideological nuclear family are seen as two opposites of a whole that only effectively correspond with male (father)/female (mother) concept. The heteronormative ideological norm was that a child can have only one mother, the biological mother (monomaternalism) and does not advocate two or more mothers (polymaternalism). These roles have recently become the foundation for conservative, religious-based movements to limit marriage to a union between a man and a woman. Religious conservatives argue against same-sex marriage, claiming that children's wellbeing is a matter of concern. This belief is born of the judgment that only rigid heterosexual families can raise well-adjusted children. Their strategies resulted in an experience of parenthood that rely on predetermined roles, yet the execution of these roles revealed their inherent instability. The experience of being two mothers who parent as a mother and a father resulted in subjectivities that were rooted in the categories fortified in cultural ideologies. Their narratives reveal the complexity of experience that require a dynamic understanding of subjectivity rather than one that concretizes those experiences into a constant subject within assimilation/resistance perspectives.

Theoretical Framework

Lisa Baraister's book *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* (2009) describes about the maternal transformation, the condition in which the "… self-budges up to make room for another, and is radically changed in the process" (41). Baraister says how the self undergoes a fundamental transformation of state from being single to being interdependent. This dialectic that provides a starting point for

tracking the psychological work entailed in transforming a woman to a mother, belongs to the highly contested notion of feminine identity that informs any discussion, whether feminist or psychoanalytic, of the maternal subject. The feminist analysis of such a position has diligently uncovered the gendered split in this conflict, pointing out how the masculine usurps the position of unified subject, and relegates the feminine as the necessarily unthematizable excess which serves to give the masculine its consistency, form and visibility (41).

Baraister also quotes Nancy Chodorow who writes in her 'Reflections on *The Reproduction of Mothering*—twenty years later' (2000), that, "…the *Reproduction of Mothering* is written from the daughter's point of view more than that of the mother, even as the kernel of the mother's viewpoint, in the psychological capacities, desires, and identities whose development it describes, can be elicited from within it. This chapter tries to formulate the concept of how the daughter wants to become a mother, to substitute the mother she has lost. It is only through having children herself that Chodorow thinks she has begun to understand 'the powerful, transformative claims that motherhood would make on our identities and senses of self." (qtd. in Baraister 43)

Jimenez conceives of motherhood as a performative identity, in the sense that Judith Butler described gender as performative, by subverting the maternal identity. She extends this notion one step further with the concept of maternal drag, which expands on Butler's theorization of cross-dressing. Unlike the works of her contemporaries, which base their representations of motherhood on conventional notions of the maternal, Jimenez moves discussions of motherhood forward, theorizing the maternal as a socially constructed role and one that is radically open

to resignification. While analyzing the core themes of Motherhood, Psychoanalysis, and Performativity when searching for a theoretical framework through which to examine motherhood (and especially the relationship between mothers and daughters), the vast majority of scholars often draw upon Freud's theories of psycho-sexual development. Nancy Chodorow's work *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) uses object-relations theory to develop Freud's theories.

Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, in the Introduction to their edited volume *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* (1991) quotes Ann Dally, Adrienne Rich and Judith Arcana, with regard to maternal subjectivity and how the mother influences the daughter when she becomes a mother. O Daly and T Reddy also quotes Marianne Hirsch's book The *Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989) where the latter talks about the feminist avoidance of the maternal and says that the concept of motherhood is entrenched in patriarchal ideals. Joanee S Frye's chapter 'Narrating Maternal Subjectivity: Memoirs from Motherhood' in the edited volume of *Textual Mothers / Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures* (2010) by Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, talks about maternal subjectivity in motherhood memoirs, which has been explored to understand the theme of subjectivity in Jimenez's memoir. Andrea O'Reilley's book *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (2016) talks about the reproduction of mothering and the maternal relational self and her quotes on Nancy Chodorow's book *The Reproduction of Mothering* regarding maternal subjectivity has been used in this chapter. O'Reilley's quotes on Julie Stephens' work *Confronting Post Maternal Thinking: Feminism, Memory, and Care* (2012) has also been explored in the chapter where the latter analyses the concept of the 'post maternal thinking' in maternal subjectivity and

how it affects recurrent terminologies of anxiety around spelling out maternal values.

From Daughterhood to Motherhood

Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's biological lesbian motherhood memoir, *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (2011) explores the universal experience of daughterhood by basing it on the critiques of patriarchally defined motherhood, with the feminist daughter analysing the social conditions which must alter if motherhood is to be re-defined. Jimenez moves through the daughter's experience to the mother's experience, and thus explains the concept of maternal substitution. She desires to be a mother because she has lost her mother. Jimenez's memoir starts with the very emphatic line "How do I get sperm when I look like a dude and I'm older and fatter than when I picked up guys as a teenager?" (5). After having 'come out' as a lesbian, she talks about her ardent search for sperm that started with her desire to have a child, when she started searching for potential partners for a one-night stand. However, while she was sceptical about her success in attracting a man, she was quite confident that she could woo any woman easily and admits that she did not know "how to look like someone who wants sperm" (5). Jimenez goes back to the time when she says her mother sensed her orientation and asks her abruptly "You do want to have a baby, don't you!?" (8). She says her mother may have sensed a loss of grandchildren after seeing her masculinity and inferring her lesbianism from that. Jimenez was quite taken aback by the question as the baby question confounds her when she was just battling with her decision to tell her parents about her sexual orientation. Her mother was trying to limit her options of not choosing otherwise,

ones that would limit the author's decisions. Jimenez says that maybe it was at that moment she realised that she really needed a baby.

> I didn't know until that moment that I wanted a baby, but when asked the question, there was no hesitation. I knew that I wanted a baby like I knew I wanted to breathe, eat, live. I spoke it and that truth became part of how I have seen myself in the world. I also learned in that moment that my appearance, my boyishness, would lead people to believe otherwise. As a butch, I would alarm proper women like my mother, who would see me as someone who wasn't going to make family, make babies, make home. (8)

Susan J. Douglas and Meredith Michaels, in their phenomenal book on motherhood, *The Mommy Myth: The Idealization of Motherhood and how it Has Undermined Women* (2004) states about the concept of intensive mothering, or the new momism which is intensified by demanding much from mothers. The term 'new momism' is inspired by drawing on sociologist Sharon Hays' dictum on what she termed "intensive mothering" (4) in her book *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (1996*).* Douglas and Michaels establish that the new momism is the normative "good" mothering ideology. This "good mothering" ideology is explained on these core beliefs and values: "the insistence that no woman is truly complete or fulfilled unless she has children, that women remain the best primary caretakers of children, and that to be a remotely decent mother, a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual being, 24/7, to her children" (4).

Jimenez was the non-biological 'extra mom' to her partner Hilary's biological children Joshua and Maya from an earlier marriage. In addition to being child-centric in that her children's requirements are always to take priority in her

life, the intensive mothering, that Jimenez adopts later, requires mothers to bring practice level skills to her mothering, while also promoting conventional values and beliefs. Jimenez echoes Douglas and Michaels' dictum that only through having a child could she be complete, exemplifying the notion of good mothering ideology. Though Jimenez was not sure about when she wanted to have a child, her mother's sudden death fuelled the desire instantly. The desire was instant, as sudden as her mother's death. She says, "… But I became ready the moment she died. It would take years to build the resources to care for a baby, but only an instant to know that I needed one. Without my mom, I was older, I was alone, I lacked family. For me, there is no stronger bond than that between mother and child. If I could no longer have a mother, then I needed to become one." (9)

When Jimenez started searching for sperm, she says the biggest decision was whether she should go for known sperm or unknown sperm. She had already gone through the initial preparations, read the lesbian fertility book, spoken to local certified lesbian parenting professional. She says that most lesbians would never pick a known donor. She attributes this feeling to "women- centred politics", but it could be more the fear of fathers dominating parental care at a later stage. She says, "Maybe it's the belief in women-centred politics, maybe it's the valuing of nurture over nature, maybe it's a question of control. What if the father attempted to take control of the child, or in general, decided to make everyone's lives miserable? That's where the fear lies." (10)

Chicana Butch Lesbian Identity and Sperm Donors

Jimenez opts for anonymous donors because the fear of relationships breaking up seemed a primordial fear to her, as to every human being. The fear of

known donors too was grounded in the same fear, in “rotten experiences with power” (11). She says that she never put much stake in fathers because her own father failed at parenting and she was raised by her mother and argued that, “Being raised for the most part by a single mother, I used to be the one who argued vehemently against those who said children needed fathers. I still believe that children do not need fathers to grow up to be good, confident human beings.” (11). But gradually Jimenez decides against it. She decides to go for a known donor as she wanted to know the genetic material of the father. She openly admits that she does not want some “creep” being the father because she did not know if creepiness is inherited. The sperm bank charts never mentioned that as there was no category for that type of information and she did not want to take chances. Jimenez also says how she likes history and genealogy. The search for family lines, the shape of lives and choices made. Jimenez wanted her baby to have the privilege to be able to trace her people. Hilary, Jimenez’s partner, also believed in having a known partner, as the child would construct a fantasy image of its father, which may be grander and more chivalrous than in real life and they (the mothers) were not really ready to compete with a fantasy parent.

Jimenez and her mother (when she was alive) had discussed potential sperm donors, when Jimenez was older and decided to have a baby. After she had informed her mother of her sexuality, the latter had reconciled to the fact as all that mattered to the mother was that her daughter was happy and she would have grandchildren. Jimenez’s mother recollected the time when she scourged sperm banks for potential donors and they were bombarded with information about “blond-haired, blue eyed Aryan sperm donors” and was agitated if it were some kind of “racist, sci-fi conspiracy” to colonise the world again (14). So, when Jimenez introduces her gay

friend Mateo to her mother, she was impressed. Mateo was a Latino and had the physical characteristics of one, including brown eyes and beige skin. She also says that she wanted to know the father and asks herself, “What combination of characteristics do I want for my child’s father? Are shared memories enough? Good looks? Ethnicity? Brains? Great clothing? A good career? Friendship? Love?” and says that Mateo possessed them all. (14)

Maternal Subjectivity in Biological Lesbian Motherhood

Brenda O. Daly and Maureen T. Reddy, in the Introduction to their edited volume *Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities* (1991) quotes Ann Dally, who says the concept of motherhood, even in the late twentieth century, “many women find it impossible to be committed to both feminism and motherhood because the two have not been reconciled” (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 1). Dally attributes this failure to reconcile feminism and motherhood to the relative paucity of feminist texts written by mothers and says that motherhood remains an “area in which there is the greatest inequality” (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 1), the “feminization of poverty” might better be called "the maternalization of poverty,” (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 1).

In her foreword to *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich says that the question of subjectivity of mothers often disappears from even the most sensitive feminist discussions of mothering. Rich's definition of motherhood as “the potential relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to her children” (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 1) explains this elision as a deliberate choice as Rich focuses on the ways in which all women can be seen as mothers, whether they give birth, care for children, or do neither. Daly and Reddy quotes Judith Arcana, where

the latter points out in her work *Our Mothers' Daughters* (1981), that, "of all the roles in which women are required to fill in this society, daughterhood is universal. Every woman is another woman's daughter. She is raised up by the society as a "daughter," should her mother die, or leave her when she is a child. Even if she becomes a mother, she remains a daughter." (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 2)

Lesbian Mother Writing and Maternal Subjectivity

Jimenez's maternal voice, both non-biological and biological, moves beyond the perils of gender polarity and normative mothering and moves beyond the contradiction of representing maternal subjectivity. She was actually living and experiencing the dual role of a mother and a writer. Maternal relative consciousness, which insists upon acknowledging the subjectivity of the (m)other, moves beyond dualism. Jimenez' memoir opens up new understandings of maternal subjectivity: incorporating both the concept of the biological/non-biological motherhood and her butch identity, while at the same time attending to the distinctive features of motherhood. From these representations, one can begin to identify strategies for rendering maternal substitutes that eludes the constraints of narrative form and cultural dismissal.

Jane Lazarre's memoir, *The Mother Knot* (1976) initiates a series of questions about narrating maternal subjectivity. Portraying her personal experiences of motherhood and referring to them as "knotted" (65), the same concept is reiterated in Marianne Hirsch's *Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989), that "mothers write their own experience *as mothers*" (176). As a mother and a writer, Jimenez draws upon her previous experiences of being a non-biological mother, in order to convey her own distinctive experiences of being a

mother, without falling into the “paradox of representation.” (176) And it is in finding her allegory—the motherhood allegory—that Jimenez highlights that motherhood evades a dominant narrative form, even as its shape and emotions undergo constant transformation.

Queer and Maternal Dis-identifications

The identity of the writer/mother, as Jimenez asserts, is contested by how society defines her. She asks if mothers are defined as by their ability to have babies, then the identity of women who are ‘unable to have babies’ or those ‘who do not want to have babies’ are questioned. Jimenez also mentions her butch identity that contests against her desire to be a mother. She says the more one interrogates identity categories, the more one falls into linguistic illusion. It encompasses fluidity, resists fixations, both conceptual and definitional, and looks to the maternal self and structures as relational accomplishments. Jimenez’s memoir follows the pattern of her attempts at pregnancy, starting with the conversation the author has with her mother regarding her alternate sexuality and subsequent desire of the latter for a grandchild. Jimenez admits that though she does not give it much thought at the time, her mother’s death reminds her of how lonely she was and that she can fill the gap only by being a mother herself. Though Jimenez is already the ‘extra mom’ to her partner Hilary’s children, Joshua and Maya, she feels the yearning to procreate a life of her own. Jimenez narrates her experiences as the ‘non-biological’ mother and how she exists in relation to others in queer social networks. Jimenez says how they were always characters in others’ narratives, and how their own narratives always involved other people. The many aspects of her lives are focused

here: personal, familial, social, and professional; spiritual or religious; physical and intellectual; romantic and sexual; and so on.

For Jimenez, the memoir or the practise of writing one, was not just something that was literate, mature or self-reflective, but rather a means by which she was able to develop her identity and personality – a literal metamorphosis from a non-biological mother to a biological mother. Her memoir did not just stem from pre-existing and integrated self; rather, it developed and defined her existing self. Most parts of the memoir are self -introspective, as she tries to reconstruct her own experiences which was an incipient stream of thoughts, feelings, and memories.

Scriptotherapy and the Maternal Voice

As in Moraga's and other memoirs taken for study in this thesis, the authors resort to writing to alleviate their sorrows, resorting to the technique of scriptotherapy. The impulse to engage in self-expression through writing arises from various motivations. Some writers document history, others seek to understand and articulate their own experiences, and a select few turn to writing as a means of coping with adversity. Coined by Suzette A. Henke in her work *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life-Writing*, it refers to the therapeutic practice of revisiting and re-enacting psychological wounds within the written word, with the ultimate aim of fostering healing and resilience. Henke conceptualizes scriptotherapy as a discursive space wherein individuals confront and process their emotional struggles through narrative, thereby transforming their pain into a catalyst for personal growth and recovery. In the memoir, Jimenez resorts to writing to ease the frustration of not getting pregnant after repeated attempts of insemination and the pain of losing her first child when she miscarries. Her journal entries begin as a

result of this tackling of pain, and at the same time, explains the discursive spaces in her life, like the concept of maternal substitutes, shifting identities of gender, Chicana lesbianism, the concept of biological and non-biological lesbian motherhood.

Motherhood scholars Andrea O'Reilly and Elizabeth Podnieks note in their introduction to *Textual Mothers/Maternal Texts*, "Autobiography (including diary and memoir) is an especially valuable arena in which we can register and understand the ways that women inscribe an 'I' or series of 'I's' in the authoring of their own maternal selves, accounting for and expressing awareness of factors such as the body, sexuality, gender, race, class, and nationhood." (O' Reilley and Podnieks 7). Within a recognizable narrative, starting with conception, navigating through pregnancy, birth, and postpartum period, there are also motherhood memoirs that dealt with infertility, miscarriage, stillbirth, postpartum depression, pregnancy with mental illness, addiction. These too intersect with motherhood. The motherhood memoir is thus not a singular concept.

The hybrid forms of writing that was produced in the memoir were textual symptoms of the effort to reformulate the subject, maternal and otherwise, and one could infer that in the process of 're-defining' mothering, it was also mandatory to re-define genres and existing conventions. Joanee S Frye, in the chapter 'Narrating Maternal Subjectivity: Memoirs from Motherhood' in the edited volume *Textual Mothers / Maternal Texts: Motherhood in Contemporary Women's Literatures* (2010) by Elizabeth Podnieks and Andrea O'Reilly, talks about Maternal Subjectivity in motherhood memoirs and begins her statement by asking a series of questions that goes thus:

> "What does it mean to write as a mother?" And I began by reframing the question in terms that were family…Why do we so rarely hear the voices of mothers in narrative form? Why is it that even women who are both mothers and writers are unlikely to portray mothers as active subjective presences? Why is it so difficult to find in narrative form the kinds of experiential insights that we assume is derived from living as a mother?" (qtd. in O'Reilly and Podnieks 187).

Frye continues her assertion that she finds it particularly "valuable, the resources of memoirs by mother-writers, autobiographical forms that set out to explore the experiences a woman undergoes as a mother and to render those experiences freshly through a heightened self-awareness" (187).

Frye also quotes Marianne Hirsch, as stated in *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*, in already providing a compelling analysis of what she called "the mother/daughter plot."She asks: "Do mothers write their own experience *as mothers*? What shapes and plots accommodate those experiences, and what is the relationship of maternal narratives to … cultural projections…? To what extent do women writers who are mothers co-conspire in their own silence…?" (qtd. in O'Reilly and Podnieks 188)

Autoethnography and Chicana Lesbian Identity

Jimenez emphasises that she wanted the father to be Chicana, to have Mexican blood. Because she came from a mixed family that was part Mexican and part white, she says she knew how to raise a kid both Mexican and white and so it was very important to her that she retain the Mexican part. She states lots of reasons why she wanted a Mexican baby thus:

I want a Mexican baby:

- because my mom had dark brown hair and almond-shaped eyes;
- because she fell for Latin guys, but married white like her mother told her to;
- because my abuelita (grandma) told me stories about the revolution and her drunk father who sang beautiful songs in a nasal voice at parties, and her grandfather who was a little man who all the women loved;
- because in the ninth grade my social studies teacher told my mom that there were too many Mexicans taking over the city;
- because I didn't admit I was Mexican when my junior high language arts teacher assumed, I was white;
- because I was ashamed;
- because I'm mixed race, forever hungering to be whole; because I took Chicano Studies classes my first year of university and found myself;
- because the US stole California from México;
- because my mom is dead and I miss her profoundly;
- because I grew up in a Mexican neighbourhood, hearing Spanish every day;
- because my mom made enchiladas for birthdays;
- because Americans think Mexicans are stupid;
- because my grandfather fought to save the homes of Mexicans in Los Angeles from corrupt corporations;

- because I moved away to Canada, where it's hard to find Mexicans;
- because I want to see my dark eyes looking back at me on a baby filled with hunger;
- and because I'm homesick. (15 bullets in text)

In an email interview with Jimenez, conducted as part of the thesis development on 23 Jan. 2024, she says how having a baby was very important to her. To the question if she had employed any diverse approaches to disrupt and challenge the heteronormative coding of space within lesbian motherhood narratives, which is deeply ingrained in the common place parenting practices, Jimenez answers:

> I feel like I could only mother space by having my own kid. Otherwise, people won't even hand a butch a baby to hold, like they will with other women. People don't want queers around children. I felt like if I had this baby from my body, it is the only way I will have some rights, some room, some space. I think again about parenting circles, especially when the children were really young. I think there are many judgments made about other people's parenting all the time, like it's almost sport. I felt like I was being judged too, but not the only one. Maybe in some ways I wasn't judged as harshly, like "she's not a real woman anyway, so why would she know how to dress the kid, feed the kid, etc." (perhaps like they sometimes let dads off the hook for not knowing parenting things.). In a way, it gave me some room, because I was too alternative to be accountable to mothering norms. On another level though, it was kind of awful because I felt like I didn't even "qualify" as a mother in these circles.

Marianne Hirsch' book *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (1989) talks about the feminist avoidance of the maternal and says that the concept of motherhood is entrenched in patriarchal ideals, leading women to associate their mothers with a sense of being victimized and martyred. Feminist literature highlights an unease regarding the vulnerability and loss of control inherent in maternity. Sara Ruddick also reiterates the same concept in her work *Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace* (1990). Like Hirsch and Ruddick, Jimenez articulates maternal perspectives, hoping that the lived practice of mothering might pave way for other possible ways of shaping motherhood and to adopt novel and non-normative methods of thinking that could have a transformative effect on how society perceived lesbian mothering.

Hirsch stresses that "…feminism might begin by listening to the stories that mothers have to tell, and by creating spaces in which mothers might articulate those stories" (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 11). The mother- daughter relationship that is reiterated in every thought of Jimenez, when she tries to get pregnant, the statement that she repeats, cited earlier in this chapter, that says, "…For me, there is no stronger bond than that between mother and child. If I could no longer have a mother, then I needed to become one." (9), what Roberta Rubenstein calls "the maternal subtext" (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 11). Daly and Reddy further quotes Rubenstein, who says that women frequently explore issues of motherhood, including their perceived notions towards sexuality, procreation, relationship, and autonomy and that the mother-daughter relationship is often "a paradigm of conflicting cultural messages" (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 11). Jimenez's queer identity as a butch lesbian invalidated the desire for a biological child initially, but

the mother-daughter bond in her grew so strong that she finally decides to be a biological mother to complete herself as a woman.

Rather than perceiving motherhood as biologically pre-determined and detrimental to a woman's life, Jimenez, like Adrienne Rich, perceives motherhood as a potent connection rooted in female physicality. Although giving birth was part of the mothering process, it was caregiving that defines the act of mothering, whether a woman was the birth mother or not. When Jimenez first moves in with Hilary's family, she takes care of the latter's children, Joshua and Maya, like her own. In this sense, as Ruddick says, all mothers (whether non-biological, adopted or surrogates) are adoptive mothers when one opts to care for the child. This notion of adoption may serve as the foundation of a transformation of motherhood, as it is predicated upon the necessity of choice and thereby rejects essentialist views of patriarchal constructions of heterosexual motherhood. (qtd. in O. Daly and T. Reddy 3)

As Jimenez writes about her experiences of getting pregnant and her desire to be a mother, she was embracing the dialogic consciousness of being both a mother (to Joshua and Maya). She narrates her experience in being the 'extra mom' to Hilary's children in the email interview:

> Yes, I was the other parent to my partner's two kids before I had my own. I have always loved the kids (who are now adults) deeply, but I did feel some insecurity in the role. I had no legal rights. They already had a father and mother. And even though I did a lot of the parenting, I felt like my parenting was not very regarded or respected in the broader social sphere. Some close

friends and family sometimes remind me that I have played a huge role in these kids' lives.

In Jimenez's memoir, the crucial issue was who makes what choice of motherhood and under what conditions. As the memoir progresses, we see Jimenez initially asking sperm from Mateo, her gay friend, for artificial insemination. She also feared that the judicial laws might not allow her to keep her baby. Though conditions were quite favourable in Canada, where Jimenez lived, she was quite sceptical if things would remain the same way, while it was not so in Virginia, U.S, Jimenez cites an instance where a lesbian in Virginia lost her child in custody battle as the courts ruled that her "deviant sexuality" (16) might be harmful for the child. Jimenez surmises that if the father was gay, then he would not take her child away as "people might not like lesbians, but they usually think gay men are the bigger perverts" (16). Mateo initially says 'yes' to Jimenez's request (after a span of two years), and she prepares her body for the pregnancy. She checks her cycles and infers the possible day of insemination. But unfortunately, Amado, Mateo's boyfriend finds out about it, becomes upset and Mateo backs out.

For Jimenez, the question of choice becomes increasingly urgent with the advent of new reproductive technologies that threaten to make the ancient fantasy of the 'single' mother a reality, in which reproduction has nothing to do with men. The language of the reproductive technocrats presumes the absence of the father as a speaking, involved subject. Jimenez's efforts at trying to conceive is echoed by her role as 'extra mom' to Hilary's children and she revels in the role. Joshua and Maya assist in the 'sperm seeking process' and Joshua, though just 7 years old, is aware that a "man's help is needed somewhere in the process" (28) and that as a lesbian,

Jimenez does not know much men. Hilary, her partner, supports her earnestly, as did her mother, who supported her deviant sexuality earlier.

After Mateo, Jimenez decides to ask Tomas (another bisexual Latino friend), a poet, artist and a free spirit. Tomas, too, cannot decide on an answer, even though he says the 'idea of a baby' stays in his mind for months, he backs out later because he feared a baby would be a huge responsibility. Jimenez's choice of sperm-donors also points to the discursive spaces of gender/racial identities and motherhood that she traverses through. The notion of traditional cultural (Chicana identity) and gender (lesbian identity) spaces in biological reproduction gets shifted here. Jimenez worries about the advancing years, tensed as she approaches thirty-five. She regales her concerns in the following sentences:

> Thirty-five is the magic number when doctors get to do more tests on you, when all of a sudden, your chances of getting pregnant decrease, when babies might have problems. When you're thirty-four, everything is clear and fine. On your thirty-fifth birthday, a single twenty-four-hour cycle later, the world has changed. You might not have a baby. I don't want that to be me. (33)

In the email interview with Jimenez, when asked about her experiences when she, a Chicana lesbian, decided to have a baby and if she had any personal experiences of racial or gender discrimination in a dominant white heterosexual society, she responds thus:

> I pass as white, so I did not receive overt racism. However, the sperm banks were almost entirely white. I had access to only two Latino sperm donors. I tried them both, but didn't get pregnant. Such extreme limited access to

> Latino sperm, for whatever reason, is a pretty fundamentally racist situation. I mean, almost no access to BIPOC sperm, you can only reproduce with white sperm. Doesn't get more extreme than this.

Subversive Identities: From 'Butch' to 'Femme'

Jimenez wonders about her butch identity that may interfere in her sperm seeking process. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Jimenez starts her memoir by wondering "how do I get sperm when I look like a dude and I'm older and fatter than when I picked up guys as a teenager?" (1). She also reflects on her butch identity when she decides to as Mateo for sperm the first time and wonders if she looks "too butch" (17). After the denial note from Mateo, Tomas and Joel (a mutual gay friend), Jimenez wonders if she was becoming desperate for a man, which she did not want to be.

> I won't be a desperate woman. I can't be so dependent on men. I didn't become a lesbian to have to turn around and hold my hand out for a guy to notice my worthiness as a mother. I don't fucking need men. That's not the life I've chosen. (38)

Jimenez finds her butch identity being challenged in quest of a sperm that would enable her to be a mother. Even though the desire to be a mother was overwhelming for her, she thinks maybe she was 'rejected' by her gay friends whom she asked for sperm earlier because of her butch identity. The feeling was overwhelming for her. She retorts with sadness and vehemently that she did not want to be a "queer joke" (38). She says, "…A woman who is too butch to get a man. I can't get over feeling like if I don't get a guy to give me sperm, I've somehow failed. I am too queer, too butch, too ugly." (38). But after all the rejections, she tries to reassure herself that it

was not just about her identity. She says that being a lesbian was “about a choice” (38) and that she chose women, not because she could not get a man but because she fell in love with women in ways she never felt for a man.

Hilary, her partner, opines that what Jimenez was asking from men was something more challenging, she was asking for ‘a baby’, something which most men were afraid of (in Hilary’s opinion) as they were not yet ‘ready’ to take up responsibility. It was then that Jimenez decides that she would go for ‘sperm shopping’. She says “… as much as I have wanted a father for my little baby, it’s not a deal-breaker. I won't lose my chance to get pregnant ... I have a paycheque. I have the Internet. It’s time to give up on the guys. It’s time to shop.” (39)

Jimenez focuses on race and ethnicity when she shops for a sperm. As the sperm banks were ‘averse’ to queer sperms, she admits that at that point of time, it did not bother much and she was more concerned continuing her race. She says, “…ethnicity is what’s truly most crucial to me. I want a Mexican man” (42). Though Jimenez buys the sperm online, she decides to inseminate at home and talks on how important it was to debunk the myth of the turkey baster. Unlike in the memoirs dealt with in the earlier chapters of this thesis, Jimenez rationales against using it as the ‘liquid gold’ (considering the price of the sperm) and preferred to use plastic syringes instead. She was also concerned of her butch acquaintance at the clinic spotting her carrying the box containing the sperm. She surmises that:

> I don’t really want butches to know I’m trying to get pregnant because I don’t want them to make fun of me. I don't want them to see me as a lesser butch either. And I don’t want to feel like a lesser butch. The idea of getting pregnant is revolting to a lot of butches, right up there with wearing a dress. I

> don’t know why I want to get pregnant while at the same time there’s no way in hell I'd wear a dress. It’s what feels right. (53)

Jimenez also surmises how a butch friend of hers, who was narrating how another butch friend had gotten pregnant, and she was aghast. She says that “The femmes are supposed to have babies,” (54), and she rates herself at 4.8 and the ‘pregnant butch’ friend of hers at 1.5 at a scale “of butchness from androgyny (1) up to ultimate butchness (5)” (53). Jimenez asserts that she did not want to lose her masculinity while at the same time, she was trying to get pregnant. But when her attempts at AI (Artificial Insemination) fails, she decides to visit a fertility clinic. She sees many women there and wonders about her identity “I’m not like them at all. I’m not really a woman even. I’m a lesbian. I’m a butch. I’m an imposter.” (64). Jimenez goes through the travails of ultrasound and scanning to check her ovulation and the size of her eggs. After weeks of assessing her reproductive health, Dr Meredith, the fertility specialist at the clinic, surmise that Jimenez can do ‘some’ IVF’s. Jimenez’s dilemma about her slowly changing gender identity gets aggravated when her body fails to conceive. Echoing her frustration, the memoir adopts a more mechanical tone here onwards, starting from page 73, when each entry is marked as “Insemination Take One”, and the next “Insemination Take Two” etc. The entries are marked as a matter of fact thus:

> Insemination Take One
>
> Date: August 21, 2007
>
> Sperm count: 2.3 million (Over 1 million is the sperm-bank guarantee, but the more, the better.)

Motility: 74% (Seems like higher numbers would be a good idea, but unclear.)

Follicle size: 1.85 cm (Between 1.7 and 2.3 is great.)

Oestrogen: 693 pmol/litre (Between 500 and1,000 is good, the higher the better.)

LH: 8 mIU/ml (Already risen and fallen. At its peak it should be over 20—mine was 17) (73)

This gradually goes on to a very matter-of -fact statement in "Insemination Take Eight":

INSEMINATION TAKE EIGHT

Date: May 3, 2008

Sperm count: 10.5 million

Motility: 86%

Follicle size: 2.1

Oestrogen: 877

LH:.23 (91)

Coping with the Travails of 'Non- Pregnancy' and 'Miscarriage'

Eight Insemination Take's after and the pregnancy results negative in each of them, Jimenez loses hope. She wonders with exasperation what it takes to 'make a baby'. In the entry titled "Prayer", Jimenez ardently invokes the blessings of the *Virgen de Guadalupe* (italics in text/ the goddess of Mexicans and Chicano/as everywhere,) and prays for the "miracle of life" (88). She prays:

> *Querida Guadalupe*. It's Karleen. In Toronto. *Por favor*. Please can you help me? I need to make a baby. I need a baby so badly. Ever since my mom died, I've been so lonely. It feels like a piece of my body is missing. Like I'm walking around without my heart. I can't be alone anymore. I can survive, but I don't want to live like this. I want more. I want my own child. My own flesh. I'll try so hard to be a good mother. I'll give her my love, good food, joking, my attention, I'll breast feed, I'll pay for her university, anything I can think of. Please. Please help me. *Gracias*. Amen. (88-89)

Jimenez goes to a therapist as she was feeling depressed after repeated failed attempts at pregnancy. The entry that had shown statements about her visit to the fertility clinic gradually changes to visits to the therapist's office. Jimenez asks the very hypothetical question to the therapist "Do you think I'll ever get pregnant?", to which the therapist answers that "Can you accept that this time, you have no control over what happens?" (89). Even writing, which used to be a pleasurable and fulfilling activity for the author, soon became tedious and she started staring blankly at the pages of her diary, not knowing what to write there. In the entry titled "Lifesaver", she expresses her ardent wish that she wanted a baby to save her life and that she was lonely and that her life lacked meaning (89). She says: "If I fight so hard, do I have a better chance at getting pregnant? Might a bunch of these struggling moments amount to something? Can they add up to a baby?" (90).

Motherhood to Jimenez signifies a significant shift in the modes and limits of the body. This shift is not only influenced by patriarchal norms, a perspective that Jimenez acknowledges as having evolved since her association with Hilary's children, but also by the unique tasks and spatial considerations that motherhood

entails. Even as Jimenez's attempts at pregnancy goes ahead, the non-biological children in her life, Joshua and Maya, loom in the background and find their way in her writings. The apparent connection between her 'writing' and 'mothering/trying to be a mother'—so that these two activities were mutually exclusive, particularly because of the relationship that mothers have to general discourses on pregnancy and to cultural authority. Jimenez says that mothers were defined in relation to the child, embedded in the imaginings of their children rather than active agents, able to speak for themselves; this view has been strongly reinforced by psychoanalytic perspectives: the "mother exists only in relation to her child.… she cannot be the subject of her own discourse", as stated by Marianne Hirsch in *Maternal Voice* (252). Jimenez says that she was torn in the tension between *self* and selflessness, which automatically labels a mother as "bad" when she asserts her own maternal complexity in her desire to be pregnant.

Jimenez finds her identity as a woman being challenged when her attempts to become pregnant fail. Because both of these views of selfhood (trying to be a biological mother and a non-biological mother to her partner's children at the same time/ her identity as a butch lesbian) are inadequate to constructing maternal subjectivity, the task itself becomes virtually impossible. After trying artificial insemination at fertility clinics, she decides to go try her luck at picking men at bars for a one-night stand. She says she did not want up to end her life like her *abuelita*(grandmother), who spend the last days of her life lamenting her losses in life. She says:

> What life do I choose to lead from here on out? One with missed opportunities? Chances slipping by? Do I want a life like my *abuelita's*,

> reciting her regrets over and over again like prayers before she died? How many years do I fail at the fertility clinic, the insemination process leaving me cold and broke on the examining table? I don't want to give up like that. That's not how my story ends. (105)

Jimenez meets a lawyer from Vancouver one night at a bar Roxy Marquis, where she had gone purposefully to find a man on the day of her ovulation. She gradually zeroes down on from among the potential 'sperm donors' and starts a small conversation with him. All the while, she keeps repeating in her mind that she should not make any false move that may scare him by accidentally revealing the real reason why she may be interested in him. She says, "…If there's anything I've learned in this whole process it's that there's nothing like talk of pregnancy to scare a man away. But I don't want anything else from him—no money, no gifts, no responsibilities—just the precious life inside him. Is that too much? It's the whole world"(106). But luck does not favour Jimenez that night. Later, when vacationing in France with Hilary, they meet a Turkish boxer named Bala. After a one-night stand with him, she gets pregnant. Before her encounter with Bala, as in the earlier instances before her insemination, Jimenez frames a conversation with her imaginary baby, addressing it as 'he/she' but most of the times 'she,' thus unconsciously framing the gender of her fantasy baby. One wonders whether she was trying to recreate the bond she had with her mother by desiring a daughter.

In the email interview, Jimenez was asked if her experiences as a butch lesbian would have been different had it been a boy child, she replies:

> I have thought of this from time to time. My oldest kid is a boy and there was a part of me that found it much easier to know what parenting to do with

> him. I'm very boyish, and I grew up with brothers, so there is an ease and comfort in boyhood for me. On the other hand, I had a much closer relationship with my mom than my dad, so I secretly wanted a girl. I feel that my mom, while sometimes favouring my brothers, ultimately had a deeper emotional relationship with me. I loved the deep connection with her and I wanted a daughter in the hopes that I could share that bond again. Which I feel has happened. Perhaps I could have had just as strong a relationship with a son, but it's just not what I saw growing up.

Lisa Baraister's book *Maternal Encounters: An Ethic of Interruption* talks about the concept of maternal subjectivity where the mother is defined in relation to the child. She cites Julia Kristeva asking the question 'what does a mother want?' (qtd. in Baraister 43) and says that she wants her own mother, even in the figure of the child. All desire, in other words, is understood as desire for the lost mother, including the maternal desire for a child. In this regard, one could say that the maternal love is often equated with maternal desire. Maternal love therefore gets self- retrospective, as either love for the self or love for one's own mother, thereby, bringing down the crucial distance between mother and child. This also negates the child's alterity, and with it, highlights the maternal love for a child. Jimenez becomes pregnant after her night with Bala, the night which she refers to as when she, Hilary and Bala 'made' a baby. Hilary thus becomes the 'other' mother in Jimenez's attempts at 'baby -making,' just as Jimenez was the 'extra mom' to Hilary's children from an earlier marriage, Joshua and Maya. In the journal entry titled 'Heartbeat' dated August 2, 2008 (place at Salt Lake City, Utah), Jimenez mentions her pregnancy test, which she tests after fourteen days of her insemination, and the first sign of the positive line on the pregnancy testing kit. The faint line that

had never been there before in her previous attempts at pregnancy. She surmises her emotions thus:

> I look back down at the test and notice a faint line perpendicular to the first, turning the negative line into a positive sign. Whoa, what's that? I haven't seen that before. But it's so faint. I hold it three inches from my eyes and it's still faint. The negative line is much darker, much more definite. Does the positive line have to be as dark to count, like the OPKs (ovulation predictor kits)? Or does its mere existence mean what I think it means? (130)

The sense of euphoria which engulfs the author and her partner for a few days slowly disappears when, during a scan, the foetus was found to be premature. In the entry titled 'Old Blood,' dated September 10, 2008, Jimenez gives a description about her miscarriage and the pain she experiences therein. The author ardently wishes her mother's presence with her at that point of time, then more than any other time. She starts the entry with the line "I am walking with a dead baby inside me" (138). She continues further that had she not gone to the fertility clinic for the past few years, she would not even know if she was pregnant or the baby inside her was dead. The angst in her voice comes out in the following words, "…How does the body know to let go? How does the body understand that the configuration of new cells isn't working?" (138). Jimenez recalls how her mother had miscarried her first baby, a girl child that she was going to name Suzy. All that Jimenez's father recalls of the miscarriage was a late night, a bloodied bathroom and "an unformed creature" (138). The father does not recall any of the pain the mother may have felt or her anguish. Jimenez wishes her mother were alive to tell her how she coped with the pain and loss. She says:

> Because she miscarried, I figured that I might miscarry. I don't know if there is any correlation between mothers, daughters, and miscarriages, but it seems like there would be. She created me. We are the most similar of animals. The fleeting stories of my mother's body are the closest I get to understanding my own. (139)

Jimenez assumes that she had miscarried because her mother had miscarried. But she says she took relief in two things. First, she knew that she could get pregnant and so there was no reason that why it should not happen again. Second, since she had already spent enough on frozen sperm and she was too broke to try again, she would now have to start looking for fresh sperm. When the pain of miscarriage started, she says that rather than crying her eyes out at, she was filled with awe and wonder at the sight of the rhythm and pain of her body at work and the sight of the pieces of life she had made in six weeks.

Shopping for Sperm at 'Listserve'

The next entry is dated October 3, 2008, where Hilary casually mentions 'listserve,' the website for queer parents, where gay couples and lesbian couples co-parent a baby and share custody of the baby. Jimenez admits that she had read about the site earlier, but at that time, the site was quite new and had only a couple of posts. Also, at that point of time, she was in the market "only for Latino sperm and nobody qualified." (140). But as time went by, she says how she had changed her preferences and was just bothered about one thing. "Is the man alive and breathing? Do his sperm swim? Okay, not quite, but almost" (140). Hilary and Jimenez look up at prospective gay couples in the website and listen to the audio posts. They listen to

one particular post titled ‘latinoqueer72’ and are immediately impressed. The content of the post goes as following:

> Latinoqueer 72: I am a thirty-six-year-old Mexican-Canadian immigrant. I came to Canada because it’s a great country that lets you be gay and love your boyfriend in the open. I have a boyfriend of three years, and we adopted a puppy six months ago. I run an import-export business. I am an uncle to three nephews and two nieces. I love them, but I want to have my own kids too. I am not very religious, but I believe in God, and I was raised Catholic. I speak Spanish, English, and a little bit of German. I like listening to music in my car, and going out dancing on the weekend. I like reading and watching movies. If I had a kid, I would help them in school because it’s important, but I would also find things that the kid liked to do. I want my kid to enjoy their life. (142)

Hilary and Jimenez were impressed by the statements made and they compose a reply to the sender. As they wait for the reply the next day, Hilary suggests a walk and they both go downtown to Kensington market. And in a context when Jimenez buys a magazine by a mixed-race post and sees a cut out of Obama and a list of ‘Yes, We Can ‘to-do-list for Canada. She asserts that the phrase ‘Yes We Can’ was actually coined “by the Chicanos, the United Farm Workers Union (*Si se puede*) (italics in text) in the early 1970s, not by Obama” (143) and admits that though Obama was an intelligent sensible man, she owed her first allegiance to strong smart women like Hillary Clinton.

Their meeting with Latinoqueer 72 is postponed, as upon contacting them, the gay couple inform them they had changed their minds about the advertisement

and that they were not ready yet for the insemination process but would nevertheless be willing to meet Jimenez and Hilary. Javier, as the Latinoqueer72, introduces himself at the meeting, was the typical Latino Jimenez had always dreamed about. The ideal sperm donor/father that she had dreamed of and hoped to get from the sperm bank since Mateo. But Javier was apprehensive as his partner Sean was not very keen about the 'sperm donation' and asks if Jimenez was willing to wait for a year as they were going to start therapy soon. Jimenez blurts outright that she could not afford to wait another year and says she "would not wait any longer for men who can't make decisions" (159). She further expresses her frustration when Javier too, like Mateo and Tomas, evades the responsibility of giving sperm as if they were afraid of taking up a responsibility. She says:

> What's with these gay guys anyway? Why are they so worried about giving some of their sperm? Why are they afraid to make babies with lesbians? Why do they need so much control? I can share. Sharing is easier. Who wants a kid 24-7? Do they know anything about kids? (159-160)

Though Javier's callous attitude proves a bit of a setback to Jimenez, Hilary introduces another long-time friend of hers, Tammy, who approaches them that she and her boyfriend Gammy were willing to help them. Hilary had informed in her own circle of friends about Jimenez's predicament and that they were on the lookout for 'good sperm.' Tammy's communication to Jimenez and Hilary takes place in the form of emails and the memoir entries are from that point onwards as email entries, dated accordingly. The first entry goes thus:

From: Tammy

To: Hilary

Sent: Tue 07/10/2008 5:31 PM

Subject: Garry

Hi Hilary,

I have an idea for you and Karleen. I asked Garry tonight if he would donate sperm to you, and he said sure. I know he's pretty pasty, which isn't exactly what you want, but at least he's tall and has good genes (the people in his family live a long time). Are you interested? Tammy (147)

Hilary and Jimenez meet up with Tammy and Gammy and they are mutually satisfied with each other. They also discuss prospects about the baby's future and Gammy assures he would look after the baby if anything were to happen to Jimenez and Hilary. Incidentally, Jimenez also gets a chance mail from Tim, a white friend of hers who spoke Spanish, and he says he knows a gay friend, an Equadorian, who loves children, but cannot support one financially and so is willing to co-parent one. Jimenez was dazed by the sudden fortunate turn of events. She says that had she contacted Tim earlier, rather than visit all the bars and clinics, she might have been fortunate earlier. But maybe she was "hindered by insecurities and …a desire for privacy" (161). She was not sure how people would react when a butch appeared desperate to have a baby. She expresses her concerns thus:

> It's how I feel on a given day, how confident I am, or how desperate. It depends on whether or not I can bear another person's gaze once I confess that I have this womanly desire, an animal urgency, to make a

> baby. Would they see me as less of a butch? Would they see me as less of a scholar? Or as less of an activist? Would I be too selfish in putting my own want in front of the needs of the community, or the struggle for social change? Can I accept that if I do not get pregnant, they will know this vulnerability in me? (161)

Jimenez decides to accept Gammy's sperm, even though he was not exactly the type of the 'sperm father' she had envisioned for her baby. But Gammy was a gift given to her by the universe. She says "The universe has been known to knock you on your ass when you try to control it, but it can also offer you gifts if you're willing to pay attention. Garry is a gift. He has looked me in the eye and promised me his sperm and promised the child his protection" (162). Jimenez gets pregnant with Gammy's sperm and the statement of live birth was recorded as the last entry in the memoir thus:

> Statement of Live Birth
>
> Sex of Child: Female Birth
>
> Date: July 29, 2009
>
> Weight of Child at Birth: 9 pounds, 7 ounces
>
> Place of Birth: Toronto
>
> Exact Location Where Birth Occurred: Mount Sinai Hospital (164)

Jimenez's motherhood experiences assert how her mother had defined and influenced her mothering decisions, something that subverted even her gender identity. Her memoir progresses from non-biological mothering experiences to biological mothering experiences. This reiterates what Andrea O'Reilley and Nancy

Chodorow talks about the reproduction of mothering and the maternal relational self in their books *Matricentric Feminism: Theory, Activism, and Practice* (2016) and *The Reproduction of Mothering*, where they argue that maternal subjectivity is a "relational self," (qtd. in O'Reilley 32) and is acquired rather than learned through the psychological process of gender formation. Mother's produce in their daughters the relational sense of self that causes women to become mothers. As Jimenez states in her memoir, daughters are created by mothers, just as her mother made her a 'mother'. Daughters are psychologically prepared for mothering through their own mother's mothering—hence, the reproduction of mothering is "rooted in women's mothering, specifically in the fact that a mother is of the same gender as her daughter and of a different gender from her son" (qtd. in O'Reilley 32).

Narrative Technique

Through fifteen first-person vignettes, Jimenez intricately weaves together the narrative of conceiving a child in a situation where her partner does not provide sperm. The storytelling in the memoir is not linear; it fluidly moves back and forth through time and space, employing a mix of storytelling, letter writing, and conversation. The memoir challenges traditional narratives of motherhood, pushing against predefined notions of who mothers are and what they do. Jimenez also provides insightful commentary on gender relations and sexuality. The death of her mother further solidifies her commitment to becoming a mother herself, emphasizing the profound bond between a mother and child.

The memoir explores the nuanced relationship between a mother and child, portraying it as a powerful and symbiotic connection. It challenges preconceived notions about who qualifies as a mother and when one is ready for motherhood. She

sees motherhood not just as the act of producing a child but as an experience that imbues one's life and body with context and meaning. Throughout her journey to motherhood, Jimenez uses the memoir format to reflect on her social position and identity. The memoir subtly disrupts commonly held assumptions about the stereotypical person who becomes a mother, the assumed desires for a baby, and the conventional paths to conceiving and raising a child.

Jimenez's memoir, as was the case with any narrative, is ordered according to the sequence of events in her life. One fundamental aspect of any narrative is the ordering principle behind the sequence of events. Chronology is the dominant ordering principle in memoir, probably because it seems intuitively apt, even inevitable as events in life unfold themselves in a chronological pattern. But most of the time, we may not remember them the way it occurred. As a work of memory, then, Jimenez's memoir does not proceed in chronological order. It can be organized in different ways according to principles other than strict temporality. One common technique is in fact to begin not at the beginning but rather at some intermediate or penultimate point, then circle back to some point of origin and tell the story chronologically up to and beyond the opening vignette.

The memoir embraces a form that is both narrative and circular, drawing on a conceptual structure even as it embraces the importance of storytelling and the notion of scriptotherapy. Jimenez's approach yields a sense of multifaceted selfhood, premised on but exceeding maternal experiences. Also, like other lesbian motherhood memoirists, Jimenez uses this structure to mimic the circular sense of time that is so integral to the experience of new motherhood: the daze of repetition, the oddly fluid notion of time that both passes and stands still. And she draws on a

structure of brief elliptical pieces to render the fragmented sense of her biological mothering experience. Jimenez's maternal narrative gives not only an alternative and particular renderings of mothering experiences, but also alternative ways of resisting the binaries that threaten the capacity to understand the full and complex humanity of mothers.

Conclusion

Jimenez's memoir explores the concept of maternal substitute by exploring explicit reassessments of love and self, explorations of time and power, textured observations about female embodiment, nuanced attention to the transmission of cultural values from being a non -biological mother to a biological mother, and her transition from a butch to a 'heterosexual', desiring to be a mother. Her memoir also addresses how, as a Chicana butch lesbian, she found it difficult to get the 'desired Chicana sperm'.

Jimenez also mentions how she has lived her life in resistance to conventions: as a lesbian who tries to get pregnant by one-time encounters with male sexual partners, then by artificial insemination and the again by 'sperm' donated by the partner of a friend. In other words, in her relation both to language and to cultural convention, she periodically invokes a critical self-consciousness that implicitly critiques the notion of transparent narrative along with the notion of "good mother" and gender polarity. In an initial reading, Jimenez seems to endorse a problematic individualism as the memoir explicitly embraces the notion of a self that pre-exists motherhood, the mind and pre-non-biological motherhood self that is suppressed by the urgencies of body and baby. The very act of making this split overt is crucial to the memoir's investigation of the ways in which mothering can

lead to an expanded and redefined sense of self. Her use of a conceptual structure—with each entry labelled according to an idea inherent in her mothering experience, rather than a temporal progression—reinforces the possibility of multiple dimensions to a self. And she clearly draws together the shifts in selfhood and the complexities of time during new motherhood.

To conclude, the statement by Jimenez in the email interview to the question about how can alternative expressions of motherhood emphasize and showcase the maternal body in innovative ways provide valuable insights into the ongoing development of sophisticated postfeminist ideologies surrounding motherhood, she says thus:

> It would be great to have representations of butch/masculine women with children. Honestly masculine women in the media or in books are pretty difficult to find on their own (Ellen DeGeneres, Lea DeLaria, Rachel Maddow). But, while we barely exist in popular media, we definitely don't exist with children. Actually, Melissa Etheridge and Brandi Carlile are exceptions to this, and I do think of them as more on the masculine side, even as they often dress femininely. And it means a lot to me to see them in images with their children or speak about their children in interviews. It's pretty amazing, even if they were not the birth parents. There is such a long tradition of keeping queers/trans peoples away from children, that it is amazing any time you actually see them together. I'm even moved by Anderson Cooper talking about his children. Feels impossible. Wish we could see more of it, and every race/ethnicity, not just white.

The relevance of biological lesbian mothering discourses reveals its growing importance to contemporary norms of kinship, even in perspectives where the symbolic significance of biological mothering to concepts of lesbian identity is also undermined. Biological bond of motherhood therefore becomes a sign of a power disparity between partners in parenting couple pacts. When one partner is the biological mother, the potential undermining of the parental status of co-mother as a result of her non-legal status often proves inadequate to nullify their relationships in the everyday practices of lesbian parents and their children. Power dominates lesbian parenting narratives, but it does not result in tension and conflict with regard to sharing motherhood, as is seen in Jimenez's memoir. There is an area of research that disproves the homophobic assumption that children thrive only in heterosexual families.

Although studies about gendered practices among lesbian mothers suggests a move away from the accent on normative performance, nonetheless both areas explore similar theoretical concerns about consistency and deviation. As suggested by the nature of discourses that explore assimilation and resistance in lesbian motherhood memoirs, Jimenez's narrative reveal that the ways in which these families are theorized is suggestive of the socio- political milieu in which lesbian parenting takes place. The memoir attempts to unravel these dichotomies and reconceptualize notions of resistance in view of the contexts within which lesbian parenting is enacted.

Chapter 6

Summation

Prior to the 1970s, lesbian motherhood remained largely invisible within both mainstream society and the lesbian community. Women faced pressure to conform to narrow ideals of motherhood, while expressions of non-heterosexual desire were discouraged. Many lesbian mothers felt compelled to compartmentalize their identities, keeping strict boundaries between their roles as mothers and their sexualities. Lesbian challenged the traditional concept of 'family' as a tool of oppression rooted in heterosexism, leading to limited discussions about lesbian motherhood within their own communities. During the 1970s, the most visible lesbian mothers were those who had children within prior heterosexual relationships. However, as lesbianism gradually gained visibility in mainstream culture, the younger generation of lesbian women sought alternative paths to motherhood outside the confines of heterosexual partnerships. Evolving attitudes towards motherhood opened up new opportunities for lesbians, resulting in a growing number of women choosing to mother within the lesbian community. Advancements in reproductive technologies and increased accessibility to artificial insemination further facilitated this trend.

Discourses promoting tolerance, intertwined with lingering hostility towards lesbianism, have become ingrained in institutional structures, portraying lesbian motherhood as 'normal' and emphasizing the importance of assimilating them into mainstream society. Lesbian mothers often align themselves with these discourses, shaping their identities in ways that reinforce conventional views of parenting capabilities. While some view lesbian-headed families as assimilationist due to their

emphasis on normalcy, others argue that these families can serve as potential sites of resistance against patriarchal family ideologies.

Academic discussions surrounding lesbian motherhood emphasize similarities between the parenting practices of lesbian women and those of heterosexual mothers. These discourses both reinforce dominant motherhood ideologies and challenge them, highlighting the complexity of lesbian motherhood subjectivities and legal perceptions of lesbian parenting, as evidenced by an examination of the literary narratives surrounding lesbian motherhood.

This thesis has attempted an analysis of the growing phenomenon of a new generation of lesbians embarking into motherhood, in the context of an openly lesbian lifestyle. The chapters have attempted to contextualise lesbian mothers' experiences and reveal the inferences of non-normative family forms for theoretical and experiential work in relation to gender, sexuality and kinship formation. While much previous research has focused on the effects of lesbian parental sexuality on children, this thesis has attempted to integrate lesbian motherhood narratives into contemporary theoretical analysis and debate. The relational choices and perspectives of lesbian mothers in the four memoirs taken for study have been explored and their experiences have been addressed in relation to their socio-political context and place. In addition, the deliberate nature of the discussions concerning the relative assimilation and difference of lesbian motherhood to their heterosexual counterparts, or to a heteronormative standard, has been challenged through a deconstruction of the heterocentric polarity of conventional motherhood.

Lesbian mother writings from the North American and Canadian context have been taken up for study in this thesis to explore patterns of similarity and

difference, thus establishing the significance of culture and legal systems that influence a lesbian woman's decision on whether to have a child or not, and also regarding her subsequent experiences of pregnancy and parenting. The research question explored includes kinship formation among lesbian mothers, enabling a constant and critical interrogation of the symbolic function of biology, gender and survival techniques among lesbian parents. The study has defined how traditional conceptualisations of gender and sexuality were also continually undermined and reinvented within these families.

The thesis has been divided into six chapters, with four core chapters. Of the four memoirs taken for study in the four core chapters, two are biological and two are non-biological lesbian motherhood memoirs. In Chapter 2, Cherrie Moraga's biological motherhood memoir *Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of A Queer Motherhood* (1997) has been analyzed from the standpoint of queer autoethnography. The work highlights the 'unconventional' Chicana family structures that eschew traditional blood ties and she also refers to the implications of the unequal legal standing of lesbian couples where only one partner is recognized as a parent. The author explores the power dynamics inherent in situations where one partner holds legal recognition as a parent, while the other does not. Moraga traverses through the three dominant areas- her Chicana identity, her butch lesbian identity and her biological maternal identity. In most parts of the work, Moraga foregrounds the cultural identity along with her queer identity, leading to the study of her memoir as queer autoethnography, borrowing on the concept of queer autoethnography, advocated by Stacy Holman Jones and Tony E. Adams's, *Queer Methods and Methodologies: Intersecting Queer Theories and Social Science Research* (2010).

Moraga, who identifies with the ‘butch’ identity, takes pride in the decision to have a baby herself, thus subverting the stereotype that motherhood and mothering practices were more ‘femme’ oriented and not ‘butch’ oriented. Despite initially believing that her ‘butch’ lesbian identity precluded the possibility of motherhood; Moraga's perception shifts dramatically at the age of forty when she realizes her capacity to bear children as a woman. She reflects on the societal stereotypes that marginalized butch lesbians, viewing them not truly as women but rather as a distinct category, separate from both men and conventional femininity. Consequently, the notion of motherhood seemed reserved for those who aligned more closely with traditional notions of womanhood, leaving butch lesbians like Moraga feeling excluded from that narrative. Moraga, through the decision to bear the child, realigns this conventional stance.

Despite the occasional discomfort caused by societal scrutiny, Moraga finds solace in the unique style and resilience cultivated through years of partnership with Ella. This style is not merely an aesthetic expression but a testament to their defiance against societal expectations and norms regarding female relationship and family dynamics, even as they enter their forties. Moraga cherishes the freedom that comes with embracing their unpredictable desires and resisting the pressures of conformity.

Moraga asserts that her experiences of lesbian motherhood, rooted in Chicana culture, reveal acts of defiance and opposition against patriarchal norms within the family structure. A perspective centred on resistance, her efforts to integrate into conventional family frameworks may inadvertently perpetuate entrenched systems of power and control, similar to other family models. Moraga's memoir employs narrative techniques that emphasize the fluidity and complexity of

lesbian motherhood experiences, challenging the notion of reducing them to predetermined frameworks or controlled sequences of events. Instead, lesbian motherhood is portrayed as a dynamic and evolving process, constantly in flux and subject to transformation, characterized by a continual unfolding and reshaping of experiences. Moraga's narrative also sheds light on how dominant parental norms often reinforce gendered divisions, an aspect she confronts while raising her son, Rafael. Through her partnership with Ella, Moraga transcends traditional gender roles typically associated with childcare, breaking away from stereotypical tasks deemed as exclusively feminine. Despite her identity as a 'butch', Moraga asserts her autonomy and individuality even during pregnancy, refusing to conform to societal expectations or gender norms.

Moraga's narrative style is substantiated by the dictums of scriptotherapy, where the author writes to heal the wounds within, when her baby Rafael was hospitalised due to premature birth and a condition called bradycardia. The impulse to engage in self-expression through writing arises from a myriad of motivations. The same pattern of narrative, though with individual differences of experiences, prompt Nancy Abrams and Karleen Pendleton Jimenez too to resort to scriptotherapy to ease their pain and angst, either to create a record of their own experiences or to write as a means of coping and survival. Experiencing a traumatic event and grappling with its aftermath can profoundly shape an individual's life, prompting them to seek solace and healing through the act of writing. This serves as a discursive space where individuals re-enact their psychological wounds through writing with the aim of facilitating healing and resolution. This therapeutic approach acknowledges the transformative power of narrative expression in processing trauma and reclaiming agency over one's narrative.

Beyond legal considerations, the lived experiences of parenting reveal additional disparities between biological and non-biological parents within lesbian couples. One notable difference lies in the ability of parents and children to employ alternative kinship terms to distinguish between biological and non-biological parents. This divergence underscores the nuanced ways in which the dynamics of parenthood manifest within lesbian families, extending beyond legal rights to encompass broader societal perceptions and familial relationships. In queer families, the non-biological mother often faces marginalization due to the absence of biological ties. Frequently referred to as the ‘co-mother’ or the ‘other mother,’ these terms serve as variations of the concept of motherhood. Lesbian co-mothers frequently encounter challenges wherein their relationship with their partner's child is questioned, leading to designations that deviate from the conventional role of a mother. Similarly, the legitimacy of non-biological mothers as ‘true’ mothers is often called into question by those who adhere to a belief in biological essentialism. Rooted in the romanticization of the bond between biological mother and child, this essentialist viewpoint shapes individuals' subjective experiences of biological motherhood, reinforcing the notion through personal encounters.

Contradictions and cultural diversity in lesbian motherhood narratives imply that pregnancy, birth and mothering are perceptions that may be enabled with varied meanings and mutually constituted in the complex terrain of culture and race. However, while lesbian mothers may often resist and restructure heteronormative concepts of motherhood, alternative debates regarding co-mothering are often seen across mothering cultures, including Chicana lesbian *familia*. The resultant changes in familial patterns among heterosexual parents are reflective of the challenges to the significance of biological mothering in families across society, paving way for the

concept of universal motherhood. Rather than explore whether lesbian mothers reinvoke heteronormative discourses of motherhood in the creation of their families and family practices, Moraga's memoir tries to explore the intersection of culture, politics and subjectivity that influence their choices, decisions and possibilities.

Chapter 3 in this thesis, Nancy Abrams' non-biological motherhood memoir, *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter* (1999), delves into a diverse array of experiences within non-biological lesbian motherhood, from the concrete challenges faced by women who lose or relinquish custody of their non-biological children to the emotional turmoil endured by those who suffer the loss of a child through separation or death and adopts the concept of monomaternal (one mother per child). The term, conceptualised by theorist Shelley M Park, deviates from the normative patterns of heterosexual mothering that also advocate one mother per child concept. The circumstances that bring monomaternal patterns into a lesbian headed family show how mothering as an institution, adopt similar patterns when the other partner is absent from the picture. Norma, the biological mother in Abrams' narrative, adopts an erratic approach to motherhood, vacillating between impulsive desires for motherhood and abrupt decisions to relinquish parental responsibilities. Abrams assumes the role of the adoptive mother to their daughter, Amelia, in response to Norma's wavering commitment.

Central to analysis of the memoir is the exploration of maternal encounters with difference, wherein Abrams critically examines concepts of home and family, while elucidating love as a practice of solidarity that fosters cohesion within households and familial units. The narrative ends by scrutinizing the notion of 'chosen family' and the process of redefining boundaries between self and other,

which often results in the marginalization of mothers and the subsequent alienation experienced by their children. This process of abjection and separation is depicted as a painful ordeal for both the mother, who is relegated to the status of the 'Other,' and the child, who is subjected to feelings of abandonment and disconnection. Moreover, the analysis of the chapter brings out the dichotomy between the idealized image of the 'good mother' and the stigmatization of the 'bad' or 'mad' mother within the discourse of motherhood studies. Through nuanced exploration, Abrams sheds light on the complexities inherent in maternal identity and challenges prevailing societal norms and expectations surrounding motherhood. Abrams grapples with the complexities surrounding the nurturing of her adoptive child, highlighting a key challenge in defining adoptive maternal bodies solely based on their engagement in nurturing roles. She frequently ponders whether adoptive maternal bodies possess inherent differences from their biological counterparts. Upon closer examination, the distinction between adoptive and biological mothers emerges as a transient one, subject to contextual nuances.

In contemporary narratives of adoptive motherhood, such as Abrams' memoir, distinct narrative patterns and experiential threads delineate these experiences from those of biological mothers. While biological reproduction affords a sense of personal identity through the transformative journey of pregnancy, emotional bonding, and childbirth, adoptive mothers like Abrams navigate a different terrain. Although Norma, the biological mother, undergoes these transformative experiences, Abrams indirectly shares in these emotional connections. The crux of biological motherhood lies in the intimate bond forged between mother and child during pregnancy—a connection absent in adoptive mothering experiences. Unlike biological mothers, adoptive maternal bodies, similar

to lesbian co-mothers, lack the inherent bodily ties that traditionally define motherhood. Consequently, adoptive mothers find themselves marginalized as they deviate from the conventional notion of motherhood grounded in biological bonds.

By renegotiating the terms ‘real mother’ and ‘biological mother,’ polymaternal families are effectively rendered invisible, overshadowed by representations of monomaternal or normative family structures where only one mother is acknowledged as genuine, making the ‘other’ mother ‘vulnerable subjects.’ The chapter explores the differential treatment between heterosexual and homosexual mothers regarding the decision-making process surrounding childbirth and nurturing. The study shows how Abrams underscores the fact that societal norms and discourses heavily favour biological motherhood in heterosexual contexts. In contrast, homosexual mothers have the agency to choose between biological and non-biological forms of motherhood, even if their bodies are fully capable of biological reproduction. This freedom allows them to deviate slightly from patriarchal institutional structures that typically privilege biological motherhood. Abrams asserts that heterosexual biological mothers often perceive themselves as inherently ‘real,’ while adoptive mothers are perceived as merely playing a role, reinforcing the societal notion that true motherhood is intrinsically linked to biological ties. She recounts instances where societal acceptance of her relationship with her partner, Norma, shifted upon her pregnancy and the birth of their child, leading to inclusion in the ‘normal heterosexual world’ and acknowledgment from society. She explores as to how heterosexual behaviour functions to construct societal norms, positioning them as the standard against which other forms of motherhood are measured. Furthermore, she distinguishes between adoptive and biological maternal bodies, emphasizing how cultural expectations and

norms influence the perception and treatment of mothers based on the method of child acquisition.

Abrams, who identifies as butch lesbian, delves into the complexities surrounding adoptive maternal bodies, particularly in relation to their roles in nurturing babies and contends that the challenge in defining adoptive maternal bodies lies in their apparent lack of essential distinction from biological maternal bodies. Frequently pondering whether adoptive and biological maternal bodies are fundamentally different, Abrams concludes that, in terms of essential traits, they are essentially the same. The perceived division between adoptive and biological mothers is thus a provisional one, subject to interpretation. However, despite this lack of inherent difference, Abrams argues that contemporary narratives of adoptive motherhood, including her own memoir, exhibit distinct patterns and themes that set them apart from those of biological mothers. Biological reproduction offers a profound sense of personal identity, stemming from the physical and emotional transformations experienced during pregnancy and childbirth, experiences unique to biological parents. Yet, when Norma undergoes these transformations, Abrams indirectly shares in the experience, blurring the boundaries between biological and non-biological motherhood.

This thesis focuses on how the crux of biological motherhood lies in the intimate bond formed between mother and child during pregnancy, an experience largely invisible in adoptive maternal bodies. Unlike biological mothers, Abrams shows that adoptive mothers lack the bodily connections that traditionally define motherhood, rendering them as different in societal perceptions. Consequently, she argues that the phenomenological and narrative experiences of adoptive motherhood

differ significantly from those of the biological mother. Abrams reflects on the advantages of her lesbian identity when considering parenthood. Initially, when Norma proposes the idea of Abrams becoming a parent as well (the Other Mother), Abrams finds the notion somewhat absurd, as she perceives numerous benefits to being a lesbian. Chief among these advantages is the freedom from societal pressure to enter into heterosexual relationships and conform to traditional expectations of motherhood.

Abram's memoir reveals that the use of the term 'lesbian mothers' acknowledges those co-parents and non-biological mothers too who claim 'motherhood' as a personal identity and attempt to incorporate all participants, irrespective of their biological relationship to the child. In situating lesbian mothers within the contexts of cultural and policy frameworks, the complex nature of identity construction of heteronormativity as monolithic concepts becomes apparent. Lesbian mothers, especially the non-biological ones, are often assumed as the 'Other,' and so are placed outside social norms and conventions and are also formulated on certain cultural norms and ideologies.

Chapter 4 focuses on Amie Klempnauer Miller's non-biological motherhood memoir *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological Lesbian) Motherhood* (2010) and says how patriarchal framework governing perceptions of motherhood operates within a gender binary system, delineating individuals into distinct roles as either mothers or fathers. Consequently, individuals who do not adhere to gendered categorizations, such as non-gendered parents, find themselves excluded from the parental classification. This exclusion reinforces the association between normative motherhood and concepts of sexual reproduction and heterosexuality. Moreover,

societal constructs of motherhood are intricately linked to the biological attributes traditionally ascribed to women, including the notion of a maternal instinct and the development of a unique bond between mothers and their children.

This study analyses Miller's memoir as advocating the concept of polymaternal, the two or more-mother concept for a child explained with the theoretical backing of Shelly M Park. This ideology derives its foundation from the intersection of queer motherhood, which allows for diverse maternal figures, as opposed to monomaternalism that insists on the exclusivity of one maternal figure. Miller's narrative traces her journey through numerous unsuccessful inseminations attempts and her subsequent experiences of non-biological motherhood upon her partner Jane's pregnancy. Through her account, Miller vividly illustrates the physiological changes she undergoes, despite being part of a non-normative lesbian family structure. Her narrative highlights the complexity of her experiences, shedding light on the emotional and physical transformations inherent in pregnancy, even within unconventional family dynamics. As Miller anticipates assuming the role of the non-biological mother to their forthcoming child, she reflects on the expectations and dynamics involved and asks if the non-biological lesbian mother inherently adopt a pseudo-fatherly role, thus inadvertently reinforcing the stereotypes perpetuated by conservative complementarians, who advocate for traditional gender roles under the guise of balance in the universe for a child to experience proper nurturing.

The categorization between non-biological and biological motherhood is dependent upon historical contexts. Within narratives of non-biological motherhood, there exist distinctive patterns and themes that set these experiences apart from those

of biological mothers. These narratives often revolve around considerations of material and physiological differences, prompting theorists to engage in discussions regarding the role and significance of non-maternal bodies. Miller delves into the authority inherent in the non-maternal body, paralleling it with the authority typically associated with the biological mother within lesbian relationships. The prevailing norms dictating what constitutes good parenting impact prospective adoptive parents, shaping the construct of the adoptive maternal body to align with societal ideals of motherhood.

A key argument Miller poses in her memoir is that the landscape of childcare has been reshaped by the emergence of non-biological polymaternal families of choice, challenging conventional family and domestic paradigms. Within these non-normative familial structures, the act of mothering is purposefully chosen or enacted to signify queer subjectivities. Whether within lesbian or polygamous family setups, practices of shared mothering facilitate the establishment of intergenerational kinship networks, presenting alternative models of motherhood characterized by female defiance against gendered expectations of selfless maternal roles. In essence, polymaternal families provide a platform for the cultivation of queer subjectivities within the realm of motherhood. Miller's memoir explores the intricacies of motherhood that incorporate polymaternalism within the context of homonormative family constructs and emotional bonds. In contrast to Abrams' narrative, which portrays conventional experiences of monomaternalism, Miller's account delves into the non-conventional facets of polymaternalism. Her narrative offers a queer perspective on motherhood, scrutinizing the interactions among multiple maternal figures and the affective connections they share.

Miller's memoir prompts a crucial inquiry into the apprehensions surrounding lesbian motherhood. A significant factor contributing to this unease may stem from the perception that lesbian mothers exist beyond the control of men, thus challenging traditional notions of femininity. Miller astutely observes the mother-child relationship as both a product of patriarchal society and an attachment pattern that subverts established social hierarchies. Within this framework, patriarchy manipulates the concept of motherhood to suit its own agenda. The maternal journey chronicled in Miller's memoir asserts the statement that motherhood is a construct shaped by societal norms rather than an inherent biological condition. Additionally, Miller sheds light on the legal complexities surrounding same-sex parenting, highlighting how legal systems often recognize only one member of a same-sex couple—the biological parent—as the legal guardian of the child. This recognition is predominantly grounded in marital and biological ties, leaving the 'Other' mother marginalized within legal frameworks.

Chapter 5 analyses Karleen Pendleton Jimenez's biological motherhood memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant* (2011) as a collective and collaborative venture. It confronts pre-conceived ideas regarding the qualifications for motherhood and the readiness individuals may have for such a role. Jimenez, grappling with the loss of her own mother, expresses a longing to fill that void by embracing motherhood herself. For her, motherhood transcends mere childbirth, as it infuses one's existence with depth and significance. Throughout her journey towards becoming a mother, Jimenez uses this experience as a lens through which to examine her social status and personal identity. By offering an authentic account of her experiences, the memoir subtly challenges common assumptions about the

typical profile of a mother, the assumed desire for offspring, and the conventional routes to parenthood, thus becoming maternal substitutes.

In her memoir, Jimenez posits that lesbian motherhood sheds light on the potential for mothering to be a collaborative endeavour among women, emphasizing the bonds of intimacy between them while simultaneously challenging the dominant ideology of biological and non-biological notions of motherhood. Jimenez directs her attention to considerations of culture and ethnicity when selecting sperm for conception. Despite encountering reluctance from sperm banks regarding 'queer sperm', she acknowledges that, at the time, this did not greatly concern her. Instead, her primary focus was on maintaining her cultural identity. Jimenez underscores her insistence on finding a donor with Mexican heritage. She emphasizes her desire for the father to be Chicano, with Mexican ancestry, as she herself hails from a mixed background, encompassing both Mexican and white heritage. Jimenez articulates that her upbringing in a blended family equipped her with the knowledge and capability to raise a child with a dual identity, and thus, preserving the Mexican aspect was of paramount importance to her.

Lesbians who possessed advantages in terms of culture and socio-economic status encountered few obstacles and enjoyed more opportunities in reshaping gender and sexual norms and consequently, had greater autonomy in their decisions regarding motherhood. Jimenez uses the narrative base of maternal substitutes in her memoir, where she talks about the desire to be a mother that was fostered by the loss of her own mother. With her butch identity asserting itself strongly in her relationship, she was content with the role of the non-biological mother to her partner Hilary's kids Joshua and Maya. The shift from non-biological to biological,

as with Moraga too, creates a new identity pattern for Jimenez that does not subvert her butch identity, yet, at the same time, instills in her the need to be desirable and presentable to men so that she may get ‘sperm.’ And as in Moraga too, by facilitating a profound examination of lived experiences, Jimenez posits that societal definitions often contest the identity of the writer/mother. She raises inquiries about whether motherhood should solely be defined by one's capacity to bear children, thus prompting scrutiny of women who are ‘unable to have babies’ or choose not to. This perspective embraces fluidity, resisting fixed definitions and concepts while acknowledging identity as a relational achievement shaped by both individual agency and societal structures.

Jimenez, as with the other authors whose memoirs have been taken for analysis here, views the act of memoir writing not merely as a retrospective endeavour reserved for literate, introspective individuals, but rather as a transformative process through which they shape and refine their identity. Through this literary exploration, the authors undergo a metamorphosis, transitioning from one state of maternal experience to the other, thereby evolving and defining their sense of self. The memoir serves as a medium for deep introspection, as they endeavour to reconstruct their lived experiences, delving into the incipient streams of thoughts, emotions, and recollections that form the fabric of their existence.

Custody disputes arising from relationship breakdowns, particularly between co-parents and biological mothers or other parties in the absence of legal arrangements such as second parent adoption or alternative forms of adoptive parenthood, pose significant challenges. This issue extends to situations where biological mothers may pass away prematurely, leading to conflicts between co-

parents and biological fathers or the family of origin of the deceased mother. Though both Miller and Abrams were the non-biological mothers in their relationship, Abrams had to go through a traumatic experience of separation from her daughter Amelia as she and her partner Norma break up. Miller, on the other hand, shared a cordial relationship with her partner Jane and their daughter Hannah. Moraga and Jimenez too mention the legal complexities of kinship that should arise if they were to be separated from their partners. Abrams and Moraga are especially vocal about the rigid laws of adoption that exist in America, where each state has its own set of rules and regulations. These scenarios underscore the complexities of establishing kinship within the legal framework. Without formal recognition, non-traditional forms of kinship are marginalized or rendered invalid, highlighting the limitations of legal reform. Consequently, individuals navigating co-parenting dynamics often grapple with the threat of legal invalidation, which recurrently surfaces in their narratives. Despite these obstacles, co-parents exhibit resilience in preserving their identities amidst legal uncertainties. The awareness of their legal vulnerability not only influences their identities but also shapes their experiences and actions within the co-parenting dynamics.

Lesbian mothers pose a challenge to patriarchal ideologies that prioritize biological ties and heterosexual unions as the foundation of family structures. Their families function much like any other family unit, yet they often face unequal access to parenting privileges. Many researchers in the field of lesbian motherhood advocate assimilationism, emphasizing similarities between lesbian and heterosexual mothers while minimizing the significance of sexuality on parenting capabilities among lesbian women.

The primary hypothesis explored in this thesis posits that lesbian mothers exhibit more similarities to heterosexual mothers than differences, with an emphasis on normalizing lesbian parenthood and advocating for equivalence with traditional family structures. This approach, centred on similarity, suggests that parenting should be regarded as a universal right unaffected by sexual orientation, as the ability to parent effectively transcends sexual identity. Additionally, highlighting parallels between lesbian-headed and heterosexual families implies that the latter serves as the benchmark against which all familial arrangements are measured.

Lesbians navigate their motherhood aspirations through a complex interplay of factors including personal beliefs about motherhood, integration into lesbian communities, intimate relationships, and work commitments. These decision-making processes diverge from those of heterosexual women due to the unique influence of sexuality on their lives. Moreover, within the lesbian community itself, disparities based on culture and class further shape individual experiences. Analysis of memoirs reveals that the decision to become a mother or remain childfree is predominantly influenced by social, cultural, political, and economic factors rather than biological determinants, underscoring the socially constructed nature of family formation.

Throughout this thesis, various discourses surrounding lesbian motherhood, such as the monomaternal, polymaternal, the autoethnographic and the coalescent motherhood as evidenced in each of the memoirs analysed, exposes hegemonic forces that perpetuate oppression and marginalization. The lesbian motherhood narratives inherently challenge established gender norms and offer opportunities for redefining kinship and motherhood concepts. By exploring lesbian parents'

experiences through the lenses of context, kinship, and normativity, this thesis analyses biological and essentialist assumptions about lesbian motherhood decisions, highlighting the role of social, cultural, and structural factors in shaping individual experiences. It also reveals the emotional complexities of maternal desire, suggesting a departure from heteronormative discourses to form as an alternative framework that includes diverse family structures.

Chapter 7

Limitations and Recommendations for Further Study

Lesbian motherhood memoirs represent a unique and valuable genre within academic research, offering insights into the complexities of family dynamics, identity formation, and societal perceptions. This thesis defines lesbian motherhood narratives by analysing key themes explored in these memoirs, such as family dynamics, identity negotiation, and societal challenges and the narratives offer intimate accounts of personal journeys, challenges, and triumphs, shedding light on the intersections of sexuality, gender, and parenthood. An examination of the contributions of lesbian motherhood memoirs to academic scholarship, exploration of how these memoirs challenge traditional narratives of motherhood and family and a discussion of the ways in which lesbian motherhood memoirs contribute to LGBTQIA+ studies, feminist theory, and family studies have been conceptualised here. The methodologies utilized in studying lesbian motherhood memoirs, evaluation of challenges in accessing and interpreting personal narratives and consideration of ethical implications in researching and representing the experiences of lesbian mothers in the memoirs is evaluated in this chapter.

Limitations

Lesbian motherhood memoirs have emerged as a significant genre within contemporary literature, offering valuable insights into the experiences of lesbian mothers navigating societal norms, legal challenges, and personal relationships. However, despite their importance, academic engagement with these memoirs remains limited. This section of the chapter discusses the challenges and limitations inherent in studying this genre and encourages more comprehensive studies on

lesbian motherhood memoirs and contribute to a deeper understanding of lesbian motherhood narratives. Despite the growing recognition of lesbian motherhood memoirs as important literary and socio-political texts, there remain significant limitations in the scope of research (as enumerated below), which hinders a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of lesbian mothers across different contexts.

1) Homogeneity of Authors and Narratives

The predominance of memoirs by white, middle-class lesbians has set a limit for cross cultural references of these memoirs in the geo-local context. Memoirs by lesbian mothers from the marginalised and ethnic minorities are totally under-represented in the mainstream scenario, either due to an actual dearth of writings or because of the stigma these mothers still face in a largely heterosexual society, dictated by patriarchy. The absence of such writings has limited the study in this regard and there is the need for more diverse representations. Future research should aim to amplify the voices of marginalized communities within queer motherhood discourse, including individuals of colour, low-income families, and transgender parents.

2) Anonymous Authors and Ethical Considerations

Most of the authors adopt pseudonyms to write about their experiences, as they fear social ostracization. An apt example is Nancy Abrams, who has written under a pseudonym to conceal both her and her daughter's identity, making it impossible to contact her for clarifications on her experiences. Also, because most of the memoirs are individual experiences, it can be difficult to draw broad conclusions from individual narratives and acknowledge the limitations of inferring findings to

broader populations. Ethical considerations also play a detrimental role in conducting research within the realm of lesbian motherhood memoirs. The research must navigate the complexities of informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality, particularly when working with sensitive or personal subject matter.

3) Overemphasis on Western Theoretical Perspectives

Much of the theoretical framework on lesbian motherhood memoirs has been centred on Western contexts, particularly North America and Europe. This geographical bias limits the scope of research and overlooks the experiences of lesbian mothers in other cultural and geographical contexts. Future studies should adopt a more global perspective, examining the intersections of lesbian motherhood with diverse cultural, religious, and socio-political landscapes.

4) Need for New Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Another area for future exploration is the development of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that can guide research within the genre of lesbian motherhood memoirs. While existing scholarship draws on feminist, queer, and critical theory perspectives, there remains a need for more nuanced frameworks that address the unique complexities of LGBTQIA+ family formations. By grounding research in new theoretical frameworks, scholars can deepen their understanding of the intersections between sexuality, gender, and parenthood.

5)Need for Revised Policy Implications for Lesbian Mothers

An examination of the role of memoirs in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy related to LGBTQ+ rights and family law has not been done due to lack of such policies by the govt. This can be bought about by a collaborative

research initiative and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations between scholars, activists, legal experts, and healthcare professionals. An exploration of the role of lesbian motherhood memoirs in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy related to LGBTQIA+ rights, healthcare, and family law can also be bought to the fore.

6) Limitations in Legal Humanities Perspective

Lack of legal recognition for lesbian mothers, disparities in parental rights, custody battles, and adoption challenges are some of the common challenges faced by lesbian, especially non-biological mothers. If the lesbian mother comes out in a hetero sexual marriage, there is a common tendency for the judicial system to give the verdict in favour of the heteronormative father than the lesbian mother. The same applies to cases of gay fathers, who lose custody of their child due to their deviant sexuality, in cases of heteronormative relationships. The challenges of gay fatherhood and the disparities in representation and recognition compared to lesbian motherhood memoirs have not been explored in the thesis.

7) Limitations in Medical Humanities Perspective

The lesbian mothers most often find inadequate recognition and support for lesbian mothers within healthcare systems. There are also limited representation of medical encounters in lesbian motherhood memoirs, with gaps in portraying healthcare experiences, including fertility treatments, prenatal care, and childbirth. There is also little mention of surrogacy options for lesbian women who wish to raise a child in the memoirs taken for study, where the medical risks and emotional complexities for lesbian couples pursuing surrogacy arrangements have not been

considered at all. There is a marked absence of narratives depicting lesbian couples' engagement with surrogacy as a means of family formation.

8) Lack of Recognition and Representation for Lesbian Mothers

Most often, one sees a marginalization of lesbian motherhood narratives, with limited visibility in mainstream literature and academic discourse. This further hinders the scope for advanced study and research in this regard. This perpetuation of invisibility and stereotypes hinders efforts to promote understanding and acceptance of diverse family structures.

9) Lack of Noted Works in Diverse Geographical and Cultural Contexts

There is a sparse representation of lesbian motherhood memoirs in non-Western contexts: lack of works exploring lesbian motherhood experiences from African and Asian sub-continents. There were also challenges of cross-cultural references with limited opportunities for comparative studies and understanding the intersection of culture, identity, and motherhood.

10) Lack of Representation in Popular Culture and Visual Forms of Narration

The theme of lesbian motherhood and memoir writings have not been given apt representation in the medium of popular culture like music, dance, television, films, documentaries etc. Queer relationships are gaining acceptance in the mainstream media and culture now, but the concept of non-normative forms of parenting and homonormative family structures, like lesbian and gay parenthood, seems to be under-represented.

Recommendations for Further Study

This section investigates the scope of academic research concerning lesbian motherhood memoirs. Lesbian motherhood memoirs constitute a significant subsection of LGBTQA+ literature, offering profound insights into the experiences of lesbian mothers navigating societal norms, legal challenges, and personal relationships. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature, this section delineates the themes, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches employed in the study of lesbian motherhood memoirs. The current research scenario provides ample space and avenues for enquiry into normative patterns of mothering like heterosexual motherhood, but has not ventured into the underexplored sub-genre of non-normative forms of mothering like lesbian motherhood memoir studies.

1) Legal Perspectives

In all the four lesbian motherhood narratives taken for analysis in this thesis, the legal complications regarding lesbian parental rights and adoption rights have been studied. The situations focused on specific instances where the biological mother and her non -biological partner separated. The legal frameworks that existed in the country of residence of the author, especially the U.S, presented a detailed examination of laws and policies impacting lesbian parenting rights, adoption, custody, and marriage. Abrams narrates in detail about the legal challenges she faced when the court granted custody and the recognition of the child to the biological mother. In making a study of the legal encounters, an analysis of discrimination, legal battles, and landmark cases that shaped the experiences of lesbian mothers has been mentioned in the memoirs. This can be further explored in

the context of intersectionality and legal pluralism, with special emphasis and consideration of how race, class, and gender intersect with legal norms to produce diverse experiences of lesbian motherhood. A further analysis of the impact of legal narratives and an exploration of how lesbian motherhood memoirs contribute to legal discourse, advocacy, and social change can also be done.

2) Medical Perspectives on Lesbian Motherhood Memoirs

The memoirs focus predominantly on the reproductive health of the authors and their partners, their access to assisted reproductive technologies and fertility treatments. Further analysis could also be done on the healthcare services for lesbian couples and the maternal health disparities faced by lesbian mothers within medical institutions. Though the situation had changed radically from Moraga's experience in 1997 to Jimenez's in 2011, society still has a long way to go before they accept lesbian mothers into their midst. When heteronormative motherhood is glorified, lesbian motherhood still faces social stigmatisation. By studying about lesbian motherhood experiences, due importance can also be given to the psycho-social aspects, with an analysis of mental health, social support, and coping mechanisms among lesbian mothers.

3)Lesbian Identity Formation Through Motherhood

The thesis explores the nuances of the construction of lesbian identity by exploring how motherhood intersects with lesbian identity formation and negotiation of gender roles. But further analysis could also be done on the impact of the familial relationships by examination of partner dynamics, co-parenting arrangements, and relationship dynamics within lesbian families. It can also further analyse intergenerational perspectives with an analysis of how lesbian mothers navigate

familial relationships, including that of parents and children. These studies can also explore the strategies employed by lesbian mothers to resist heteronormative expectations and affirm their identities. Studies can also reflect and set ethical guidelines for researching and writing about personal narratives of lesbian motherhood by studying under-represented perspectives, comparative studies with heterosexual motherhood memoirs, and temporal analysis of changing narratives across decades and centuries by examining the intersection of race, class, and gender in these narratives. A temporal analysis of the emergence of lesbian motherhood memoirs in literature, from a historical perspective to the present day, can also be studied.

4) Autoethnography and Scriptotherapy as a Tool of Analysis

A study using the above-mentioned concept of the memoirs can be done in detail, considering the author's own identity and positionality in relation to the subject matter and an application of intersectional perspectives to understand the complex interplay of identities in memoir narratives. The narrative theory can be examined by exploring the narrative techniques and storytelling strategies employed in memoirs to convey experiences of lesbian motherhood. This can be done by conducting interviews and using qualitative approaches to engage directly with lesbian mothers and explore their lived experiences. This could foster comparative analysis by examining differences and similarities between lesbian motherhood memoirs and other narratives of motherhood, including heterosexual and trans experiences.

5)Adequate Representation in Popular Culture

Representation of lesbian motherhood memoirs can be encouraged in popular culture like television, films and other visual media like short films and documentaries.

Conclusion

Lesbian motherhood memoirs offer a rich vista of narratives that highlight the complexities of LGBTQIA+ family life. While research within this genre has expanded one's understanding of identity, kinship, and societal norms, methodological challenges and limitations can sometimes hinder research in this regard. By addressing issues of representation and theoretical frameworks, researchers can continue to advance knowledge within the field of lesbian motherhood memoirs, ultimately contributing to more inclusive and equitable representations of LGBTQIA+ families within academic discourse.

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APPENDIX

1. List of Published Articles

Sl no	Authors in order and Title of Publication	Journal, name, Volume, Number, Year& DOI	International /National	Publisher with ISSN	Web address of the Journal	Impact Factor of any
1	Razeena P R, Dr Praseedha G "Designing Affection and Aesthetics of Cuteness: Re-Envisioning Desire, Domesticity and Agency in 'Cute'Animal Videos"	Madhya Bharti -Vol 82 No 6, July-Dec.2022 (UGC-CARE)	National	0974-0066		
2	Razeena PR Dr Praseedha G "Loving From the Borders: Restructuring the M/Other Revolutionary Praxis in Select Motherhood Manuals"	Singularities-Vol.9 Issue 2,July 2022	International	2348-3369		6.875
3	Razeena PR, Dr. Praseedha G. "Negotiating Queer Mothering Desires: Analyzing the Dialectics of Resistance of the Adoptive Maternal Body in Nany Abram's *The Other Mother: A Lesbian's Fight for Her Daughter"*	Singularities-Vol. 8 Issue 1, Jan.2021	International	2348-3369		6.875
4	Razeena PR, Dr. Praseedha G. " Mother Without Child: Analyzing the Spatial Dialectics of Alternate Motherhood in *She Looks Just Like You: A Memoir of (Nonbiological) Lesbian Motherhood* by Amie Klempnauer Miller"	Conspectus: A Journal of English Studies Vol 14,2020	International	0973-0990		

2. Personal Online Interview with Cherrie Moraga

(Full text of the Q and A session conducted via Google Meet (https: //meet.google.com/upc-zrbk-zuw.) on 28 Mar.2024.)

1. Does motherhood transform into 'otherhood' when linked with lesbians, as they diverge from the conventional patriarchal dichotomy of accepted norms in sexual identity and constructs of motherhood?

Of course, it does. But the real issue is not them being mothers, but them being ‘queers.’ After all these years, it is still difficult. I had faced homophobic experiences in the hospital (during delivery of Rafael)

2. In what ways do you feel the principles of lesbian motherhood operate with stylistic intent to convey and influence a distinct set of values, beliefs, and assumptions regarding both privileged motherhood and alternative forms of motherhood, all the while presenting novel and potentially challenging postfeminist ‘solutions’ to the crisis in femininity that emerged post-second wave?

I don’t think in the same theoretical framework. Privileged motherhood is patriarchal motherhood. I would like to think that every culture is specific: religion, class and race relates everything to everything else. My raising helped me define who I am. In my book *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness: Writings, 2000–2010* (2011), I talk about the queer *familia.* It counters privileged heterosexual motherhood. Patriarchal capitalism dominates all family relationship.

My understanding of queer family was not to get acceptance from society; it has nothing to do with convention. I was always attracted to mothers. Lesbians have babies, not because they have to, but because they want to.

3. How does the lesbian mother navigate the expanding divide between her ideals and societal judgment in contemporary culture, while also grappling with her undefined role as both a partial object and subject within the Western philosophical tradition?

No, I don't think that way.

4. When you decided you wanted a baby at the age of 40, you said that having a baby as an "avowed lesbian" would have been a radical move, had you lived anywhere else. You also mention in your memoir that you decided to embark on this journey only because you had full faith in your partner Ella. Would you have gone ahead with having a baby had it been otherwise?

Yes, I just knew I wanted a baby. If I could not get pregnant, I would have adopted one. It also has something to do with me being a writer. Coming from a working-class background, one had to work for a living and be a mother.

5. If the status of the lesbian mother is always questioned and challenged, then the parental status of the 'non-biological co-parent' is even more. She is side-lined in mainstream parenting society and her identity as a parent is frequently challenged in broader society. How has this been true in your case before you became a biological mother?

Yes

6. How does your memoir, instead of framing gender as a rigid binary, delve into a diversity of gendered practices influenced by desire and belief rather than conforming to societal norms?

In the 'Introduction' to the 2022 edition of *Waiting in the Wings,* I have written about gender and sexuality. They are not necessarily related. Sexuality is about desire. You can be a butch lesbian and still be attracted to men.

7. Have you felt at any point of time during your motherhood experiences, that you had deviated from normative scripts in mothering practices, regardless of the individual's self-identification and had thereby demonstrated the potential for those practices to be 'queered'?

Yes, I have deviated from normative scripts of mothering practices. Under the guise of democracy, everything seems to be equal, but lots of back lasing happens.

Also, abortion was not legal back then (in 1997), but now it's legal.

8. Being a Chicana Lesbian, how do you recount your experiences when you decided to have a baby? Did you ever have to face any personal experiences of racial or gender discrimination in a dominant white heterosexual society?

(sighs) There were so many instances of homophobia.

Yes…people often asked way back then "Why didn't Ella have the baby?" Because she was the femme, people assumed that only femmes are supposed to give birth. Society makes a lot of assumptions.

9. In your memoir, you mention having a son Rafael. Have you ever felt that your mothering experiences as a butch lesbian would have been different had it been a girl child?

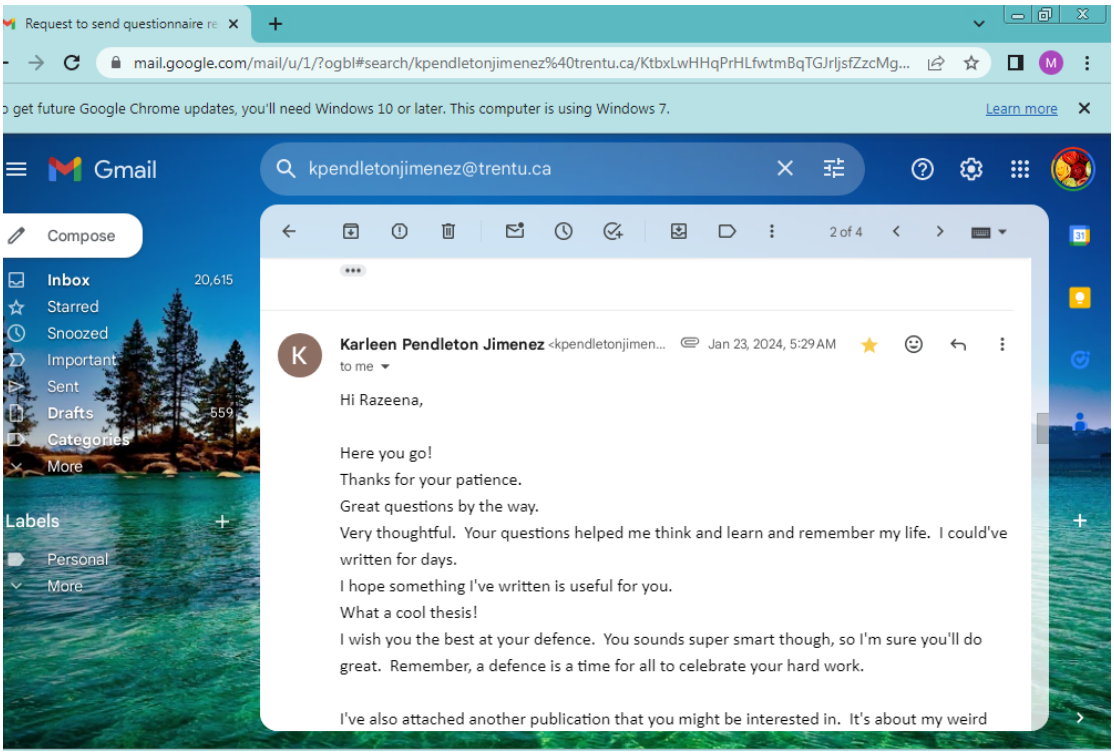
No.

That's a funny question. When I found out that my baby was a boy, I thought, maybe on a certain level, we can understand each other. More like a comradeship. I was not the heterosexual mother. I had given myself a wide berth when I was a girl. I wanted him to be like me. Rafael was raised by two mothers and he has the advantage of it.
I started late with having a baby, but I wish I had started earlier. I enjoy being a mother.

This is what I believe, "You are not the center of the Universe, but you matter…"

3. Email interview with Karleen Pendleton Jimenez

(Full text of the Q and A of the interview conducted via Gmail, received on 23 Jan.2024.)



1. Does motherhood transform into 'otherhood' when linked with lesbians, as they diverge from the conventional patriarchal dichotomy of accepted norms in sexual identity and constructs of motherhood?

Yes, sometimes. I've attached, as well, an essay I wrote about all the "other" butch experiences I was having while pregnant (of possible interest).

Let me see. At the childcare centres (Canada offers places to go with your baby so that you can meet up with other parents/babies – to support community and mental health of caregivers), the other mothers mostly did not talk to me. I think this was because I was a butch lesbian and because they were feminine heterosexual women. I don't think this was conscious, just probably what seemed as a natural flow of social interaction for them. I made two friends that year – with two fathers that were there (both school teachers in their careers) who had taken parental leave instead of their female spouses. In a sense they were anomalies too, so the three of us found each other. They are friends to this day.

People in my work setting, and acquaintances, have often asked if the father would be in my baby's life. He was/is and so I said yes, and have received many affirming comments. (I have another lesbian mother friend, where the father is not in the child's life, and she receives a lot of negative comments. It was only when hearing her story that I realized what was happening in mine.) "Oh that's so great!" "That's so important for the child," etc. Almost a big sense of relief.

New people in my life being over the top shocked that I have a baby/child that I gave birth to. Like, they speak to me with giddy discomfort.

No other queer parents in my kids' classes since kindergarten. Very real isolation in that sense. Again, I often end up making friends with other "othered" parents – Mexican, Black, Chinese parents – these are my best parent friends from kindergarten to grade 8. This wasn't conscious choice, just also seemed to happen.

On the other hand, my kid has always been very welcome and part of queer/trans community events.
Many other things are probably just the same as any other mother though: feeding, clothing, helping with homework, parent-teacher interviews, pretty much the same. (Except again, a big lack of queer/trans resources, knowledge, and curricula at school).

2. How can alternative expressions of motherhood that emphasize and showcase the maternal body in innovative ways provide valuable insights into the ongoing development of sophisticated postfeminist ideologies surrounding motherhood? Could you elaborate on this with your experiences?

It would be great to have representations of butch/masculine women with children. Honestly masculine women in the media or in books are pretty difficult to find on their own (Ellen Degeneres, Lea Delaria, Rachel Maddow). But, while we barely exist in popular media, we definitely don't exist with children. Actually, Melissa Etheridge and Brandi Carlile are exceptions to this, and I do think of them as more on the masculine side, even as they often dress femininely. And it means a lot to me to see them in images with their children or speak about their children in interviews. It's pretty amazing, even if they were not the birth parents.

There is such a long tradition of keeping queers/trans peoples away from children, that it is amazing any time you actually see them together. I'm even moved by Anderson Cooper talking about his children. Feels impossible. Wish we could see more of it, and every race/ethnicity, not just white.

3. In what ways do you feel the principles of lesbian motherhood operate with stylistic intent to convey and influence a distinct set of values, beliefs, and assumptions regarding both privileged motherhood and alternative forms of motherhood, all the while presenting novel and potentially challenging postfeminist 'solutions' to the crisis in femininity that emerged post-second wave?

Such great questions. Very thought-provoking. I suppose what might give us a lot of privilege is that probably our babies have been planned. We've made an explicit choice to have them and so hopefully have some thoughts about how we will manage financially, emotionally, and care-providing.
Challenging post-feminist femininity. Well, while lesbians are all different, I think we do share the fact that we've come out. We've put our emotional and erotic desires first. That's still pretty bold and revolutionary as we continue to live within patriarchal societies. Kids will still see power struggles among their parents of course, but they won't be associated with Man and Woman, rather just power struggles that any two people could have. I wonder what that will do to their imaginations. Also, I think we are more likely to break out from traditional gender and sexuality roles, so hopefully this would offer kids more examples of how to express their gender and sexuality and feel ok with who they are. This is aspirational, but hopefully, there is some merit in it.

4. How does the lesbian mother navigate the expanding divide between her ideals and societal judgment in contemporary culture, while also grappling with her undefined role as both a partial object and subject within the Western philosophical tradition?

I came out in 1990 and the homophobia was much worse then. I had physical threats. I had my girlfriend removed from me, etc. I feel like 2023 is moving backwards to that era. It makes me fearful, but not something I haven't survived. I think what's

hardest with mothering in this is that I don't want my kid attacked for my lesbianism, and I don't want to get hurt and be unable to take care of my daughter. Back in the 1990s it was only me, so I felt 100% that I could risk harm for my love, desire, and life, but now my risk also involves my kid. That's way more upsetting. This said, I have chosen to live in a very queer positive city, so I hope that nothing harmful will happen to us.

I don't sit still though. I do a lot of work in education, helping teachers and principals learn how to make classrooms that welcome queer/trans students and families. And I write books for queer/trans kids. I have to be an activist and keep fighting to make a more loving world, and this brings me some sense of peace.

5. How do homosexual couples challenging the heterosexual norms surrounding motherhood describe the public challenges they face during the process of conception and the subsequent stages of becoming mothers?

We face a ton of misconceptions.

Misconceptions: 1) that we will turn our kids into queer/trans people; 2) that the kids will be harmed by not having a parent of the opposite sex; 3) that we are sexual too much, or in a weird way, and this will harm the kids; 4) or cultural institutions condemning us , like some churches (or Catholic public schools, including such ideas in the curriculum; 5) sometimes our parents don't accept us or the grandkids (though not in my case); all of the paperwork in schools, assumptions in schools, designed for heterosexual parents (this has been changing); 6) curricula at schools not reflecting our families, not acknowledging our existence; 7) as I write this, I realize that a lot of the oppression we face is related to schools, the violence of the absence of our families/lives in schools, or the overt judgments made about us. I guess because, for the most part, school is the public sphere where we have the least amount of choice over who we share space with.

6. How would you define the lesbian's longing for motherhood that goes against the norms of generative as something that is unexpected?

It's interesting. There are a ton of heterosexual people who do not want us to have babies, because of their social and cultural values. There are also a ton of

heterosexual people who think it's totally normal for us to want to have babies because they themselves felt the same longing. In addition, there are some queer/trans people who don't want to have babies and don't understand why some queers want to have babies. So we get misunderstood and embraced from all sides. I think the longing is a very animal feeling that some people have and some people don't. I think what's different in this case is that if a lesbian has this longing to be a mother, it is all of a sudden part of a big social value war, with tensions, arguments, assumptions, and misinformation. The social war doesn't change the fact that a lesbian longs to have a baby. I think sometimes though the social piece might stop a lesbian from fulfilling her longing to become a mother.

7. When you decided you wanted a baby at the age of 40, you said that having a baby as an "avowed lesbian" would have been a radical move, had you lived anywhere else. You also mention in your memoir that you decided to embark on this journey only because you had full faith in your partner Hilary. Would you have gone ahead with having a baby had it been otherwise?

One clarification note: I was not 40 when I got pregnant, I was in my mid-30s. My longing was so strong, ever since I was a teenager. I would have gone ahead anyway. But it would've been harder, and maybe I wouldn't have been successful.

8. If the status of the lesbian mother is always questioned and challenged, then the parental status of the 'non-biological co-parent' is even more. She is sidelined in mainstream parenting society and her identity as a parent is frequently challenged in broader society. How has this been true in your case before you became a biological mother?

Yes, I was the other parent to my partner's two kids before I had my own. I have always loved the kids (who are now adults) deeply, but I did feel some insecurity in the role. I had no legal rights. They already had a father and mother. And even though I did a lot of the parenting, I felt like my parenting was not very regarded or respected in the broader social sphere. Some close friends and family sometimes remind me that I have played a huge role in these kids' lives.

9. What does it take to be a lesbian mother? A Deleuzian/Guattarian reading of your memoir attempts to look at it from a different way than resistance and

assimilation perspectives. It attempts to capture the fluidity and multiplicity of subjectivity by asking, "When a lesbian mom behaves in a certain way to gain social acceptance, what is she doing?" Could you briefly describe your experience regarding this?

The first thing I thought of, is again, all the affirmation I receive for having her father in her life. I'm not doing it for the affirmation (just believe it's good to have as many loving people as you can in a kid's life), but there probably is some part of me that feels nice about receiving this social acceptance, given that I don't receive any other mainstream acceptance for my mothering or my life as a lesbian.

10. How does your memoir, instead of framing gender as a rigid binary, delve into a diversity of gendered practices influenced by desire and belief rather than conforming to societal norms?

You know, I think I expand what it means to be a mother (not just feminine), and what it means to be a butch (it's ok to be masculine and want to have a baby), and in this way hopefully it helps other people of any gender imagine more possibilities for their gender.
I remember another butch coming up to me, praising my book, and I asked if they wanted to have a baby. The person said, no, but that my book made them feel like they could do more things in their life as a butch, like knitting, etc., traditionally feminine things. They felt like they had more freedom to do what they wanted because of what I wrote. I loved that moment. I want people to feel like they have the choice to do what they want with their gender. I think it makes people love their bodies more, feel more powerful, feel more beautiful.

11. Being a 'butch' you have asserted her identity when you were pregnant with your child and after. Have you ever felt that your sexuality has influenced your motherhood experiences in any way?

Hmm, another interesting one. Well, my partner is a feminine woman. She is my sexuality, as I am most attracted to feminine women. And she is also there to help with my daughter's femininity. My daughter identifies more with femininity at this point in her life, and I feel often at a loss to help her. I adore her and support her with everything, but clothing and hair and make-up and all those traditional feminine

objects I let my partner take charge of. She helps her, teaches her etc. I don't feel like she has to be a butch woman like me or a lesbian. If anything I think she will either be attracted to men, or maybe to masculine women – and maybe this might be related to me being her mother. In some ways this makes me feel like more of a traditional dad, even though still deep in our hearts and bodies I am her mom.

12. Have you felt at any point of time during your motherhood experiences, that you had deviated from normative scripts in mothering practices, regardless of the individual's self-identification and had thereby demonstrated the potential for those practices to be 'queered'?

I give a lot of room for my kid to play with clothing, she can pick from the "girl's side" or the "boy's side" of the store, she can explore pronouns and names, etc. I give her a lot of room to try things. I do so in a very chilled out/calm way. I think this is queering motherhood, and something I learned by being part of the queer/trans community. I think this is queering the script in the best way, giving options, not getting all serious about what she is trying, or diagnosing, or worrying, just letting her be. I think her ability to see my life, and all my queer friends, and community, also offers her many ideas for her imagination in letting her become whoever she wants to be. I hope so. I wish I had known the queer/trans world when I was a kid. I would've had less shame.

13. The active negotiation of mothering space is a recurring theme in your memoir *How to Get a Girl Pregnant.* Have you employed any diverse approaches to disrupt and challenge the heteronormative coding of space within lesbian motherhood narratives, which is deeply ingrained in the commonplace parenting practices?

I feel like I could only mother space by having my own kid. Otherwise, people won't even hand a butch a baby to hold, like they will with other women. People don't want queers around children. I felt like if I had this baby from my body, it is the only way I will have some rights, some room, some space. I think again about parenting circles, especially when the kids were really young. I think there are many judgments made about other people's parenting all the time, like it's almost sport. I felt like I was being judged too, but not the only one. Maybe in some ways I wasn't judged as

harshly, like “she’s not a real woman anyway, so why would she know how to dress the kid, feed the kid, etc.” (perhaps like they sometimes let dads off the hook for not knowing parenting things.). In a way, it gave me some room, because I was too alternative to be accountable to mothering norms. On another level though, it was kind of awful because I felt like I didn’t even “qualify” as a mother in these circles. Does that make sense?

14. Being a Chicana Lesbian, how do you recount your experiences when you decided to have a baby? Did you ever have to face any personal experiences of racial or gender discrimination in a dominant white heterosexual society?

I pass as white, so I did not receive overt racism. However, the sperm banks were almost entirely white. I had access to only two Latino sperm donors. I tried them both, but didn’t get pregnant. Such extreme limited access to Latino sperm, for whatever reason, is a pretty fundamentally racist situation. I mean, almost no access to BIPOC sperm, you can only reproduce with white sperm. Doesn’t get more extreme than this.
Other than this, my kid looks much whiter than me, so many people don’t realize she is my biological child. Often they express a dual surprise (butch lesbians don’t usually have babies and she’s thin and blonde and feminine-so she must not be related to you)

15. In your memoir, you mention having a daughter. Have you ever felt that your mothering experiences as a butch lesbian would have been different had it been a boy child?

I have thought of this from time to time. My oldest kid is a boy and there was a part of me that found it much easier to know what parenting to do with him. I’m very boyish, and I grew up with brothers, so there is an ease and comfort in boyhood for me. On the other hand, I had a much closer relationship with my mom than my dad, so I secretly wanted a girl. I feel that my mom, while sometimes favouring my brothers, ultimately had a deeper emotional relationship with me. I loved the deep connection with her and I wanted a daughter in the hopes that I could share that bond again. Which I feel has happened. Perhaps I could have had just as strong a relationship with a son, but it’s just not what I saw growing up.