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Mothering experiences of lesbian women in Harare, Zimbabwe

A Thesis submitted as an integral part of the examination for the Master in Sociology and Social Anthropology Degree

By

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## **Acknowledgments**

As an armature and novice researcher the experience of researching on lesbian mothers was like sailing a boat in unfamiliar sea. The data that I gathered was sometimes overwhelming and meaningless. The conversation that I had with myself becomes more like an anthropologist from the moon. As I interacted more with the learned colleagues I started to understand the issues better. To all who made this project a success, I owe you all a BIG THANK YOU.

A topic of this sensitivity requires expert couching, which may not always be available. Initially I thought the department could assign Mr Muparamoto (PhD), a student and lecturer in the department who is pursuing a similar area. Of course wishes and 'expertise' do not always work in the academic world. It's a world where you expect anything and this is symbolic order of some sort. Imagine a situation where all students are allowed to choose their supervisors willy nilly. Some can have a baggage of students and others can even fail to have one! I was bold yet naïve. I remember my chat with professor Charlotte Patterson from America as she encouraged me with this word- Bravo. She knew the area is an uncharted sea and made it clear that the study was the first systematic study in the area. I had no "experience" so I was naïve. I was impatient. I remember Dr Ruparanganda telling that you should not always rush things and of course of one my classmates made similar sentiments. But I had in mind the academic landscape that I was placing my foot on, not easily penetrable. That's okay because certain people always come to my aid and I owe them a BIG THANK YOU. These includes amongst others my supervisor Dr W Ruparanganda, Mr N Muparamoto, Professor C J Patterson, my Brother DR David Mandiyanike, Dr S Bhatasara and Dr R Mate. To Dr R Mate you were more like a co-supervisor. To all of you I am grateful. My participants are also worth mentioning, this study is a result of their participation.

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## **Dedications**

To RJ

## **GLOSSARY**

**Bisexual** – a person who is attracted to both males and females and can have sexual and romantic relationship with both.

**Butch**- masculine gender expression especially amongst same sex loving women.

**Closeted**-being in a closet/ not disclosing one's sexual orientation

**Coming out**- disclosure of one's sexual orientation

**Gay**- a man who is attracted to other men, romantically and sexually.

**Gender**- a code that is socially and cultural constructed to categorise what the society terms as either feminine or masculine conduct

**Femme**- feminine gender expression especially amongst same sex loving women.

**Heterosexual**- a person who is sexually and romantically attracted to the opposite sex.

**Homophobia**- fear, hatred and discrimination against homosexuals

**Homosexual**- a person who is sexually and romantically attracted to the same sex.

**Lesbian**- a woman who is sexual and romantically attracted to other women.

**Sexual orientation**- a term that is usually used to designate the direction in which one's sexual and romantic desire is directed. That is, whether one is attracted to the opposite sex, not attracted to anyone at all or attracted to same sex or attracted to both.

**Abbreviations and acronyms**

**AID**-Artificial insemination by Donors

**CI**- Clinical Insemination

**CIO**- Central Intelligence Organisation

**DI**- Donor Insemination

**CBD**-Central Business District

**GALZ**- Gays and Lesbian Association of Zimbabwe

**HIV**-Human Immunodeficiency Virus

**IUI**- Intra-uterine insemination

**LBTI**- Lesbian, Bisexual Transsexuals and Intersex

**LGBTI**- Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transsexuals and Intersex

**IVF**-Invitro-fertilisation

**ROPA**- Reception of Oocytes from partner

**SI**- self insemination

**STI**- Sexually Transmitted Infection

**UK**- United Kingdom

**USA** – United States of America

**VOC**- Value of Children scale

## **Abstract**

*This study provides a Sociological and Anthropological understanding of how lesbian women accomplish and negotiate their mothering journeys in Zimbabwe given the fact that they are operating outside the idealised family constellation. It explores the mothering journeys of 8 self-identified lesbian mothers, the ways/ mechanisms used to accomplish motherhood, the challenges faced and coping mechanisms adopted in these mothering journeys. The data was collected from June 2016 to January 2017 through unstructured interviews, diaries and repeat interviews. The theoretical formation of the mothering journeys is pursued through examining a dyad of Anthropological and Sociological theories, featuring specifically Herbert Blumer (1969) Symbolic Interactionism and Michael De Certeau (1984) Practice of everyday life. Lesbianism and motherhood is highly contested and regarded differently across the world. The phenomena is embryonic in Zimbabwe and little is known as a result. This explorative study is informed by Situational Symbolic Interactionism as an epistemological tradition embedded in the qualitative research paradigm, accommodating therefore the researcher to view the research encounters as relational, impromptu, emergent, negotiated and pragmatic in nature. The analysis and results show that in order to accomplish motherhood lesbian women sought the services of informal sperm donors, 'manipulated' men and 'requested' men to sleep with them so as to conceive. As a result of being mothers the respondents faced a number of challenges relating to heteronormativity, stereotyping, discrimination and homophobia. So as to cope and negotiate the challenges emanating from normative expectations regarding family and motherhood, participants resorted to a number of self-management mechanisms such as normalization, naturalization, neutralization, resignation and ritualization. By doing so lesbian mothers can be regarded as active agents as they faced challenges with resilience and fortitude. Thus, resonating with the Michael De Certeau (1984) Agency theory and Herbert Blumer symbolic interactionism as the enlisted theoretical frameworks to illuminate this study. This study concludes by suggesting that mothering experiences of lesbian women in Harare, Zimbabwe can be understood as experiential, circumstantial and situational as it varies within and across individuals as well as with social spaces and time. The challenges faced by these lesbian mothers can not only be understood as challenges of their 'lesbianism' but also as challenges of intersectionality as some of these challenges related to them as single mothers and not as lesbian mothers per se.*

**Key words:** lesbian, motherhood, challenges, coping, intersectionality, experience, agency, resilience

## **Table of Contents**

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Acknowledgments .....   | ii  |
| Dedications .....   | iv  |
| GLOSSARY .....  | v   |
| Abbreviations and acronyms.....   | vi  |
| Abstract.....   | vii |
| CHAPTER ONE .....   | 1   |
| <b>1.0 Introduction</b> .....   | 1   |
| <b>1.2 Background to the study</b> .....  | 2   |
| <b>1.2 Problem statement</b> .....  | 4   |
| <b>1.3 Objectives of the study</b> .....  | 4   |
| <b>1.4 Research questions</b> .....   | 5   |
| <b>1.5 Significance of the study</b> .....  | 5   |
| <b>1.6 Conclusion</b> .....   | 6   |
| <b>1.7 Outline of the study</b> .....   | 6   |
| CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .....  | 7   |
| <b>2.0 Introduction</b> .....   | 7   |
| <b>2.1 Lesbian mothers, conventional ideology and heteronormativity</b> .....                                 | 8   |
| <b>2.2 Lesbian mothers and child development</b> .....  | 8   |
| <b>2.3 Technology, donor insemination and lesbian motherhood</b> .....  | 9   |
| <b>2.4 challenges, opportunities and lesbian mothering journeys</b> .....                                     | 10  |
| <b>2.5 Ways/methods used by lesbian women to become mothers: A synthesis of available literature</b><br>..... | 11  |
| <b>2.6 Coping mechanisms used by lesbian mothers in negotiating their mothering journeys</b> .....            | 14  |
| <b>2.7 What motivates lesbians to become mothers?</b> .....   | 16  |
| <b>2.8 Lesbian mothers in Australia</b> .....   | 17  |
| <b>2.9 Lesbian mothers in South Africa</b> .....  | 19  |
| <b>2.10 Lesbian baby boom</b> .....   | 20  |
| <b>2.10 Literature critique and conclusion</b> .....  | 21  |
| CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....   | 23  |
| <b>3.0 Introduction</b> .....   | 23  |
| <b>3.1 Herbert Harold Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism</b> .....  | 23  |



|  |    |
|--|----|
| 3.2 Agency theory .....  | 25 |
| 3.3 Conclusion.....  | 29 |
| CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY METHODOLOGY.....   | 30 |
| 4.0 Introduction .....   | 30 |
| 4.1 Study area .....   | 30 |
| 4.2 Research Methodology and Research Design .....   | 31 |
| 4.3 Situational symbolic interactionism as an epistemological tradition in qualitative research .. | 31 |
| 4.4 Sample size and Sample recruitment .....   | 37 |
| 4.5 Strategies for data collection .....   | 37 |
| 4.5.1 Diaries .....  | 38 |
| 4.5.2 Unstructured interviews .....  | 38 |
| 4.5.3 Repeat/ follow-up interviews.....  | 40 |
| 4.6 Data analysis techniques.....  | 40 |
| 4.7 Ethical considerations.....  | 40 |
| 4.7.1 Informed consent .....   | 42 |
| 4.7.2 Ongoing consent .....  | 44 |
| 4.7.3 Confidentiality.....   | 44 |
| 4.7.4 Debriefing .....   | 45 |
| 4.8 Methodological and ethical challenges .....  | 45 |
| 4. 8 Study limitations .....   | 48 |
| CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION .....   | 49 |
| 5.0 Introduction .....   | 49 |
| 5.1 Data presentation.....   | 49 |
| 5.1.1 Ruth Mathews .....   | 50 |
| 5.1.2 Tec .....  | 52 |
| 5.1.3 Hope.....  | 55 |
| 5.1.4 Euan.....  | 60 |
| 5.1.5 Sarah.....   | 61 |
| 5.1. 6 Nicole .....  | 65 |
| 5.1. 7 Tamia classified.....   | 67 |
| 5.1.8 Kelly.....   | 74 |
| CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION.....  | 79 |

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>6.0 Introduction .....</b>  | <b>79</b>  |
| <b>6.1. Lesbian mothers destabilising and deconstructing the conventional family .....</b>         | <b>80</b>  |
| <b>6.2 Lesbian mothers: Challenges and implications on kinship, affinity and relatedness .....</b> | <b>82</b>  |
| <b>6.3 Lesbian women deconstructing sexual binaries and sexual behaviours.....</b>                 | <b>83</b>  |
| <b>6.4 .0 Ways and or mechanisms of accomplishing motherhood .....</b>                             | <b>87</b>  |
| <b>6. 4.1 Lesbian mothers as products of heterosexual marriages .....</b>                          | <b>88</b>  |
| <b>6.4.3 The use of home/ self-insemination.....</b>   | <b>90</b>  |
| <b>6.4. 4 “Accidentally” becoming a mother.....</b>  | <b>93</b>  |
| <b>6.5.1 Heteronormativity and the existence of lesbian mothers .....</b>                          | <b>93</b>  |
| <b>6.5.2 Lesbian mothers and challenges of intersectionality.....</b>                              | <b>98</b>  |
| <b>6.6 .0 Copying mechanism used by lesbian mothers.....</b>                                       | <b>101</b> |
| <b>6.7. 1 Naturalisation, normalisation and neutralisation .....</b>                               | <b>102</b> |
| <b>6.7.2 Symbolisation, naming and labelling.....</b>  | <b>103</b> |
| <b>6.7.3 Avoidance .....</b>   | <b>106</b> |
| <b>6.7.4 Accommodation .....</b>   | <b>107</b> |
| <b>6.7.5 Resignation and Ritualization .....</b>   | <b>107</b> |
| <b>6.8 Conclusion.....</b>   | <b>107</b> |
| <b>REFERENCES.....</b>   | <b>111</b> |

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **1.0 Introduction**

Today's families are increasingly becoming diverse. Despite having a single mother-father as the more valorised and idealised family matrix, a number of family setups have also emerged. These range from single parent families, child headed families, same sex families among others. Lesbian women because of their lesbianism have been stereotyped as oversexed, narcissistic, pleasure oriented and thus viewed as lacking the quintessential qualities of being good mothers as they 'chose' to live with other women. Although lesbians have in the past usually been associated with a childless lifestyle, they are increasingly opting for motherhood by creating their families of choice with their children, either biological, adopted or fostered. The current millennia have witnessed what Patterson (1992) has termed lesbian baby boom as lesbians are increasing choosing to be mothers. Of late studies have also noted that many lesbian mothers today are opting for motherhood in openly lesbian relationships as opposed to mothering under the pretence of heterosexuality (Nelson 2000 and Wall 2011). In short, lesbian women are increasingly becoming parents and have become a focus for number of studies. Overwhelmingly, these studies are more concentrated in the developed countries especially United States of America, United Kingdom, Sweden and Australia. As for Zimbabwe, there is little if any literature on the topic under scrutiny. Resultantly, the current study focuses on lesbian mothers in Harare, Zimbabwe. These women happen to be mothering regardless of the fact that they are operating outside the idealised family configuration.

Lesbians in the global South may not have the same privileges as those in the global North in the event they decide to found families. Families of choice in the form of same sex marriages are regarded differently across the globe and in Zimbabwe they are illegal. General perception and argument is that if lesbians do not want procreative relationships then they should not have children. This qualitative study explores the subjectivities of the lived experiences of 8 self-identified lesbian women in Harare to delve on how they accomplish motherhood and how they negotiate the challenges they face by operating outside the idealized family constellation. It uses agency theory by a French anthropologist and philosopher, Michael De Certeau as well as Herbert Blumer's symbolic interactionism to comprehend and elucidate the parental experiences of lesbian mothers as they operate outside the confines of heteronormativity.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

Lesbian families have historically received less attention in literature. Lesbians have historically been viewed as interested in living a child free life style. To Lewin and Lyons (1982) lesbianism has been placed as a lifestyle of women who are oversexed, narcissistic, masculine, gender confused and pleasure oriented. Consequently, inappropriately positioned to assume the quintessential women task of motherhood as they fall outside the gentle, supportive, nurturing and 'weak' mother ideations in heterosexual societies. Traditionally, LGBT people had few family building options and some entered heterosexual marriages for the purposes of childbirth (Goldberg 2010). The heterosexual set up was the only viable option to accomplish motherhood. Most early studies on lesbian mothers were initiated in part following custody issues that lesbian women faced in the 1970s and early 1980s in America. The custody issues necessitated the need for empirical evidence to determine child custody, (Patterson 1992 and Goldberg 2010) and to assess if lesbianism would impact negatively on children of lesbians in becoming lesbians too (Patterson 2006).

Gates (2013) notes that it is estimated that 37% of the LGBT adults have a child at some point in their lives in America. As Gates (2013) argues, an estimate of 3 million American LGBTs have had a child and these are as many as 6 million. For those below 50 years nearly half of the LGBT women, around 48% are rearing a child below 18 years. Out of the 2010 census in America it is estimated that nearly 650 000 same sex couples exist in America. 19% of these are raising a child below the age of 18 years and 27% of these same sex couples are females and 11% are male couples (Gates 2013). Around the 1980s a number of studies shows that lesbian mothers started to live openly in America and other developed countries following divorce or separation (Patterson 1992 and Patterson 1995). Due to these divorces, a number of custody issues were inevitable and most of the lesbian mothers lost custody of their children due to the politicisation of their sexual orientation. What is notable is that many of the studies were legal than sociological and anthropological, focusing on the legal debates and custody that involved lesbian mothers. Due to loss of custody, many lesbian women who wanted to become mothers in the late 1980s started to engage in shed parenting with gays. Some could simply ask gay friends to father their children. All these were attempts to limit custody issues and challenges.

With changing legal and technological contexts especially in America, Australia, South Africa, France and United Kingdom more and more lesbian started to have children via a number of mechanisms in the 1990s. Constituting what Patterson (1994 and 1995) termed gay and lesbian baby boom. Families of choices were especially increasing due to decriminalisation of homosexuality and a number of laws such as Human Tissues Act that allowed lesbian and gays to have children via surrogacy, donor insemination, adoption, foster care, second parent adoption and other alternative mechanisms. Wall (2013) is in fact convinced that lesbian women have more choices today than in the past from which to accomplish motherhood. This is especially feasible for those countries that have technological and legal advances to allow for donor insemination (either clinical or self-insemination at home) and adoption as well as second parent adoption and foster care respectively for lesbian women.

In Africa generally, lesbian mothers has not been well documented. They are thus under theorised and understudied. The exception is that of South Africa where a number of studies have started to emerge. These includes Luce (2002), Van-Ewyk and Kruger (2016) and Potgieter (2003) amongst others. As for many developed countries more and more lesbian women are choosing to have children in the context of same sex relationship (Hayman *et al* 2015).

As for Zimbabwe, the situation is incomparable and different as Zimbabwe does not have laws that allow for foster, adoption and second parent adoption by lesbian women. Zimbabwean laws also do not allow same sex marriage. The infrastructural, institutional and political as well as legal environment do not have mechanism such as clinical insemination, surrogacy amongst others that lesbian women can use as mechanism to accomplish motherhood. Due to the fact that same sex families of choices are differently regarded across the world and the fact that same sex families are illegal in Zimbabwe it is opined that the experiences of lesbian mothers in such a context can be insightful as this understudied group of lesbian women may fruitfully extend sociological and anthropological knowledge on this area of interest.

In this context, the context that vilify lesbian motherhood it remained significant to keep on questioning how lesbians accomplish and negotiate their mother identities in Zimbabwe as Zimbabwe criminalises same sex marriages. It is from the above captioned context that the study explores the life experiences of lesbian mothers in Harare, Zimbabwe.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

Brown (1995) notes that motherhood was often thought of as antithetical to lesbian identity. Consequently, lesbians have been equated to child haters, child averse and men haters who evade marriage and child bearing and rearing responsibilities. Lesbian women sometimes live in societies that regard lesbian motherhood as extraneous to authentic lesbian culture (Hayman *et al* 2015). The society in general and the lesbian community in specific can both regard lesbian motherhood as antithetical to lesbianism. Arguably, lesbian motherhood is seen as actively defying the heteronormative standards of procreation. Paradoxically, lesbian women are increasingly choosing to be mothers even in openly lesbian setup (Wall 2013), despite receiving conflicting messages that they should not be mothers and are not good mothers (Wall 2011). There is increasing social visibility of lesbian mothers in Zimbabwe especially if one is familiar with the social events and gatherings that involves LGBTI women. Despite this increasing social visibility of lesbian mothers there is paucity of literature that documents subjectivities of the lived mothering experiences amongst lesbian women. All humanity is born of women. But despite this simplicity that all humanity is born of women, the complexities of the “other” mother, the lesbian mother has been rarely dealt with especially in developing countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in general and in Zimbabwe in specific. Given the anthropological significance of procreation, studies that delve into lesbian motherhood are especially warranted to address this gap in knowledge.

Zimbabwe’s legal and political environment is atypical to many studied areas where lesbian mothers are pursuing parenthood. It has a constitution that criminalise same sex marriage. Though adoption by lesbians is not clearly outlawed, the environment is not so welcoming to same sex individuals to adopt as homosexuality is frowned upon. Given such an existential setup and background it raised academic curiosity as to how lesbian women accomplish and negotiate their mothering. In essence lesbian parenthood has been much researched in the developed world. In spite of the fact that lesbian mothers exist in Zimbabwe the continued perusal of Zimbabwean literature is evident but however paradoxically worrying as it constitute an almost academic erasure on the topic of lesbian motherhood.

## **1.3 Objectives of the study**

1. To explore the mothering experiences of lesbian women

2. To analyse the ways/mechanisms used by lesbian women to accomplish motherhood
3. To identify the challenges and opportunities associated with lesbian parenting
4. To analyse lesbian mothers' coping strategies to deal with the challenges faced

#### **1.4 Research questions**

1. What does it mean to be a lesbian mother in Zimbabwe?
2. What mechanisms do lesbian women use to accomplish motherhood?
3. What are the challenges and or opportunities that lesbian mothers face
4. How do lesbian women manage their way to parenthood?

#### **1.5 Significance of the study**

Kinship, relatedness and reproduction as well as sexuality in general are arguably sociological and anthropological issues whose salience and currency is inescapably of scholarly attention. Such issues are key to this study in both implicit and explicit ways. Albeit, these issues are patchy, emblematic and embryonic in the Zimbabwean scholarship. Constituting a scholarly erasure or abstinence of some sort. Such issues are espoused in this study with vigour.

Lesbian women occupy an intriguing and thought provoking place in relation to reproduction (Luce 2002). Increasing number of families by non-heterosexuals has not only become a social fact, but a social anthropological fact (Zambrano 2007). For others it is risky and not a straightforward continuum, but a web of legal, economic and geographical constraints and opportunities (Luce 2002). Anthropologists and sociologists have always been interested in the awe, the "phenomenal"-that which stood in stark contrast to the norm. The deviant so to say. They have been equally interested in procreation and family. Kinship, procreation and family has been traditional fields of anthropological interest. Such parental setups deconstruct former anthropological certainties (Siegenthaler *et al* 2000). Procreation and motherhood still find such an intriguing place especially mothering by the "other" mother, the lesbian mother.

It brings to the fore the significance and the meanings that is culturally assigned to having or not having children. This is especially significant for women who belong to the sexual minorities. As such, the author addresses such issues in Zimbabwe by looking at how lesbian

women experience the whole issue of motherhood. The aim of anthropology in studying the phenomenal, the 'different', that which defies the norm is not to provide a solution but rather to understand it better. Lesbian women are anthropologically of significance as they constitute a significant subculture (Kuyala 2014). Studying lesbian mothering experiences can therefore be insightful and adds to academic knowledge as studies on homosexuality from Africa as a continent is an almost virgin area of academic inquiry that calls for extensive academic work (Mudavanhu 2010). Lesbian mothers are mothers regardless of their sexual orientation and are thus academically a "worth" population of study. What even makes this population to warrant being researched is that they are unique from heterosexual mothers due to their stigmatisation and marginalisation (Griffin 1998).

Lesbian mothering is an emerging issue in Zimbabwe that warrants further academic exploration. This study explores the parental experiences of lesbian women and thus becomes salient in adding knowledge to the existing body of knowledge on the topic from a Zimbabwean context.

### **1.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has provided the study background, study objectives and significance of the study as well as current lacuna in literature through the problem statement. The associated abysmal gap in scholarly insights created the space and the need to have a study of this nature.

### **1.7 Outline of the study**

This study comprises of 6 chapters. The first chapter, being the introductory chapter that provides the study background, study rationale as well as the problem statement, inter alia. Chapter two reveals related literature with regard to lesbian motherhood. Chapter three details the theoretical underpinnings that guided this study. The methodological, ontological and epistemological issues are provided in chapter four. Chapter five is data presentation while chapter six is the final chapter of this study that is data analysis and conclusion.



## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter is organised as a nuanced review, extrapolating and exegetically analysing related literature in relation to lesbian motherhood. As shall be clear this author does not in any manner attempt to rewrite the literature but to borrow much, appreciate and acknowledge even the associated caveats in literature. Zimbabwe's legal and political environment is atypical to many studied areas where lesbian mothers are pursuing parenthood. It has a constitution that criminalises same sex marriage. The Criminal Law and Codification ACT Chapter 29:23 also criminalises sodomy. Given such an existential setup and background it raises academic curiosity as to how and under what circumstances do lesbian contemplating parenthood realise their endeavours.

What became apparent is that lesbian mothering experiences is an area that has generated a lot of attention from almost all disciplines such as Psychology, social work, sociology and social anthropology. Extensive work has been done in these disciplines in that ascending order. Psychology has dominated much of the studies especially in America and Britain respectively where the works Patterson, Tasker and Gombolok are numerous. Even though studies have been done, majority of the works have been carried out in developed countries such as America, United Kingdom and Australia. Of late South African academics have started to show similar interest with the works of Potgieter, Van Ewyk and Kruger (2016) being worth mentioning. A perusal of literature on Zimbabwe constitute an almost academic erasure. Such existential setups and academic lacunae on part of Zimbabwe makes this study paramount as it can bridge the abysmal gap and generate knowledge on the area in Zimbabwe.

What became of surmountable realisation is that all these countries have advanced technological innovation that makes procreation incomparable to that of Zimbabwe. These countries have laws that are similarly different from that of Zimbabwe. Majority of these countries have legalised homosexuality and have provision in various laws such as Human Tissues ACT that provides access to reproductive technologies and adoption. Albeit, this is not to say that the countries have the same laws on these issues. Neither is this suggestive of saying these countries have similar geographies. Much of the studies, if not all have either used symbolic interactionism, feminist theory, psycho analytic theory or queer theory or phenomenology or a

combination of feminism and phenomenology. While mothering is in fact highly gendered, theoretical underpinnings of feminism were rarely dealt with in detail by the studies that attempted to use it. Where phenomenology was used the theory was discussed in a passive manner. Much can be attained by using the above theories on mothering experiences of lesbian women. Mothering is highly gendered and it is highly contextualised such that the use of these theories becomes paramount and warranted.

### **2.1 Lesbian mothers, conventional ideology and heteronormativity**

Lesbians have been viewed by the mainstream society as not interested in mothering to such an extent that many of lesbian women have regarded parenting to be not part of their identity. Lesbian mothers were seen as falling outside of the heterosexual norm and were considered to be unnatural, immoral, deviant and inappropriate (Wall 2011). This is not surprising given the fact that ideology and myths do not exist in a vacuum but are inculcated by the society and can lead to internal homophobia and misconceptions. Lesbians have been mothers but the majority of these became mothers covertly under the pretence of heterosexual matrix (Patterson 1992 and Patterson 1995). A number of studies that documented early mothering experiences of lesbians have done so after lesbians have divorced and custody issues became paramount. These studies compared the development of children raised by lesbian women with those children raised by heterosexual women in heterosexual marriages (Patterson 1995). The phenomena of lesbian motherhood was studied “scientifically” especially with regard to custodial right and to assess the adequacies of the lesbian parents in not “infecting” their children to be lesbians too (Costa 2013). Lesbian mothers who wanted to have children during the 1980s, chose rather to become pregnant with gays as opposed to heterosexual men as they were afraid of losing custody of their children following divorce (Bradford *et al* 2013).

### **2.2 Lesbian mothers and child development**

Patterson (1992) study is one of the early studies in psychology that focused on lesbian and gay parenting. Lesbians, as the study revealed had children from previous heterosexual marriages. One belief that undergirded most policies on custody, adoption and foster care was that lesbians and gays were not fit to be parents (Patterson 1995). Naziri and Feld-Elzon (2012) in a related study in Belgium posits that many studies on lesbian parenting had focused on educational

and emotional development of their children. Patterson (2006) also focused on assessing whether parental sexual orientation affect children's development. The study contended that it does. In essence studies have proved up to date that sexual orientation of the parent does not affect children's development. The focus of these studies is not surprising given the fact that they were many assumptions regarding parental abilities of lesbians and gays that necessitated such a focus. To use Clarke (2000) these comparative studies between children of lesbian and heterosexual women are defensive and apologetic in that they justify the normalcy of the children of the former in accordance to conformity to heteronormativity.

The studies were positive politically and effective in recognising lesbians and gays as capable parents and placed them at leverage than previously thought (Clarke 2000). While these studies were important and ground-breaking in revealing that children of homosexual parents do not typically become homosexuals themselves and thus lessened the stigma and myth that children of homosexuals become homosexuals. The focus of these studies were *children* of lesbian mothers not the *lesbian mothers* themselves thus they in general contributed less to scholarly understanding of lived experiences of lesbian mothers as the lesbian mothers were not the point in focus. They were also heterosexual undertones that undergirded these studies, the fear that lesbianism is contagious and the problematic use of heterosexual standards as standards of measuring children's normalcy.

### **2.3 Technology, donor insemination and lesbian motherhood**

Marina *et al* (2010) study focused on shared biological lesbian motherhood that is pursued through the use of Invitro fertilisation (IVF). The authors of the study were interested in ethical issues surrounding the aforesaid method of conception. While that was the focus of the study it became apparent that lesbians have various routes to conception and parenthood, some of which could equally allow them both to be genetically related to their child(ren) even though one individual could carry the pregnancy to term. ROPA (reception of Oocytes from partner) allows lesbian mothers to share biological parenthood to their children. This is in the context where ROPA is legalised. The study has been insightful in shedding light as to how lesbian mothers can go about conception and share biological ties to their children. This could apply to Spain where the study was conducted and where in 2005 lesbians have been granted the right to biologically

co-parent as one partner could provide the eggs fertilised with the sperms from a donor of choice and the other partner receives the embryo and gestates them. The availability and accessibility as well as utility of any method of conception should not be simplistically assumed to exist everywhere equally as contexts are different as sexuality is bound with geographical and culturally limits and specifics. Ways that lesbians adopt in Zimbabwe remains therefore of academic and personal curiosity to the author.

Donor sperm can be used for various alternate modes of insemination, including vaginal insemination (VI) intra-uterine insemination (IUI) or invitro- fertilization (IVF) of which the former could be undertaken either in a medically supervised procedure in a clinical setting or as self-insemination (SI) at home but the latter i.e. IVF takes place in a clinical setting (Marina *et al* 2010). In terms of who is to be inseminated amongst partners doing co-parenting a number of factors such as age, fertility status, health status, preference and nurturing capacity are even put into cognizance (Marina *et al* 2010). Self-insemination at home with non-quarantined sperm can be cheap but risky as STIs could be present and not screened (Marina *et al* 2010).

#### **2.4 challenges, opportunities and lesbian mothering journeys**

Hayman *et al* (2015) conducted a study in Australia. The study used 30 lesbian women (15 couples). The study triangulated data collection methods and used semi-structured in-depth interviews, journaling and demographic data sheets. The objective of this study was to explore the ways in which mothers construct mothering. The study indicated that the increasing accessibility of assisted reproductive technologies makes conception of lesbian women far less complicated than before. This does not mean that becoming mothers is easy for lesbian women as Wall (2011) poignantly reveals that being a lesbian mother is a challenging journey as lesbian women receives conflicting messages that they cannot be mothers and are not interested in mothering. In the same vein Hayman *et al* (2015) observes that the general populace also speculate that they would be childless and the lesbian community on the other hand can be harsh in its judgement on lesbian mothers as it regards motherhood as extraneous to authentic lesbian identity. While other ways of conceptions such as heterosexual intercourse is easily available it is usually regarded as unacceptable by most lesbian women as it is viewed as disrespectful to their lesbian identities (Baetens and Brewaeys 2001). The results of the same study shows

that lesbian women plans are so intensive and carefully thought as issues of deciding who will become the biological mother as well as the donor physical characteristics and involvement are equally weighed. Roller-coaster of emotions are also inevitable especially where donor insemination is attempted but fail with initial trials.

In another study conducted by Harris (2000) in Canada, the author bemoans the difficulties of having willing doctors who could help lesbians with donor insemination and how that forces lesbian women to go for risky self-insemination from informal sperm donors whose sperms could not have been screened for HIV. Harris (2000) argues that when lesbians attempt to exercise their reproductive choice and try to access fertility clinics they often encounter resistance and discrimination. Harris (2000), however, concluded that amidst these difficulties lesbian are increasingly becoming mothers.

Insemination accessibility and availability in Europe is also different. Other lesbian women in Europe have to travel to where they can access it (Griffin 1998). Griffin (1998) also argue that the role of the donor is also important as part of consideration on insemination. Lesbian mothers have to grapple and think over it. Spelling out the role and position of the donor is also a conscious act to avoid custody issues and parental involvement of the donors.

## **2.5 Ways/methods used by lesbian women to become mothers: A synthesis of available literature**

Luce (2002) argues that queer women who are attempting to conceive often have experiences with a variety of methods of procreation in assisted conception. Others attempt legal adoption to become parent (Richardson and Goldberg *undated*). To Demino *et al* (2007) lesbian headed families are created through birth, adoption or co-parenting. Despite having a number of issues to contend with about how to be a parent lesbian women can also have other issues that confront them. As mothers, lesbian mothers may be required to have social intercourse and networking that may reveal the non-traditional setup of their families (Demino *et al* 2007). This may consequently leave them more vulnerable to homophobia. The discrimination that lesbian mothers face are in part because they face discrimination because of their sexual orientation and secondly they face discrimination in their own lesbian community that regards motherhood as not part of its true identity (Demino *et al* 2007). Demino *et al* (2007) study was

based in America. The sample of planned lesbian families had either parented through insemination or adoption. Insemination and adoption are expensive which maybe reflective of the affluent class from which the sample was drawn. The areas studied by these Authors in America is typically associated with domestic partnership, civil unions, same sex marriage and second parent adoption (Demino *et al* 2007). It follows that such a sample cannot and was never intended to reflect the diversity of all lesbian planned families worldwide. Paying due regard to the very social fabric in which motherhood is pursued is therefore paramount and warranted to further scholarship diversity and richness in lesbian motherhood.

Griffin (1998) study on how lesbian women have kids and become parent is instructive to many issues involved. Participants in that study became mothers through a diversity of methods including informal insemination from willing donors, deliberately entering into heterosexual relationship with a man to have kids and asking friends to father their children. The main challenge that participants highlighted was how to get the kids and how to keep them as lesbians are viewed by the mainstream society as not ideal mothers and are at the same time challenged by other lesbians for having contact with men.

Nelson (2000) posits that the status of a mother is extremely complex and context achieved status. Nelson study is based on a qualitative research undertaken in 1992 with over 30 lesbian mothers in Calgary and Edmonton, Alberta. The results indicated that lesbian mothers achieved their motherhood by impregnation either through donor sperms or having sex with a man, being a partner of the impregnated lesbian(co-parenting), impregnation in a heterosexual marriage, being partner with a mother who got a child from a previous lesbian relation or being a partner of an individual who got a child from a previous heterosexual relation.

Nelson (2000) study reveals that the child could call all the parents as mothers but they would be a different between the biological mother and non-biological mother as there are challenges in terms of limited vocabulary especially to address the later. The step mother usually remained the unidentified 'other'. In some families they can be confusion as to what name and role she could play given the fact that the biological mother would have been there and had played

the parental roles already. Resultantly, to the child/ren the co-parent becomes a stranger, (Nelson 2000).

There may be more complicated issues with regard to motherhood for lesbian women in relation to extended family if one has come out of the closet. This is even more complicated for co-parent to the extent that even her family of origin may not recognize her as a parent (Nelson 2000). Because of their sexual orientation some lesbians may already have been in an emotional and geographical drift from their extended families. This can sometimes worsen or become better depending on a myriad of factors such as the value or love the family have towards the grandchild (Nelson 2000). The study by Nelson is insightful. It is useful and it provides an initial springboard for the current study. However, lesbian women may not have the same privileges and challenges in the event that they want to accomplish motherhood. Thus necessitating the need for a study that is contextually embedded in Zimbabwe to understand the same issues locally.

Wojnar and Swanson (2006) concurs that little is known about the existence of lesbian women who attempt motherhood and go through miscarriages. The argument proffered in the study is that lesbian women like any other women also go through miscarriage that impact on their emotional and mothering endeavours. Central in Wojnar and Swanson (2006) study is that lesbian face issues that sometimes cut across sexual orientation and should also be treated equally as women. Other lesbian women chose to have short lived relationship with a donor so as to conceive (Wojnar and Swanson 2006). While others have to go for sexual intercourse naturally with man so as to conceive other lesbians saw the same act as disrespectful to their lesbian identity, harmful to couple relationship and unacceptable, (Wojnar and Swanson 2006). This is in resonance with the findings by Potgieter (2003). In a study conducted in South Africa by Potgieter (2003) lesbian women deliberately manipulated men to have sex with them so as to become pregnant. To the participants being lesbians meant that they had relationships with other women but not that they had problems with having sex with a man in order to get pregnant. This is in tandem with Weeker (1991) observation of lesbian women crossing over in dual sex system. These findings are really ground-breaking as they challenge scholarship to move beyond equating sexual orientation with 'typical' sexual practices. If lesbian women engage in an act of sexual coitus with a man she is regarded as

not really a lesbian. Her identity may be questioned. Paradoxically, heterosexuals involvement and practices of anal sex in and outside marriage is not related in the same manner but treated along the line of sexual adventure and funny ( Author's emphasis).

Malmquist (2015) did a study in Sweden. The results indicated that the information technology age and the scientific advancements had ushered an era of possibilities for lesbian women to pursue parenthood that are fundamentally different from the earlier generations. Zambrano (2007) argue that there are four principal access to motherhood by lesbian women, these includes having children from previous heterosexual marriages-recomposed families, adoption (legally or informally), using reproductive technology (Artificial insemination) and co-parenting. In a qualitative ethnographic study specifically designed to address choice of methods used by lesbian women in Santiago, Chile to achieve motherhood Herrera (2009) found out that lesbian mothering can be achieved through sexual intercourse with a man, artificial insemination, and adoption but lesbians have to put a lot of effort and have to buck off social expectations. Homophobia was identified as the greatest challenge to lesbian motherhood in that study and many lesbians had to conceal the sexual identity as lesbians to avoid losing custody of their children.

## **2.6 Coping mechanisms used by lesbian mothers in negotiating their mothering journeys**

Hequembourg and Farrell (1999) undertook an exploratory study in which they had in-depth interviews with 9 lesbian mothers in North East America, USA. They used Symbolic Interactionism to explore the mechanisms that lesbian non-birth mothers used to gain acceptance in their family networks. Being a lesbian mother combines a marginal identity (lesbian) with the most revered identity of women (mother). When these mothers turned to their families for support and validation others found support while others faced resistance (Hequembourg and Farrell 1999). This can be due to the fact that many regard lesbians as child aversive (Wall 2013). Co-mothers sometimes faced challenges of non-recognition as parents and that led them to seek second parent adoption (Hequembourg and Farrell 1999). The study is valid and shed light on mothering issues that lesbian mothers had to contend with. However, the study sample was relatively homogenous, mainly middle class white respondents.



In a more related study, Padavic and Butterfield (2011) focused on how lesbian co-parents negotiate their parental status. The study was based on the premise that understanding how lesbian co-parents negotiate their identity is necessary as some of them are partners and co-parents to lesbians who had parented their children alone to such an extent that the children may not see the relevance of having yet another mother. Understanding how lesbians who are less privileged to legally adopt, manage and create a parental status becomes warranted (Padavic and Butterfield 2011). The motherhood of co-parents is seen as not congruent with motherhood ideals. Dunne (2000) and Wall (2011) also highlights how lesbian co-mothers are faced with language inadequacies to accurately describe them and their roles in same sex families. They face challenges in asserting the legitimacy of their parental identity because of the social context that renders it tenuous. Identity was regarded as a social construct. Such a position tallied with the findings as identity fluid and actively created through interactions. Identity can thus be created, deconstructed and reconstituted. In that study the participants had to create their own identity by using terms such as mother, father and “mathers” when they were caught up in an identity limbo that equated them to legal strangers.

In a study conducted by McKevey (2013) it became apparent that co-parents are not automatically recognised as parents and this equates them to a legal stranger to their children. McKevey study focused on the narratives of postpartum experiences of non-birth lesbian mothers. In a study of similar orientation and focus, Price (2007) also notes that non-birth lesbian mothers have to contemplate the whole motherhood discourse. Price was mainly focused on understanding the causal factors in becoming non-birth lesbian mother. In a bid to make the other parent, the non-birth parent to feel recognised as a parent. The families in Price (2007) study had to do family rituals, giving the child the maternal name of the non-birth mother, having family trips together as well as attending family funerals to legitimate the mother identity of the co-mothers. This appears to merit attention and has contributed to understanding of familial interactions of lesbian families especially having the focus of study being non-birth lesbian parents as many studies focuses on lesbian birth mothers. What is worrisome is the theoretical analysis on part of the text. Price (2007) made a superficial reference to phenomenology. None of the theoretical concepts was revisited in data analysis. This therefore warrant further theoretical clarity and references.

## **2.7 What motivates lesbians to become mothers?**

Siegenthaler *et al* (2000) notes that information is lacking with regard to motivations to be parent amongst lesbian women. Garterll *et al* (1996) study is one of the longitudinal studies that looked at various issues related to parental responsibilities, social support, pregnancy motives and preferences. The study made use of 84 lesbian families. Mothers looked to having shared parental responsibilities but had stigmatization concerns. The participants in the study also highlighted that they had always desired to be parents. The study respondents were predominantly white, college educated and middle class and upper middle class which could one way or the other have a major imprint on the result, many had gone for donor insemination, a pretty expensive parental mechanism. Nonetheless, the study affords insights in revealing that lesbians are not as not interested in mothering as sometimes presented. Questioning lesbian motives in parenting is an area that scholarship should take seriously as one is working against a background that views lesbian women as child aversive. The objectives of that study which are already captioned above, one of which was to understand pregnancy motives was rarely investigated in detail. Such positions or methodological caveats can find remedy through further exploration using unstructured in-depth interviews.

Siegenthaler *et al* (2000) argues that parenthood and children were assumed simply to be not part of lesbian and gay persons world. This notion however is no longer a novel concept. This idealization of assumed incompatibility of non-heterosexual identity with parenthood was a result of societal scripts that permeated society. Siegenthaler *et al* (2000) study was based on a sample of 51 women parents who were respectively 25 lesbian and 26 non lesbian mothers in Colorado. The study was comparative in nature and used value of children scale to compare the value that the two groups attach to children. The values were more similar. What was different in the study is generativity, as lesbian women do not have children because of social expectations but their own desire to parent. They also differ in the way that the society receives them, with heterosexuals being more accepted. The scale used however limits participants' responses. The same scale is heterosexually biased. It is originally constructed as a value of children scale (VOC) for heterosexual parents. Many of the respondents were Caucasians, with high levels of income and education, urban members of a parenting group and may have leverage over the general lesbian population. Lesbian mothers may experience difficulty in being accepted in the lesbian community and the society. As with the Lesbian

community the authenticity of her sexual orientation maybe questioned. The need for questioning lesbian mothers parental motives is really insightful and warranted as one is working against a background that equates lesbians to child haters. Thus these two related studies are particularly topical given such a position. These studies provides an invaluable corrective to the myths surrounding lesbian disinterest in mothering as the results showed that lesbians value children just like heterosexuals. As such, studies that delve into these issues, parental motives of lesbians are still few, exploring the issues in different geographical and legal context can also further academic knowledge in that regard.

In a qualitative study that examined the meaning of motherhood amongst lesbian women Richardson and Goldberg maintained and buttressed the position by Urich and Weatherall (2000) that motherhood is an ideal maintained by the society that women inculcate as individuals. Lesbian women are faced with the reality that their parenthood is not necessarily expected or even encouraged. As such, they go through a tumultuous journey to conception and adoption (Goldberg 2006). Richardson and Goldberg ( p.1) argues that “ given these circumstances motherhood for lesbians is not compulsory, but purposeful and chosen thus providing an avenue from which to comprehend and examine in more detail fully the question of why motherhood is seen as important and the whole meaning of what it means to be a mother”. The result indicated that lesbian women pursuance of parenthood was motivated by the following among other factors, (1) partners as a driving force, ( 2) the instinctual desire to always become a parent ( 3) as well as the growing desire to be a parent in spite of the fact that one could have not desired to do so earlier. Lesbian mothers motivations to parent cannot be assumed to be analogous worldwide and across races and classes. The diversity of which needs to be brought into scholarly analysis.

## **2.8 Lesbian mothers in Australia**

Another study that motivated further exploration of lesbian women parenthood to this author is the study by Misty Wall. Wall’s studies cannot be missed if one specifies Australian studies in his or her literature searches. Wall’s studies have been insightful. Wall (2011 p. 2 ) argues that though “ the path is laden with barriers, lesbian women are choosing to become mothers in greater numbers than previously seen”. Lesbian mothers also had to deal with the effect of stigma that children may suffer because of their orientation (Wall 2011). Their families may also draw

a line at their choice of raising a child in a lesbian context. Wall study made use of online questionnaire that had 104 questions, majority of which being quantitative, 3 being qualitative. One of the central questions was, what is the most difficult thing for a lesbian women considering parenthood? Issues of financial strain of adoption, lack of familial support, fears of societal interferences and obstructive laws were identified among the major obstacles. These questionnaires were sent and received back through an email and 487 women completed the questionnaire. Out of the total 487 completed questionnaires only 397 respondents answered the qualitative question. The question that is of course very central and core to her study. Wall herself acknowledges the fact that her choice of methodology, point of data collection limited the depth of responses and that snowballing may have impacted the type of respondents that participated in the study.

What remains unanswered despite the insights that Wall shared is how she reached about the sample. No sample size calculation was done for the study as she could have not known the lesbian mothers population throughout the studied countries 'worldwide' as Wall used lesbian and gay organizations 'throughout' the world as points of recruitment. It is worth mentioning at this point that Wall's study triangulated feminist standpoint theory and phenomenology as theoretical frameworks to explicate her study. Central to phenomenology is the lived experiences of the individuals in their situatedness and phenomenology does not aim to generalize the responses but to illuminate the specific lived experiences by the participant, (Lester 1999), a point that becomes obsolete if such responses are generated worldwide and context becomes so blurred by geographical and cultural specificities of the respondents. Lester (1999 p. 1) poignantly argues that "the aim of phenomenological approach is to illuminate the specific, to identify phenomena through how they are perceived by the actors in the situation". It means gathering deep information through inductive qualitative methods such as diaries, focus group discussion and participant observation, (Lester 1999). Given the fact that phenomenology as both a methodological design in qualitative research and as a theoretical framework aims the above, Wall (2011) choice of phenomenology becomes a mere academic work that is politically charged by her aim to give voice to lesbian mothers (see Wall 2011).

## **2.9 Lesbian mothers in South Africa**

Ewyk and Kruger (2016) is one of the studies done in Africa, South Africa, that focused on the emotional experiences of motherhood in planned lesbian families. The study drew on a qualitative exploratory approach with lesbian couples. It was guided by semi-structured interviews and feminist phenomenological framework. The participants came from various parts of south Africa including Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town among others. Mothering as the participants revealed is not always straight forward process as it incorporates one's beliefs about what counts as motherhood. The study revealed that lesbian motherhood is accompanied by emotional experiences such as hope, joy, love, anxiety, helplessness, exhaustion among others. Despite the brevity of the researchers in the study, much remains to be known as to other diversities of lesbian parenthood outside those who are pursuing adoption and donor conception which was their main focus.

Potgieter (2003) is one of the studies in South Africa that focused on black south African lesbians. 9 individual interviews and 10 focus group discussions were conducted. The objective of the study was to explore the position and viewpoint from which the participants speak and how their discourse relate to the dominant motherhood discourse either in terms of replicating, challenging or contradicting the dominant motherhood discourse. The result showed that lesbian mothers viewed their motherhood discourse in line with the discourse of naturalness, i.e. having a child as conforming to the dominant motherhood ideology. This naturalness discourse means that parenthood was constructed within the confines of normal, everyday and regular women. In South Africa of late same sex couples are now legally in a position to adopt. Some despite that provision had sex with men so as to fall pregnant and have baby. To the participants having a child accords and aligns in resonance with adulthood. It is thus a feature of womanhood regardless of whether one is heterosexual or lesbian. Potgieter (2003) argues that by doing the dominant discourse on motherhood such as having a baby lesbian mothers are creating a comfortable space to be a lesbian as the attention is now diverted from their lesbianism by their family to being mothers. Their families would even think that by having a baby these lesbians are no longer lesbians. Hequembourg (2007) however critiques the theorisations of lesbian motherhood along the normalisation – resistance discourse.

Hequembourg (2007 p.1 ) argues that “ lesbian mothering strategies are commonly theorised as instances of assimilation or resistance”. Assimilation is the naturalness discourse. This discourse emphasises the similarities of lesbian mothers with heterosexual mothers. “Normalisation however implies that heterosexual family is the ideal against which all variations of family should be measured. These leaves out those that fall outside this normalisation” (Hequembourg 2007 p. 4).

Despite not being mothers themselves some lesbian women endorsed the importance of motherhood ( Potgieter 2003). This can be due to the fact that in Africa one can be regarded as mother despite not having a biological child of their own as they can play the mother figure to ones’ elder or younger sister’s children. As such Lubbe ( *undated*) observes that since the adoption of South African Constitution same sex families has been on the increase since lesbians and gays are now able to adopt or to do donor insemination to form families. Lubbe’s study explored the experiences of children growing up in a lesbian-headed family in South Africa. The study explored the experiences of these children as they interact with other people in their lives and how the children negotiate heteronormativity. The findings indicates the interconnectedness between disclosure, awareness, openness and open mindedness. While this study shows that lesbian parenthood is on the increase in South Africa its focus, *children of lesbian mothers* is different from the focus of this study, *lesbian mothers* themselves.

## **2.10 Lesbian baby boom**

Patterson (1995) is one of the studies that showed the increasing number of lesbian mothers in what is referred to as lesbian and gay baby boom. Families of origin may start to question the existence and origin of pregnancy if one is not married as such lesbians have to ponder around issues of disclosing their sexual orientation if they were in a closet ( Hayman *et al* 2015). Despite the increase in lesbian mothers Wall (2013) reminds readership of the fact that lesbian women also experience discrimination because the society believes that they should not be mothers. The extended family, despite initial acceptance of lesbian woman sexual orientation may become estranged at the decision that she want to become a mother. Costa (2013) argues in tandem with the above observation that lesbians face a number of challenges. These families face unique challenges and experiences that are a result of social oppression and discrimination. One of the objectives of this thesis is to analyse how lesbian women

navigate through these challenges. Little is known with regard to the resilient strategies used by lesbian mothers to navigate their paths to parenthood. To date the existence of lesbian mothers and their experiences in the academia is little known. Such caveats necessitates and warrant the need for scholarly studies in this area in Zimbabwe.

Walks (undated) reminds the academia of a salient challenge that lesbian women face in becoming mothers. The factor cuts across sexual orientation. The common belief is that access to sperms is the main challenge to lesbians trying to become mothers but lesbians just like heterosexual women experiences infertility and that can act as an inhibitor to parenthood.

## **2.10 Literature critique and conclusion**

Wall (2013) argues that there is no doubt that lesbian women have always existed and some have been mothers. Becoming a lesbian mother is a multi-layered and complex journey that is fraught with challenges that requires great deal of preparation and planning, ( Hayman *et al* 2015). The challenges are compounded by the fact that there was until recently the false assumption that lesbianism was exclusively accompanied by a lack of desire to procreate and raise children (Wall 2013 ).

Reviewed literature on the topic of lesbian motherhood in this study has contributed enormously to the understanding of the existence, structure and thereto related issues of lesbian families and parenthood. Albeit, the studies also contains caveats. The study by Wall (2013) used feminist theory, her study in 2011 adopted and integrated phenomenology and feminist standpoint theory, Wall (2013) also used feminist theory. These studies have concluded that feminist theory offers insights into struggles that lesbian mothers face. While mothering is a gendered issue the use of feminism as a theoretical lens to analyse mothering experiences of lesbian women has become a tradition and ritualistic as many of these studies make passive reference to the very theoretical framework. Specific theoretical underpinnings and concepts should be pointed and utilised in data analysis of related issues, an aspect that many papers including the academic ones still shrouds in obscurity.

Wall (2011) study offers invaluable insights to lesbian motherhood. In fact it offers a springboard for this thesis. The standardised nature of the tools used, online questionnaire in the study implicitly underplay other emergent issues that could have emerged. Majority of the reviewed

literature comes from countries such as Australia, Spain, United Kingdom, America, Belgium, Finland and Iceland. These are generally the world most developed countries, the exceptions being Brazil and South Africa. However paths to parenthood are diverse and depend on the concerned country's laws, (Costa 2013). Given the fact that Zimbabwe socio-legal and political context is different from the majority of these countries, the latter being poor and criminalises homosexuality while the majority of the former countries are developed and have legal provision that allows adoption, surrogacy and reproductive technologies regardless of sexual orientation the paths to parenthood can be implicated in one way or the other as such situating a study in Zimbabwe that delve into life experiences of lesbian mothers was therefore warranted. Mothering experiences of lesbians is warranted on the premise that it has not been fully explicated in the Zimbabwean academic literature. In this chapter an attempt was made to review related academic literature on the topic of lesbian parenthood. While valuable insights have been gained, a perusal of literature on the very same issues indicates that literature on Zimbabwe is rare and adhoc, creating an academic abstinence of some sort.



## **CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter details the theoretical frameworks that are used as sensitising lenses to illuminate and comprehend the study. Theoretical framework of any research project relates to the theoretical aspects of the chosen theory and the practical components of the research (Mertens 1998). What is central here is that the theoretical framework chosen for the study should provide the link between its theoretical underpinnings and the phenomena, social process or social events to be explored. This study adopted Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism theory and Michael De Certeau (1984) Agency theory as theoretical frameworks to illuminate the study. Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism foci is to tap the specific lived experience through the lens of the meaning that the very actors attaches to the experience. Concepts such as human agency, naming, meaning, label, identity, deconstruction, contexts and sensitivity as well as emergent are central to this study while the concept of Practice of everyday life from Agency theory by De Certeau (1984) is also adopted. Much can be attained through such an integration of these theoretical concepts. It is opined that such a theoretical bricolage can attend astutely to identity formation and identity negotiation by lesbian mothers as these are central to this study. The centrality of agency theory in lesbian motherhood is of uttermost salience and relevance due to the fact that lesbian mothers are seen as deconstructing the norm and thus require adaption to handle resistance or constraints from patriarchy and heteronormativity.

### **3.1 Herbert Harold Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism**

This study heavily draws on Blumer's symbolic interactionism. The term Symbolic Interactionism was coined by Herbert Harold Blumer (1969) who is regarded as its enunciator. Generally, Symbolic Interactionists are concerned with every day interactions, the symbols used and the importance of language in these interactions. In his theory, Blumer attended with much voracity to issues of meaning, identity, labels and the fact that language is used in everyday interaction and is therefore important. Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism is useful as a theoretical framework for understanding how lesbian mothers construct meaning of themselves as mothers and negotiate their existence outside of the social expectations as it is especially interested in how in this case lesbian mothers saw themselves as mothers, the demands and sensibilities of others and how they negotiate these as they develop their mother identities. It can also illuminate how the meanings that lesbian mothers associate with aspects of parenting

emerge out of social and interpretive process (Blumer 1969). What matters to the actors is not the norms of ideal family that is set by the society but the symbolic meanings that these mothers construct about their mothering and what these interpretations mean for how they imagine themselves as potential parents. Symbolic interactionism is necessary as the society is also important in validating these families and the associated motherhood. The society can also act a strain as heteronormativity, homophobia and stereotyping can also be inevitable in the experiences of these lesbian mothers as they fall outside the ideal family.

The meaning that things have to actors (lesbian mothers in this case) is dependent on the interpretation that the actors attach to the things, objects and events. This theory is thus equated to a theory and science of interpretation. Meaning is regarded as context specific and fluid. This approach therefore helps in understanding how lesbian mothers negotiate their mother identities and manipulate various symbols at their disposal as they are operating outside the norm. It can also help in understanding the language used by lesbian mothers in their interactions as they construct their mother identities.

This theoretical framework is considered appropriate for this study because it deals with issues of identity, identity negotiation as well as the transient nature of these identities and the use of symbols and labels in these various interactions. Central to this theory is meaning making. As such it can help illuminate the whole meaning and interpretation of what it means to be a lesbian mother as shared by these mothers.

The theory also enables one to envisage the challenges/strains that lesbian mothers face by operating outside heteronormative expectations. Although lesbian mothers stake out identity claims as mothers, the validity of these claims is dependent on the societal responses. These significant others who may validate these identities includes the children in these families, extended and immediate families, friends and the lesbian community (Hequembourg and Farrell 1999). The challenges regarding normative expectations differs whether one is a biological parent or not. These challenges forces them then to negotiate and claim their familial configurations and places as mothers in a heterosexual society. Societal expectations of mothers such as being a heterosexual married mother results in a seeming expectation that mothers should not be same sex lovers but instead heterosexuals. Children may also expect their mothers to

lead an idealised lifestyle that is not homosexual, failure of which results in invalidation and resistance by some children. Step mothers claims as mothers is socially constructed and depend on validation by children and other lesbian women such as partners. Because another mother is already there in recomposed families, step mothers, their children and partners have to negotiate their places by creating linguistic management mechanisms that validate and legitimate the step mothers. The mothers may also negotiate their places by engaging in behavioural strategies that are valorised symbolically in culture of motherhood such as washing, cleaning, fetching the child from school, providing emotional and financial support for school work amongst others.

To Li (2009) symbolic interactionism centrality in sexuality studies is the deconstruction of sexual conventions. It therefore rejects the dispositional fallacy of homo-hetero dichotomy and advocate instead for a variety of achieved sexualities. There is no need to objectify 'sex' in sex so to say. Sex should not be located in the body so to say but in the process of social interaction (Li 2009). Symbolic Interactionism therefore is pertinent in understanding lesbian mothering experiences as a polymorphous journey which is both situational and experiential, varying from individual to individual, to include contextual embodiments and deconstruction of sexual behaviour that are narrated in these lesbian women as they accomplish parental identities out of sexual contact with men which is however viewed as an act of crossing sexual scripts and boundaries in the mainstream discourse. Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism in this study thus help to see how parenthood in these women is guided by the meanings they constructed out of their lived realities.

### **3.2 Agency theory**

Agency theory is associated with and credited to a number of social anthropologists and sociologists who emphasis the fact that individuals are not passive to their circumstances but knowledgeable and conscious as well as calculus. One such a theorist is a French philosopher and Anthropologist Michael De Certeau's (1984) concept of Practice of everyday life. De Certeau (1984) identified a number of issues such as ruses, strategies and tricks that everyday man use in walking down the city and thus limiting states' surveillance and panopticism. Responses to constraints is what De Certeau called strategies. De Certeau (1984)

work help thus to highlight the dynamic ways in which lesbian women everyday activities functions as tactical responses to extricate and extricate constraints posed by the society. It affords insights into the multiple, subtle and seemingly everyday ways in which lesbian mothers resist and contest as well as manage everyday challenges. Though Blumer's work identifies and uses the concept of human agency, De Certeau concept can further augment such issues. Thus, in addition of Symbolic Interactionism, De Certeau (1984) is used by the author to draw on every day practice to illuminate how what seems passive, everyday regular practices are embedded with tricks, ruses and strategies that eludes discipline and thus coping of the lesbian mothers in a clandestine manner by operating underneath the radar. Both Blumer and De Certeau sees humans as agentive. For the latter, practice of everyday life enables the exploration of otherwise taken for granted regular behaviour as potentially enabling and resilient in making.

De Certeau (1984) observes that 'tricks' help the actors to contest, subvert and disrupt norms in an emergent, transient and sometimes unpredictable manner. Tricks thus are resistance mechanism that are miniature. They may take the form of everyday speaking, interacting and walking. Tricks are not large scale resistance mechanisms but are just in time assemblages seized by the actors (De Certeau 1984).

The concept practice of everyday life is illuminative of the reflexive exercise of agency by ordinary man as he uses ruses and tricks to circumvent surveillance and gaze. De Certeau (1984) argues that actors can be mistaken as passive but upon a nuanced analysis one can note that their actions counts as ruses, as they are disguised as everyday practice of regular life, yet they are transformative and concealed with the need to survive and outdo constraints. In this study ruses may take the form of lesbian passing as straight to depict themselves as straight single mothers thereby limiting challenges of homophobia, though facing challenges of deconstructing heteronormativity. As literature attest, lesbians mothers face a number of challenges as they are operating outside the norm (Wall 2011). This theory in that regard can therefore help in comprehending and elucidating the parental experiences of lesbian women who are operating outside heteronormativity and are caught up in an identity limbo. Nelson (2000) posit that lesbian parenthood presents a conceptual challenge to the lesbian mothers themselves as well as to others around them too in which they had to deconstruct the

meaning of motherhood. The path to lesbian parenthood is laden with barriers (Wall 2011), choosing to be a lesbian mother requires therefore careful consideration and much planning (Dunne 2000). As lesbian women are implicated by fear of mothering in a homophobic environment from the society in general and their families of origin in specific (Wall 2011). The concept of practice of everyday life from Agency theory as propounded by De Certeau (1984) was used in this study to elucidate the resilience and coping mechanisms used by lesbian women in everyday life in face of challenges that relate to their identities as lesbian mothers.

Society is made of pathways that individuals should follow to pursue certain goals. For instance, in a heterosexual society motherhood is to be pursued in a heterosexual family. Anything outside this matrix is thus considered an apathy. When it comes to procreation societies creates scripts to be pursued. "These pathways would be inscribed into disciplinary society for managing, differentiating, classifying and hierarchizing all apathy" (Certeau 1984 p. 6). In fact "De Certeau believed that society could not do without governmentality" (Wild 2012 p. 3). To him there was need for dominant rationality that acted as endoskeleton of vitality for societal coherence. He however, nevertheless thought of societal members from complete submission to this rationality, (Wild 2012), as man can both question and affirm their societal membership. He advances the argument for the ability of common man to escape dominant rationality, (Wild 2012). Agency is in fact a solution, a kind of social plumbing by lesbian mothers.

Central to De Certeau's proposition was that societies erects routes that individuals should follow in their various endeavours ( in this study heterosexual marriage becomes the route to procreation and motherhood). He however posited the possibility that individuals can creatively design new paths through which to navigate the interstitial spaces (Wild 2012). The assumption is that man is amassed and endowed with potentialities to peruse their way through challenges. It looks at the innovative ways used by people to deal with their everyday experiences. This lens can therefore help to explain the resilience on part of the lesbian mothers to limit panopticism and gaze as they engage in parenting. By using Agency theory the writer relates to how individual lesbian mothers reflexively regulate their responses and strategies in everyday

life. De Certeau (1984) posited the possibility that individuals can try another path in spaces regulated by panoptic procedure or network of surveillance. This is in essence the trial by subjects to engage in unreadable but stable tactics to the point of constructing everyday regulation and surreptitious creativities that are merely concealed by frantic mechanism, (De Certeau 1984). Agency theory, practice of everyday is thus concerned that in a conjecture which is marked by contradictions between collective pathways and individual modes of re-appropriation individuals can engage in multiform resistance, tricky and stubborn procedures that elude discipline.

In essence the practice of everyday life under Agency theory is that lens which view individuals as conscious individuals with voracious properties of innovation that improves, invents, transform and multiply their possibilities with tactical apprehension and kinaesthetic appropriation. These modalities and intensities vary according to time and path chosen by the agents (lesbian mothers) but the overall aim of the agent (actors) is to peruse through and navigate the trammelled spaces. Lesbian women despite inscriptions on parenting that runs counter to them, (Nelson 2000) are increasingly choosing to parent in openly lesbian contexts (Wall 2011). De Certeau (1984) concept therefore helps in illustrating how lesbian women improvise their circumstances which relates to one of the objectives of this study which is to analyse how lesbian women copy with challenges they may encounter in their mothering. Such an objective can be explicated by using Agency theory as Agency theory looks at how individuals (in this case lesbian mothers) resist panoptic practices of procreation that may be inscribed to them by the society.

Whereas both Blumer's Symbolic interactionism and De Certeau frameworks creates a context for elucidating the coping strategies employed by these mothers as they experience the phenomena, capturing the very phenomena (identity formation and negotiation) is more accessible using Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism. Nelson (2000) argues that lesbian motherhood is a conflict ridden process. On the same vein, Wall (2011) avers that lesbian mothers receive conflicting messages in this endeavour. As such how lesbian women navigate the path is of paramount importance. This is where agency theory comes to the fore. A synergy of Agency theory and Symbolic Interactionism is used therefore as sensitizing lenses to conceptualize how lesbians construct and negotiate their mother identities' in various

situations, times and places in Harare and overall a heterosexual societies that vilifies such identities. Individuals have abilities therefore to manipulate symbols (Blumer 1969). Thus illuminating how the meanings of motherhood by lesbian women is not inherent or essential in nature but arising out of interpretive processes and accentuating therefore how motherhood is not given but negotiated and deconstructed.

### **3.3 Conclusion**

Blumer Symbolic Interactionism seeks to look at issues of social interaction, the agency of humanity, the language used, the labels used, the meaning that actors attach to social events and processes. Blumer is poignant on the fact that identities are fluid, so are the labels as well as the meanings and the contexts of operation. Nelson (2000) argues that lesbian motherhood is a conflict-ridden and complicated process. On the same vein Wall (2011) avers that lesbian motherhood is a unique process that involves lesbian women hearing sometimes contradictory messages that they should not and cannot be good parents. As such how women navigate the path to motherhood is of paramount importance. This is where agency theory comes to the fore.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: STUDY METHODOLOGY**

### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter looks at the methodological, ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study. The data collection techniques, data analysis procedure, ethical issues, study limitations and methodological rationale is also discussed here in detail. This study explores the lived experiences of lesbian mothers and as such qualitative research methodology was considered essential as it allowed the researcher to explore the topic of this sensitive nature in a holistic manner in its natural settings without attempting to manipulate the context. Situational Symbolic interactionism as an epistemological tradition embedded in the qualitative research paradigm was therefore considered an appropriate epistemological tradition to capture the issues in detail as it allows emergent inquiries. Diary methods, 1-1 unstructured in-depth interviews and repeat interviews were used to collect data from the field. Repeat interviews were used to seek further clarity and insights where necessary.

### **4.1 Study area**

The study was carried out in Harare metropolitan between June 2016 and January 2017. Harare metropolitan constitutes a political constituency and province in its own right. It covers areas such as Mabvuku, Tafara, Msasa park, Belvedere, Mtpleasent, Avondale, Belgravia, Mbare, Hatfield among others. Harare is the capital city of Zimbabwe and is diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, class and sexual orientation of its locales. As a city it might serve as both a site of struggle for identity creation and identity reinforcement. It is in Harare where one can find GALZ and Pakasipiti as LGBTI and LBTI organisations respectively. Zimbabwe is a patriarchal and heterosexual society. Heteronormativity as Kuyala (2014) has argued, offers trammelled experiences for non-heterosexuals in Zimbabwe. Albeit, Kuyala (2014) is poignant to the fact that heteronormativity does not deter homosexuals from reflexively strategizing and capitalising on their agency. Generally heteronormativity have seen sexual minorities resorting to pretence so as to limit heterosexual gaze and surveillance as they can simply pass as heterosexuals (Kuyala 2014). Harare therefore allows lesbian mothers to attain anonymity. This existential setup has rendered lesbian mothers to remain invisible as some will be acting “straight”. The experiences of lesbian mothers is different and unique from those of heterosexual women as the latter is given epistemic validity and privileges in the mainstream society but the former is vilified. Generally, as site Harare was ideal because it is feasible to the researcher. As a city



it offers an environment of anonymity for lesbians as opposed to say small rural growth point. Major LGBTI organisation and LBT organisations are located there and offers services to lesbians and other sexual minorities.

#### **4.2 Research Methodology and Research Design**

Methodologically, this study is qualitative in nature. It explores the mothering experiences of lesbian women who lives in Harare. A detailed exploration of such sensitive issues as opined by the researcher was best explicated by a methodology that is naturalistic and flexible. This necessitated the use of qualitative research in this study. Rationale for qualitative research in this study lies on its ability to delve on the essence and ambience of the research phenomena. Silverman (2000) observes that qualitative research emphasises the dynamic, holistic and individual aspect of the human experience in their entirety within the context of those who are experiencing the phenomena. Denzin and Lincoln (1994) further posit that qualitative research is naturally situated in the context of the participants and locates the observer in the world. Similarly, Mack *et al* (2005) notes that qualitative research produces culturally specific and contextually rich data. As for this study situational symbolic interactionism was used as a qualitative epistemological tradition. The tradition is detailed below.

#### **4.3 Situational symbolic interactionism as an epistemological tradition in qualitative research**

Confusion exists on the nature of qualitative research especially that of regarding qualitative research as if it is a single approach (Jacob 1998). Following Kuhn's (1970) use of the term tradition as subgroups in research paradigms, there are many varieties of epistemological traditions one of which is concerned with how individuals take another perspective and learn meaning and symbols- Situational symbolic interactionism. This qualitative research adopted Situational Symbolic Interactionism as an epistemological tradition. It is ushered by Herbert Blumer (1969). Blumer (1969) argues that though Symbolic interactionism is a philosophical doctrine, it can be used as a perspective/approach in qualitative research that can yield knowledge. Nothing is known to humans except in the form of something that may be indicative of and be seen from the perspective of the insiders. This is because the empirical world has an obdurate character, which one has to come to terms with. This world is continuously recast, appears in there and now. Researchers should respect the obdurate character

of this empirical world. A distinction can thus be noted that symbolic interactionism is both a philosophy and an epistemological tradition in research.

Blumer (1969) argues that symbolic interactionist researcher should see the empirical world as emergent and constantly negotiated. The strand is thus adept to enable robust exploration and capturing of the field particularities. Respondents have an epistemic advantage that researchers can draw on ostensibly as in this case the researcher was interested in the ways that respondents interact and interpret their circumstances by using symbols of motherhood and overall how they create and negotiate meaning of motherhood. By using Situational Symbolic interactionism, the author reasoned that there is an interactive and mutual relationship between the researcher and the researched. The researcher also presented himself as an outsider who should immerse himself in the participants world and acquire an emic perspective. Blumer (1969) argues that symbolic interactionism as a research epistemology is more of a science of interpretation as researchers should uncover how the respondents interpret their world and construct the meanings in their worlds. Blumer (1969) argues that researcher do not have by definition first-hand acquaintance with the sphere of social life that he proposes to study. He is not a participant in such life circles. He is an outsider as he lacks familiarity with what is actually taking place in the chosen area of study. The area of study and data collection technique is not pinned down to anything so absolute because it is emergent and flaccid in nature. As this study has shown, meanings of motherhood and meanings of what counts as research is handled and modified by an ongoing interactive process. In this study credence has been credited to pursuing symbolic interactionism as a design/epistemological tradition and philosophy simultaneously. Theoretically and methodologically, symbolic interactionism is constructivism as knowledge is social constructed and negotiated.

Symbolic interactionism constitutes a qualitative research epistemological tradition in its own right just like phenomenology, ethnography, ethnomethodology inter alia. There are varieties of Symbolic interactionism designs. These includes structural symbolic interactionism, Iowa school and Chicago school. Chicago school have a number of subgroups also. It however have a prominent epistemological tradition/design ushered by Herbert Blumer. The design is known as situational symbolic interactionism.

This study is pursued through such an approach, allowing and accommodating for emergent inquiries yet in a naturalistic fashion as the researcher and the respondents interact and engineer the inquiry process in unison. While preparing to collect the data using 1-1 unstructured interviews two of the respondents suggested that they would rather want the research encounter to be an open talk between the two of them and the researcher. This dovetails Blumer's (1969) ideas on data collection. Blumer (1969) argues that the maxim of symbolic interactionism as an epistemological tradition is to use any ethically allowable procedure that offers a likely possibility of getting a deeper picture of what is going on. The procedure is to be adapted to its circumstances. In the above scenario the researcher used his own judgment and made the interviews an open talk as he could have lost the respondent by clinging to a single data collection technique. Blumer (1969) argues that the data collection procedure is to be guided by judgment of its propriety and fruitiness. In the case of Hope and Tec the data collection procedures were adapted to circumstances as part of revision of the researcher observation and what the respondents had told him.

This therefore entails the researcher to have the ability and wisdom of when and how to ask questions and to be an avid listener so as to produce a coherent narrative with shared meaning yet interesting to others. As Li (2009) observes, this approach to sexuality is central to deconstruction of sexual conventions.

Situational symbolic interactionism is a qualitative research design that actually influenced the birth of another qualitative design known as grounded research design. Marshall and Rossman (1989) view symbolic interactionist attributes to qualitative research tradition as a preference to inductive reasoning, implicitly meaning lack of standard procedure in the research. To Li (2009) Situational symbolic interactionism sees reality as subjective, multiple, context specific and constructed. The ontological assumption like in any other qualitative design is that reality is not given but subjective, multiple, contextual as well as constructed (Cresswell 1994). This orientation grew in dissatisfaction with positivist tradition by emphasising that the researcher ought to interact with participants and must be cognisant of the situational constraints that shape the inquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). It encourages sensitivity to settings as settings are important during research inquiry.

Symbolic interactionism thus pertains to qualitative research tradition whereby it shows commitment to naturally occurring data in naturalistic patterns (Li 2009). It is argued that the approach then allowed the researcher to see sexual behaviour like any other human behaviour as meaning oriented as biology alone cannot explain the purpose of sexual behaving. Presumably, sex therefore becomes a variable that is shaped and reshaped, constructed and deconstructed in various social contexts and should be understood in those contexts so as to make sense and meaning out of it.

A brief discussion of situational symbolic interactionism as a research design is necessary as this will enable readership to comprehend the ontological and epistemological foundations which guided this study and consequently sift through and understand the rationale behind using situational symbolic interactionism. Li (2009) is of the view that Symbolic Interactionism assumptions help to guide the research in a controlled but fluid manner and at the same time allowing for a means to assess and analyse data. It is asserted by the author that since human experience is seen as socially constructed subjective interpretation by both the researcher and the researched becomes a reality in research inquiry. The reflexive quality that is enabled to the researcher and the respondents as they interact in knowledge production is therefore cardinal and cornerstone in the choice of this research design. Knowledge is believed to be in the 'actors' experience and the actor is the original source of exceptional experiences that the researcher is interested in. The inquiry is thus more ideal as it is situated contextually in a micro level scale.

This type of inquiry therefore enabled the researcher to reflexively engage with the participants and articulate the contingent and context specific knowledge that are in the respondents' subjective meaning. It is pivotal because it enables one to explore the meanings and activities which are difficult to capture using conventional designs (Li 2009). This orientation is more interested in the emergence and maintenance of self as it emphasises the fluid and contingent nature of research (Longmore 1998).

There is no impervious and stringent inquiry therefore in social inquiry as the respondents behaviour is indefinite, flexible, spontaneous and transient. Blumer (1969) thus opines that epistemologically symbolic interactionism as a design is emergent, entailing systematic inquiry that is consequent of direct examination of the subjects under study (Li 2009). Researchers

have to expect anything in the research field and should consequently accommodate this emergent situation. For emergent research scenarios that this researcher dealt with see the methodological challenges in this section below. To Li (2009) Symbolic Interactionist inquiry therefore is ideal as it deals with the problematic and socially constructed nature of sexual meaning. It is rationale therefore as Blumer (1969) argues to use 'sensitised' concepts rather than empirically defined variables in research because by using the later one can underestimate individual ability to create and recreate roles from one situation to another. The scholarship of Herbert Blumer reminds researchers to adopt situational and experientially sensitised approach to inquiry as they interact with the respondents in the field.

The other salient issue in the choice of this design is its insistence in researchers being explicit about the research context. That explains why the researcher has attempted throughout this study to narrow down the research field particularities, being in a food court, moving to a gay friendly bar and explaining even the home contexts in which the interviews were done. This is important because data collected and its relevance cannot be divorced from its contexts as Symbolic Interactionism valorises contextual particularities as primordial essentials.

Consequently, the researcher is not an objective data collector (Li 2009), because he engages in an interpretive process as he interacts with respondents and analyse data. What is perhaps pertinent in the adoption of this design is the researchers interest in lesbian mothers identities and the meaning they attach to being mothers. Blumer in fact equated his research design to a science of interpretation. The assumption is to understand the meaning the individuals make of their life experiences than what others believe. In that regard the use of Symbolic Interactionism is premised upon the attempt to understand how individual lesbian mothers develop their point of view by taking another perspective and learn the meaning (Denzin 1978). In a Blumerian fashion then the researcher shapes and reshapes the inquiry according to ongoing observation and interactions and the meaning coming out of such experiences. It is opined then that Symbolic Interactionism affords insights into how lesbian women themselves make meaning of and interpret their mothering as nested in their contexts.

The approach accommodates thus an impromptu fashion in inquiry. No one can really tell therefore in advance the research inquiry in its totality. Therefore, researchers can attend to 'emergent' scenarios through improvisation. In this scenario researchers have to stand back and take a

reflexive stance towards the meaning others bring on to the research encounter, consequently propelling the interaction in an unanticipated direction. In this study the principle and assumptions of Situational Symbolic Interactionism design are evident. The researcher had to engage the research in a reflexive manner: that is standing back between his various identities and positionality in research and the respondents suggestion and taping a meaning out of the encounter to drive the research into unanticipated but necessary manner to produce knowledge. The research encounter in which researcher had to juggle in through sticky situations is more attuned to Situational Symbolic Interactionism design as it attend to situations in temporary and emergent manner. These attestations, in which the researcher had to deal with situations through improvisation is the core vocation of Situational Symbolic Interactionism.

Situational Symbolic Interactionism is perhaps one of the most used research designs in micro sexuality studies. It is premised on the idea that sexual behaviour like all human behaviour is symbolic (Longmore 1998). Meanings associated with sexuality are therefore topics for symbolic interactionists.

To Symbolic Interactionism as a conceptual framework and methodology, meaning and self-identities have been cardinal focus as it emphasises face to face micro interactions. Constituting more of pragmatism and human adaptation. Situational Symbolic Interactionism to be specific emphasises the emergence and maintenance of self in face to face interactions as fluid and contingent nature of reality is alive in this research orientation. Situational Symbolic Interactionism approach by accommodating the indeterminant, impulsive and spontaneous order and approach to sexuality is illuminating and has furthered understanding of interpersonal process and personal strategies involved in identity formation and various sexual subcultures

Denzin (1991) opines that the researcher reach the conduct and experiences of those studied and utilises multiple observational techniques in natural settings. Utterances and gestures are important as are the settings of inquiry. Using Situational Symbolic Interactionism design therefore allowed this researcher to view interviews as relational encounters in which the researcher and lesbian mothers mutually influenced the content and meaning of data in a co-constructed manner. Thus this research design views people as interpretive beings capable of making sense of and interpreting their world.

#### **4.4 Sample size and Sample recruitment**

Eight self-identified lesbian mothers, (current or expectant) were recruited upon reaching data saturation. Given the nature of this study and the fact that lesbians are a hidden population the participants were recruited using snowball sampling. Berg (2001) is of the view that snowballing is a purposive sampling technique that is used to locate hard to reach study participants. Snowball sampling is sometimes referred to as referral chain sampling, (Mack *et al* 2005). Petty *et al* (2012) and Mack *et al* (2005) notes that snowball sampling is a form of non-random sampling in which the informants make use of their social networks to refer the researcher to other potential participants. The researcher has been working with lesbians and gays for a period of time and has established personal networks with some participants. In order to recruit the participants, personal networks, networks from friends as well as networks from GALZ and Pakasipiti ( an LBT women organisation) were used.

The researcher has known a single lesbian mother, Nicole. She was recruited from such a personal network. One of the researcher's friend works at GALZ, he knows a number of lesbian mothers. He gave the researcher contacts of participants who were willing to take part in the study. Some of these participants referred the researcher to their friends. One of the participants in fact liaised with the researcher's friend and introduced the researcher to Pakasipiti. He later accessed participants from that network. Thus forming more of a chain of referrals.

#### **4.5 Strategies for data collection**

Sexuality is a sensitive area of research inquiry. Given the fact that the area is sensitive and that the researcher wanted deep and detailed data on the issue 1-1 unstructured in-depth interviews and diary method as well as repeat interviews were used to collect data. Follow up interviews were only carried out where necessity arose.

Fontana and Frey (2005) defines in-depth interview as an open-ended, discovery oriented method aimed at obtaining detailed information on the topic of concern. Unstructured in-depth interviews follow a chit chat structure that allowed the researcher to gain additional information about the phenomena. These interviews are useful especially when the researcher is unfamiliar with the explored phenomena, (Berg 2001). Unstructured interviews were considered a necessity in this study as they are flexible and more relaxed as they take a form of natural conversation.

Petty *et al* (2012) avers that interviews are useful especially when the researcher wants to explore in depth individual experiences in sensitive topics. On the same vein, Mack *et al* (2005) argues that in-depth interviews allows for greater spontaneity and adaptation between the researcher and the participant. Unstructured interviews gives the interviewer the ability to probe deeply and unearth issues on the phenomena as it takes a highly informal or a mere conversation approach.

#### **4.5.1 Diaries**

Upon contemplating to explore the life experiences of lesbian mothers the researcher gave a friend small notebooks in June 2016 to be given to some potential participants to diarise issues they consider key in their decision to parent as lesbian women. A lesbian from his personal network was also given this notebook by him directly. These diaries were distributed in June 2016 and later collected during open interviews around end of October 2016. They formed the basis of some of the core issues that were further explored during unstructured interviews. It should be made clear here that since some diaries were not returned data was generated from unstructured interviews and repeat interviews or open interviews alone. One participant (Nicole) was not comfortable with open interviews and her case as presented in chapter 5 is solely based on the returned diary and the chats that she had with the researcher on WhatsApp. Consider the following scenario as it makes clear how diarising experiences by respondents was necessary in certain ethically demanding moments. The researcher visited Nicole upon her request to do so. As he arrived they conversed generally. After some few minutes Nicole became silent. While the researcher was thinking through the situation a cock runs through and pecked a slice of bread on the table and flew over the head of the researcher, leaving some feathers. At that moment Nicole requested him to come back after some days to collect the diary only as the interview would make her revisit some excruciating and painful experiences. At that moment the idea of a diary became handy and necessary. However, three participants did not return their diaries as some considered it more tedious. The others five participants returned their diaries. Berg (2001) reasoned also that a diary may be created at the specific request of the researcher as a contribution to some study. Lester (1999) shares a similar worldview.

#### **4.5.2 Unstructured interviews**

Participants were asked to tell the researcher their background and their journey as lesbian mothers in Zimbabwe. Participants were asked questions on their decisions to become mothers,



influencing factors, the implications of such a decision on their identity as lesbians, ways/mechanisms used to become mothers, challenges faced as a result of becoming a mother, coping strategies used, and overall what it means to be a lesbian mother in Zimbabwe. As these were unstructured interviews, they followed more of a natural conversation and questions were dependent on the response of the interviewee and not following any pattern. It was a more relaxed natural conversation. The researcher remembers very well an encounter with Ruth. Ruth was smoking as they conversed about the issue. The researcher was also enjoying some biscuits and coffee offered by Ruth and her friend Tec. In an open interview with Sarah they were actually in a food court, ended up in a gay friendly bar talking generally about how she became a mother. The researcher and the participants laughed and giggled where necessary. In the case of Hope and Tec, the researcher and the respondents laughed and joked about a number of issues. Hope and Tec were not comfortable with 1-1 open interviews as contained in the sentiments below, however the unstructured nature of these interviews allowed the researcher to quick fix and respond accordingly and interviewed them concurrently:

*“hah ma 1-1 interviews nemaquestionnaire kukuudza ahaite in research of this nature, pane vakauya last time nemaquestionnaire, we just filled the yes, no, yes, no but takatowaudza kuti research yenyu iri biased because hapana chaunowana, we respond as you want, so in this interview we just have to talk our issues both at the same time and we tell you that you will appreciate the findings”-* (in research of this nature 1-1 interviews and questionnaires are not useful. Last time certain researchers came with questionnaires we just filled yes, no, yes, no but we told them how biased their research was, you find nothing, we respond as they wanted and in this interview let's talk generally as we both tell you our issues and you will appreciate the data).

Because the interviews were more relaxed they tended to be long, lasting between 40 minutes to 1 hour 45 minutes. There was no guiding list of questions. The questions were asked off head basing on responses given. Interesting issues were probed further. In fact respondents were asked to tell the researcher about their mothering experiences. With the permission of the respondents, these interviews were recorded and later transcribed. One participant only declined being recorded. Notes were also taken simultaneously with the recordings.

#### ***4.5.3 Repeat/ follow-up interviews***

Repeat interviews were carried out to seek clarity on the issues raised in prior interviews. These were however very short as opposed to initial unstructured interviews. There were certain nascent but salient issues noted in the audios and notes from first interviews. These necessitated the researcher to arrange for repeat interviews and confirm his prior data on participants. Only 4 repeat interviews were carried out. In one instance the researcher wanted to seek further clarity on factors that influenced the choice of who was going to carry the pregnancy while the participants were doing co-parenting. In another case the researcher wanted to seek clarity on why despite identifying as lesbian a participant chose to go ahead and have sex with a man so as to fall pregnant. The case of Kelly necessitated repeat interview because the researcher wanted to seek clarity on some of the earlier discussed issues as well as sexuality and violence that were grey and unclear in the former interview. On the last case the researcher sought clarity on where and when various labels are used in the respondents' lives. Vincent (2013) is of the persuasion that a single interview could not yield detailed and deep accounts as repeat interviews as the later affords one to follow up lines of enquiry missed in the first interviews as well as seek clarity and verify responses.

#### **4.6 Data analysis techniques**

Thematic data analysis method was used to analyse the findings. Data analysis was thus established by reading and rereading the cases. As such the researcher was tracing recurring refrains and synergies into concrete themes. The researcher read the transcribed scripts over and over to note the emerging themes across and within the responses. Silverman (2000) posits that thematic data analysis is a way of comparing data from one respondent to the other and noting the overall emerging themes. Analysis in qualitative research can involve one arranging findings in accordance to themes to draw key issues discussed by the participants and can be done robustly by including direct quotes to illustrate points, (Lester 1999). This is typically what the researcher did during data analysis.

#### **4.7 Ethical considerations**

The ethical dilemmas of researching a topic of this nature manifest itself from the moment of choice. Just by attempting to research an area so untraveled: an area so tabooed. The researcher remembers instances when others questioned him about his own sexual orientation. The assumption was why he is researching the 'beast if he was not one of them?' A colleague had told

the researcher that this area can blacklist his Curriculum Vitae. A number of colleagues also asked if any other topics of academic and epistemic value are no longer existing. At home, his sister-in-law warned him,

*“you can end up becoming one of them or a rich white guy can buy you off”*

The assumption is that homosexuality is spiritually contagious and that it is also motivated by material gain. Of course these assumptions are not the focus of the thesis but they indicate the methodological and ethical placidity of the area the researcher was setting his academic foot on. The research ethics paid particular attention to during the field study are detailed below.

Researchers sometimes are themselves caught up in a web of decisions. Participant observation could have added insights. The researcher was caught up in a web of decisions with regard to partake in parenting, being a sperm donor, informal sort of. This was however revoked for ethical, professional and marital reasons. Of course merely as a researcher that could have added insights but validity of responses by participants could have been mediated by this relationship. At the same time there was mounting pressure from the his fiancé, prospective wife to revoke such a scholarly inquiry. The latter prevailed. But researchers engaging in topic of this are not only caught in the ‘typical’ ethics such as consent, confidentiality etcetera. But they are also cornered to strike a balance between moral and ethical demands as well as the validity of the data putting into cognisance the impact of their research inquiry into the future.

Berg (2001) observes that social scientists delve into social lives of other human beings and for this reason they have an ethical obligation. Any study that involves human contact should regard research ethics as essential and must priorities the wellbeing of the research participants (Mack *et al* 2005). This study therefore is not immune to such ethical standards of research conduct. In particular research ethics such as informed consent, debriefing, confidentiality and ongoing consent were considered in this study. Punch (1994) argues that concerns about ethics revolve around issues of harm, consent, privacy and confidentiality.

Because one's sexuality is a private and confidential matter the researcher had an ethical obligation to maintain the participants privacy, anonymity and consent. Because of stigma and discrimination and the politicized nature of their sexuality the researcher therefore regarded respondents as a vulnerable population. No harm to participants meant participants will not suffer any psychological and physical harm as a result of participating in the study for instance through blackmailing or them getting arrested or followed up by the police or police searching their homes or police raiding the researcher and the participants which is an occasional occurrence in Zimbabwe where members of the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) sneak in, arrest and raid respondents' homes. These occasional raids makes participants to do background check and as such it takes a long time to reach rapport with them as they are suspicious that the researchers can as well be a member of the Central Intelligence organisation.

#### ***4.7.1 Informed consent***

The researcher in all cases explained the research focus, pros and cons to the respondents in agreed language, Shona and English in all cases. The respondents were told that no material benefits accrue as a result of their participation. The researcher sought informed consent from the participants through word of mouth, (oral consent) by clarifying the purpose of the research. It meant that no formal records of their existence is in place (Berg 2001). This was necessary for security reasons given the violations of the privacy of sexual minorities by the ununiformed police in Zimbabwe.

Informed consent involved the researcher disclosing his identity. It involved him telling participants his educational, professional and ethnic background so that they know fully who they are consenting to. This was done in all interviews but specially reference is going to be made to Hope and Tec cases. As detailed elsewhere, the researcher met Hope and Tec at their work place. He had visited their co-worker who was willing to participate in the study. By the time the researcher reached the workplace she was not in. She phoned Hope and Tec to help the researcher with responses. They told the researcher who they are and wanted to know him likewise. The thought of someone interested in lesbianism was farfetched to them. They told the researcher that they rarely know someone of Shona ethnic group interested in studying

homosexuality. This is of course their assumptions based on their knowledge of utterances made by the Zimbabwean president.

The situation however gave the researcher an upper hand. The researcher is a Zimbabwean by birth but he belongs to the Malawi descent. The respondents joked about the researcher and told the researcher that Malawians are 'free' minded and 'open' people. This enabled rapport. The researcher reflected on his multiple identities as well. He told the respondents that he was a student and had researched a topic of similar nature during his undergraduate studies. He once did consultancy work on gays. To the respondents that enabled them to see him as an insider researcher. His interest in the topic and his consultancy work made them to treat him as 'one of them'. To them he was now more of a 'gay' researcher despite the fact that he is heterosexual.

In that regard, the researcher was invoking his personal reflexivity, that is his values, interest, beliefs and commitments as they can influence the research process. The researcher also invoked epistemological reflexivity as a symbolic researcher, that made him view Tec and Hope as interreactants and the research as an interactive process that is emergent in nature.

Explaining the focus of the research was premised on eliminating instances that respondents will feel they have been tricked into participating. In other words the researcher was trying to maximize informed consent. As informed consent means knowing consent of the participants to participate as an exercise of their choice that is independent of any forms of manipulation, malice or illicit inducements (Berg 2001).

Sex and sexuality are very sensitive areas of academic inquiry. In fact it is an ethical minefield. Mudavanhu (2010) posits that sex is a sensitive area and even the marital act of coitus is indirectly referred to in many African countries including Zimbabwe. This sexual secrecy motif indicates much gatekeeping and less public discussion of issues related to it. Informed consent is one of the fundamental ethics without which access to participants is implicated. It is a mechanism for ensuring that people understands well what it means to participate in a study so that they can consciously decide whether or not to participate, (Mack *et al* 2005).

Informed consent was crucial in this study as one can discern in the methodological and ethical challenges below, (this chapter) that informed consent can affect the data produced and or the failure to produce data. Participants wanted the researcher to fully disclose his identity regardless of the fact that they knew the ones who had given him their contact details (see researchers comments above on his multiple identities).

#### ***4.7.2 Ongoing consent***

The researcher also paid particular attention to ongoing consent. The respondents were told that they have a right to withdraw from the study. No one did. There was necessity in seeking ongoing consent as the researcher had to have follow ups after collecting the diaries and conducting initial unstructured interviews. Ongoing consent was also necessary during unstructured interviews as they were long. The researcher was also conscious of nonverbal communications as a way to assess ongoing consent. He remembers a case when a partner to a respondent started fidgeting and laughing uncontrollably as they had the interview. He told her that the interview was almost done and she smiled with sigh of relief and told the researcher that she was surely stuck awaiting for her partner as the interview was long. Of course this was at their house, in their dining room but they like any other people also want privacy and it was on a weekend, a day they could have spent relaxed as partners away from their work. Ongoing consent was essential because one can consent to being interviewed during initial interviews but that does not necessarily mean she is comfortably with the researcher constantly following her up for clarity.

#### ***4.7.3 Confidentiality***

Confidentiality of the participants was ensured by using pseudo names of the participants' choice. Berg (2001) argues that confidentiality is an attempt to remove all potentially identifying characteristics related to the study participants. Respondents pseudo names of choices were used in the data presentation and analysis except one case where the participant did not mind using her original name as she is already out to the public. Some participants (Hope and Tec) even requested the researcher to change their educational qualifications as they are few popular lesbian mothers in Zimbabwe.

#### **4.7.4 Debriefing**

The researcher debriefed participants for two reasons. To ascertain the validity and reliability of the responses and avoid misrepresenting the participants. Typed and transcribed text were sent to respondents to verify if the researcher had not misinterpreted them. This was meant to avoid researcher bias interfering with the participants data. It was a way of safeguarding data validity and reliability. A friend was also given the transcribed text to go through. A close friend from the LGBTI community was given the scripts to draw his analysis. This was compared with that of the researcher and it emerged that they had captured similar themes except only that he emphasized that direct quotes were essential in avoiding loss of meanings in data as quotes can enhance the lively nature of the research naturalistic tendencies. Choosing a gay guy and friend was premised on the fact that he knew these respondents in detail and can correct the researcher on certain issues.

#### **4.8 Methodological and ethical challenges**

The methodological and ethical issues encountered by the researcher is briefed here. The researcher explained the research focus to the participants in vernacular and were offered an opportunity to ask questions and seek clarity. However, the research encounter raised nascent methodological and ethical issues. One participant elaborated and revealed during the interview her discomfort with 'conventional' research approaches such as questionnaires, semi structured interviews and structured interviews ( See earlier comments on page 38, where a respondent argued against one on one in-depth interview).

She further elaborated ethical issues involved in the study. She was also very clear on how sexuality in Zimbabwe is an ethical minefield:

*“ We don't just allow anyone to come to this place and as for you when our friend phoned us, we just looked at each other ( referring to other colleagues in the room) and when we were told Raymond! We just asked Raymond! Where from? ,because there are security issues so we do a lot of background check here”.*

In as far as the ethics are concerned she places emphasis in what she called 'public' 'out' lesbian mothers in Zimbabwe. It is imperative at this juncture to mention that the researcher had to do a sort of 'quick fix' and engineering of his inquiry. In the above scenario the researcher

ended up not using 1-1 unstructured interviews. The interviews remained unstructured as the respondents conversed over the issue and gave each other turns.

Another ethically demanding scenario was the researcher encounter with Nicole. Nicole had made arrangements with the researcher, she actually texted the researcher to come over to her place. As they were talking something crossed her mind. Her eyes turned red, she was almost about to cry. As the researcher and the participant were seated something ‘dramatic’ happened. A cock runs from outside and pecked a slice of bread on the table, leaving some feathers on his head. While trying to interpret the whole scenario and caught in between exasperating scenarios Nicole asked the researcher to leave her ‘alone’ and come a few days to collect the diary as her contribution to research as the interview made her feel ‘uncomfortable’. He obliged. These are ‘emergent’ situations that no qualitative research textbook can prepare a researcher. But the researcher has to engage in what Blumer in his situational symbolic interactionism methodology termed ‘sensitivity’. The researcher has to juggle between the two scenarios and decide between losing the participants because they wanted to be interviewed concurrently and or losing Nicole’s contribution because she is no longer willing to have 1-1 unstructured interview but to diarise her story.

There was a concern among the respondents to worry about being ‘used as research objects’ and to verify the identity of the researcher. They also had curiosity as to why he was researching an area that is so tabooed. One respondent even asked why the department of sociology and social anthropology would allow him to research such a sensitive topic. In fact suspicion of researchers’ identity in researching the sexual minorities is evident in Zimbabwe, (Kuyala 2014). This is due to the fact that members of the Central Intelligence Organisation clandestinely sneak into and ‘investigate’ the private lives of sexual minorities and in some instances raid their workplaces and homes. The suspicion and curiosity resulted in the researcher declaring his identity which however gave him a leverage as discussed elsewhere in this methodology. The placidity and fragility of researching on and with a vulnerable population such as lesbians have already been evident in the researcher’s former studies during his undergraduate and that had even ‘forced’ him to go early into the field so as to reach rapport and built trust with various respondents.



Participants took long to respond. Sarah, a participant actually told the researcher that she was 'afraid' to participate. Her friends also did not participate out of 'fear' despite them being lesbian mothers. Sometimes the potential respondents ignored calls and one participant went as far as blocking the researcher on WhatsApp. An informal chat with a participant later revealed that they (participants) in some instances deliberately ignored the researcher as means testing to tap into his patience and authenticity as a student. One of the participants was actually baffled by the researchers suggestion to diarise her mothering experiences, she did not have 'time' to quote her as writing was tedious to her.

Finding a very conducive place was always a challenge especially when the participant was still in the closet at home and at the same time not comfortable going to the researcher place of residence. For other participants conversations were done at their homes and work place in their closed offices. One instance is when the researcher was invited by a respondent to come to Joina city. Upon his arrival it was decided that changing the location will be good as the inns were staring continuously at the researcher and the respondents. The area was also overcrowded. The researcher and the participant moved to a gay friendly bar. The researcher and the participant actually occupied a table of 3. They conversed over the issue but because Sarah's butch appearances Inns looked at them continuously. The conversation proceeded and was recorded. Music background can be heard from the background of that audio. The conversation was more in riddles so as to limit Inns getting the meaning and essence of the conversation. Notes were not taken to avoid making the conversation a formal to the Inns as taking notes in a bar can raise suspicion of an investigation going on, which the bar security officers would obviously want to know of.

Methodologically speaking participants were told by the researcher that he was only interested in lesbian mothers. In a certain case, a workmate wanted to participate in the research but her friends, prior respondents told her that she was not eligible as she was not yet a lesbian mother. In another case also a participant warned the researcher not to interview A as A was still in identity crisis. In such issues even participants animosity amongst themselves can also be an issue in recruiting the respondents as the referrals can avoid the distant one in their choices of snowballing future respondents.

#### **4. 8 Study limitations**

The limitation of this study relates to the fact that it is qualitative in nature as such it cannot be generalised to a different contexts. The researcher tried as much to locate white lesbian mothers but they were not forthcoming as such the research is highly composed of black Zimbabweans. Only one coloured lesbian mother participated. The use of snowballing may result in participants referring the researcher to other friends of similar experiences, thereby blurring heterogeneity of participants. In this study it resulted in participants being especially black, shona and of Christian origin.

## CHAPTER 5: DATA PRESENTATION

### 5.0 Introduction

This section is only intended to present data from the field as it relates to lesbian mothers in Zimbabwe. The data was collected using various tools as already indicated. Participants' demographic data is presented using table1 below. However, detailed data presentation is made using case by case presentation.

### 5.1 Data presentation

Data presented in this study as elaborated elsewhere, ( chapter 4) was collected from 8 women who self-identify as lesbian mothers in Harare. All names used in this presentation and data analysis are fictitious except otherwise stated. They therefore do not identify with a real individual out there even if coincidence may happen. Data was collected using open in-depth interviews, repeat interviews, and diaries. In some cases respondent information was collected through unstructured interviews and repeat interviews or unstructured interviews and diary methods or a dyadic or tripartite combination of these methods.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

| Name   | Age | Occupation            | Level of Education | Religion     | Location   |
|--------|-----|-----------------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|
| Euan   | 30  | Customs Officer       | Tertiary           | Christianity | Mtpleasent |
| Tec    | 31  | Accountant            | Tertiary           | Christianity | Msasa park |
| Ruth   | 32  | Revenue Collector     | O Level            | Christianity | Greendale  |
| Tamia  | 32  | Human Rights Activist | Tertiary           | Christianity | Mabvuku    |
| Sarah  | 31  | Personal Assistant    | Tertiary           | Christianity | Tafara     |
| Kelly  | 48  | Administrator         | O Level            | Christianity | Belvedere  |
| Nicole | 32  | Prison Officer        | A level            | Christianity | Mufakose   |
| Hope   | 42  | Personal Assistant    | Tertiary           | Christianity | Glenview   |

### **5.1.1 Ruth Mathews**

Ruth is a single mother. Ruth have one child. She is a 'butch' lesbian. Her one and only daughter is 6 years old. The term 'butch' is in quotes because despite the fact that Ruth is butch she made it clear during the interview that she is not comfortable with labels at all. Ruth was clear that people may look at her family and frown at it and disqualify it as a family because it does not have a father and a mother but she nevertheless regards it as a family. Ruth elaborated that there is nothing different from her family and other families. Ruth's story is one of its kind as due to societal norms of heteronormativity she tried to 'pretend' to have an opposite sex partner as having a same sex partner is vilified. The relationship however accidentally resulted in her falling pregnant. She did not decide or plan to be a mother. This is captured in the sentiments below.

"I didn't decide to be a mother, it sort of just happened, because of stigma you try to fit into the society, because same sex relationships are not allowed I had a guy to 'display' so that I can show people that I have a boyfriend. I had this guy, we were dating.... It just happened. We did not really sit down and say we want a child..."

She disclosed her sexual orientation in August last year in 2016 to her eldest aunt at a funeral, the aunt later told others about it. Her aunt accepted the fact that she is lesbian and said she cannot change her orientation. She had a child before disclosing her sexual orientation. One of the challenges as she explained is that of heteronormativity as people expects her to be married and not to be a single mother,

"Because people see you got a child, you not married, people start to suspect something, and they never hear of your boyfriend... people also expect you to be married...but I don't mind it, I work and I support my kid. I don't rely on any one. I keep and mind my own business and can't involve other people...."

The participant was probed further to understand if she had any challenges from the lesbian community. She puts it across in the following way,

"The challenge from the lesbians' community besides it being small is that we pull each other apart. But generally lesbians have children maybe because of various reasons. But as for me I have never been asked why I have a child while being a lesbian".

Even though people sometimes question the 'true' lesbian identity of a lesbian who is a mother the case of Ruth is different. She explained that she had a child before disclosing her sexual

orientation to the lesbian community and the community at large. When she had a child people just viewed her as a single mother and treated her as a single mother. When she came out of the closet to the lesbian community she was already a mother as such many did not mind her being a lesbian mother. She explained further, the narrative is illustrative of the fact that being a mother makes ones' identity to become doubted as a lesbian but in her case she was just viewed as a single mother and thus raising a child out of wedlock. Presenting herself as a regular single mother prevented her from being a victim of homophobia and lesbophobia as her lesbianism was not known to people.

“When people know that you are a lesbian and have a kid people can think you are lying, but that's not it. You can chose to have child or can have the child accidentally....in my case things did not become difficulty because I wasn't out, no one knows that I was inclined to girls, so to people it was like she is now a mother just like that...I never had a situation where someone asks me why I had a child as a lesbian even though that happens, in the lesbian community people just know that I have a child but so what ...”.

Ruth never saw same sex people much in the public and so ended up forcing herself into a heterosexual relationship so as to fit into the society. The then boyfriend later discovered.

“He later discovered that I had a same sex relationship, though it was a long distance one. He was angry. He later confronted me and told me about my sexual orientation”.

Ruth was not married to the aforementioned boyfriend. As a result she had to take care of the child as a single mother. She explained.

“It was sort of degrading he thought like I am looking down on him. He eventually got to accept it. Right now he is living with the child since last year. We talk and discuss parenting and we both love the child. I had been living with the child ever since her birth. I have a same sex partner but my kid just knows her as aunt, but I don't know if she really understands what it means to be aunt”.

In as far as the issue of lesbianism and motherhood is concerned she did not face homophobia or have her lesbianism doubted as she was just treated as regular, 'normal' and everyday single heterosexual mother. To many people in the then small town of Mvurwi it was just like she is a heterosexual single mother in general and not a single lesbian mother.

Ruth say she is likely to face one challenge of disclosing her sexual orientation to her daughter:

“how I am going to explain my sexual orientation to my child because the child is growing up and I always wonder when and how I will tell her...I wouldn't want my child to resent me, I want her to love me and just see me as mom despite being lesbian”.

Being a lesbian mother in her extended family was not a challenge because the family is already distant to her. Her parents are deceased and no one pressurizes her to settle down or asks her why she had a child while she is lesbian. This is how she puts it across.

*“It's never really an issue that I had a baby we had other issues not sexual orientation that affected our relationship and we don't talk much. But I don't want my kid to go through the experience that I go through as a lesbian, I might have a thick skin but deep down stigma affects us. We are not hating anyone or stealing from someone...but I don't want a situation yekuti vanhu vanenge vakamuvhurira maziso kuti your mother is lesbian...being a lesbian or lesbian mother don't live the way people want you to live..., live the way you want to live regardless of your orientation, be true to yourself.* – (To my extended family having a baby has never been an issue. We were already in an emotional and geographical drift, though not because of my sexuality. I do not want my child to experience stigma as I do as a lesbian. I do not want my child to be a victim of homophobia because of my lesbianism. As lesbians and lesbian mothers people should live an authentic live regardless of what people say and expect of their lives).

As Ruth puts it across she would want a situation to sit down and talk to her child, she however appreciates that there is no right moment or time because the child might already be knowing about her sexuality while assuming she does not. “I would want a situation to sit down with her and tell her but there is no right moment and time because she might be knowing it already and you may be surprised to find out that she knows about it..... Kids are kids and can find out”.

Ruth just minds her business and by that way avoids much issues with people who may question her true lesbian identity while she is a mother.

### **5.1.2 Tec**

Having been married for 7 years, Tec latter found “out” that she loves other women and had to part ways with her husband, the father to her 13 year old daughter. That shocked her

extended family and they tried to arrange another marriage for her, but she turned them down. She identifies her immediate family as “gay friendly” and had “embraced lesbianism” as opposed to her extended family who confuses her sexuality as being driven by the love of ‘money’ and gossip about her sexuality: “ they gossiped about me at the funerals and everywhere and had tried to get me married. When I refused they always say I divorced my husband because I had found a rich woman”.

She explained that she became a mother in a heterosexual marriage and had a good relationship with her husband but latter “ found’ out that she is lesbian and had to separate with the husband. However, she is now living in an openly lesbian relationship. She felt as relaxed as she told the researcher that,

“I fell in love with this guy and we had a good relationship, we settled down and I got pregnant and had a beautiful baby girl, however around about 7 years later I started to see and I find out that it wasn’t me. I was someone. I was someone who wanted to be in a relationship with another woman. So I had a baby before I find out about my sexuality and then parted ways with my husband”.

She emphasised normalcy and similarity of her same sex family to a heterosexual family. As she is currently living with her partner her daughter once called her partner aunt but now calls her by her first name. “I think we are just like any other family. Just like the heterosexual families only that we are two women of the same sex... ..”

She was probed to explain if she had any challenges as a lesbian mother from her immediate family. Tec explained the optimism and hope as well as support and acceptance that she got from her immediate family. Tec’s immediate family had normalized lesbianism and homosexuality and being a lesbian mother did not present her with much challenges to the immediate family as a result. She explained,

“In our family we normalized lesbianism because my elder sister is lesbian and so my immediate family is not baffled by that and they accept the way the things are and even my kid understands that, and even if someone of the opposite sex comes she will give you this weird look like what about aunt! (Aunt is reference to her same sex partner)”.

Such experiences in which the child feels jealous and knows of mother sexual orientation to Tec shows that the child really understand just like anyone in the family that she is lesbian and accept

the way things are and that she has got two mothers. She was asked issues of disclosure in the family and how that could have affected her parenting. She demonstrated that she did not really sit down and told the family that she is lesbian but the family just started to suspect and accepted it and gave her support as she repeated how lesbianism is normalized in the family and how even a small child in family knows and accepts that as part and parcel of the family.

Tec demonstrates the close interaction that takes place between the child and her partner as well as the change in terms and labels used to identify her partner in their same sex family.

“they would interact and talk and sometimes you don’t even know what’s going on, at first she would refer to her as aunt and these days I think she is no longer satisfied with that and she now calls her by her real name”.

Tec upon being probed to describe what is really means to a lesbian mother to her she explained the joy that comes with the identity of being a lesbian mother.

“ I think in terms of not just being a mother, but being a lesbian mother is a unique and joyous experience, other lesbians who want to become mothers and are failing and going to South Africa they look up to you and say woow! You are lesbian and mother at the same time, it’s something other lesbians are aspiring to become”.

The respondent also highlighted the social stigma that the child sometime faces. She recalled an incident when her 13 year old daughter came from school and told her that some students made fun of her and told her that she does not have a father and a mother but instead have “two mothers”.

Tec upon probed as to how she coped with similar experiences illustrated that she had had to let go those situations and did not confront the bullies at school because to her that could actually open “ a sack of problems” as it will mean that she will be disclosing her identity at the school and the child could suffer more. She explained “I just told her kuti ah siyana navo vanopenga-meaning, just leave those insane bullies”.

The researcher asked that participants if there is anything from her journey as a lesbian mother that she wanted to tell him. She had this to say

“I think sometimes as lesbian mothers we have this double burden of being a mother and being a lesbian, sometimes a gap is created between you and other lesbians who are singles and do not want to have children who then ask like so is she a real lesbian if she had sex with a man and have a child”.



She continued to elaborate how just the identity of lesbian mother is sometimes viewed as an anomaly by other lesbians. She recalls how she and other lesbian mothers are labelled as “*fertile lesbians*”-meaning those lesbians who bears children with men out of penetrative vaginal sexual intercourse while crossing the sexual script. As she puts it across, it is a label that questions their ‘true’ lesbian identity. Like lesbians are confined somewhere to act and behave in a certain way and once they fail that they become suspects, more of “identity confused individuals”, [Data from an interview with Tec on 2 Nov 2016].

Tec also reminded the researcher of her experience with the extended family. She recalled an experience when her aunties had to organize a marriage that she turned down and how she suffered stigma,

*“There was a moment when someone was arranged to marry me and I turned that down and people will always talk at the funerals and other places like ndivo kavaya vekuramba murume nokuti vakawana mukadzi ane mari and people will think like you are lesbian by choice and you are doing it for money!”*

Translated that means, there was a moment when a marriage was arranged that Tec rejected and at social gatherings extended family members will rumor behind her back that she turned down a marriage with a man because she is in love with a rich lesbian and that could give an impression that she is a gold digger, a lesbian by choice who is just pursuing materialism not real love.

### **5.1.3 Hope**

Hope is a lesbian mother of one to a 22 year old son who is currently doing his studies at one of the local tertiary institutions. She ‘faked’ falling in love with a man and ‘manipulated’ him to sleep with her and impregnate her. When she became pregnant she had to ‘break up’ with the man. He later discovered that she just wanted him to give her a child. She was never married before and has only cohabited with her same sex partner. She has always dreamt of being a mother and explained being a mother as “becoming me”. She puts it across in the following sentiments, “The fact that I had fulfilled my parental expectations, I had gone to school and had graduated and was now working I wanted to become me. I wanted to become true to myself and my mother supported me”.

In terms of how she became a mother, Hope had conceived and became a mother through “*the natural way*”. The researcher was interested in understanding what she meant by “*the natural way*” and probed further for the participant to recall and describe to him the whole experience. She recalled ‘falling’ in a ‘manipulative’ relationship with a man [*Repeat Interview data*]. He, as she puts it ‘Unfortunately’ passed away some time later. She elaborated that:

“I fell in love with a man and had sex so as to become pregnant, but he discovered later that I had used him to fall pregnant, but he later accepted that I am lesbian and didn’t seem to mind it. In terms of parental rights and obligation he was not involved because he sadly passed away”.

She described how she become a mother in the following quote: “ I wanted to become a mother and had to have sex with a man. I had to ‘fall’ in love so as to become pregnant”. Hope was probed by the researcher to explain how despite identifying as lesbian she had to sleep with a man. In her response Hope was elaborate that her sexuality and sexual behaviour are not the same thing and should be treated likewise. To her she had to be in “manipulative” relationship to become pregnant. She explained however that “ he found out that I used him to become pregnant. He accepted that but was not involved in parenting as he unfortunately passed away”.

Both Hope and her partner are treated as parents by his son, only except that terminology and labels used had been in a process of incessant shifts with regard to time and contexts. Hope explained the relationship between her partner and her son as sort of that of a co-mother and son but was clear on the transition and negotiations of this relationship along the way. This is contained in her sentiments, “ she is more like a co-mother but at first he ( son) simply addressed her as aunt and latter started calling her Blaz( slang for brother), and I was like really! He wants to call my partner blaz! These days they call each other blaz and are both comfortable with that”.

The researcher wanted to know of parental relationship between the child and the ‘other’ mother. Hope revealed that her partner is treated as mother though how her son addressed her partner has been changing as he used various terms to identify the other mother. This as Hope chronicled was influenced by the interactions and familiarity between her son and the partner and the consequent closeness of their relationship. This is narrated in her sentiment below:

“My son treats us as both parents, more like mama1 and mama2 and he would address my partner as aunt the first days and as they come to know each other he started to be more open to her to an extent that they might talk and have their secrets without me knowing. He can even talk about his academic needs to her without my knowledge becoz she is a parent to him *and vatosvika pakujairana zvekuti I think zvaimuremerera mazuva ekutanga kuti aiti aunt to my partner because she is butch and I think as a result he adjusted and saw kuti calling her aunt because she is butch was not fitting and these days anooti kwaari blaz, and to me the first days I was like really!.....*”.

The researcher probed further on the various issues surrounding the seeming shifts in labels of Hope’s partner as a co-mother. She chronicles it below, “Since she is my partner I think that is why my son had to call her aunt, but as he grew up they started to become more intimate and he found it very difficult to call her aunt and had to call her blaz as she is more butch. ...”. In a repeat interview Hope was very clear on the fact that her partner is only addressed as Blaz when they are at home and in public places and other social gathering the partner is addressed as Blaz T, which is a combination of the co-mother’s real name and her label Blaz as simply using the label Blaz can be uneasy at gatherings as it has masculine connotations. This is how she puts it across, “They both address each other as Blaz, but at other places my partner addresses my son by his name and my son addresses her as Blaz T to avoid people to focus on why she is called blaz”.

She disclosed her sexuality to her family and was accepted regardless of her being lesbian. She did not disclose to her family “*over a conference table or meeting*” as she put it. Her parents found out on their own that she is lesbian and her mother accepted it first and then introduced her partner to the family. The partner is now known to the family and to the parents. Hope and the partner had good times before the mother passed away. Her partner since then has been integrated in the family and takes part in family funerals and other related issues such as picking up the kid from school.

Hope in terms of having faced any challenges as a lesbian mother vehemently points out that she cannot lie that she faced many challenges. She pointed out that she actually finds much support from her partner and her 22 year old son who accepted his mothers’ familial setup. The fact that

Hope and her partner are both employed and could pick up the child at school and help raise the child was an advantage to her. She equated the experience to more like co-parenting as the parents' shares parental duties regardless of who is 'butch' or 'femme'. Just like heterosexuals the parents are just parents as she puts it across.

The child understands the mother sexual identity and the fact that their family is 'not' any different from heterosexual families and might be better off in some instances. This is how she puts it across:

"My son is someone who accepts the fact that he's got two mothers and sometimes he would joke about a beautiful potential girlfriend for me being around in the neighborhood. He is someone who knows that despite being in a lesbian family he might be better off than someone who is in a heterosexual family as he is well catered for in terms of his needs despite having lesbian parents. He can tell you that I have never gone hungry because I have lesbian parents.... There is nothing that takes away his parents abilities..."

Hope continually emphasised that she has not faced challenges overall as a lesbian mother. She pointed to the support from the partner, the child and the parents and recalled the fact that her parents were in love with the child because she had the financial capacity of raising the child and because she had met their expectations. This can be discerned from the sentiments below:

"I thought of having a child at around 20 years and because I had met my parents expectations which was going to school and passing and finding a job there was nothing that was going to stop me now from becoming me, which is becoming a mother. My mother also understood the fact that I had the financial capacity to raise a kid and she was like all thumbs up and before she died she was in love with the grandchild. She introduced my partner to the family and everyone knows her now".

Hope illustrated that being a lesbian mother is not as gloomy and dark as some experiences are worth enjoying and remembering, "it's not always about challenges, challenges, there are brighter moments as lesbian mothers, having a loving kid and partner and those memorable times and events we share and if there is a lesbian who want to have a kid I will tell her to do so right away".

Hope's son was once a victim of homophobia because he is in a lesbian family and she would recall a moment when her son was approached by a child who was inquisitive and wanted to know much about his mother's sexual orientation. As she puts it across:

"There was a kid who approached my son and asked him why I always hang up with the other women. I think that kid up to now regret asking that. My son is very confrontational and defensive. He stands up for himself. He beat up the child and I think even some who would want to know something about his mother are just scared off, and just by the fact that he is a young man doesn't make him more vulnerable to stigma by other people".

As for the family chores and division of domestic labour Hope says it is more egalitarian. As she points out,

*"we share responsibilities equally, someone can cook and someone can pick the child from school hakuna zvekuti ndini baba ndini amai, of course I am talking from my own experiences which might be different from the experience yevamwevo malesbians anogona anemumwe anotozviti ndini baba mumba muno, despite the fact that my partner is butch she doesn't mind sharing chores equally".-( we share responsibilities equally, someone can cook and someone can fetch the child from school. Despite my partner being butch no one claims to be the father or mother, of course this relates to my experience which can be different from those who may have the mother-father roles in their lesbian families).*

Hope associate being a lesbian mother with joy and that whole experience to her is something that regardless of homophobia cannot be revoked or changed as she remains a parent. She pointed that below,

"Being a mother is something amazing, it's just an indescribably moment and identity. You cannot really explain what it means to be a lesbian mother even Mugabe himself cannot take away my child. He is part of me. He is part of my flesh that is living. To my parents I had to pretend but to him I could not pretend or hide my true identity and I had been true to him and he understands me. Just to have someone who depends on you for everything as a parent feels good".

#### 5.1.4 Euan

Euan has been thinking of being a mother for a long period of time now. She is someone who had been trying to have a child for the past 5 years. She is planning to have a child through artificial insemination. Finances had been not coming up and this explained her failure to be a mother. She is thinking that if any opportunity arises she would engage in co-parenting with the other partner. They had discussed the issue numerously. The partner had raised concerns of having resemblance and biological affinity ties to the child. Euan resolved that they could adopt another child so that both could feel connected to the children. She raised the difficulty of adoption however in Zimbabwe.

Since Euan and her partner had been failing to raise money to have artificial insemination she is not left with an option but to have someone willing to be a sperm donor. As Euan narrated, “*we would want someone willing to be a sperm donor, preferably a gay guy*”. As Euan puts it they want a ‘*clean gay guy*’ to be a donor. The researcher probed into the issue. It emerged that Euan’s meaning of a ‘*clean gay guy*’ was double barrelled. It meant that the guy was supposed not to be infected with any STIs. Clean also meant as she narrated ‘*not a father already*’, sort of parentally clean.

A gay guy was ideal to Euan because it means less drama. Someone who is heterosexual might be married and his wife may discover that he is the father of their child and that might cause a scandal. She will be treated more like a small house of some sort, a thing she is not prepared to do. A gay guy is also preferable because like a lesbian they have social stigma to deal with and are both scorned in the society, limiting the chances of them being in parental loggerheads because they would be trying to limit public disclosure of their sexuality.

A gay guy is more likely to be devoted to the child because he is not likely to be having children elsewhere and that would mean full commitment as well as no divided financial responsibility, entailing they could raise up the child together with full parental support of all the parents, material and moral wise. Euan narrated that this is necessary because, ‘*I wouldn’t want to raise a kid that is not well taken care of*’.

As she put it finances has been the major challenge in her failing to have a child. This is how she puts it across, ‘if it wasn’t for money I would have had 3 or more children’. She further emphasised that, ‘money is a challenge because we can’t adopt or have donor insemination without money, give us money and we are good to go’.

Euan parents are looking forward to being grandparents. They have been asking for one in fact. This is despite the fact that they knew about her sexual orientation. When she came to Harare the parents found a letter in her room from her girlfriend and they came to know about her sexual orientation through that letter. It was 4 years ago. They had been a bit extreme about it but they have really changed and have now embraced the reality.

She wants insemination either clinical or self-insemination because she wants the kid to be more like her and to be related to her through blood. This could be attested in the following sentiment, ‘I think anyone wants to have a child who looks more like them or their partner’.

She expressed the need to raise a child in a less homophobic environment. If finances allow they would want to go and live outside Zimbabwe in a less homophobic context. However, she thinks she is not more exposed to homophobia and the child is less likely to be a victim, but a less homophobic environment is ideal. This is how she expressed it, “As for me I don’t think homophobia would be a challenge because I have not experienced homophobia specifically”.

#### **5.1.5 Sarah**

Sarah said she was even more than happy to participate in the study so as to share the struggles that lesbian mothers go through. She is born in a family of 3 siblings and she is the last born in that family. She is a mother to a 3 year old daughter. Even though she is now a mother she did not plan to be a mother.

She shared how she became a mother. To her being a mother was not planned. Due to her parents pressure to settle down she started to have a boyfriend for “cover” so as to limit her parents inquisitive questions and pressure to settle down and have a child, “accidentally” she fell pregnant and had to avoid abortion and thus became a mother:

‘I didn’t exactly think about having a child. Whether or not you married you have to give that other life a chance according to my religion. I didn’t have to plan to have a

child. I found myself pregnant. As a Christian I believe a child is a blessing from God. There are certain issues that we value. We don't believe in abortion so I just embraced that I got pregnant.'

To confirm the aforesaid statement that her motherhood was unplanned, she was probed as to whether she deliberately slept with the guy to be pregnant. This is how she clarified her position

"No, no we were in a relationship and it just happened. We bump into each other but he is not involved. Am the father and mother at the same time...other people plan but in my case we didn't have to. But in my case you dating, have sex and you fall pregnant. Most guys with the economic situation they don't want to have kids especially if they find out that you are pregnant. As women however we have maternal instincts ..... ; most of your heterosexual friends may have kids and have settled'.

She had faced a number of challenges as a result of being a parent. Some of these challenges relate to being a single mother, being a Christian and also her having a child out of the wedlock as she defied her parental expectations. Some as she narrates relate to her being lesbian and these were especially spearheaded by her lesbian friends who knew her sexual orientation. The narratives captured at length depict this,

"I have faced certain challenges. Oh yes I have faced challenges. Because of my religion my family say I have a child out of wedlock. They expect Lobola to be paid and have a child.... When that happens its worse, they (her friends) say that's who you are?, then they throw it back at you, if it's right thing to do( lesbianism) why are you stepping out. My family doesn't know. But my friends do. People are like if being lesbian is a natural orientation why then are you choosing something that goes against your lifestyle. They vilify having a child outside the wedlock and because you are lesbian then they say if you are lesbian why are you stepping out and have a child. In terms of support if you have a child out of the wedlock people don't really support you. And in terms of clinics they expect having a father and mother. If you are having a first child you are more exposed to challenges because you don't know anything about being a parent'.



Her challenges were also magnified by the fact that it was a her first pregnancy.

“You need support when you are pregnant. When people know that you are not married then they don’t support you. You end up using the Internet to learn certain things. You don’t have someone to guide you, a role model especially if you having a child for the first time, people can have miscarriage because of that. So when you go to clinics they are like we don’t teach you about pregnancy...they just take your temperature.”.

As to how she coped, she had to rely on some friends, reading around stress management and visiting a doctor for counselling. This is captured below: “It wasn’t really easy. But it helps when you have a job. I had my problems fell back on my job and I could afford to see a doctor. I had friends, I asked them how they are managing. Above all I read...’ From the foregoing a number of coping mechanism were used by Sarah, she used her social networks of friends, resorted to the internet, she went for stress management and took her job as a refuge.

The researcher asked her if she had any challenges from the lesbian community. This is how she put it across:

‘In terms of lesbian community it’s actually worse. People start to question your identity. They say like maybe you are not really what you say you are, because they start to say how did all this happen but others can understand, they look at you and your age and say maybe she is of age and say she is old and felt like she need a baby and that you ended up having sex with a man because Zimbabwe is not like in any other countries where you can wake up and say I need a child... like artificial insemination and other methods..’

She raised issues of challenges faced by lesbians trying to resort to shared same sex parenting as well as single motherhood-

“No one want to really raise a child on their own. In the lesbian community there isn’t a lot of stability they are a lot of challenges. What’s gonah happen when you die? My parents became entitled to the child not my partner. It’s a bit difficult to have her claim in terms of the child so it’s like she doesn’t have right like me. They are limited....if I carry the pregnancy my parents saw my partners simply as a friend and because

we are not disclosed they will just take my child, so they may limit her like visiting the child. ...'

The researcher wanted to know how the child relates to her partner. It emerged that she does not live full time with her partner but the partner just comes here and there. Her encounter with the baby is therefore temporary and the baby is still young to understand what will be going on "I don't live with the partner. But when she visits you just say, say hie to my friend etc. she runs to them etc....." She raised the fact that in terms of the relationship of the partner and the child the child is still young and it's not a challenge in any manner: "A child doesn't exactly know what's going on. She is 3 and she just thinks its moms friend and she is young. I have to have a stable relationship. I can't just continue introducing more friends to my child. I should have known you for long...."

Familial support is important to any parent, but to Sarah this is a bit curtailed because she had a child outside the wedlock,

'The child need a parent and grandparents. Grandparents are more like second parents to your child so they need to support you. I thought about disclosing my orientation. But I can't... I don't want to my child to tell lies. But I'm lying. But the child will soon be asking where is my dad and she will be seeing this other mom. I would want to tell my child the truth and I don't want to lie to her....'

The repeat interview revealed that the father to Sarah's daughter is not involved. she was asked why she was in a relationship with the opposite sex if she identifies herself as a lesbian, she revealed that it was because of mounting pressure at home to settle down.

' parents at home will be like can't you settle down and give us a grandchild and you end up having a boyfriend just to 'display' to them. But he's got needs and you end up sleeping and in my case I fell pregnant but as with my orientation I did want of course to be that committed and it was any advantage to him because he was not looking forward to having that kid. ..."

### **5.1. 6 Nicole**

Nicole is a single lesbian mother to a baby boy who is 6 years old. Born and bred in Harare, Nicole later moved to her aunt's place after a fatal accident that claimed the lives of her parents and young sibling. However, she was already in 'emotional' drift with her extended family because of her sexual orientation. When her parents died she was still doing her 'A' level studies and had to later join the Prison and Correctional services. She later changed her place of residence to limit embarrassment by her aunt who always raise up the fact that she had a child out of an incestuous relationship with her uncle. Currently she not in a serious same sex relationship. She has been disassociating herself from the extended family recently because of the pronounced incestuous relationship with her uncle that resulted in her being pregnant.

Ever since she was young she wanted to be a mother. She was however not comfortable having a child through sexual intercourse with a man due to her orientation. However, she later did. She did not have the finances to adopt or to go for insemination in South Africa and she ended up exploring local channels. She attempted to conceive on 4 accounts, but through 3 donors.

She first attempted conceiving when she was 22 years. She read around how to have home based insemination by using sperms donated by a heterosexual friend. She tried this mechanism two times and failed. They insinuated that maybe their lack of knowledge about the method to be a mediating factor in that failure. She felt like just relaxing and stopped home based insemination. Around the year 2009, she seriously wanted a child and had to talk to a heterosexual friend, they had natural sexual encounter but nothing happened. She started to suspect that either one of them might be having fertility problems. She then a month later discussed the issue with a gay guy who was willing to be a sperm donor. As agreed the gay guy was not to be involved thereafter. She found out that she was pregnant two months later. She revealed the news to the donor who later became more interested in monitoring her pregnancy and wanted to be equally recognized as a parent:

“a friend had offered to help, he was not interested in having a child by that time.

When the donation became a success he changed. He started to push me to move to his

apartment despite that fact that he knew I am a lesbian. He wanted to be involved now. I was against that. Unfortunately I lost the pregnancy. I HAD A MISCARRIAGE....”

The donor thought she deliberately terminated the pregnancy however. In 2010 she resolved wanting a child again after these initial attempts. She discussed the issue with the uncle, who later became a willing ‘donor’. She had suggested that he donate the sperm directly but he declined citing fear of possible use of his seeds in rituals. She desperately wanted a child though and the uncle consented to ‘the natural way’, that actually resulted in her being pregnant and being a mother.

The third encounter that made her pregnant was motivated by the need to evade problems associated with the former attempted ways to conception. Her uncle had been very close. He would not cause any drama about being the father in any manner. Besides he had many children, some outside wedlock. So he would not be someone desperately wanting to be involved in her parenting and he is even not involved until now.

A probe on WhatsApp with Nicole revealed that she had no problem with him even if he would have claimed the child afterwards. The child is related to both and already it cannot be counted as a loss if he wants to claim custody. It will be a blessing in disguise:

“I wouldn’t count that as a loss! He will be caring for his own and I don’t mind. what I don’t like is being dragged in courts by a heterosexual guy claiming he is the father to my child. And in many cases heterosexuals guys can simple make you lose custody by making your sexual orientation the topic of the day”.

The extended family found out that she had a child out of an incestuous relationship the same year through a friend whom Nicole regarded as having black mailed her and abused her trust. Since then she has moved from her original place of residence to limit stigma and mounting stress from the scenario. “They treated me like a psychopath. Like what else could have come out of being lesbian!”

She had been distant and rarely talk to many of the family members. As for the uncle she thinks he is used to being scorned because he already have different children with different mothers outside the marriage. In her case much emphasis was placed on her orientation as if

she bedevilled her uncle, like using charms to seduce him. Changing her place of residence was therefore meant to reduce stigma. As she is employed she does not have to look for financial support from anyone.

#### **5.1. 7 Tamia classified**

Tamia parents died when she was 9 years and had to move in and between houses, which she described not as home “enough”. This is because she suffered being rejected because of her sexuality and the fact that she lacked parental love and care because they (the parents) unfortunately passed away when she was young. She lives in Harare and has been ‘married’ to her same sex partner for 4 years. She wedded in South Africa before the priest, friends and relatives, some of whom she sponsored to attend the wedding in South Africa.

She always wanted to be a mother because as “a woman I was socialized to be a mother” and because “I have been in houses, under roofs, but never felt like in a home, and I want to give another life that chance that I was deprived of, it’s more of realizing the ideal family that I always dreamt of and it’s also about the birth of a new dynasty, a dynasty that would be gay friendly. Two generations from now my grandchildren will not have to worry about their grandmother who was forsaken because of her sexuality because they will be socialized to accept that type of a family..”. she also explained her motives in being a mother in the following words: “I have always been a family oriented person, but in terms of wanting to be aggressively being a parent it’s two years ago. When we settled down we talked about it but had to think around a lot of issues, when and the various ways to use”.

Tamia and her partner, Rosa have both thought about being parents at some points in their lives. It is only in the past two years that they have ‘aggressively’ thought of being parents and so started to look for ways and means to become one, weighing the cons and pros of these means to parenting. She smiled and sighed as she elaborated how she planned on being a mother. She emphasised that she is beyond seeking validation from her family. Telling her family about being a mother is just meant to inform them. She elaborated, “informing our relatives about the baby is not about being validated as a family. We have moved beyond that.....” (Smiling).

Upon being probed, Tamia explained that it is only within the last two years that she and her partner became “aggressive’ about being parents and as such they started to find out

more about various ways of mothering and the pros and cons involved. They had many various option but having a “child free” and “care free” young man who is not thinking about being a parent later presented itself as an option and had to choose one young man who was ready to act as an informal sperm donor from a semi-random sample through a semi-legal transaction. He was paid for his services and had no other parental obligation or rights whatsoever.

Tamia and her partner, Rosa had to negotiate who was going to be inseminated and carry the pregnancy. Because Tamia is already preoccupied with being a bread winner and because she has an infection which the doctor said can affect her pregnancy as well as due to the fact that Rosa is relative younger and has many chances of carrying pregnancy without any difficulties it was decided that Rosa carries the pregnancy. Because they both want a big family Tamia and Rosa are thinking of adopting singly, but Tamia expressed the possible hurdle of being blacklisted as an adoptee because she works for GALZ.

As a result of self-insemination at home Rosa was 4 months pregnant by the time of the first interview. The first time Tamia and Rosa had a conversation with the researcher they were looking for a donor, by the time of the interview the pregnancy was 4 months and in January 2017 they were now mothers to a baby girl. Social network was important in finding a donor as they had to rely on friends who spread the message that their friends were looking for a donor from ‘outer’ circles, which Tamia characterized as “semi-random sample” so as to maintain a distance with the donor.

Tamia and Rosa journey is not just as straight forward, she explained various attempts and ways to become pregnant they had to try and use. First they wanted to seek donor services of someone who had children, verifying therefore his virility. And they had to consider someone who had both boys and girls so that even if they had a boy he will not claim the child as he already have one. The other attempt that they abandoned was donor services of Joe. Joe agreed to act as a donor but failed to show up one of the days during donor insemination so as to provide them with the sperm and they considered him as not reliable and had to later have the services of Richie who later donated successfully resulting in Rosa, Tamia’s partner becoming pregnant.

She provided a lengthy account of her experience during self-insemination at home and a roller coaster of emotions involved, “Insemination was a mixture of fear and worry and anxiety because even though we googled about all aspects involved we are not doctors and anything could have gone wrong, you have to think about whether you are putting the right amount of pressure or the temperature and even the speed of insemination,...”. Tamia was explicit and acknowledged the fact that their experiences was a “lucky” one as many have to inseminate many times and can end up being infected especially if the donor is not screened.

Tamia and her partner had a lot of decisions to make as to how to have a child. They had a lot of issues and experience as shown in the sentiments quoted at length below:

“Our first option was to go to South Africa, go to a sperm bank, there were a number of barriers, finances were a challenge because they are costs of the tests the doctors had to go through and the actual donor insemination, an estimate of 45000 Rands it would go down with time but it was first barrier and if you are not a South African you have to go through courts and the legal cost that would mean it would go up. The second option was shared parenting. The challenge was to me specifically. The legal implication was that she (her partner) would be a parent and I would be excluded, that option because of my reservation was stopped. We then had to go for a sperm donor, who is not wanting a child but have children because if he doesn't have a child he might come back and say I want my child. Then going for heterosexual guy who either don't have children or girls alone was a challenge should we then give birth to a boy, then he might want him”.

The other options that Tamia and her partner had to think about was a heterosexual man who have children (both girls and boys), obviously entailing his virility.

“the other option was a heterosexual guy, he was supposed to have both boys and girls so that he wouldn't mind us even having either a girl or a boy because he already have one. The third option that presented itself later was a young boy carefree, not thinking about having a family, who wants to move out of the country, not sexually active, the person was to be selected from a semi random sample, it wasn't from our closer circles in other words. So that we can even decide to move and it won't be easy to track us down. It became a legal transaction with a young care free guy. We were avoiding drama...”

It was necessary that Tamia and her partner familiarize themselves with self-insemination since they had found a donor. They had to rely on the internet for such information. She elaborate the whole scenario below:

“..So we started googling on doing self-insemination all the particulars, like the food involved and how your partner should open her legs when doing the insemination, the size of syringes, temperatures that the sperms should be kept in etc. .. She took fertility improving food. We had to inseminate 2 days before ovulation, on the day of ovulation and two days after ovulation so as to improve the chances. We sometimes had a heterosexual guy who was a father to a girl he didn't pitch up on the day of ovulation so he was not that reliable...”.

The last insemination with a “carefree” young sperm donor became a success. Their doctor however raised the issue of eclampsia that happens when home insemination is done. They are still considering adoption as they want a big family. “We raised issue of adoption and we are still considering it. We want a big family. But for adoption you have to foster first. Fostering comes with each challenge because you work for GALZ even though you lie about your sexual orientation. So they can turn you back.”

Considering this situation the researcher wanted to know how she will safeguards issues of parental legal recognition. She raised the issue that she is not considered a parent by the law and they are planning on second parent adoption so that she will become a legally recognized parent:

“In terms of personal bond you can bond when the child is born. Not being legally recognised as a parent is a challenge not just in terms of custody it can be simple thing like going for holiday with the child because legally I won't be recognized. The legal power is always important. So that you have the legal bond, we are attempting that through a family lawyer to help with issues of second parent adoption”.

The other challenge was about the pregnancy outside heterosexual marriage. Tamia's partner , Rosa being pregnant raises question of how she fell pregnant and the family of origins needs to know all the finer details.



“ Given that she falls pregnant then they would want to know how and so it means you have to come out so there are a lot of issues to be considered in those circles and the general health concerns. Yes we had a doctor but it’s a process that took about two months and what does it mean on her and the child. We considered all those issues. Some take at least 7 circles to get pregnant ..... We thought about all that. We were lucky because they are a lot of issues that could have gone wrong so none of that happened so we consider ourselves lucky. So we thank God because it’s not because we were read”.

To eliminate issues of infections the donor was to be screened. Tamia and her partner were screened too. It is not ‘full proof’ as she put it. But by virtue of being young, the donor was not that sexually active. The risks were still much less as compared to say an old donor who is sexually active [Data from an unstructured interview with Tamia].

Tamia was asked what it means to a lesbian mother. Her sentiments below are illustrative of her views about being a mother and what that entails.

“Being a parent is about a blessing from God. Sometimes we underestimate having a child. Children gives value and we should kneel down and thank God. The house feel empty without having a child. Being a parent entails raising a life that also will take care of you. And in terms of same sex families it’s about creating a dynasty that by socialization is going to be gay friendly. Two generations from now they don’t have to worry about grandmothers who forsake us, but particularly in terms of family it means support. The family systems becomes a support system. There is joy that nothing else can give. There is this inexplicable level of joy cos you might have the money the cars etc. but it means nothing. So having a child it’s a world of your own.”

The respondent was asked why despite media coverage that regards lesbian as not interested in being a mother she goes ahead and become one:

“It’s a myth. They are just imagining two women together. Just that you don’t have a kid doesn’t mean that you can’t and don’t want to have a kid. The average lesbian want to have kids, of course some don’t. I was born a woman and socialized to want to have a child and because my parents died I started to yearn to have a home and you

want to realize the ideal home by having children. So you get married and all the stuff. Borrowing from our parents and infusing with our own ideas, so it's more of realizing the ideal family."

The researcher had to probe further the fact that the respondent identified herself as married to another lesbian woman. She revealed that she wedded in South Africa 4 years back. She organised transport for friends and relatives who could not afford to go but others went on their own. She also have a number of gay and lesbian friends in South Africa who witnessed her wedding. She however cannot be registered because of the mutual agreement between South Africa and Zimbabwe that Zimbabwe should approve the wedding.

"We wanted to have a wedding here but were limited by the legal terrain. So we have to go to South Africa. The South African constitution is progressive however to its own citizens. We can't be registered because they have to send back our marriage certificates to Zimbabwe to be recognized but we defined marriage as a union before God and that in itself was enough for us. We are married though in the eyes of the law we may not. So the idea of having a pastor and rituals done was enough than having a paper signed. That was 4 years ago..."

She raised issues of lacking role models and counsellors as some challenges.

"We don't have role models or a pastors who then come and counsel us. When same sex relationships are in this contexts they break apart. So the upcoming anniversary is worth celebrating. So our life is an everyday experiment. If I buy a book today it talks about how men and women should do their marriage which is not applicable in our context. In our context we have to negotiate our parenting than say heterosexuals because we sit down and say you are good in this am good in that, then we do that, you are more like borrowing and changing ideas because they are not as applicable. We have to find what you are good at, she can wash and I can cook. So we negotiate than already set roles. Principles of marriage are the same but in terms of practices they are different. Like you want to take your kid to church you end up lying she is my sister. In terms of health facilities you are not seen as a couple you cannot visit her like a partner. It's an everyday struggle..."

Social perceptions and stigma were amongst the challenges of being lesbian mother.

“People might not look at us as a family. Challenges also comes with the society. Same sex people are negatively viewed and what does that mean raising a child in such an environment when they are told how they are so wrong so they are those issues of how you are going to manage those things as they are always expectations from the society. We don’t have a lot of support systems sometimes, it’s more like the lgbt community becomes your own extended family”.

Challenges as Tamia illustrated are varied and numerous on being a lesbian and worsened by being a mother. As they have to worry about stigma, threats to report them to the police by people and being chased away from home and even the fact that since she is into co-parenting covering her child under medical aid is not possible. She has to fund two separate medical aids, one for herself and the other for her partner and the child which means the cost of living is worsened by lack of legal recognition.

One way or the other Tamia has to inform her family and her partner’s family too about them being parents. Which comes with its own challenges. She is however prepared to meet those challenges.

“ We will just tell them but not to validate us as a family because we have passed that stage. So we are more of informing them. Telling them is just to have them as a support system not to validate us. So it’s not about how they will react. It’s just more of informing. we had negative reactions in the past so it’s not an issue. We look forward to positive reaction but we can embrace both reactions”. She elaborated further “So they can accept it because it’s easy for some to swallow a baby issue than sexual orientation issue, some can actually come up and be involved. Some of that chaos need to happen now so that when the child comes into the world its already good. Heterosexuals don’t realize the privilege bestowed on them, it’s a shame as some dump children and some are desperately wanting children. Being a parent is good regardless of sexual orientation it’s something that cannot be removed because you are gay , lesbian , asexual etc...”.

All things being equal Tamia and her partner wants to look for a more conducive environment to raise their children. She responded that:

“So we are looking forward to moving to a conducive environment. Legal protection may not materialize. Just having the child knowing you as parent may be enough regardless of what the legal paper say. So despite not having the paper if you have each other knowledge that you are parents that is enough.....”.

In negotiating parental roles such as who was to carry the pregnancy, Tamia emphasised health concerns, she has a medical problem that complicates her being pregnant and that is why her partner had to be the one who got pregnant. Personal preference was also put into consideration, age and the fact that Tamia is working and already bears the bread winner role was also important. So their decision of who got pregnant was also negotiated by putting into cognisance a number of factors[ Data from repeat interview with Tamia].

#### **5.1.8 Kelly**

Kelly is a single lesbian mother from a previous heterosexual marriage. She is also now a first time grandmother. She had been married for more than 10 years and had 3 children. She explained that she fell pregnant when she was still 14 years during her High school education. She had a very romantic and happy relationship with the then husband. By the time she got married, Kelly was aware of her sexual orientation but had never ‘acted’ it out on any one.

Circumstances following her marriage however turned into a completely ‘incompatible’ and ‘abusive’ one. Kelly’s husband did not knew about her sexual orientation, but realized it later after their divorce. She ended hating the father of her children because he had become abusive. She said, ‘he became very abusive 7 years after being married’, in this situation Kelly was both economically and physically vulnerable and she had no option except to stay and in the process had 2 other children. As she explained the eldest son is now deceased. Consequently, 2 of her children are living. Her children were however free to live with either their father or her after her divorce as they had been sharing custody. Her surviving children are grown ups and are now married. The church however abandoned her and denied helping her with burial rituals of her son because she is lesbian, “I have a relationship with God and not my church. I believe the sanctity of life and death are important in Roman catholic but

they dumped me when my first born died. They refused to perform his burial rituals because I am a lesbian”.

During the repeat interview Kelly was very explicit on her position regarding her marital breakdown, divorce and her sexual orientation:

“The violence that I experienced in that relationship is not a contributing factor to my sexuality. I believe I have always been attracted to other women but I never acted on it. I can never blame my husband and other boyfriends for my sexuality and what it is. I had good relationship with men when I broke up with my husband. They took care of me and my children but what I wanted as intimacy has always been missing”.

Kelly could not really pin down what motivated her in being a parent, though she always thought of becoming one. However, because her first pregnancy was “unplanned” and out of the wedlock she had to become a mother “accidentally” by marrying her boyfriend. Following however the fact that she was now pregnant, Kelly had to settle down with her “boyfriend” and thus formed a heterosexual union. In as far as the other two children that Kelly ‘had’ with the then husband it was expected of ‘them’ as they were married and Kelly had no ‘option’ but just to stay with the husband as she was economically and physically vulnerable as she was still ‘young’ by then. She however appreciates the privileges that parenthood bestows as she recalls how other lesbians who are running out of age talks to her about their concerns with regard to property succession and social security in old age and now want to have children.

By the time that she divorced, Kelly started to live an openly lesbian lifestyle and had to bring ‘girlfriends’ home. She also had very ‘butch’ friends and very ‘feminine’ boyfriends and that forced her to come out of the closet to her family about her sexuality. It was difficulty for the parents to really accept it because of many varied reasons. The first being Kelly’s personal security. As Kelly remembers it was in the early 1990s and President Robert Mugabe was very homophobic and had made unpopular antigay sentiments. Her family became concerned that she may end up being arrested. The second reason was familial

security as the police would probably come and arrest the whole of her family for having a lesbian daughter.

Kelly however, as she puts it remained 'adamant' and started renting her own apartment. Her children were young but could come on weekend and spend time with her and that placed her at a difficult position. She was forced again to disclose her sexual orientation to her children as they grew up. She remembers one instance in which her children "discovered" her in bed with another women. To her, coming out was really a challenge as a lesbian mother in various circles, her family as well as her children because of homophobia and children's resentment and the challenge of accepting that their mother is lesbian. This is how Kelly puts it across:

"Being a lesbian mother is a challenge because I have to come out to my family which is a challenge in the context of Zimbabwe and I have to come out to my children as they grew up, they started to see me having either butch friends or very feminine men, they started to see me sharing a bed with other women. So I have to come out to them because when I came out they were very young".

Kelly's challenges as a lesbian mother in particular came as double disclosure of her sexuality especially as to how she relates and discloses to her children, who above all started to be ashamed and worried about their mother not being typical of other mainstream heterosexual mothers as they expected to be brought up in a 'normal' family. Kelly articulated this below in her sentiments:

"I have to come out to them (children). Which is not easy as children also became ashamed of having a lesbian mother. Unfortunately in Zimbabwe I am unable to have professional counselling for my children. In Zimbabwe homosexuality is viewed as unnatural, taboo and illegal. I had to deal with them myself".

As a result of being a lesbian mother she had a number of challenges from her children who started to see their mother's family as not conforming to a typical family in many ways. This, as Kelly articulated relates to them being children in a single parent family, being in a lesbian family and above all being in a lesbian family in which another same sex partner is sometimes available as it seems weird to her children by then

“Our children are expecting to have a mom and a dad. The worst is to have a single mom or a single father. It is more difficulty then to be a lesbian mother who has a partner. Teenage issues becomes more difficulty. When you try to discipline them you have sexuality thrown back at you like you are a lesbian what can you tell me. Children face a lot of embarrassment because they are children of a lesbian. So they don’t know a lot. They have to know from what I have to tell them”.

Her children reaction to her sexuality at first were very extreme. She had the challenge of controlling her children as they “threw back” her sexuality. The children however later changed and embraced her. Her eldest son, who was very homophobic later started to be very close to her partners and one of her long term partner became her son’s confidant. She narrated: “My oldest son once shouted at me on the streets.... My middle son did not talk to me.... My daughter refused to speak to me for year. She was so ashamed...I had my diary written in bold....**LESBO**. They have now accepted it. But it was gradual”.

Kelly as a lesbian mother particularly from a heterosexual marriage had challenges from within the lesbian community. She was stereotyped, stigmatised and discriminated. She was forced to admit to being bisexual because she once had sex with a man and had “tasted” the heterosexual life. She was forced to accept the fact that she was a prostitute or at least sexually adventurous and insatiable and very experimental. She chronicles this below.

“Because I had sex with a man other lesbians think I should still be able to have another relationship with a man or admit that I am bisexual of which I am not bisexual but a lesbian. I have been viewed as someone who is now fed up with heterosexual life and now want to try the lesbian life. I have been viewed as a prostitute, a person who is confused as they believe that since I once had a relationship and sex with man I can still go back and live like what I did before...”.

In order to cope Kelly had to rely on her social networks from other lesbian mothers who were accommodative of her and other homosexual friends particularly from GALZ. She narrated this in the following words: “I was able to have support from people from GALZ. I had friends here at GALZ. I went on for counselling courses and learnt how accept myself to be strong...”.

She thinks lesbian relationships is more of negotiation of roles. She characterises it as more egalitarian. Physical violence in same sex relations as she articulated was very low. Though had one partner that was emotionally black mailing, "I have always found solace and comfort in my lesbian relationship. The relationships have always been equal in division of power and finances. Violence is minimal. But sometimes emotional violence can be worse".



## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION**

### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the findings from the study. Central to this study was how lesbian women accomplished their motherhood how they negotiate the issues pertaining their mothering, especially heteronormativity. It was opined that such a foci can be pursued through using Herbert Blumer Symbolic Interactionism and Michael De Certeau Agency theory. This section discusses the findings from this literature in light of already existing academic insights and the chosen theoretical frameworks. Divergences, convergences and new insights shall be outlined henceforth. It is argued that the chosen theories for this study concurs well with the findings as lesbian women strategized consciously to wiggle out parental constraints and homophobia as well as heteronormativity. Indeed they manoeuvred and strategically aligns themselves by tapping on their resources and innovations in a bid to extricate a myriad of challenges. The findings from this study evinces that lesbian mothers and their children as well as partners created their own ideal families regardless of the fact that others may fail to recognize them as such. Thus, the lexicon of lesbian parenthood is a negotiated and socially engineered entity created with resilience in face of adversity in some instances.

Lesbian women who had sex with men to become mothers had their lesbian identities doubted. Thus, this data shows the existence of lesbian politics where some see genuine lesbians as those who do not have anything to do with men. Thus having sex with men for the purposes of childbirth is considered selling out. However, in Zimbabwe fertility clinics do not exist and those that exist outside Zimbabwe, for instance in South Africa are expensive for many of these women who because of desperation may end up sleeping with a man for the purposes of childbirth. It is argued however that Symbolic Interactionism principles shows that sexual performance is shaped and reshaped by interactions which involves both actors own interpretation of sex and the social definition of sex which lesbian mothers had to deconstruct to acquire new meaning. Sexual behaviour like any human behaviour is therefore not an essential character of the human body. It is a social construct that is constantly constructed and deconstructed by its own actors depending on how they interpret it. Sexual behaviour was once thought of as powerful drive based on romantic attraction (Gonzaga *et al* 2006 and Woolley 2017). It is not solely based on attraction but it can be used as an instrument to pursue various ends depending on the symbolic power that it is given. Using symbolic

interactionism, it follows then that there is no objective way of doing sex or with who. It becomes fluid and transient as it takes many guises and acts like a chameleon. Sexual behaviour like any other human behaviours is meaning oriented as biology (sexual orientation) alone does not explain the purpose of behaving. The body is the body as lived by the actors not as biology assumes. Morphology and physiology can condition and limit what is possible in sex but they do not cause the patterns of sexual life (Weeks 1986). The meaning of sex emerges therefore through interpretation.

An analysis of the mechanism used by lesbian women to accomplish motherhood reveals that there is not much locally. Services such as clinical insemination, ROPA, surrogacy, adoption and second parent adoption have not been utilised by participants because they are not in place. As such it can be argued that a synergy of the political environment, legal environment regulating human tissues conduct and infrastructural constraints coalesces and coagulates to further creates barriers to lesbian women who want to accomplish motherhood. However, respondents peruse the environment by resorting to what is at hand, buying sperms locally amongst other things. Thus resonating with Herbert Blumer (1969) and De Certeau's (1984) concept of human agency as respondent extricate their constraints actively and consciously.

### **6.1. Lesbian mothers destabilising and deconstructing the conventional family**

Lesbian mothers who lived as a couple had a number of issues that they negotiated. These involved negotiating who was going to be the biological mother as well as negotiating the familial everyday chores. By establishing families of choice, lesbian mothers are erecting a family form that challenges the normative definition of a family (Stacey 2003), that have parents of opposite sex (Dalton and Bielby 2000). By proving themselves as capable of parenting and having their own children lesbian mothers are in fact challenging the heterosexual monopoly of reproduction (Dunne 2000). The same line of argument is poignantly offered by Dalton and Bielby (2000) as they asserted that out of considerable forethought lesbian mothers challenge the idea that reproduction is ideally pursued in a monogamous heterosexual marriage, as it is viable outside that context as long as spermatozoa is provided to meet the ovary (authors emphasis). Lesbian mothers, both biological and non-biological did not differ in their evaluation of labour, which they both

believe were more egalitarian and shared relatively upon preferences. This can be noted in one of the sentiment by Kelly in reference to her past same sex relationship and roles with her partners. By establishing families of choice in which the mothers could negotiate who is going to cook and who is going to wash amongst other things and thus not following the gender script that typifies certain roles as masculine and others as feminine lesbian mothers are in fact deconstructing and degendering gender roles. In line with this, Tamia, a respondent narrated that:

“We don’t have role models, everyday life is an experiment. Though the principles of marriage are the same in practice they are different. In heterosexual families they have clearly stipulated roles but we negotiate. We share these depending on preference. She might be good at cooking and I may wash”.

The interpretation of the above is that lesbian mothers are privy of the fact that their experiences in fact deconstruct normative gender roles that are usually hinged on biology. Symbolic interactionism is central to deconstructing conventional gender ideals and is thus relevant in illuminating this study. In line with Blumer (1969), participants such as Tamia and Rosa are therefore building up their lines of action to fit into one another, sort of a dual process of designation and interpretation as they sometimes had to go into areas of unscripted conduct. Arguably, the study resonates with Blumer’s Symbolic Interactionism.

These findings however do not comport well with earlier findings by Hayman and Wilkes (2006). In this study respondents who lived as couples talked of egalitarian gender roles that are flexible and negotiated on preference and ability as opposed to say typical gender roles pursued by mothers and fathers that are hinged on gender identity. Respondents elaborated that one can flexibly switch from role A to role B. In contrast, Hayman and Wilkes (2006) found out that division of labour in their respondents was centred on gender identity as butch mothers enjoyed typically masculine roles while the femme lesbian mothers enjoyed typically feminine roles. In this study preference and negotiation was the norm. The divergence in terms of these two studies can be probably because majority of the respondents in the former study were pursuing motherhood as a couple from the outset as opposed to some instances in this study where a partner can join in and start living with a partner who has child/ren already.

Lesbian mothers by sometimes having a same sex family with two mother as opposed to a father – mother family are in fact redefining parenthood, family and motherhood in contrast to what is scripted to them by the society. For instance families formed outside heterosexual marriage and those formed via donor insemination are examples of alternative families that destabilises heterosexual, monogamous mother-father families. In this way lesbian mothers are negotiating and creating their own family model. They legitimate it and thus claim their own spaces in spaces that are construed as heteronormative spaces. Viewing such experiences through symbolic interactionism turns the spotlight on how they destabilises the ideals of normative gender roles that are often a norm in heterosexual families comprised usually of Mother and father. These experiences reveals therefore that lesbian mothers have in fact socially constructed motherhood that is atypical to the normative conception of mothers as these are sometimes two mothers as opposed to one biological mother and one biological father. This further illuminates the resonance of the study to Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism ideas as he regarded individuals as sometimes calculating clearly against the norms and thus destabilising the conventional norms regarding parental roles and the dominant mother ideals. This illuminates that gender and familial norms are undergoing some sort of reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation.

## **6.2 Lesbian mothers: Challenges and implications on kinship, affinity and relatedness**

Other methods of conception can have kinship and affinity implications. These results in families that are of late known as postmodern families. The case of Nicole is the case in point. Herrera (2009) had a participant who had a similar dilemma, in which Gaulepe (a participant in that study) had a son, old enough to impregnate someone and could donate sperms so that her mother's partner (non-biological mother) would carry the pregnancy. Gaulepe felt uncomfortable by this situation as she had to ask his own biological son to father his own sibling. It is a compromising position as he will be both the father and brother to that child. It will also create a 'strange' bond to Gaulepe and her son. Considering bloodline Gaulepe would automatically be the child's grandmother (Herrera 2009). It is an excruciating position difficult to explain in the future to the child that her/his brother is the father and the non-biological mother is the grandparent at the same time. In the case of Nicole, her uncle is the father to her child but at the same time he is the biological father to her child. She, Nicole can call him uncle 'formally' or normatively because he is the brother to her biological late mother. She can however not comfortably call him husband

because of the vilified nature of such incestuous relationship and because he is not legally married to her to call him husband regardless of the fact that he fathered her a child. Nicole case is worth commenting at length here. It touches immensely on issues of cultural relatedness and kinship. Her son would obviously call her mom. But her son is placed at a quagmire as to how he relates to the one who 'fathered' him, can he equally call his uncle dad or uncle because of the incestuous nature of the relationship. Zambrano (2007) argues that lesbian parenthood deconstruct former anthropological certainties and family normalcy. Issues of sexual legitimacy and procreation are continual being challenged. At least this case and other related cases such as that of Tamia and Hope and her partner shows that motherhood is not synonymous with kinship and affiliation as it can be exercised by a single person with no clear legal or consanguineous relations with the children under their care as long as the person/s is active in their upbringing. To Symbolic Interactionism then, content and foundation of parenthood is not given and should not be taken for granted as it is under constant construction and deconstruction to make sense and meaning to its actors.

### **6.3 Lesbian women deconstructing sexual binaries and sexual behaviours**

Sexuality is not automatically hinged on biology. It is thus not an independent category that is objectively definable across varied contexts. Categories, concepts and sexual behaviours are not given. To symbolic interactionism sex and sexual meanings are therefore differently interpreted and negotiated and should be understood using an emic view. Respondents in the study unravelled lesbian politics in which the mainstream thinking is that lesbians should engage in relationships with other women and should only have sex and relationships with women if they want to be considered genuine lesbians.

In her South African Study, Potgieter (2003) argues that lesbian women discourse challenges the notion that having sex with a man is only to men's benefit. Symbolic Interactionism posits that sex is inherently contextual and its meaning should be discerned from how the actors interpret it. In this manner having sexual act of coitus with a man was thus not interpreted as a change in sexual orientation by Hope (a participant in this study) but was interpreted as a means to an end, that is for the purposes of childbirth. In essence Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism is salient in this discussion because what is central to Symbolic Interactionism is the deconstruction of sex binaries. Who have sex with who and why is not a matter but

should be understood from the meaning the actors attach to the act of coitus. Meaning is important to Blumer. Social actions and an array of other activities such as sex as Blumer (1969) argues are not necessarily activities in which individuals are acting to a play of factors but meets what the actors notes, gives meaning and is used as basis for directing actions. In this manner and in concurrence with symbolic interactionism is sex attuned by lesbian mothers based on the meanings they attach rather than a play of biological factors.

As Blumer (1969) argues this line of analysis stand in contrast to the view of human action in a number of social sciences explanations. Such views ignore one of the central arguments apparent in this study that Blumer (1969) argued for, the concept of self-interaction. Through this mode of interaction, actors/lesbian mothers in this case takes into account various things that they note and forge a line of conduct on the basis on this calculated self-interaction. This kind of analysis dovetails and concurs with De Certeau (1984) agency theory as individuals are knowledgeable and do not behave as hard wired robots. Having sex with men is thus a well calculated and conscious act in which respondents are privy of their environment and using this *tactic* to use De Certeau (1984) to achieve their goals.

Blumer (1969) argues that meaning is usually taken for granted, bypassed and swallowed up as unimportant. The meanings that lesbian mothers had in their sexual behaviours is therefore important. To these mothers, as their narratives depicts sex with men is just plutonic, not romantic or perennial. It means therefore that it does not affect their identities as 'true' lesbians as it was simply used to achieve an end, being mothers. Lesbian mothers to use Blumer (1969) acted towards sex with men basing on the interpretive process and the meaning that they attach to such behaviours. Lesbian mothers thus in line with Both De Certeau (1984) and Blumer (1969), in this case do not act as automates but conscious and calculus individuals.

Sex is thus fluid and transient in its meaning. Hope's relationship with the father of her child cannot be described as romantic but rather a platonic one, a sort of in time assemblage that is short lived. This is crucial in that it affords scholarship to move beyond the binaries where sex is solely thought of as based on attraction. For instance symbolic interactionism accommodates the possibility of a heterosexual young man and a heterosexual woman engaging in anal sex not because they are homosexuals but because of the intentions and meanings

that the actors have in mind, actors can engage in anal sex for instance to avoid losing virginity as well as to avoid pregnancy and can still pass as virgins and not pregnant. One can of course not argue that because the actors in the above scenario have engaged in anal sex there are therefore homosexuals. To Symbolic interactionism, meaning and context of sex is fluid and should be understood from the actors perspective. Sex and relationships is this not the same thing. Lesbian can have romantic relationship with other women based on romantic attraction, but they can cross the boundary of romantic attraction to have sex with men, presumably the ones they are not attracted to because they have calculated high chances of achieving parenthood from such engagements. This is where agency theory becomes handy, according to agency theory human beings are not passive but they are conscious, calculative interactants who uses ruses and tricks to peruse through liminal social spaces (De Certeau 1984). Hope felt so limited in becoming a mother in her same sex relationship but she however opined the possibility of becoming a mother by faking a relationship and she fell pregnant and became a mother. According to Certeau (1984), ruses and tricks are not so long lived but are ephemeral engagements that man uses to limit surveillance and gaze. The fact that Hope as a lesbian women had to reflexively strategize to have an identity transition renders credence to the utility of the ongoing theoretical bricolage of Agency theory and Symbolic Interactionism of Herbert Blumer. Sex as evidenced in this case can be engaged for various reasons including, but not limited to having fun, procreation, achieving intimacy and even controlling someone. Thus in line with this study symbolic interactionism elucidate and tallies with the current literature as sexual behaviour is symbolic in nature. To Longmore (1998) Sexual behaviours is associated therefore with a number of activities that have different symbolic meaning to its actors that range from exerting power, having fun and achieving spirituality.

According to De Certeau (1984) man can peruse through liminal and interstitial spaces by using ruses and tricks. These ruses and tricks, as De Certeau (1984) argues are ephemeral mechanisms that are temporary in nature but that are meant to evade everyday regulations. It is opportune to discuss this theoretical proposition with findings from this study and try to show why it resonates with the findings as opined by the current author. It is clear that De Certeau (1984) as an Anthropologist saw societies having regulatory standards or pathways to be pursued by everyone. In this manner, the Zimbabwean society as a heteronormative society

encourages parenthood inside a heterosexual monogamous marriage. Lesbians having children outside this matrix are obviously found wanting because they are seen as deconstructing the norm by having children outside this setup. They have therefore according to De Certeau (1984) to turn to ruses and tricks to evade this regulation in pursuing parenthood. De Certeau (1984) was clear that these ruses and tricks are ephemeral and carried underneath the radar to as to limit gaze and surveillance.

Lesbian women in this case resorted to ruses and tricks that were ephemeral to become mothers. See the case of Nicole, she had to have sex with her uncle in a covert manner. She had to have just an ephemeral sexual engagement to become pregnant. The case of Hope is perhaps very informative in this point. She had to resort to a trick, i.e. faking a man that she is falling for him while in the back of her mind she just wanted a child. This is in fact the essence of Agency theory where man is seen as conscious and not just a passive being that acts in accordance to antecedent commands. Man is knowledgeable and very intentional. Man do not do things for the sake of doing.

Nicole had a difficult experience with a gay guy who had helped father her a child. Because of that Nicole had to put into cognisance the identity, advantages and disadvantages of whoever was going to help in accomplishing motherhood. Her experience in that scenario had taught her the fragility of certain mechanism and routes to accomplishing motherhood. Consequently, she wanted to trade softly and carefully in the future by minimising these difficulties. She thus ended up approaching her uncle to help father a child. According to Herbert Blumer (1969), in face of radically different and stressful situation people are led to develop new forms of action that are distinctly different from those they have previously engaged, yet even such cases always have connections and continuity with what went on before. This is also in line with De Certeau (1984), as he argues that man is far from passive as he is endowed with voracious capacity to consciously wiggle that which faces him. This underlines the fact that actors, in this case lesbian mothers are conscious and calculative agents as they weigh up their experiences in an attempt to deal with adversity. In this manner, the experiences of lesbian mothers vividly concurs with the chosen theoretical frameworks as they display a sense of agency that is portrayed by both De Certeau and Blumer in their theories.



#### **6.4 .0 Ways and or mechanisms of accomplishing motherhood**

Oswald (2002) argues that because homosexual sex is non procreative it is interesting to canvas and unpack how same sex loving women accomplish being mothers. This study sought amongst other things to explore how lesbian women accomplished being mothers. The ways/mechanisms they use to conceive and or become mothers was therefore central. Lesbian women in this study had erected their families and accomplished their mother identities differently. Two mechanisms with broad intra-dynamics were identified. Two women had become mothers in heterosexual marriages, one couple had bought sperms locally and informally from a man and inseminated one partner at home, one lesbian woman had 'tricked' a man to sleep with her and impregnate her in the process, one had asked her uncle to 'father' her a child, the other two 'accidentally' became mothers and the remaining one couple was still looking for a gay sperm donor. It follows then that a nuanced analysis reveals that lesbian women have limited mechanisms through which to accomplish motherhood. This is attributed to absence of donor insemination services, particularly sperms banks, inhibitive costs of seeking these outside Zimbabwe and the restrictive laws regulating adoption of children in Zimbabwe. Lack of these services results in lesbian women being desperate and led some of them to sleep with men for the purposes of childbirth. This is regardless of the fact that such an excruciating position makes them to be regarded as not genuine lesbians. Accidentally 'falling' pregnant and resultantly becoming a mother cannot be argued as a way or a means used to become a parent because that in itself shows that the lesbian mothers in question have not planned to accomplish being a parent but accidentally became one. The ways used by lesbian women to become mothers are dealt with below.

Indeed as argued already by Hayman *et al* (2015) lesbians who choose or plan to have children consider a lot of issues and decisions that are unique to them. In this study lesbian women who really planned to be mothers had a lot of decisions to factor in in their parenting. They had to think around the ways through which to engage parenthood, the cons and pros of such a way, the costs and the challenges involved. In the case of Tamia and her partner Rosa they had to think around going for insemination in South Africa, adopting, having a local sperm donor and even the parental status of such a donor so as to maximise chances of conception but at the same time avoiding 'drama'. This calculus and reflexive strategizing by lesbian mothers is the essence of Michael De Certeau (1984) Agency theory in which he desisted from

seeing human beings as mere passive conduits of social processes. It also tallies and resonates with Herbert Blumer (1969) symbolic interactionism as Blumer articulates that activities of human beings consist of meeting a flow of situations in which he/she act and the resultant action is built on the basis of what they note, the assessment and the interpretation and consequent projected lines of action they map out. Actors therefore selects, regroupes, suspends and transforms the meanings in light of existing situation. As can be seen from all the cases in which lesbian women planned to have children, calculating constraints and challenges is evident. Tamia and her partner, Rosa had to make decisions on who is going to be pregnant and why. They had to negotiate parental roles. The latter thus tallies with Symbolic Interactionism of Herbert Blumer. To Blumer social processes and role are negotiated and in constant flux as they are not hinged on biology.

#### **6. 4.1 Lesbian mothers as products of heterosexual marriages**

It is widely acknowledged that some lesbian mothers have been married before and may separate and or divorce with their husbands but have in the process become mothers (Patterson 1992, Patterson 1995, Garterll *et al* 1996, Balka 1993 and Langwarthy 1988). In his study on familial experiences of gays and lesbians in Zimbabwe, Kuyala (2014) alluded to a case of a participant who was a single lesbian mother following her divorce with the then husband. Arguably, lesbians mothers can also be a product of heterosexual marriage in which they had been in pretence of being 'heterosexual' so as to limit heterosexual surveillance and gaze, equating to what Rich (1980) termed compulsory heterosexuality. Lesbian mothers may also 'discover' their sexuality after being married already and thus divorce and start to live openly as lesbians mothers. Earlier studies, (Wall 2010, Patterson 1995, Garterll *et al* 1996 and Langwarthy 1988) concurs therefore with this literature as participants such as Tec and Kelly were explicit that they had children while they were in heterosexual marriages. Respondents in this study discovered their sexual orientation after having been married already and had mothered at least a child or two. This is not surprising given the fact that heterosexual marriages in which lesbians have been in are considered the ideal procreative constellation. And in these heterosexual marriages procreation is compulsory. Thus, in this context it can be argued that that one way in which lesbian women accomplished their mother identities is through heterosexual marriages.

#### **6.4. 2. “Manipulating” man and “asking” a man to father a child**

This study underlines the fact that lesbian women can ask acquaintances to father them a child. They can also manipulate men to make them pregnant. Lesbian women having a short term relationship with a donor so as to become pregnant was also attested to by the study by Wojnar and Swanson (2006). In which other lesbians deliberately chose to have a short term relationship with a man to be impregnated. However, Wojnar and Swanson (2006) pointed out that other lesbians viewed having a relationship with a man as disrespectful to their lesbian identities and harmful to the same sex couples relationship as the other partner may start to be jealous. Implicit in the above cases is that lesbian mothers can pursue their mothering by having natural sexual intercourse with a man outside of the wedlock either as planned or not. These observations in which lesbian women can fake relationships with men and have sexual intercourse with men so as to become mothers resonates with similar findings by Wojnar and Swanson (2006) and Potgieter (2003) who found out that lesbian women may also accomplish being mothers by having sex with men outside the heterosexual marriage.

In her South African Study, Potgieter (2003) avers that lesbian women like any other women are quite capable of engaging in sexual intercourse with a man often solely for the reason that they intend to get pregnant. A participant in this study, Hope elaborated how she used ‘manipulative’ sex with a man so as to fall pregnant and have a child. In a study by Potgieter (2003) a participant chronicled that, “...So I had a man to give me a baby. I wanted the baby not him, him I did not love, I only love women—but I had him till I had the baby”. Another participant in the same study narrated that : “ I got drunk twice, went with a man and got pregnant”. These sentiments underline the fact that lesbian women in instances of constraints can use their agency to have babies, even if it means crossing the sexual script. Potgieter (2003) poignantly argues that lesbian women in this regard meant that they have relationships with women, but find no problem in having sex with man in order to conceive and have a baby. Faking and manipulating a man for the purposes of childbirth by lesbian women equates to what De Certeau (1984) termed tricks. Lesbian mothers in this case because of liminality resorted to tricks to accomplish motherhood. What the above entails is that the experiences of lesbian mothers in this study resonate with De Certeau (1984) concept of practice of everyday life. Tricks in this way enabled lesbian mothers to discreetly undo and resist the norm. In line with Blumer’s Symbolic

Interactionism these tricks elaborate how lesbian mothers are in fact challenging social expectations that their sexual activities are confined to same sex lovers.

#### **6.4.3 The use of home/ self-insemination**

Lesbian women can also buy sperms from local informal donors as a way to conceive and become pregnant. This mechanism in line with Herbert Blumer (1969) and De Certeau (1984) underlines the fact that donor insemination destabilises, deconstruct and radically challenge heteronormative norms undergirding reproduction, which is via heterosexual sex inside a marriage between a man and a woman. Both theories see human beings as sometimes actively calculating and going against the norm. The case of Tamia and Rosa is livelier and exemplary. In this study Tamia had to make a semi-legal transaction to buy sperms from a local sperm donor and inseminate her partner. Her partner became pregnant and are now parents to a baby girl. In a study conducted Marina *et al* (2010) it was revealed that donor sperms can be used for various modes of insemination, including but not limited to intra-uterine insemination(IUI), invitro-fertilisation (IVF) and vaginal insemination (IV). Vaginal insemination can be done in a clinical setting or can be done by lesbian women themselves as self-insemination at their places of residence. Tamia and her partner used self-insemination thus confirming similar finding by Marina *et al* (2010). Informal sperms donors were also used in a study conducted by Harris (2000). Respondents in that study had to resort to informal sperm donors because doctors were homophobic and denied them accessing formal sperms from sperm banks on grounds of their sexual orientation. Concerns however revolved around issues of safety and infections from buying sperms from informal donors. Lesbians can thus end up risking their lives and become infected with STIs. However, the case of Tamia is unique it shows agential exercise by the respondent. Despite buying sperms locally Tamia also thought of infections and had to make the sperm donor to undergo screening by their family doctor to eliminate chances of infections. De Certeau (1984) argues that individuals are conscious and calculative beings in that regards the case of Tamia is exemplary of lesbian women display of agency as they strategize and eliminate possible challenges. She displays knowledge and logic of her future challenges and thus tactical and swiftly responded accordingly.

Health such as cancer could affect terms of pregnancy and lesbian women who are into co-parenting have to consider the health status of the partners in carrying the pregnancy (Hayman

*et al* 2015). In the case of Tamia and her partner they had to negotiate who was going to carry the pregnancy. As this study has revealed Tamia's partner was considered younger, healthy, willing to carry the pregnancy and not occupied with other roles as she was not employed by then. Tamia feared that her health status may curtail her carrying of pregnancy to terms. This tallies with earlier study by Marina *et al* (2010) and Hayman *et al* (2015) where co-parents had to consider one's nurturing capacity, age, fertility status and self-preference as factors that are important before one is inseminated to carry the pregnancy. The case of Tamia may be considered to be typical to aforementioned studies because Tamia and her partner illustrated and pointed out that they had to rely on online literature on their parenting mechanism especially on donor insemination, (See Tamia in chapter 5 ,data presentation).

Lesbian mothers who involve a donor must spell out the role of the donor (Griffin 1998). That is whether they want them to be involved or not in parenting. Spelling out the role is meant to avoid custody issues. In the case of Tamia she had to limit the donor's role just to being a sperm donor not being an active father by making the sperm provision a semi-legal transaction where the donor just provides sperms and he receives his fare for these services. This is necessary to avoid drama that ensue if parental lines and roles are not clearly drawn [ Data from an interview with Tamia]. Hayman *et al* (2015) shares similar insights and argue that lesbian mothers had to make a decision between choosing a known and unknown sperm donor. Choosing an unknown donor is meant to limit future parental claims. This study there echoes the above studies by Griffin (1998) and Hayman *et al* (2015) in that lesbian women have to draw clear lines when they seek the services of a sperm donor.

In the case of Tamia she had to google about fertility supplements and had to maximise conception by inseminating two days before ovulation, on the day of ovulation and two days after ovulation. They had to keep sperms in a cup in between the thighs. She elaborated that her partner had engage in leg and buttocks elevation so as promote movement of the sperms into the uterus. She also described how the whole insemination process was a mixture of anxiety, worry and fear. In a study by Hayman *et al* (2015) similar sentiments can be noted. In the latter, participants elaborated that they took prenatal supplements in preparation for pregnancy and had to engage in post-insemination activities such as leg and buttocks elevation for thirty minutes.

It was however characterised by a roller coaster of emotions as these home insemination sometimes failed and they felt guilt, disappointed and sad.

Tamia and her partner self-insemination was associated with worry and anxiety because they did not really know whether they are doing the right thing or not [Data from unstructured interview with Tamia]. Worry is inevitable because during self-insemination one should have access to sperms while they are still mobile. There is urgency required during insemination so as to increase the likelihood of successful conception (Hayman *et al* 2015).

In the case of Tamia, a child is not born because of the erotic desires and contact of two people. A child is born out of the synergies of their biological products and vessels so to say. Neither Tamia's partner nor the donor had experienced the erotic desire, but the donor had provided his sperms, the biological product and Tamia's partner, Rose had provided her ovary and womb to carry the baby, she had provided the biological 'vessel' and product, her own semen that fused with the provided sperms. This equates to and concurs to what Ehrensaft (2008 pp 8) observed:

“ Each of us is conceived out of the desire of one or more people and possibly the assistance of one or more people who participated in our conception or gestation not out of sexual desire but out of the willingness to provide use of their uterus or to donate their gametes so that we could be born ”

These sentiments in line with Tamia and partner's scenario points to the fact that it is not always sexual activity that guarantees the birth of someone but even as simply as helping with inseminating a partner or just helping a partner to exercise leg and buttock elevation is decisive in conception and birth and that is not typical to the traditional way of conception in which two people are supposed to have a sexual contact.

Unlike in earlier studies, the use of home insemination in this study is not as result of professional prejudice and homophobia. Because of professional prejudice amongst doctors doing artificial insemination by donors ( AID) lesbians have decided to conduct AID by themselves or with the assistance of sympathetic men, (Hanscombe 1983). This is highly probable in many homophobic setups, however the same reason did not obtain in this study as participants who used home insemination did so because of the fact that locally there are no professional

services offering AID. Those that exist are in South Africa and are inhibitory in terms of expenses. Because of lack of finances to manage the services in South Africa and the absence of professional services dealing with artificial insemination Tamia and Rosa resorted to using home based insemination.

#### **6.4. 4 “Accidentally” becoming a mother**

Heteronormativity has a number of implications on lesbian women in this study. Euan, Sarah and Ruth were expected by their families to have boyfriends, settle down and have children. Unfortunately for the latter that resulted in them falling pregnant. At this juncture it is insightful to show how the current study has diverged from lesbian motherhood scholarship. Goldberg and colleague see lesbian motherhood as planned but not compulsory. Nelson (2000) view the journey as a planned too. It is attested in this study that lesbian motherhood cannot be always thought of as planned and deliberate. It is sometimes accidental as lesbians found themselves pregnant. Sarah and Ruth said they “accidentally” became parents as their pregnancies were “unplanned”. These had children out of having natural sexual intercourse with a man outside a wedlock. They are two explanations for this. In the case of Sarah and Ruth these were unplanned pregnancies but they pursued parenthood however because they value children. They had to go ahead and remained unmarried because their sexual orientation do not allow them to be in a long term committed opposite sex relationships even though they can be in short term ephemeral ones to ‘fake’ their sexual identities in the society.

#### **6.5.1 Heteronormativity and the existence of lesbian mothers**

By the mere fact that lesbians are seen as operating outside the norm they have a number of challenges as they are trying to create a space for themselves in an already established space that valorises heterosexuality and at the same time vilify their family configuration and motherhood. Lesbian women because of heterosexual norms were expected to be married by their families and in this study that has resulted in them faking their identities and being in heterosexual relationships for cover. However, in two cases these resulted in participants accidentally becoming mothers after falling pregnant. Heteronormativity was a challenge to a number of lesbian mothers because the society expected them to be married and to have children inside the wedlock rather than as single parents. This is discussed further below under intersectionality. However, heteronormativity seems to be the greatest challenge because even

though lesbian mothers may not have their lesbianism being a challenge because they are in a closet the issue of having a single parent family and or having a same sex family was always an issue as it defied the heterosexual standards and norms. Operating outside the confines of heterosexuality had a number of implications. Sarah, a participant in this study revealed that having children out of the wedlock resulted in her losing support from her parents despite the fact that grandparents are more of second parent to the child. She also bemoaned the challenges faced in accessing health care facilities as these expects parents to be both a mother and a father and single mother often face resistance consequently. Tamia also revealed that because of heteronormativity which expects parents to be a mother and father presenting herself as a non-biological mother is a challenges and so she had to lie and visit her partner, the biological mother like she is visiting a sister. It also meant she can end up lying that her child is in fact her sister as she is not the legally recognised parent.

Heteronormativity also results in lesbian mother facing challenges from other lesbians as they are viewed as not genuine for having slept with men for the purposes of childbirth. Heterosexual societies assumes sexual binaries where one is either homosexual or heterosexual and sexual adventure is not permissible. This therefore entails that these binaries creates sexual scripts that defines lesbian women as confined to romantic and sexual relationships with other women. A failure to live up to these standards results in the society and other lesbians not validating the lesbian mother identities as true lesbians but rather not genuine. This tallies with symbolic interactionism as Blumer (1969) argues that individuals are also expected to live to certain standards to be validated. A number of respondents such as Sarah, Tec and Kelly had their lesbian identities politicised as ‘fertile lesbians’, ‘fake lesbians’ and sometimes as ‘prostitutes’ who are fed up with heterosexual life and now want to try lesbian lifestyle. As pointed above lesbian mothers who had sex with a man for the purposes of childbirth are relegated to the fringes in the lesbian community and their identities are vilified as they are viewed as selling out and not genuine lesbians. They are thus marginalised in their own lesbian community as regarded as lesser lesbians because they had contact with men. This is so because heterosexual intercourse is regarded as unacceptable by most lesbians women as it is viewed as disrespectful to their lesbian identities ( Baetens and Brewaeys 2001). As heteronormative standards are clearly the guides in the consequent lack of validation of lesbian mothers identities one can note the relevance of Blumer (1969) symbolic



interactionism as a theoretical lens in this study as the society is acting as a strain on lesbian mothers especially in validating the lesbian mothers identities.

Heteronormativity entails and assumes that heterosexual mothers are the ones that have the quintessential mother qualities. Lesbian mothers are thus relegated for not having the heterosexual qualities of good mothers. Kelly had challenges in disciplining her children as they always throw back her sexuality as evidence of a 'failed' mother and hence have nothing to learn from her. These tensions with children are due to the fact that she was invalidated for lacking heterosexual qualities of a mainstream mother. These relational tensions with children are heightened because she is a single mother. Kelly's children were shamed for having a lesbian mother as being a lesbian mother is atypical to the valorised heterosexual mother as Kelly narrated that children expects to have heterosexual mothers and fathers. Challenges can be magnified by having a single parent who is above all a lesbian. In line with Blumer's (1969) symbolic interactionism one can note that Kelly's children in this case had been trying to validate Kelly's own motherhood qualities as motherhood carries with it certain expectations. Consequently, lesbian mothers may be stereotyped and stigmatised for lacking these qualities and expectations. They are also marginalised in the whole motherhood discourse as they are seen as lacking the heterosexual qualities of being a good mother (Griffin 1998). Hayman *et al* (2015) argues that the lesbian community can be harsh in its judgment as it regard motherhood as extraneous to their identities. This is worsened by the fact that there is general social reluctance to acknowledge them as mothers (Nelson 2000). In this study similar findings are evident as lesbian mothers such as Kelly received harsh messages from other lesbians who regarded her as someone who is suffering from identity crisis, a prostitute and worse of all just a heterosexual woman who is now fed up by man and wants to adventure into being a lesbian.

Though there were challenges in their lives, respondents in Hayman and Wilkes (2006) described their mothering journeys as positive and enjoyable. This can also be noted in this study as respondents had positive experiences especially from their immediate families. Hope, a participant in this study elaborated that lesbian mothering is not all that "gloomy". Such experiences are detailed under intersectionality and lesbian mothers as these challenges are situational, experiential and in some instance have privileges. As they are both constrained

and enabled differently in different situation and as such caution must be placed on viewing lesbian motherhood as too bleak, gloomy and full of challenges as they draw on differential sources of support.

Consistent with other studies such as (Wall 2011), (Wall 2013), Dunne (2000) and Nelson (2000), this study established that lesbian mothers do not only deal with stigma and homophobia as individuals. But they also worry about stigma and shame that their children may endure (Wall 2011). In this study lesbian mothers were worried about the stigma that their children may have to go through because of their sexual orientation. Sexual orientation may be used to validate their families and motherhood and may result in homophobia being used as corrective for defying heteronormative standards of motherhood and family. In the case of Hope and Tec their children had already been victims of stigma and homophobia. In the case of Tec her child was victimised by other children at school for having 2 mothers instead of having a father and a mother. In the case of Kelly she illustrated that her children felt ashamed for having a lesbian mother. In the case of Ruth she narrated that *“I do not want a situation whereby people will widely open their eyes and await to harm my child because her mother is lesbian”*. She does not want her child to resent her because of her sexuality or become a victim because her mother is lesbian.

Because of heteronormativity individuals who are non-conforming such as lesbians, gays, lesbian mothers and other sexual minorities may face challenges in claiming their places and coming out as lesbian, gays amongst others. As noted already by Neophythou (1994) in her South African study, lesbian women living in homophobic environment cannot easily come out due to fear of rejection and ostracism. The same line of argument is buttressed poignantly by Mezey (2008) who argues that coming out is difficult for lesbian mothers as their children may develop a sense of shame that can lead to heightened internalized homophobia. The same findings are apparent in the cases of Sarah and Ruth as they are afraid that coming out to their children though necessary may lead to resentment. Coming out may mean a loss of identity and connection to her children and the community and thus is closely monitored in certain cases. Even though a lesbian woman may act as a single mother, falling pregnant may force her to come out of the closet to her family in trying to explain the how about of her pregnancy (Bradford *et al* 2013). Similar findings are made by Hayman *et al* (2015), lesbian women have

to ponder around disclosing their sexual orientation if they were in a closet as families may incessantly question the existence of her pregnancy as she is not married. Lesbian women are thus faced with yet another challenge of coming out in the process to their families. Coming out may be complicated especially if one is coming out to the extended family (Nelson 2000).

Coming out of the closet as lesbian mother is even more complicated for co-parents as they usually lack biological affinity ties with the child which is a symbolic indicator of cultural relatedness between mothers and their children in many societies. Parents may therefore not regard them as mothers to the children in their unions (Nelson 2000). The relationship with the extended family may worsen especially if they were already in an emotional and geographical drift because of their sexual orientation. The extended family can end up regarding them as good for nothing. In the case of Nicole, a participant in this study this is evident as her extended family had to say to her that what else could come out of her lesbianism and equated her to a psychopath.

In this study Kelly illustrated the difficulties she had in coming out to the family given the Zimbabwe context where homosexuality is still considered unnatural, a choice and un-African. She also had a challenge of coming out to her children. This is what she said,

*“Being a lesbian mother is a challenge because I have to come out to my family which is a challenge in the context of Zimbabwe and I have to come out my children as they grew up..”.*

Coming out to one's children may be more difficulty as they feel ashamed of having a mother who is atypical and may resist parental discipline of their own mothers as they regard her also as already deviant and have nothing therefore to learn from her. Lesbian mothers in this study who have children who are still young also see coming out to their children as a challenge that is inevitable as they wonder how and when they will tell their children and how these children will react ( See the case of Ruth and the case of Sarah). Coming out to children is inevitable because as they children grow they start to see their mothers going out with other women and this may appear weird and they will need explanations. Coming out may also be a challenge because children may expect to see their fathers and may ask his whereabouts and mothers can find it difficult to keep on lying about his existence or

nonexistence as these children may find out from other sources such as the extended family and significant others.

### **6.5.2 Lesbian mothers and challenges of intersectionality**

As can be noted above, lesbianism alone cannot adequately elucidate lesbian mothers' journeys as some of these relates to being for instance single parents. Currently, much literature focuses on how lesbianism pose and invite challenges to lesbian mothers. In contrast to such studies however, the current study underscored the fact that the experiences of lesbian mothers can also be understood as experiences of intersectionality. As indicated, the experiences vary considerably with situations, individual family background, disclosure of sexual orientation, existing relations with the extended family and or the immediate family. An understanding of these issues as issues of intersectionality can be illuminating as some of their challenges are sometimes not challenges of their lesbianism as some relates to them as single mothers. In articulating this position experiences of the respondents are discussed in light of how their interacting and intersecting categories can further disadvantage or privilege them similarly and differently. Crenshaw (1993) points out that intersections of individual social categories can act as both sources of oppression and or privilege. Recognising these intragroup differences enables the overcoming the elision of social categories (Crenshaw 1993).

Lesbian mothers also faced challenges that do not necessarily spring from being lesbians. These relates to being mothers but at the same time "not married" or being mothers outside "the wedlock" and the challenge of raising a "child alone". In essence these challenges related to them being single mothers. Ruth was explicit that people wonders that she has a child but is not married. Sarah was also explicit that no one would want to "raise" a child alone and that her parents scorned her being a single mother outside the wedlock. Sarah also pointed that when people discover that one has a child but is not married support will be limited as people expect one to have a child inside the marriage. In this regard being single mothers further marginalised lesbian mothers, as single motherhood is vilified and ostracised in Zimbabwe by using derogatory terms such as *Mvana* (Mawema-Chitauro 2013). However, the term *Mvana* is not used publicly. In essence gender and single parenthood social categories further act as a source of disempowerment and marginalisation for some lesbian mothers. These intragroup differences and challenges cannot be wholly understood by just capturing

the category of lesbian mothers as some have not experienced this challenge of being “single mothers”. This is crucial as some of these challenges do not relate to lesbian mothers because of their “lesbianism” but social visibility as single, unmarried mothers out of the wedlock.

Another crucial issue is how familial background of lesbian mothers acted and intersected with their motherhood and thus make the experiences of lesbian mothers qualitatively different. Tec’s immediate family has embraced lesbianism and Hope’s family also integrated her and her partner thus acting as a source of support for them. Ruth’s extended family also did not question her for being a single mother because they had “other differences” other than sexual orientation that drifted them apart. In these and other cases like that of Sarah what is apparent is that familial background intersected with lesbian motherhood and either acted to give them more constraints or support depending on the family’s background, values and reaction.

In the case of Sarah, her religion had also intersected with her motherhood and thus become another source of intersectional disempowerment. She is reminded by her immediate family that her “motherhood” runs contrary to her religion that expects her to be married and then have a child. In the case of Kelly her church did not help her with burial rituals of her son because she is lesbian. From there onwards Kelly withdrew from her church and started to have a relationship with God and not her church as her church’s actions violated the sanctity of life and death with it “purports” to value. In other lesbian women however religion was not raised as acting as a source of challenge thus pointing to the fact that by simply using “lesbianism” one can elide the intragroup differences within and amongst lesbian mothers who may both identify as lesbians and of the same religion but experiencing these differently as experiencing the phenomena can vary within the same group (Crenshaw 1993).

Challenges faced by lesbian mothers are largely consequences of their lesbianism, but these are compounded by familial background, familial reaction to either lesbianism or single parenthood, heteronormativity, religion among other things. As such lesbian mothers challenges can also be understood as challenges of intersectionality as various social categories intersect as either source of strength or marginalisation.

Lesbian mothers’ challenges are experiential. Heterosexism constraints and privileges lesbian mothers differently. The case of Ruth is illustrative. When she had a child the general populace

treated her as a single mother and was not a victim of homophobia. She alluded to the fact that no one has ever confronted her as to why she had a child while she is lesbian. In comparison to other lesbian mothers she actually enjoyed the secrecy of being treated as a regular single mother, though she appreciates that other lesbians are scorned for being mothers while they are lesbian. Lesbian women, depending on their experiences may enjoy subtle and secrecy existence as mothers, who the society assumes to be heterosexual, but in fact may be non-heterosexual. Ruth passed therefore as an ordinary, everyday mother. Potgieter (2003) explains why respondents like Ruth enjoys her being: by being seen as a regular women lesbian women can be creating a comfortable space to be lesbian.

Intersectionality can be illuminating because it affords one to see the intragroup differences amongst lesbian mothers themselves. Thus affording one to avoid conflating and eliding these experiences. In as far as some lesbian mothers' experienced lesbian politics some did not. Tec was articulate that sometimes as lesbian mothers they are called names such as fertile lesbian to denote that they are more of fake lesbian as they had sex with men. Sarah also pointed out that,

*“Sometimes you have your sexuality thrown in your face. If you are a real lesbian why then are you stepping out and going against the lifestyle that you chose”.*

Such sentiments reveals that lesbian politics is at play here. It also reveals that motherhood is not necessarily the issues to other lesbians but how motherhood was pursued, by having contact with a man. Having a contact with a man is viewed as disrespectful amongst certain lesbians and therefore those that does have contact with men are considered not genuine. Pursuant to intersectional argument proffered, not all lesbian mothers had experienced lesbian politics. Tamia, Hope, Ruth, Rosa and Nicole have not been victims of lesbian politics but Kelly, Sarah and Tec had been victims of lesbian politics. Another illustration can further illuminate issues of intragroup differences. Nicole and Tec faced challenges from their extended families as a result of their lesbianism and motherhood but distinct experiences can be noted from Ruth. Ruth did not face any challenges from her extended family though they had other issues that made her to be in an emotional drift with her extended family. What can be underlined from such a study is that these women journeys are constrained and privileged differently depending on various social categories, issues, spaces and individuals involved.

What the above observation reveals is that lesbian mothers' experiences are experiences that are situational, contextual and experiential. Their journeys differ with times, spaces, context and individuals. To elaborate on the situational nature of these experiences one can note that lesbian mothers both drew support and sometimes resistance from other lesbians. Blumer (1969) argues that individuals approach situations differently, live in different worlds and guide themselves by different set of meanings as they occupy different positions. Sarah, a participant in this study was questioned by other lesbian as to why she is crossing the line by going against the 'lifestyle' that she chose. She however got help from other lesbian women on how they coped. Kelly was viewed by other lesbians as a prostitute and sometimes as someone who is bored by heterosexual life with men. However, not all lesbians viewed her as such as she got help from other lesbian friends at GALZ. Tec was criticized likewise for being a fertile lesbian yet other lesbian look up to her as role model. Especially those that are struggling to have children. In terms of contexts, experiences from the immediate and extended families differ within and amongst individuals. These experiences also differ depending on the mechanism used to accomplish motherhood and the disclosure of sexual orientation to their families. In resonance with Blumer (1969) Symbolic interactionism, experiences and actions are a product of and emerges in contexts and can be understood in such contexts.

#### **6.6 .0 Copying mechanism used by lesbian mothers**

One assumption of this study was that in choosing to become mothers lesbian women face a number of challenges. They are seen as challenging the status quo and the norms by having unconventional families outside the ideal family matrix. Balka (1993) argues that coping amongst lesbian mothers concerns are around how lesbian mothers have to defend their mothering in an environment that can be unwelcoming to them and their children. Their motherhood is seen as not comporting well with the idealised standards of a mainstream mother. They have to therefore create their space in a heterosexual society. They have therefore to adopt certain mechanics to navigate through such a terrain.

Consistent with Herbert Blumer's Symbolic Interactionism and Michael Certeau Agency theory lesbian mothers are active conscious agency as they actively wiggle their constraints. Lesbian mothers experiences in coping and negotiating of their experiences shows the relevance of

Blumer's principle of human agency and Michael Certeau concept of everyday practices in which resilience and human intentions are so cardinal. They had to employ behavioural strategies that 'legitimise' their identities. They had to consciously redefine and come up with meaning making strategies that create linguistic and symbolic structures that affirm their motherhood. To Certeau (1984) lesbian women strategies becomes just in hand time assemblages as they want to respond to as well as challenge that which faces them in mothering journeys.

#### **6.7. 1 Naturalisation, normalisation and neutralisation**

Conventional society view of family is that of a mother and a father, lesbian headed families either single parent or same sex parent was viewed as falling short of societal of normative heterosexual ideals. Due to these issues lesbian mothers have to negotiate their places. They must forge their understanding of family as same sex families lack legal validation in Zimbabwe. Hequembourg (2014) study established three resilient mechanism used by lesbian mothers. These involved second parent adoptions, commitment ceremonies and normalisation. In this regard lesbian mothers view their families as not anything different from the heterosexual families. They normalise their families. In the case of Tec she viewed her family as normal like heterosexual families. In the case of Ruth again she pointed that she sees her family as a normal family regardless of what people may say. Normalisation in the case of Ruth also involves her passing as regular everyday heterosexual single mother. In other words she managed her sexual orientation and did not disclose it to the society. Ruth was thus seen by the society as a regular, everyday single mother and thus lesbianism has not been as serious issue used to challenge her motherhood. While in the closet she could note those that affirm lesbianism, keep close to them and maintain distance with those that frown on lesbianism. Oswald (2002) argues that managing disclosure is a process that can promote resilience of families of choice by selectively bringing affirming individuals close while creating distance with the hostile one. This illuminates the salience of De Certeau (1984) practice of everyday life.

In case of Tamia she also views motherhood as normal part of anyone. In the case of Hope she also said that her family is normal and in some instances better than heterosexual families because they can provide for their child and are more egalitarian in nature. The case of Ruth and Tec as well as other various cases such as that of Kelly shows that other people do not view them as parents. Normalisation is important to these mothers because they will



be living a life that is true to themselves regardless of what people say. It helps them to have a positive image of their identities and thus survive the scenario. It helps them have their own breathing space that is content to themselves. Normalisation was expressed differently by participants. Normalisation involved lesbian women viewing motherhood as normal and authentic part of their identities as women. In the case of Hope she pointed out that she wanted to be the real Hope. Meaning therefore that her identity is not in dissonance with motherhood. This was against a background in which others did not view them as normal to their lesbian identities. What is crucial in this mechanism is that lesbian mothers do not deny that they are different from heterosexual mothers but sees their choice of being mothers as normal regardless of ones' sexuality.

Lesbian mothers one way or the other responded to their experiences through neutralisation. This involves a deliberate attempt on part of the actors to make the challenges ineffective or an attempt to counterbalance these challenges. In other words it involves invalidation of the challenges by the actors. In the case of Ruth she was very clear that whether or not the society sees her family as a family she does not care but views herself as a mother and her family as a family. Neutralisation eases the challenges because it simplifies the challenge and view them as just minimal and in this regard lesbian mothers would have created a bulwark of some sort to shield themselves from existing challenges. In these scenarios lesbian mothers and their children will view their challenges as typical and normal day to day issues which they are getting used to and will not change them and thus cope in the end. Flood (undated) argues that lesbian mothers may use coming out of the closet as neutralisation mechanism to cope in the society. Flood (undated) was convinced that coming out that is characterised by self-confidence and unapologetic coming out which somehow neutralises other people's responses.

#### **6.7.2 Symbolisation, naming and labelling**

Language is not neutral but politically charged and possesses both the power to acknowledge and affirm as well as render invisible the position of lesbian mothers (Brown and Perlesz 2008). In this study it is apparent that lesbian mothers' partners/co-mothers had to negotiate in conjunction with children and other partners through interpretive processes their mother identities and roles as parents. This is so because there was notable absence of commonly understood language for the non-biological mother. In this regard they had linguistic constraints

and had to construct symbolic and linguistic management mechanisms to identify each other. Similar findings have been reported by Butterfield (2011) in which lesbian non-biological mothers coined the term “Mather” as a hybrid of father and mother to anchor and identify themselves and positions as parents. Blumer (1969) argues that meanings that things have for human beings are central in their own right. In this study how children responded to and interacted to their co-mothers was based on the meaning that they have and these resulted from the interactive process between these parties. So as to fit within the motherhood discourse lesbian mothers especially co-parents had to negotiate and go through a process through which their participation in the daily lives of their partners lives acquired them a symbolic meaning of a mother through picking the kid from school and doing everyday chores. The children at first saw them merely as partners of their mothers but at the end regarded them as mothers as the meanings they had changed. See Hope and Tec cases in chapter 5. Labels such as aunt, mama 1 and mama 2 as well as Blaz where simultaneously created so as to give a name to the ‘other’ mother. What is perhaps particular about symbolic interactionism is the issue of how labelling and naming takes centre stage of human interactions. A mother is expected to be feminine among other things. She is supposed to have ‘carried’ the pregnancy. In other words if she fails to meet these qualities she is supposed to negotiate her identity through symbolisation and then acquire the symbolic indicators of being a mother. This is especially difficulty for a non-birth mother who is typically not feminine and children may struggle either calling her mom or dad because she falls short of neither qualities.

In her Yorkshire study in the UK, Gabb (2005) argues that lesbian blended families may be faced with linguistic challenges of identifying the non-biological mother. The data in this literature evinces that while faced with these linguistic constraints the creative use of language by children and their non-biological mothers demonstrates the ability, agency and deconstructive abilities alluded to by Blumer (1969) in these experiences as these families positioned themselves dynamically and strategically to facilitate and include the other mother by using a number of terms expounded below. Children may assign labels to her so as to give a place in their families. This is an initiation/ symbolisation of some sort.

In this study it became interesting as children at first neither saw their mothers butch partners as mom nor dad but had to view them later as such because the partners were butch, which

is thought of as a discrepancy to the ideal or because they had mothers already. In that regard the naming and labels shifted as the meaning does. When children saw them as mothers they started to interpret them as such despite their physical appearance or the fact that they had other mothers. Meaning therefore was in constant shift and negotiated and not fixated on the bodily appearance or the presence of biological parents but more on the meaning they had out of everyday interactions. The case of Hope and Tec are helpful here and are detailed below. Thus in line with Symbolic Interactionism ideas of Herbert Blumer (1969), one can note that it is out of the interactions and negotiations that the mothers had with their children that created space for them as mothers. Blumer (1969) argues that actors are forced to direct their own conduct in terms of what they take into account in face of the actions of others.

Hope's son and Tec's daughter wanted to make meaning of the 'other' mothers in their families and at first they would address them concurrently as aunts. Tec's daughter increasingly viewed her other mom not as aunt and changed to calling her by her real name. Similarly, Hope's son started calling her other mom blaz. These labels were negotiated through interactions so as to create a space for and legitimate the existence of the other mother. In essence they actively socially constructed their identities together with their children as they interact every day. Based on the contexts and meaning these labels shifted accordingly. Blumer (1969) argues that actors may abandon an intention, revise it, intensify it, check it or replace it. This is typically what is evident here as there are shifts in the linguistic terms that designate mother in these mothers' relationship with their children as a result of the interactions they had. In certain contexts children simply addressed their mothers as mom, aunt, blaz or blaz T. When they thought of their mothers as aunt they addressed them as such. When they thought of their mothers as Blaz they interpreted them as such. These labels were also emergent and temporary and context specific. Imagine this case, Hope is a mother and in a relationship with T. T is a mother consequently, more of a co-parent to Hope's child. When Hope's child was young he referred to T as aunt. As Hope's child grew up he started to view T not as aunt but more like a mother-father figure. He stopped calling her aunt. He started calling her Blaz. Blaz is more like a brother in slang. T label changed from aunt to Blaz as the meaning that the child have changed. The label Blaz was meant to accommodate T's butch qualities. So in essence the label Blaz made T to be recognized as a mother, a woman who is physically and economically a provider, more of a double identity of father and mother in a single individual. T is not

addressed as Blaz to match the aforementioned issues only. The term Blaz is meant to neutralise societal negative remarks. It allows T and his son to interact as close affinities without society having to ask him why he has two mothers. The label blaz used by T's son changes in contexts. When T is with the son she is addressed as Blaz but when they are at school or funeral T is referred to as Blaz T, more of a combination of the label (blaz) and her real name (T) so that people will not ask why she is addressed as Blaz, a purely Masculine label, sort of neutralising people's reaction. This therefore evinces and concurs with Blumer's Symbolic interactionism where identity is negotiated and transient as well as context specific. Indicating therefore that utility and resonance of this theory to the current study.

Gabb (2005) notes that children's eclectic and tentative vocabulary sometimes may highlight absence of social status for the other 'mother', but does not situate her beyond the boundaries of the family but instead attest to children's creative familial-linguistic management of the notion of family. In the case of Hope, a participant in this study the son had to call the other mother Blaz amongst other things and in the case of Tec, her daughter had to act in a likely manner by calling the other mother by her real name thus dovetailing Gabb (2005) findings.

### **6.7.3 Avoidance**

Nicole had to withdraw from her relatives and started to avoid them so as to limit the stigma associated with being a mother out of an incestuous relationship. This was particularly due to the fact that she was out of the closet already to a number of friends and her extended family. Symbolically speaking humans are supposed to live up to certain expectations. These groups according to Blumer validate the individual identities. As a result Nicole had to avoid her close affinities because she was operating outside the expectations and therefore failed to be validated. Accordingly, it should be noted that Symbolic Interactionism of Herbert Blumer is also clear on the fact that human being exercise agency by reflexively engaging and strategizing. To use Certeau, practice of everyday life, Nicole was avoiding her affinities so as to operate underneath the radar. She was thus exercising her agency in limiting herself to become a victim of relentless gaze. It is opined in this regard that such a theoretical bricolage of Symbolic interactionism and Agency theory affords scholarship to understand how lesbian mothers sometimes deal with their experiences as agency is cardinal to these theoretical frameworks.

#### **6.7.4 Accommodation**

Respondents emphasised being true to their identities and accepting the reality. An emphasis was placed on not trying to conform, but to live and appreciate their difference. Ruth was very vocal in this dynamic. Accommodation involves normalisation as stated above but accommodation is more embracing, it then appreciates that lesbianism is just but one component of the lesbian mother identities. They have other identities worth celebrating like being an accountant. In the case of Hope she emphasises other joyous moments and events in her life. Kelly despite being vilified by the church placed emphasis on her individual identity as a Christian who have a relationship with God than a member of the church and thus having a relationship with God not church. Lesbian mothers also made use of their social networks for stress management.

#### **6.7.5 Resignation and Ritualization**

Resignation as used in thesis is not necessarily giving up. Resignation is that attempt by a lesbian mother to reciprocate to the society that in fact they are lesbian mothers but they are immovable in their stands as lesbian mothers. In other words it is a mechanism of reciprocating to adversity by stabilising their identities as mothers. Like lesbian mothers are here to stay regardless of adversity. In essence it is a resilient mechanism in which one declares her ground as a decree. In the case of Ruth she made the following sentiments, “yes I am a lesbian mother, but so what...”. Respondents using this mechanism seem to accept that yes the society vilifies their identities but they do not care about what the society says or thinks.

Lesbian mothers may perform rituals such as commitment rituals and marriage rituals. This makes observers and adversaries realise that they are really committed and prepared to face any adversity. The adversaries in the long run may validate these mothers. Hequembourg (2014) equates this to commitment ceremonies. As Hequembourg (2014) argues commitment rituals are performed to gain validity and legitimation in the eyes of their friends and families and at the end of the day acts as a symbolic scaffold to strengthen the relationship. In this current study Tamia and her partner had to perform marriage rituals with her partner in South Africa in the presence of her friends and relatives.

#### **6.8 Conclusion**

The section concludes this study. The study is meant to illuminate how lesbian women accomplish their mother identity, the challenges faced along the way, how they interpret and

describe the whole mothering journey. It also illuminate how lesbian mothers negotiate and claim their place as mothers operating outside of the norm. This study is solely concerned with mothering journeys of women who self-identify themselves as lesbians in Harare, Zimbabwe. Given the intricacies in everyday life of lesbian mothers, the decisions they make and the meaning they attach to their mother identities and how they interpret it Situational symbolic interactionism was considered as the ideal qualitative research epistemological tradition from which to pursue the study. This thesis is an attempt to locate, situate and tell (an emic perspective) from an insider point of view how, why and with what challenges do lesbian women carry out or intend to carry out motherhood in Zimbabwe and what the whole experience of being a mother means to them.

In becoming mothers lesbian women had to rely on their positionality in the ways to become mothers. They felt constrained by the lack of services that caters for non-heterosexuals as such they had to use resources at their disposal such as buying sperms locally and using manipulative sex as well as natural sex with close affinities. It can therefore be argued that in terms of ways used to become mothers there is not much locally as Zimbabwe is stringent in its adoptions laws and because other fertility services are not so pronounced in Zimbabwe. This explains why lesbian women end up doing 'anything' even what people see as unthinkable, immoral and inauthentic. They however redefined their positions as those compelling them to do so. They have to therefore suspend their identities so as to achieve an identity transition from just being a lesbian to being a lesbian mother. In that regard lending credence to Herbert Blumer symbolic interactionism as a chosen theoretical framework for this very study as it posits that identities are negotiated and in constant state of flux.

Symbolic interactionism in its variations moved away from seeing human beings as just miniature passive aggregates in the society. In essence Herbert Blumer posited the ability of man to consciously exists in the society. He argued therefore that humans should be understood as having agency, specifically by interpreting their actions from the meanings they attach to specific events and processes. Despite facing varied challenges in its multiform existence, lesbians women who are into mothering cannot be viewed as victims of circumstance in which their endeavours die along the pipe dream. This study has shown how these women face up everyday challenges with fortitude and resilience as they camouflage their mothering with a

spirit of comradeship where soldering on is emphasised. It is also momentous to make mention of this, lesbian women face challenges but one of the perhaps ground-breaking findings that has even challenged general expectation is that certain lesbian women do not want and they do not believe their mothering journeys are so flooded with challenges as presented in literature. This is unthinkable given the levels of homophobia in Zimbabwe (Mudavanhu 2010) and the legal-political context that trammels the lives of lesbians and gays (Kuyala 2014).

Sex is a human behaviour that is fluid and meaning oriented but at the same time it is so vested with emotional significance and having a child out of sexual contact with a man is not easy for many lesbian women as they see this as a betrayal to their partners and their lesbian identities. However, as this study reveals that lesbian women can cross the sexual boundary to have children and this does not mean a change in their sexual orientation neither does it make them lesser lesbians. The conventional assumption is that lesbians do not have sex with man in as much as gays 'do not' have sex with women. Albeit, they do. Sexual behaviour cuts across sexual orientation. If sexual behaviour is and should not cut across sexual orientation what does anal sexual contact between a heterosexual man and woman make them. If they remain heterosexual, lesbian should likewise be treated the same because whether heterosexual partners have engaged in anal sex to avoid pregnancy or losing virginity that is not the concern because they have likewise crossed the script. Symbolic interactionism affords insights therefore into viewing sexual behaviour as not objective but subjective behaviour that takes varied meaning and intentions.

Participants had to negotiate with donors, friends, relatives and partners in becoming mothers. Lesbian mothers in openly lesbian relationship as the study indicates are the ones who negotiated who was going to be impregnated or to play which roles. In that regard mothering roles and its variants elements is thus not essential or given but socially constructed and negotiated. Blumer's Symbolic interactionism alludes to social reality as socially constructed and negotiated. In that regards the study accentuates the salience of Symbolic Interactionism as the findings are dovetailing the essence of Blumer's symbolic interactionism.

One of the research recommendation with regard to this paper is to understand more lesbian motherhood and intersectionality as well as the division of labour within same sex families of these lesbian women as they seem to emerge from this literature. It should be clear that in this

study the researcher did not map how children of lesbian mothers felt about growing and being brought up in a lesbian family because that was beyond the scope of this study, but can equal constitute an area of further academic inquiry.



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