12-1993

Satisfaction in Lesbian Relationships as Compared to the Qualities of Mutuality, Cohesion, and Merging

Patricia R. Murray

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Counseling Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/1888

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
SATISFACTION IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS AS COMPARED TO THE QUALITIES OF MUTUALITY, COHESION, AND MERGING

by

Patricia R. Murray

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Counselor Education
and Counseling Psychology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 1993
SATISFACTION IN LESBIAN RELATIONSHIPS AS COMPARED TO THE QUALITIES OF MUTUALITY, COHESION, AND MERGING

Patricia R. Murray, Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 1993

Recently theorists have examined women's development as relational. The ability to use empathy, the value of mutuality, and a flexible boundary structure are components, which lead to psychological growth and emphasize the importance of relating within the relationship. Lesbian relationships are likely to be highly relational, as they consist of two women relating in an intimate way. Research regarding satisfaction in lesbian relationships has been sparse; satisfaction has been correlated with mutuality, intimacy, and dyadic attachment. Other variables such as an equal power balance, commitment, and cohesion have also been positively related to satisfaction. The purpose of the present study was to examine mutuality, cohesion, and merging as correlates of relationship satisfaction.

A sample of 115 lesbians received packets containing the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire, Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II, Marital Satisfaction Scale, Life Styles Questionnaire, and Personal Information Questionnaire. Usable data were received from 63 women for a return rate of 55%. The data were analyzed using correlational techniques, and a stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate which dependent variable
was the best predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Mutuality and relationship satisfaction were significantly correlated, and mutuality was found to be a highly significant predictor of relationship satisfaction. Cohesion was also significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction; merging showed a significant correlation with relationship satisfaction. Time spent together in the relationship had an inverse correlation with relationship satisfaction.

The results indicated that mutuality is a valued aspect in women's relationships, which supports Stone Center theorists' emphasis on growth through mutual interaction. The correlation between cohesion and satisfaction indicates the value which lesbians place on sharing friends and interests, mutual support, and emotional bonding. Merging was not viewed negatively by this sample. It was concluded that the negative statements which abound in the literature regarding merging in lesbian relationships do not consider the differences which exist in women's development. The need to allow norms in lesbian relationships to develop without a heterosexual or traditional developmental interpretation is essential to avoid pejorative labeling which can lower self-esteem and devalue the lesbian relationship.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
Satisfaction in lesbian relationships as compared to the qualities of mutuality, cohesion, and merging

Murray, Patricia R., Ed.D.
Western Michigan University, 1993
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing and completing a dissertation study is a task which requires persistence and motivation to achieve. My motivation and ability to maintain my enthusiasm through difficult times is due to my relationship with my father, who continually encouraged me to reach my potential. Throughout this process I have been able to access memories of his positive and loving attitude, which continued to provide emotional support when I needed it.

During the pursuit of my doctorate I have married and borne two children. Completing this dissertation would have been extremely difficult without the caring support of my husband, who encouraged me to prioritize my education and who provided the financial support so that this objective could be achieved.

Each member of my committee has made valuable contributions, which I would like to acknowledge. I appreciate Dr. Betz's ability to provide concrete, detailed feedback, and his orderly approach to the dissertation process. I thank him for his consistent, supportive attitude during each step that I encountered. I relied upon Dr. Trembley's interest and feedback regarding the theoretical aspects of my dissertation. I appreciated his sensitivity and thoughtful discussion of the theoretical nuances, which I struggled with periodically in writing this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Reeser for her energetic and thorough consideration of women's issues. She strongly reminded me of my potential bias and placed a great deal of thought into the issues discussed.
Acknowledgments—Continued

This study would not have been possible without all the women who encouraged me and volunteered to help by giving questionnaire packets to friends. The support and caring of the many women who believe in the study of lesbian issues was a crucial and integral aspect in this dissertation.

Lastly I would like to thank my typist, Lee Pakko, for her meticulous attention to detail and constant availability. I relied upon her experience and knowledge about practical aspects such as formatting, graduate college expectations, etc.

The support, guidance, and suggestions of each person mentioned has made this an experience which has been enjoyable, interesting, and realizable.

Patricia R. Murray
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................................................... ii
LIST OF TABLES ........................................................................................... vii
CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION ............................................................................. 1
   Statement of the Problem ..................................................... 2
   Significance of the Study ....................................................... 4
   Theoretical Rationale .............................................................. 6
   Definition of Terms . ................................................................. 11
   Limitations of the Study . .......................................................... 13
   Methodological Assumptions ................................................ 15
   Summary ................................................................................... 16

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE ............................................ 17
   Satisfaction and Relationships ............................................. 17
   Mutuality and Self-in-Relation Theory .................................. 23
   Merging and Female Developmental Theory ....................... 28
   Merging and Systems Theory ................................................. 34
   Summary .................................................................................... 37

III. METHOD .......................................................................................... 39
   Population and Sample .......................................................... 39
   Research Model and Design .................................................. 40
   Instrumentation ........................................................................ 41
      Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire ... 41

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Table of Contents--Continued

CHAPTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales II</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Satisfaction Scale</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Style Questionnaire</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Information Questionnaire</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Hypotheses</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of the Data</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. RESULTS</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description of the Sample</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative Results</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Results</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality and Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion and Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merging and Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Between Mutuality and Cohesion</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Relationship and Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Prediction of Relationship Satisfaction</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality and Lesbian Relationships</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion and Lesbian Relationships</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
Table of Contents—Continued

Merging and Lesbian Relationships ......................... 80
Satisfaction and Lesbian Relationships ................... 85
Implications for Future Research ........................... 87

APPENDICES ................................................................. 90
A. Cover Letter .......................................................... 91
B. Informed Consent Form ....................................... 93
C. Advertisement for Participants ............................. 95
D. Letter of Approval From Human Subjects Institutional Review Board ........................................ 97
E. Personal Data Sheet .............................................. 99
F. Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire Form A ......................................................... 101
G. Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II ............... 103
H. Marital Satisfaction Scale .................................... 106
I. Life Styles Questionnaire ..................................... 109

BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................... 112
LIST OF TABLES

1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample ................................ 52
2. Comparison of Demographics Between the Current Study and a Study by Eldridge and Gilbert .......................... 54
3. Correlational Matrix Between Psychological Variables, Months in Relationship, and Relationship Satisfaction .... 56
4. Summary of Predictor Variables for Relationship Satisfaction From Stepwise Regression Procedures .................................. 59
5. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Satisfaction .......................................................... 59
6. Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Psychological Variables and Months Together ........................................ 61
7. Percentage of the Sample in Each Level of Cohesion .............. 62

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, an increased emphasis has been placed on the quality of human relationships. With the prevalence of divorce, concerns about developing stable, successful relationships have arisen. Articles, books, talk shows, and workshops explore means of developing positive relationships. Interest and research efforts have been traditionally focused on heterosexual relationships. However, as more individuals are acknowledging their homosexuality, it is becoming apparent that relationship issues which gay couples face similarly need to be addressed and explored.

Research regarding lesbian and gay relationships has been limited. It has often been assumed that either gay relationships are totally different from heterosexual relationships, or basically similar and require no special understanding (Toder, 1979). It is obvious, however, that lesbian relationships are unique, as they are composed of two women relating in an intimate way.

Intimate female relationships often contain an emphasis on empathy, reciprocal sharing, and consideration of the needs of the other person. Self-in-relation theorists (Jordan, Surrey, & Kaplan, 1983; Miller, 1984) write that women's development is characterized by empathic involvement and mutual interaction within the relationship. Chodorow (1978) proposed that the preoedipal development for women
is relationally oriented and complex, as women are not pushed to separate from their mothers. Therefore, a strong relational experience with their mothers encourages women to seek close mutual interactions in their relationships. Lesbian relationships have been viewed as cohesive due to the relational emphasis which women share. Traditional analytical theory (Lindenbaum, 1985) has described lesbian relationships as merged, so that each person feels whole only by uniting with the other in the relationship. Current writers (Mencher, 1990) examine merging as a reflection of women's capacity for close, mutual relationships. Mencher suggested that merging may add a sense of closeness and satisfaction within the lesbian relationship.

Research which examined the variables which correlate with satisfaction in lesbian relationships has been limited. Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) found significant correlation between dyadic attachment, power, intimacy, and self-esteem with relationship satisfaction. Continued research which further examined relational qualities with relationship satisfaction was viewed as important in expanding the field of knowledge regarding lesbian relationships.

Statement of the Problem

Relationships between women are characterized by empathy, mutuality, and a flexible boundary structure (Surrey, 1984). Relating is a central component in the female world. It is a means for developing a sense of self and establishing self-worth. As Surrey wrote, relationships "facilitate the growth of a sense of self through psychological connection and expect that the mutual sharing of experience will lead to
psychological growth" (p. 5).

Females demonstrate a strong empathic ability to psychologically place themselves in the world of the other, experiencing both feelings and thoughts. One's own sense of self is temporarily left to join in the perspective of the other. In mutual empathy the process is reciprocal and leads to a sense of mutuality in which the inner experience of the other is important on both an affective and cognitive level.

Mutuality in female relationships presents the opportunity for growth in a caring interpersonal atmosphere. As Jordan (1984) wrote, "Often mutuality comes more easily for women in women to women relationships which can provide wonderfully sustaining mutual empathy and care" (p. 7). The potential for satisfaction in relationships between women is high. However, the possibility of a loss of a sense of self exists since females tend to be more concerned about the needs of others. When an individual's empathic attunement rests solely with the other, their own self-perspective is lost and merging of self with other may occur.

The unique features of female relating is reflected in lesbian couples. It is thought that mutuality, cohesion, and merging are relational qualities in lesbian relationships which are magnified due to the effect of two females who are relating intimately. Merging is viewed as a process in which the individual's sense of self is defined by being in relation with the other. Merging as a common phenomenon in lesbian relationships has recently received attention in the literature (Burch, 1982; Elise, 1986; Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Lindenbaum, 1985). Some writers point out that merging should be evaluated in a positive, rather
than negative, manner (G. D. Green, 1990; Markowitz, 1991). They suggest that the merged couple may actually experience a closer, more satisfactory relationship. Conversely, merging has been described as a phenomenon which limits growth in a relationship (Krestan & Bepko, 1980).

Recent studies have found a high level of cohesion in lesbian relationships (Peplau, Padesky, & Hamilton, 1982; Zacks, Green, & Morrow, 1988). Cohesion encompasses a sense of caring, giving, and bonding in the relationship with shared activities, friends, interests, and decision making. Cohesive relationships often are highly correlated with relationship satisfaction (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986b). It is believed that many of the characteristics of the cohesive relationship are similar to the relational qualities of both mutuality and merging.

The purpose of the present study was to examine mutuality, merging, and cohesion as correlates of relationship satisfaction. A gap in the research exists regarding the specific factors which predict relationship satisfaction in lesbian relationships (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990). In this study, the relational qualities of mutuality, merging, and cohesion which are prevalent in lesbian relationships were compared with satisfaction in the relationship.

Significance of the Study

Lesbian relationships have often been either ignored or pathologized. Living in a homophobic society places stress on relationships (Toder, 1979). As a consequence of internalized homophobia, lesbians themselves often question their own relationships (Markowitz, 1991).
Research which validates the strength of the lesbian bond helps provide a sense of self-worth to lesbians in relationships. Examining and reporting both the positive and the problematic aspects of the lesbian relationship can encourage and support relationships in their growth process (Peplau, Cochran, Rook, & Padesky, 1978).

All relationships have unique dynamics regarding autonomy and closeness. The lesbian relationship with its intense intimacy has special characteristics. These relational characteristics need to be determined and provided a theoretical basis for their understanding. These characteristics include a strong sense of responsibility for fulfilling the needs of the other. Attunement to the feelings of the partner and a wish to care for and respond to these feelings are also aspects found in female relationships. A strong interest and involvement in the activities of the partner and a commonality of friends, ideas, and opinions often occur (Burch, 1982).

Merging may exist which strengthens the intensity of the connection. Merging has been traditionally viewed as a negative phenomenon. Yet merging in lesbian relationships may be valued, creating a norm not present in most heterosexual relationships. Norms in a hidden society are not openly available for recognition and discussion. If merging was found to be associated with low relationship satisfaction, then options for growth through individual differentiation could occur. If merging was found to be associated with relationship satisfaction, then similarities and differences in mutuality, merging, and cohesion could be investigated.
Studying lesbian relationships acknowledges their importance, as they become a valid topic for research. Lesbian relationships, as a strong mirror of female relationships, can provide information regarding females in relation. For example, lesbians who rate their relationships as merged and satisfactory may demonstrate a value which heterosexual women might wish to achieve in their relationships. The concept of mutuality has not been a key focal point in studies of adult development (Genero, Miller, & Surrey, 1990). Since mutuality is an important factor in promoting psychological growth, research in exploring its effect upon relationship satisfaction will demonstrate its usefulness. Similarly, little research exists which addresses the issues of mutuality, merging, cohesion, and satisfaction in lesbian relationships. Most studies are based on clinical populations or are commentary based on case studies. A research study which uses a nonclinical population includes a wider representation of the lesbian population, although results of this study can be generalized only to women who have similar demographic characteristics to the present sample.

Theoretical Rationale

The unique features of female development with its emphasis on the mother-daughter relationship form the cornerstone of the relational strength of the female. Chodorow (1978) examined the differences in development due to gender. The female preoedipal attachment to mother is described as longer and more intense than that experienced by the male, who is pushed towards an oedipal attachment. Issues of competitive possession and phallic-sexual oppositeness occur for the
male, as he becomes embedded in the triangular conflict of the oedipal period. This experience diminishes the relational capacities of the male. The female remains preoccupied with mother, experiencing "a continuation of the two-person relationship of infancy" (p. 96).

The strong attachment with mother is a theme which continues throughout the female developmental cycle. In the oedipal stage the daughter forms an attachment with father to defend against the primary identification with mother. In contrast to the male oedipal resolution, the female does not reject mother, but rather continues important oedipal attachments to her mother as well as her father. "These attachments, and the way they are internalized, are built upon and do not replace her intense and exclusive preoedipal attachment to her mother" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 127). The resolution of the oedipal complex points again to the strong connection with mother, which emphasizes the importance of relating. The ability to differentiate is not as essential for the female who sorts through layers of relating experiences. Chodorow commented that the female oedipal situation is both externally and internally complex as "her relationships of dependence, attachment, and symbiosis to her mother continues, and her oedipal (triangular, sexualized) attachments to her mother and then her father are simply added" (p. 120).

In examining female moral development, Gilligan (1982) affirmed the theoretical stance of Chodorow (1978). She viewed the female development of moral judgment in a positive light by emphasizing that intimacy and identity are linked "as the female comes to know herself as she is known, through her relationships with others" (p. 12). The moral
judgment of the female has been previously discredited as underdeveloped, as it does not reflect similarly the logic of the male. Gilligan interpreted the morality decisions of the female in light of her differing developmental issues and importance of relational needs and concerns.

Writers from the Stone Center (Wellesley College, Boston), which is an organized forum of women writers who address issues regarding female development, abilities, and concerns, also agree that the development of women varies from the male model of separation-individuation. Miller (1984) expanded on Chodorow's (1978) theory by emphasizing the interaction between mother and infant. She suggested that women's relational ability is not due simply to gender similarity and consequent lack of separation. A construction of self which is interactive with others from birth is postulated. Through the process of identification, females are encouraged through the maternal relationship to develop connections. "An inner sense of connection to others is a central organizing feature of women's development" (Miller, 1988, p. 2). Many kinds of connections exist such as nurturing, listening, and mothering. Connection includes activity in which the psychological development of both people in the relationship is empowered.

Connection is learned in the mother-daughter relationship. Surrey (1984) proposed three crucial aspects of the mother-daughter relationship which include: (1) daughter's interest and desire to be connected to mother, (2) mother's ability to empathize and mirror child's feelings, and (3) mutual empowerment, a state where mother and daughter are highly attuned to the feelings of each other. The mother-daughter relationship is the foundation for the reciprocal experience of empathy.
Empathy is a key concept which organizes women's relational experiences. "The assumption is that the self is organized and developed through practice in relationships where the goal is the increasing development of mutually empathic relationships" (p. 3). The relationship with mother is grounds for the development of the self.

Separation is viewed as movement away from connections. Surrey (1984) proposed a concept of relationship-differentiation in which the self develops by encompassing greater levels of complexity within the bonds of the relationship. Development of self then is a move towards the relationship. It is the relational strength of the female which allows for the presence of mutuality. Mutuality is a process in which each person is affected and affects the other. Jordan (1986) employed the term mutual intersubjectivity to adequately define the meaning of this process. She described mutual intersubjectivity as a relational frame of reference within which empathy occurs. "It is a holding of the other's subjectivity as central to the interaction with that individual" (p. 2).

The self-in-relation theory emphasizes the development of self through relationships. Connections versus separation is a critical point. Theorists expand on this concept by exploring the qualities of empathy and mutuality which predominate in women's relationships. Mutuality as a function of being female would be present in lesbian relationships. The theory also contributes to an understanding of merging in lesbian relationships. The importance of connection which is the foundation of self-in-relation theory can lead to merging, if a distinct sense of self is not maintained. Women's desire for connection is a strength, which presents challenges and limitations. The strong concern for the needs of the
other can produce a lack of interest in self. Miller (1976) wrote:

Indeed, women's sense of self becomes very much organized around being able to make and then to maintain affiliations and relationships. Eventually, for many women the threat of disruption of connections is perceived not as just a loss of a relationship but as something closer to a total loss of self. (p. 83)

When the loss of self occurs, the relationship adopts a merged quality in which one person loses a sense of self through an empathic absorption toward the other. Jordan (1984) addressed empathic failure indicative of a permeable boundary in which the individual becomes overly stimulated by the affect of the other. This leads to a joining with the other's affect and consequent loss of self.

The phenomenon of merging in lesbian relationships can also be explained from a systems perspective. As the lesbian dyad is rejected by mainstream society, the couple responds by intensifying boundaries, turning inward toward isolation. This dynamic leads to merger as "the intensity of fusion between partners increases as the insulation of the relational system from outside influences is increased" (Karpel, 1976, p. 77). "The function of boundaries is to protect the differentiation of the system" (Minuchin, 1974, p. 53). When a family or couple turns inward, boundaries between the family/couple and the external world become rigid erecting a wall between the family/couple and others. Reaching to create a connection to others outside the family is difficult. As the boundary structure toward the external world strengthens in intensity, boundaries between members in the family system weaken. Examples of weak boundaries include enmeshment between child and parent, triangulation, and in extreme situations incest. Family systems
operate on a continuum of boundary functioning between enmeshment and disengagement.

Family theorists offer insight into the merged relationship by extending the concept of the other to the entire family. Bowen (1971) presented the concept of the undifferentiated family ego mass in which family members are stuck in togetherness, working to maintain enmeshed family relations. In this environment a pseudo self develops which conforms to familial expectations. The greater the pseudo self, the less differentiation. Two pseudo selves demonstrate potential for fusion in future relationships. Bowen proposed that differentiation needs to occur within the family of origin as the family member will continue to create enmeshed relationships. The concepts provided by family theorists are particularly important in examining the relational style of lesbian couples who exist in a minisystem within a society which often projects homophobia.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined according to their usage in the present study:

Merging is defined as a process in which the individual views self in relation to the feelings, thoughts, and needs of the other. The individual's sense of self is defined by being in-relation with the other. If the other seeks greater autonomy, a sense of loss occurs as the individual feels like she is losing her self. When viewed on a continuum, merging demonstrates diverse qualities. Merging which occurs due to the relational aspect of being female may create a strengthened bond in
the relationship (Green, 1990). A strong bond may similarly develop within the lesbian relationship due to the pressures which exist from a homophobic society. The dysfunctional end of the continuum occurs when an individual who has not sufficiently developed a sense of self actively seeks the creation of self through a relationship with the other. The process occurs without respect to gender, as any individual can have missed the necessary elements in the developmental process which nurture the growth of the self.

**Empathy** is a cognitive and emotional activity in which one person experiences the feelings and thoughts of another, while still holding and perceiving their own thoughts and feelings (Jordan, 1986). In empathy, then, the person's sense of self is not lost in relating with the other.

**Cohesion** is defined by Olson, Sprenkle, and Russell (1979) as the emotional bonding that members within a relationship have with one another and the degree of autonomy that a person experiences within the couple system. Specific variables that are included to assess cohesion are emotional bonding, independence, boundaries, coalitions, time, shared friends, decision making, interests, and recreation. Cohesion, when balanced, is valued as a positive quality which enhances the relationship.

The concept of **mutuality** was examined by Jordan (1986). She described mutuality as "having an impact on the other, seeing that our actions, feelings, or thoughts affect the other, and opening to the influence of others on us" (p. 6). Impact is measured by emotional reaction or behavior change. Mutuality highlights the importance of relating rather than problem solving. A relationship characterized as mutual
contains the qualities of a growth fostering relationship as defined by Miller (1986). Miller described the following qualities:

- Each person feels a greater sense of "zest."
- Each person feels more able to act and does act.
- Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person.
- Each person feels a greater sense of self worth.
- Each person feels more connected to the other person and a greater motivation for connections with other people beyond those in the specific relationship. (p. 3)

A **lesbian**, for the purpose of this study, is a woman who is sexually and emotionally involved in a relationship with another woman for a minimum period of 6 months. Celibate lesbians who choose to relate intimately only with women and whose choice is based on feminist, political reasons were not included. The sample is based on women who have had both a sexual and emotional relationship with another woman, as these elements create a strong sense of bonding and intimacy.

**Relationship satisfaction** is a measure of the attitude or perception that an individual holds toward the relationship along a continuum of greater or lesser favorability. The measure is not static as perception is determined at a given point in time.

**Limitations of the Study**

One **limitation** of this study is that the concept examined is a developmental one. That is, an individual's development includes a shift in adolescence toward relationships with others. Kegan (1982), a developmental theorist, differentiates between the interpersonal and
interindividual stage. In the interpersonal stage the individual is engrossed with issues of affiliation, connection, and interest in intimate relationships. An individual who remains stuck in the interpersonal era will not move to the interindividual stage in which self-definition is interwoven with intimacy. Kegan described this stage as the prototype of mature adult love. His description seems similar to Miller's (1986) understanding of growth fostering relationships. In this study the assumption that the subjects were at a similar developmental level may not be true. Participants who described their relationships as merged, may have been focused at the interpersonal era of development.

There are many confounding factors which can contribute to merging in lesbian relationships. S. Roth (1985) wrote that couples who are isolated from the lesbian community experience a greater degree of merging than those who are well connected to their lesbian friends. It is obvious that the isolated lesbian couple will experience a greater degree of dependency upon each other. Another factor which affects merging in lesbian relationships is the developmental aspect of the relationship itself. Merging is a state which may exist temporarily in the initial stages of a relationship. During infatuation the couple appears merged as other interests and friends are dropped. The dyad is immersed in the feelings of each other. In an attempt to account for this developmental phase of the relationship, only women who had been in a relationship for 6 months or more were included in the study.

Sampling procedures may provide additional limitations to this study. Volunteers from local gay organizations, advertisements, and a friendship network comprised the sample. Those women who
volunteered may not adequately represent the typical lesbian. Volunteers are often more psychologically astute and trusting. Since research on lesbian issues is a sensitive topic, women who are not as open or self-confident may not be included in the study. Again, this may not then preclude a representative sample, and results can only be generalized to a sample with similar demographic characteristics.

Using a friendship network as a means of gathering volunteers is an example of purposeful sampling. The main limitation of a purposeful sample is the lack of generalizability of results. This may compromise the interpretation of the study. Internal validity is affected by the differential selection of subjects as nonvolunteers may respond differently. The difficulty in generalization to the population can also affect external validity. Results can be generalized on a limited basis to a sample with similar characteristics.

Methodological Assumptions

The following assumptions were made in order to conduct the present study:

1. Mutuality, cohesion, merging, and satisfaction are not static states. Therefore, the findings represent a measure of the relationship at a given point in time.

2. Mutuality, cohesion, and merging represent discrete states producing different qualities and consequences to the relationship.

3. Mutuality is a growth producing state.

4. Cohesion is a growth producing state.

5. A low level of merging may be a growth producing state,
while a high level of merging is a nongrowth producing state. Trends of merging can be measured by the Life Style Questionnaire.

6. Cohesion in lesbian relationships can be adequately measured by Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales III, Couple Version Scale (Olson, 1986).

7. Mutuality in lesbian relationships can be measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (Genero et al., 1990).

8. Satisfaction in relationships can be measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale developed by Roach, Frazier, and Bowden (1981).

Summary

The study was a survey of lesbians in relationship with the intent of assessing the degree of relationship satisfaction, as it is affected by the relational qualities of mutuality, cohesion, and merging. Mutuality was proposed as a growth producing quality which enhances the relationship and creates a favorable level of satisfaction. Cohesion was similarly viewed as a growth encompassing quality which leads to relationship satisfaction. A high level of merging was viewed as a non-growth producing process which reduces the growth of each person in the relationship and produces a low level of relationship satisfaction. A low level of merging was believed to create a positive impact on relationship satisfaction. The following sections provide a review of the literature relevant to this discussion and a description of the methodology which was employed to measure these variables. In Chapter IV the results are presented, and a discussion of the results and their implications comprises Chapter V.
Satisfaction in lesbian relationships has recently become a topic of interest. Due to the feminist stance of equality of power in relationships, it has been hypothesized that lesbian relationships which demonstrate an equal power base would demonstrate greater satisfaction. This idea was supported in a study by Caldwell and Peplau (1984). The person who was less dependent on the relationship and had greater resources was viewed as more powerful. The authors found that women in equal power relationships as compared to those in unequal power relationships, reported more satisfaction and anticipated less problems in their relationships. In a similar study by Peplau et al. (1982), satisfaction was associated with both equality of involvement and equality of power.

The dimensions of durability, interdependence, and equality were examined by Schneider (1986) in comparing 10 cohabiting lesbian and 10 heterosexual couples. Durability referred to the actual duration of the relationship and the couple's confidence that it would continue. Interdependence referred to the degree in which the couple's lives were intertwined on a financial and legal basis. Equality referred to the sharing of responsibility within the household. Lesbian couples reported their relationships as more equal, less durable, and less interdependent than
heterosexual couples. It is important to note that interdependence was measured by legal and financial factors rather than emotional or interpersonal variables.

Peplau et al. (1978) studied the factors of autonomy and dyadic attachment in a sample of 127 lesbian relationships. Autonomy and attachment are viewed as dimensions of a relationship. Personal autonomy is linked to independence, the importance of outside friends and interests, and self-actualization. Dyadic attachment emphasizes the establishment of an emotionally close and secure love relationship. The factors are not mutually exclusive nor polar opposites. It was believed that both factors would be reported in lesbian relationships. It was predicted that autonomy was related to a strong feminist perspective and involvement, while dyadic attachment was related to a more traditional feminine perspective. These predictions were found to be true. Women who desired autonomy and equality in their love relationship, rejected feminine sex roles to a greater degree than the traditional female. In this study different values were related to each factor. Dyadic attachment was associated with greater closeness and satisfaction and worries that independence would create problems in the relationship. Autonomy was associated with spending less time with partner and worry about having an overly dependent partner. The authors concluded "our contention is that autonomy and attachment are distinct but not mutually exclusive orientations was provided by evidence that the two had different correlates" (p. 25). Reports of affiliation and satisfaction in the relationship were related to attachment values, but not correlated with autonomy values. Strong values of autonomy had no impact on
satisfaction in the relationship. These factors co-exist in lesbian relationships. Finding a balance which fits is the task of the couple.

Dyadic attachment and autonomy were correlated directly with satisfaction in a study of 275 couples (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990). Variables such as career commitment, role conflict, and power were also examined. The results of this study replicate and expand upon previous findings (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a; Peplau et al., 1978).

Equality of power was related with relationship satisfaction. Higher levels of dyadic attachment, but lower levels of personal autonomy were connected to greater relationship satisfaction. High levels of self-esteem were positively related to relationship satisfaction and high levels of role conflict were associated with lower relationship satisfaction. The measurement of intimacy by the Personal Assessment of Intimacy in Relationships examined five types of intimacy: emotional, sexual, social, intellectual, and recreational (Schafer & Olson, 1981). Interestingly, emotional intimacy was the subscale which was most highly correlated with satisfaction in the relationship. This points to the strong value which women place on the emotional, interpersonal aspects of relating. This study verifies the findings of Peplau et al. (1978) in which the respondents valued both personal autonomy and dyadic attachment. Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) wrote that the dynamic interplay between attachment and autonomy is an integral aspect in most relationships.

Sex-role self-concept and its impact on satisfaction in relationships has been another focal point of study. In an initial study by Cardell,
Finn, and Marecek (1981), 10 heterosexual, 10 lesbian, and 5 gay male couples completed the Bem Sex Role Inventory to measure sex role identification. Results were correlated with a measure of relationship satisfaction. Data indicated that lesbian couples were less sex-role identified than individuals in heterosexual relationships. All relationships reported less satisfaction when role differentiated identity was high. The results of this study need to be treated cautiously as the sample was extremely small.

A comparison between sex-role self-concept regarding relationship quality in 44 married, 35 heterosexual cohabiting, 50 gay, and 56 lesbian couples was made by Kurdek and Schmitt (1986b). Masculinity, femininity, androgynous, and undifferentiated types were derived from the Bem Sex Role Inventory. In each type of relationship, positive relationship quality was connected to the presence of the androgynous or feminine type. Kurdek and Schmitt summarized that positive relationship quality is related to either both high instrumentality (masculinity) and high expressiveness (femininity) (an androgynous sex-role self-concept) or to high expressiveness alone but not to either both low instrumentality and low expressiveness (an undifferentiated sex-role self-concept) or high instrumentality alone. The significance of this finding is the features of androgyny and femininity which contribute to high relationship quality. Feminine individuals are sensitive to the feelings and needs of the other, while androgynous individuals are socially outgoing, assertive, and self-disclosing. Both these sex roles have a focus outward, as compared to masculine and undifferentiated types which are more self-focused.
In another study (Kurdek & Schmitt, 1986a), lesbian partners were sex-typed as more masculine than married partners. Yet they were also found to be more feminine and androgynous than either gay or cohabiting partners. Lesbians were found to be as satisfied as married partners with their relationships. It may be that the feminine and androgynous partners balanced the presence of masculine sex-typed individuals. These studies support the connection between female relational qualities and relationship satisfaction.

The dynamic interplay between autonomy and attachment as it relates to relationship satisfaction is a theme in the studies cited. Attachment is indicated as a correlate of relationship satisfaction. This would seem to indicate that mutuality as characterized by a strong connection and concern for the feelings of the other would significantly relate with relationship satisfaction. Empathy represents the ability to understand the feelings and needs of the other, as if they were one's own. The quality of empathy is inherent in a mutual relationship.

It has been noted that lesbian relationships are characterized by strong attachments with possible loss of clear boundaries (Burch, 1982; Elise, 1986; Krestan & Bepko, 1980). The term merging or enmeshment has been used to describe this state. The relational quality of merging as it relates to satisfaction has been studied by Zacks et al. (1988). Fifty-two lesbian and 1,140 heterosexual couples were compared on the dimensions of the Circumplex model developed by Olson (1991). The Circumplex model identifies two important aspects of family/couple behavior: cohesion and adaptability. Cohesion describes the level of involvement, ranging from disengaged, separated, connected, to
enmeshed. Adaptability measures the system's reaction to stress and ranges from chaotic, flexible, structured, to rigid. The hypothesis of the model is that couples who score in the intermediate range on each dimension will demonstrate a more effective level of functioning. In Zacks's et al. (1988) study, lesbian couples scored significantly higher on the cohesion dimension than heterosexual couples. The result is quite dramatic as 82.7% of lesbian couples scored as connected or enmeshed compared to 49.9% of heterosexual couples. The difference in score lies within the enmeshed category as lesbian couples scored 46.2% compared to 13.4% for heterosexual couples. On the dimension of adaptability, lesbian couples scored in the chaotic category. Lesbian couples reported higher levels of satisfaction than heterosexual couples. Statistical analysis revealed that cohesion, adaptability, and satisfaction were not statistically discrete measures, although they remained conceptually distinct. The measure of satisfaction for this study was developed by Olson (1991) and based on the factors of cohesion and adaptability. It was normed on the same sample as the FACES III scale. Satisfaction was highly correlated with both cohesion ($r = .77, p < .01$) and with adaptability ($r = .62, p < .01$). Therefore, satisfaction was statistically interrelated with both cohesion and adaptability. It would be helpful to replicate this study utilizing a different measure of satisfaction. Assessing the interaction between merging in lesbian relationships and relationship satisfaction has not been adequately addressed.

In the discussion of their results, Zacks et al. (1988) stated that greater adaptability in lesbian relationships may be functional, as a model for couple role structure is not predetermined in the lesbian community.
The lesbian relationship is a nontraditional one, which requires improvisation and freedom to develop new traditions and guidelines. The adaptability dimension reflects such items as "When problems arise, we compromise." A high adaptability score may reflect positive qualities such as flexibility in a relationship. The intermediate adaptability score may also represent a traditional heterosexual bias, as it implies that rigidly fixed sex roles or divisions of tasks create a well balanced relationship. The equality of power espoused by lesbians would indicate a preference for non-sex-typed roles. It may be that this scale is outdated. Similarly, the cohesion score which measures less clear boundaries and greater closeness may be adaptive for the lesbian couple. The norms for the cohesion scale are based on scores from white couples. Zacks et al. reported that Chicano couples score higher on the factor of cohesion. It seems that this factor needs to be evaluated in light of culture and gender. Examining satisfaction and enmeshment from a lesbian standpoint would provide information regarding desired closeness in lesbian relationships.

Mutuality and Self-in-Relation Theory

Only recently has mutuality been viewed as a key element in relationships. Traditional object relation theory has focused on separation and autonomy as major goals leading to maturity. References to mutuality have been made sporadically, as Winnicott (1960) stated that the infant and the care given by mother together form a unit; meaning there is no such thing as an infant alone. This statement points to a mutual interaction which is not necessarily based on simple need gratification of
the infant by the mother. The motivation of the mother to be attuned to
the infant presupposes a one directional flow of caring.

In a discussion of the lack of theoretical emphasis on mutuality,
Jordan (1986) noted that Guntrip is one of the few theorists who openly
acknowledges the existence of mutuality. She quoted him as he wrote,
"But personal object relations are essentially two-sided, mutual by
reason of being personal, and not a matter of mutual adaptation merely,
but of mutual appreciation, communication, sharing, and of each being
for the other" (p. 4).

A notable change in the acknowledgment of mutuality occurs in
the infant research of Stern (1986). He suggested that the infant has a
sense of differentiation from the other at birth and he refuted the idea of
primitive symbiosis. The infant initiates and receives a mutual interac-
tion with mother by crying, initiating and terminating eye contact, etc.
He described several ways that mutuality occurs in the mother-infant
interaction. These include:

1. Self-other complementarity in which each mem-
ber’s actions are the complement of the partner’s; one
person performs the action, another receives it (e.g., mother-
infant cuddling, babbling, and alternate listening).

2. Mental state sharing and tuning in which there is
some sense of commonality of experience or sharing of
similar external or internal experience (vocalizing together,
simultaneous imitative events, affect contagion, empathy).

3. State transforming events which are the experi-
ences that originally and traditionally preoccupied psycho-
analysis namely gratifying the hungry infant and causing the
shift in state from hunger to sleep. (pp. 4-5)

The Stone Center theorists (Jordan, 1984; Jordan, Surrey, &
Kaplan, 1983; Miller, 1984; Surrey, 1984) have developed a
self-in-relation theory in which mutuality is a key component. In this theory development proceeds in the context of the relationship rather than by disconnection from it. The female develops the expectation that growth of self is facilitated through psychological connection and mutual sharing of experience. As Miller (1984) wrote, relating with another produces a sense of self-enhancement and growth rather than a loss of self. Attending to the relationship, listening, and caring for the other are goals which act as a motivation not detraction from self-growth. The relationship becomes a source of both gratification and self-esteem. A woman's sense of her capacities are developed within a relational framework.

Empathy is a cornerstone of this theory, as it is viewed as a central organizing concept in women's relational experience. Surrey (1984) wrote that empathy is often initially learned in the mother-daughter relationship through the process of mutual experience, mutual engagement, and mutual empowerment. In this developmental model "the self is organized and developed through practice in relationships where the goal is the increasing development of mutually empathic relationships" (p. 3). The nuclear mother-daughter relationship is often the earliest model which allows for empathic development of the self. However, it is not limited to this relationship and can be found in any productive relationship which contains the elements necessary for mutual empathy. Empathy is a complex process which requires a good level of ego strength and development. Jordan (1984) emphasized the affective experiences of joining with the other while maintaining active cognitive structuring. In the joining process a more differentiated image
of the other occurs which allows for growth of the self and the relationship. Empathy is a reciprocal process which is encompassed by mutuality.

Mutuality adds to the growth of the self, as it is practice in relational development. Surrey (1984) defined the relationship as an experience of emotional and cognitive intersubjectivity. This signifies the importance of mutuality, as in relationship one is continually aware and responsive to the existence of the other. Again, this is a mutual, reciprocal process and does not involve separation from the other with subsequent internalization of attachment. The process of mutuality is continuous and is maintained through many important relationships. Intersubjectivity contains an aspect of motivation to understand and experience the frame of reference of the other. In this sense it encompasses empathy. However, it is this motivation which is the essence of female relationships, which promote growth.

A sense of "response/ability" to the relationship develops with the ongoing motivation to attend to the relationship. This differs from the traditional emphasis on autonomy and reflects the importance of mutual interaction in the growth process. Miller (1986) proposed five aspects of growth which result from mutually enhancing relationships. These are:

1. Each person feels a greater sense of "zest" (vitality, energy).
2. Each person feels more able to act and does act.
3. Each person has a more accurate picture of her/himself and the other person(s).
4. Each person feels a greater sense of worth.
5. Each person feels more connected to the other person(s) and a greater motivation for connections with other people beyond those in the specific relationship. (p. 3)

Zest is created by the excitement of making an emotional connection. Since women value connections with others, a sense of pleasure and gratification occurs. Action is encouraged in a mutual interaction as the person feels heard, understood, and validated. The validation augments the sense of self which empowers the individual to act on her feelings and beliefs. Knowledge about self is increased as each person in the interaction has a clearer understanding of her own feelings. As in the empathic process, the mirroring of the feelings of the other can help clarify the inner world of the listener and the respondent. The effort and energy which is placed in this mutual empathic interchange again validates the value of the individual which increases a sense of self-worth. Having one’s feelings, experiences, and meanings receive careful attention creates a connection which is special and rewarding. As the mutual process occurs, each person feels a greater desire for connections with others. The listener has received validation for her empathic abilities and the responder has received understanding and caring support and clarification. A sense of pleasure and gratification occurs for helping the other person. Each person in the interaction feels rewarded which reinforces the desire to seek and develop other connections. The mutuality which occurs generally creates a sense of satisfaction within the relationship.

Differences in male and female development exist. Miller (1984) suggested that males are not conditioned to develop empathy or value connections in relationships. In examining the mutual interactions between men and women, it is apparent that women are more adept at
sensing feelings, while men pay attention to behaviors or ideas. Women often seek attunement to their feelings, while men respond with solutions. Because heterosexual relationships are hampered with differences in mutual responding, mutuality is not easily achieved. As Jordan (1986) wrote, "Often mutuality comes more easily for women to women relationships which can provide wonderfully sustaining mutual empathy and care" (p. 7). It is likely that female relationships are more frequently characterized by a mutuality which brings a sense of pleasure and innate satisfaction.

Merging and Female Developmental Theory

The quality of merging in lesbian relationships has been defined by feminist theorists in the following ways. Krestan and Bepko (1980) utilized the word fusion to describe a psychological process in which the person experiences a state of "undifferentiation within the relational context" (p. 227). In a fused/merged relationship, the couple experiences anxiety when either partner makes a bid for autonomy. Independence is viewed as separation and subsequent loss. Lindenbaum (1985) described this loss in powerful preoedipal terms. She wrote that merging is an attempt to attribute desired characteristics of the other to one's self. When the two partners are together each feels whole. As one member of the couple seeks greater autonomy, the other member feels as if she is losing part of her self. This loss creates panic and an attempt to move closer to the withdrawing partner.

Feminist writers (Chodorow, 1978; Miller, 1984) point to the influence of the mother-daughter relationship as a factor which creates
the relational emphasis of the female. The intensity of the attachment to mother predominates, reducing the desire to pursue the tasks of separation-individuation. The ego boundaries of the female are looser, more permeable, providing both greater relational capacities and an increased ambivalence with autonomy. Autonomy is experienced as a rejection of the mother, and the conflict between attachment and autonomy is a powerful one, which is reflected in the adult female relationship.

The process of separation-individuation with mother continues to reenact both wishes for symbiotic union and fears of engulfment. This struggle is a central aspect in the merged relationship. Chodorow (1978) wrote:

In later life, a person's early relation to her or his mother leads to a preoccupation with issues of primary intimacy and merging. On one psychological level, all people who have experienced primary love and primary identification have some aspect of self that wants to recreate these experiences, and most people try to do so. (p. 79)

The intensity of the bond with mother is reflected particularly in relationships between women. In a lesbian relationship the sexual, physical intimacy is reminiscent of the primal intimacy experienced with mother. Flax (1978) wrote that women search for their mother in relationships and concluded that "our sense of self is bound up with other women in an intensity and depth simply not present in relations with men" (p. 179). The fear of a merged state is not as strong for the female as the experience with attachment predominates.

The female's attunement to the needs of the other and vulnerability to emotional distance is evident in merging. Differences
may be resisted as they block the merger and expose the individual's aloneness (Burch, 1987). The concept of difference becomes more affectively laden, as each person realizes that they do not own the qualities of the other. A strong sense of loss and abandonment occurs in differentiation, if the sense of self is not whole. The relationship may end as the illusion that the "we" which protected the empty shell of the "I" is shattered. The loss is profound and may immediately prompt the individual to seek another merging experience.

The potential for both mutuality and merger is increased in lesbian relationships. The frequency of merging in lesbian relationships has been related to the strong attachment of mother and daughter with subsequent difficulties in separation-individuation, and to the availability with a female partner of reexperiencing the primary bond with mother (Lindenbaum, 1985). The original experience of merging with mother adds to the strength of the merger. A female who experiences both difficulties with separation-individuation and a strong bond with mother might seek a merging experience in her adult relationships. Yet many females do not experience merging and are able to negotiate the tasks of separation-individuation. It is important to distinguish the type of merging experience which exists in the relationship. It is likely that the above conditions would lead to a pure fused state or undifferentiated merger. Merging which is not as intense or basic is described as differentiated merger. It is this second type which develops simply due to the strong relational bond frequently experienced by the female with mother. Women who have been socialized to consider the needs of the other before their own, place value on relating and avoid conflict, if it is
thought to harm the relationship. A strength of the merged relationship may be the ability of each person to care for and be attuned to the other.

The relational emphasis which Chodorow (1978) discussed is still couched in traditional theory, as development is traced through the process of separation-individuation. Autonomy and independence are viewed as signs of a healthy ego structure. Yet recently feminist theorists have focused on the strength of the female ego system, which differs in its emphasis placed on relating and connections (Jordan, 1984; Miller, 1984; Surrey, 1984). The limits of the model of separation and individuation are confronted in the self-in-relation theory. Surrey (1984) proposed development which occurs through a process of relationship differentiation. She described this term as "a dynamic process which encompasses increasing levels of complexity, structure, and articulation within the context of human bonds and attachments" (p. 7). The development of the self occurs in the context of relationships rather than through separation from relationships. Other aspects of the self, including autonomy and assertion, develop within the context of the relationship.

Three essential aspects of the mother-daughter relationship are emphasized. Due to the strong relational bond, the daughter experiences an ongoing interest and desire to be connected with the mother, which leads to the development of a capacity for empathy. The mother who listens and responds, mirrors the child's feelings. A mutual empathy results in which both mother and daughter experience feeling understood and connected. Surrey (1984) wrote that the emotional and cognitive
connections based on this shared understanding develop over time into a process where both participants are highly responsive to the feeling states of the other. In this way they both nurture the relationship and the daughter experiences validation of her developing empathic competence. Surrey named this aspect mutual empowerment and emphasized that this process begins the female's experience in relational caretaking. The development of the self occurs in a model which is interactional in nature. A healthy degree of reciprocity and role flexibility are essential for the growth of the self.

The intensity of female preoedipal attachment and resolution of the oedipal conflict is not addressed by Surrey (1984). Instead she questions these concepts and poses the idea that development which is based on disconnections from mother and an affirmation of differences between men and women may not be a healthy model of development.

The flexibility of the boundaries of the female allows the process of empathy to flourish. The female is able to temporarily abandon her own sense of self to understand the affective experience of the other. As Jordan (1984) related, "a momentary overlap between self and other representations as distinctions between self and other blur experientially" (p. 3). During the affective joining, the cognitive component of the self understands and interprets the experience. A loss of self does not occur, but a temporary identification with the other exists. Aspects of merging appear to be present in this experience. Yet Jordan challenged the traditional dichotomy of autonomy and merger, as she quoted Kaplan (1983) in stating: "Is it not possible to experience a sense of feeling connected and affectively joined and at the same time cognitively..."
appreciate one's separateness" (p. 5).

Merging as a transient rather than fixed state demonstrates strengths. It allows one to experience the feelings of the other as the self joins with the other. Times in a relationship where merger occurs include the romantic, falling in love stage. G. D. Green (1990) commented that merger is constructive when it is a conscious choice, rather than an involuntary need. She compared this to the pure fusion of the infant who has no choice, but the merged experience. During lovemaking, or at times of intense sharing, the adult may merge by consciously letting go of boundaries for a finite period of time. The ability to choose to move in and out of a merged boundary with the other implies a self that chooses merger for short periods of time, avoiding entrenchment or requiring the presence of the other to complete a sense of self.

Merging can be constructive in certain circumstances. Burch (1985) described the merging experience as one of growth in "finding one's self inside the merger and keeping one's self through the transition back out of it" (p. 107). The emphasis is the ability to move in and out of the merged experience. It is when a couple is stuck that negative consequences occur. Since the merged experience is relational, growth can occur.

In lesbian relationships merging can be viewed as a compensatory mechanism to balance the male model of individuation (Markowitz, 1991). Women enjoy and promote a more intense involvement with each other. As Brown (1988) wrote, it is important to place the values of the female in a cultural perspective. What is the norm in a heterosexual union may not be in the lesbian relationship. She cited a study of
the Japanese culture which values connection to family and fitting in with others. The autonomous functioning of the American male would be viewed as pathological and not normative in Japanese society. Therefore, it is important to view merging in lesbian relationships within the framework of connection valued by the female.

Merging and Systems Theory

In our homophobic society the lesbian relationship is viewed with negativity. The couple's response is to intensify or rigidify boundaries, turning inward toward isolation. Krestan and Bepko (1980) wrote that "fusion in the committed lesbian couple is perhaps a typical but unfortunate response to living within a tightly closed system" (p. 279). The system is rigidly closed to defend against prejudice and sanctions against the relationship. The couple boundary is not respected when the partner is not included during holiday events or family gatherings. Depriving one partner access to her mate during times of illness is common. Legal protection in mutual ownership of property is not sanctioned, unless certain precautions are taken (S. Roth, 1985). The lesbian couple does not have either legal or social approval in a marriage ceremony. The relationship then exists in a sort of limbo without the ritual which marks its existence and legitimizes the boundaries of the couple. The lack of official recognition may encourage the couple to announce their partnership quickly without foundation, leading to a premature termination. Couples are often confused about how to define a committed relationship.
Affection, physical and verbal, is restrained in public which creates estrangement and an observable lack of couple connectedness. The couple who can only demonstrate their love for each other in a private space, suffers from a strong societal dictate that this love should not exist. Pearlman (1989), in describing this phenomenon, wrote, "While heterosexual couples go out to be together, lesbian couples go out to separate" (p. 84). To affirm their relationship many couples limit their interaction with mainstream society, which intensifies merger.

The heterosexual couple receives feedback that its boundaries and rules are normative. This reinforces the maintenance of the relationship and enhances individual functioning. Krestan and Bepko (1980) proposed that the lesbian couple expends excessive amounts of energy in defining boundaries in order to maintain relatedness and space. "Energy spent in more individuated behavior may tip the balance of the relationship toward dissolution" (p. 278).

The rejection from others is a loss which is absorbed into the relational system. Other losses are similarly incorporated as extradyadic support within the homosexual community is not readily available. Loss of relationships, loss of the self-image, loss of the option of child bearing, etc. are common. Krestan and Bepko (1980) pointed out that these losses are judged by society as negative consequences of deviant behavior. The lesbian community is utilized to validate and recognize the loss. This occurs with mixed results.

The lesbian community does not consistently respect the sexual and emotional boundaries of the couple (Krestan & Bepko, 1980; Pearlman, 1989; Sang, 1977; Tanner, 1978). "Any woman, attached or
otherwise, is considered fair game sexually by another lesbian" (Krestan & Bepko, 1980, p. 284). Feminist lesbians often advocate non-monogamy, stating that it is not politically correct to mimic traditional heterosexual marriages. Nonmonogamy is also viewed as a means to individuate and break away from the merged, couple system (Kassoff, 1989). This dynamic can be interpreted as an example of blurred boundaries, resulting from both internal problems with boundary regulation and external boundary sanction of the couple system.

Relationships within the lesbian community can become inbred due to the nature of the closed system with limited access to new relationships. The lesbian community experiences dynamics similar to those of the couple including enmeshment and triangulation. Two factors affect this phenomenon. Lesbians tend to maintain relationships with former lovers. Former lovers are considered as family (Sang, 1977). This dynamic may occur due to the lack of connection with the family of origin. Couples often create their own families. The prevalence of including former lovers may be related to the premium placed by females on relating and maintaining a connection. Unfortunately, families which include former partners contain skewed boundaries, as these members tend to be intrusive and create inappropriate claims (Krestan & Bepko, 1980).

The second factor which contributes to the dynamics of enmeshment and triangulation is the lack of clear boundaries between friends and lovers. As Sang (1977) wrote, every friend is also a potential lover. The close tie between loving and sex strengthens this association. Lovers are then suspect of the friendships of their partner. To protect
the relationship, activities are often pursued jointly, which does not promote differentiation of the self from the other. As the protective custody continues, one partner longs for freedom and leaves, initiating an affair, which reinforces the fear of interpersonal freedom. In heterosexual friendships a strong bond with another female is enjoyed, because the possibility of sexual union is not prevalent. Ironically, the lesbian may find herself socially isolated.

These dynamics within the lesbian community create blurred boundaries, which do not support the individual's ability to maintain a sense of self among others. With both internal and external boundary confusion, it is not surprising that merging is a phenomenon found frequently in lesbian relationships.

Summary

A review of related literature indicates that satisfaction in lesbian relationships is associated with equal power and attachment. Autonomy is a value which is espoused but is not correlated strongly with relationship satisfaction. Dyadic attachment which emphasizes close and secure love relationships is correlated with relationship satisfaction. Dyadic attachment is found to be related to traditional feminine values of relating and connection. Current theory has pointed to the strength and value of the female orientation toward attachment and connection (Miller, 1986). Lesbian relationships are characterized by strong attachments due to gender and not homosexuality (Elise, 1986). Some writers have described the intense attachments in lesbian relationships as a merging process in which clear boundaries are not maintained (Burch,
1982; Krestan & Bepko, 1980). The literature reviewed links the presence of these relational qualities to the unique developmental process of the female which creates a strong relational emphasis. The strong connection to mother and the absence of a need to separate to establish a different gender identity creates boundaries which are looser and relational. Merging is also viewed from a systems perspective in which rigid external boundaries lead to an insular, merged relational system. Merging may be viewed on a continuum basis, as some writers view merging as detrimental to the relationship, while others point to the values of the interdependent model. The relationship between the qualities of merging and mutuality and satisfaction in lesbian relationships has yet to be assessed.
CHAPTER III

METHOD

Population and Sample

Participants were volunteers who were recruited through several approaches. An advertisement was placed in a local lesbian newsletter Lavender Morning, which is available to women in the southwest Michigan area and has a circulation of 600. Please refer to Appendix C for a copy of the advertisement.

A similar advertisement was placed in the Western Herald, which is the student newspaper for Western Michigan University. Participants were able to pick up packets at the Office of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Men's Issues or through contacting the author by phone or by mail. Members of the Gay Alliance at Western Michigan University were contacted by the counselor of the Office of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Men's Issues. She gave a general announcement, which was similar in content to the advertisement used in the Western Herald, and invited members to participate if they were interested.

An advertisement for participants was posted at Pandora's Bookstore, which is a local woman's meeting place, bookstore, and center for information regarding lesbian community events; packets were left at the store for distribution.

Lastly, volunteers were solicited through a local friendship network. The network consisted of friends and colleagues of the author.
who were willing to ask their friends, acquaintances, and colleagues to participate in the study. Their friends asked other women and information was gathered in a fanning-out fashion. The friendship network approach for gathering information in a hidden population has been found to be quite successful (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990). A major limitation of this purposeful sampling is lack of heterogeneity of the sample (Herek, Kimmel, Amaro, & Melton, 1991). One means of compensating for purposeful sampling is to target different segments of the population by using a variety of recruitment strategies. In this study a variety of strategies were used such as advertising in student and women’s publications, Gay Alliance, and the local community bookstore. A diverse geographical area was included, as the friendship network extended to Traverse City, Michigan; Toronto, Ontario; New York City; and South Bend, Indiana.

Permission to conduct this study was granted by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at Western Michigan University. Please refer to Appendix D for a copy of the letter. Two letters of consent were sent to each participant, and one signed form was returned to the researcher in accordance with university policy and federal regulations.

Research Model and Design

This study was designed to measure satisfaction in lesbian relationships and to study the relationship between satisfaction and mutuality, cohesion, and merging. The design of the study was correlational, as its intent was to investigate the relational qualities of
mutuality, cohesion, and merging regarding their prevalence and effect upon satisfaction in relationships. Information was determined through a survey of volunteers with questionnaires used to obtain the required information.

Instrumentation

The following instruments were used to operationalize the concepts of mutuality, cohesion, merging, and satisfaction. A questionnaire which was designed to gather demographic data is included.

Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire

The Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire (MPDQ) is an instrument which is designed to measure the extent of perceived mutuality in close relationships. The instrument has been recently developed by Nancy Genero, Research Program Director of the Stone Center (Genero et al., 1990). It is designed to measure the mutuality in intimate relationships with a spouse or partner. The MPDQ contains a total of 22 items, which represent the six conceptual elements of mutuality. These elements are identified as empathy, engagement, authenticity, empowerment, zest, and diversity. The items are divided into two sets of 11 statements in which the respondents rate the first set of items from their perspective and the second set of items from the perspective of their partner; i.e., "When we talk about things that matter to me, my partner is likely to . . ." and "When we talk about things that matter to my partner, I am likely to . . ." Ratings are made using a 6-point Likert scale of never, rarely, occasionally, more often than not,
most of the time, and all the time. To prevent biased responses, items are balanced by negative and positive content.

To compute a mean mutuality score, negative items are reversed. The items are summed and divided by the total number of items. The higher the number, the greater the perceived mutuality with a mean of 6.0 as the highest possible score. The test is a self-report measure which takes approximately 10 minutes to complete.

Inter-item reliability and validation of the MPDQ was established in a study of 345 men and women. In this study subjects completed questionnaires which contained measures of perceived mutuality, depression, adequacy of social support, relationship satisfaction, and cohesion. Inter-item reliability was high with alpha coefficients ranging from .89 to .94. Two shortened interchangeable forms of the MPDQ were constructed due to the high reliability analysis.

Construct validity was also supported, as perceived mutuality was positively correlated with social support ($r = .43$), relationship satisfaction ($r = .70$), and cohesion ($r = .75$). As predicted, mutuality and self-report ratings of depression were negatively correlated (partner: $r = .35$). Therefore, high self-report of depression predicted a low mutuality score.

Concurrent validity was similarly established, through an analysis of predictor variables and mutuality. Results indicated a .38 increase in mutuality for every unit increase in relationship cohesion.

In a second study, 81 respondents from the western suburb of Boston were asked to complete the MPDQ to assess the comparability of Forms A and B and to establish test-retest reliability. Correlations for
test-retest reliability varied from \( r = .71 \) to \( r = .83 \). The high alpha findings of Study 1 for inter-item reliability were replicated. A copy of this test is found in Appendix F.

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales II

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scales II (FACES II) is an instrument originally developed by David Olson as a tool for clinical diagnosis and as a means of identifying specific treatment goals for families and couples (Olson et al., 1979). FACES II is a 30-item scale which can be administered twice, once for the perceived and once for the ideal descriptions of the family. The measures of cohesion and adaptability have been factored out of many concepts as two main measures of family functioning. Family cohesion is defined as the emotional bonding members have with one another and the degree of autonomy that is experienced within the family system. Variables used to assess the cohesion factor include: emotional bonding, independence, boundaries, coalitions, time, space, friends, decision making, interests, and recreation. Adaptability is defined as "the ability of a marital/family system to change its power structure, role relationships, and relationship rules in response to situational and developmental stress" (Olson et al., 1979, p. 12). It is assumed that an adaptive system is composed of elements of change and stability. The variables which comprise this dimension are: family power structure (assertiveness and control), negotiation styles, role relationships, relationship rules, and feedback. It is hypothesized that the family systems which achieve a balance on each dimension are healthier and constructive.
The instrument was normed on a sample of 2,453 adults and 412 adolescents (Olson et al., 1979). The cohesion scale demonstrated a reliability of .87 and the adaptability scale demonstrated a reliability of .78. Total reliability was .90, and test-retest reliability was reported as $r = .84$. Olson (1986) reported good evidence of both content and face validity. Concurrent validity was found to be .93 for cohesion when FACES II was compared to the Dallas Self-Report Family Inventory (SFI).

FACES III has been used for research measuring the concepts of cohesion and adaptability in a curvilinear way. As FACES III was compared to FACES II, it was determined that the concepts fit best into a three dimensional model in which high scores represent balanced functioning and low scores represent extreme functioning (Olson, 1991). Findings by R. G. Green, Harris, Forte, and Robinson (1991) support a linear relationship between FACES III and these results are similar to other studies which compare FACES III with other self-report measures. Development of FACES IV is in progress which will be designed to capture a curvilinear design by using a bipolar response format which replaces the current Likert scale. A copy of FACES II is found in Appendix G.

Marital Satisfaction Scale

The Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) is an instrument which measures attitude toward one's marriage or relationship (Roach et al., 1981). The concept that attitude is a perception of satisfaction at a certain point in time is emphasized, which is a contrast from previous tests that have measured marital adjustment or success as a fixed state.
The MSS differs from other previous tests such as Spanier’s (1976) Test of Dyadic Adjustment and Snyder’s (1979) Marital Satisfaction Inventory in its emphasis on attitude rather than adjustment. Items were designed to avoid cognitive recall and estimates of frequency or degrees of difference. The revised scale, Form C, is composed of 24 items and is based on the original 73-item scale. Participants respond to a 5-point Likert scale designated as strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. Negative and positive statements are varied to prevent rote positive responses. In scoring the test, negatively oriented statements are given a reverse number. All statements are summed with the highest numerical score indicating relationship satisfaction.

In a pilot study (Roach et al., 1981), 88 subjects composed of Texas school counselors and students at Texas A&M University at College Station participated in measuring perceived satisfaction in their marital relationships. Internal consistency as measured by Cronbach’s alpha was .98. Results indicated that items correlated well with the total scale, and the scale involved a single factor. In a subsequent study, Frazier (cited in Roach et al., 1981) studied a sample of 309 subjects from Texas A&M University and Bryan College at College Station, Texas, who volunteered to participate in a study of marital satisfaction. The internal consistency reliability was measured as .97, which was similar to that found in the initial study. Twenty subjects who requested feedback on their responses to the original test were asked to retake the MSS after a period of 3 weeks to assess test-retest reliability. The test-retest reliability was established as .76. Concurrent validity was determined by comparing the MSS with the Marital Adjustment Test.
Life Style Questionnaire

The Life Style Questionnaire (LSQ) was developed by the researcher to assess the perception of merger within the relationship. The material for the questions was adapted from the categories of space described by Kaufman, Harrison, and Hyde (1984). Temporal space is time spent with separate friends or involved in activities separate from one's partner. Questions 1 and 3 reflect this category. Environmental space examines one's ability to have a sense of individuality amongst others. Questions 2 and 4 focus on this quality. Cognitive and emotional space is described as the need to have one's own thoughts, ideas, feelings, and interests which are not totally shared by one's partner. Questions 6, 9, and 10 are based on this category. Kaufman et al. also described territorial space which is the need for one's own unique physical space, such as drawers in a dresser, and financial space which indicates a separation of finances, investments, or guidelines on shared banking.

Emotional attunement is the ability to empathically experience the feelings and ideas of the other. It is the belief of the researcher that this quality in the extreme is present in merged relationships. Questions 5 and 12 reflect this idea. A sense of responsibility for the other is an integral aspect in many female relationships (Miller, 1986). When taking
responsibility for the feelings of the other occurs continually, a merged quality is present in the relationship. Questions 7, 8, and 11 were included to address this aspect of merging.

The Life Style Questionnaire consists of 12 questions with a 6-point Likert response scale of never, rarely, occasionally, more often than not, most of the time, and all the time. Several questions are reversed for scoring to avoid routine responding. Questions which point to a less merged state are reversed and the answers are summed and divided by 12 to obtain the mean score. The higher the score the stronger the tendency to portray a merged relationship.

The questionnaire was distributed to seven lesbians for pretesting. Feedback regarding impact of questions, wording, and ambiguity was received and the questionnaire was revised. This instrument is not standardized and was used in the study as a means to evaluate a trend in the relationship, rather than a true indicator of merging. Please refer to Appendix I for a copy of this form.

**Personal Information Questionnaire**

The Personal Information Questionnaire (PIQ) was developed by the researcher to collect demographic data. Because of the study's focus on a hidden population which is difficult to access and which was not randomly selected, it was important to describe the demographics of this particular sample. Results of the study may be generalized to samples which reflect similar demographic statistics.

The PIQ consisted of seven questions which inquired about the participants age, race, religious preference, education, employment
status, income level, and years involved in the current relationship. The last factor was used as a correlate of relationship satisfaction. Please refer to Appendix E for a copy of this form.

Data Collection

Packets of the questionnaires were distributed during January and February 1993 through a local friendship network and by the researcher. They could also be obtained at Pandora’s Bookstore and at the Office of Lesbian, Bisexual, and Gay Men’s Issues at Western Michigan University. Each packet consisted of a letter which explained the study and participation procedures (see Appendix A for a copy of the letter), two copies of a letter of consent (see Appendix B for a copy of the consent form), the Personal Information Questionnaire, the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire, the Life Style Questionnaire, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II (couples version), the Marital Satisfaction Scale, and a postage paid envelope which was preaddressed to the researcher.

Subjects were asked to return the packets by March 6, 1993. One hundred and twenty-six packets were distributed and 63 packets were returned by the deadline date, resulting in a 55% return rate of completed questionnaires.

Research Hypotheses

Ten research hypotheses were generated in this study.

Research Hypothesis 1: Mutuality as measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire is found to be significantly and
positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

**Research Hypothesis 2:** Cohesion as measured by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II is found to be significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

**Research Hypothesis 3:** Merging as measured by the Life Style Questionnaire is found to be nonsignificantly and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

**Research Hypothesis 4:** Mutuality as measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire and cohesion as measured by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II are significantly and positively correlated.

**Research Hypothesis 5:** The length of time involved in the relationship is significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

**Research Hypothesis 6:** Mutuality as measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire and cohesion as measured by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II are significant and positive predictors of relationship satisfaction, as compared to the factor of merging.

**Research Hypothesis 7:** Lesbians report a significant level of mutuality in their relationships as measured by scores on the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire.
Research Hypothesis 8: Lesbians report a significant level of cohesion in their relationships as measured by scores on the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II.

Research Hypothesis 9: Lesbians report a significant level of merging in their relationships as measured by scores on the Life Style Questionnaire.

Research Hypothesis 10: Lesbians report a significant level of satisfaction in their relationships as measured by scores on the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

Analysis of the Data

This study was designed to measure the correlations between relationship satisfaction and the relational qualities of mutuality and merging. Multiple regression analysis was performed to examine which of the predictor variables (mutuality, cohesion, or merging) would predict relationship satisfaction. Length of time in the relationship was also used to predict relationship satisfaction.

All questionnaires were scored by the researcher and the data were entered in the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program (Norusis, 1988). This program provided a correlation matrix which demonstrated correlations between the dependent variables of mutuality, cohesion, and merging and the independent variable of relationship satisfaction. Empirical findings were examined to assess if the data supported the hypotheses which had been generated.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter a description of the sample is followed by the results of the statistical analysis of the hypotheses. A brief summary of the chapter is given.

Description of the Sample

Demographic indicators were gathered to describe the sample in this study. A description of the sample is presented in Table 1. Ninety-five percent of the participants were Caucasian with one minority, Native American, represented at 5%. Seventy-three percent of the respondents fell in the 35-50 age range, with a mean age of 39. Ages ranged from 18 to 63. Everyone in the sample had completed a high school degree, 27% had 1-2 years of college, 25% had a bachelor's degree, 38% had a master's degree, and 6% had a doctoral degree. The occupational functioning was largely professional, as 65% of the women described their employment in this category. Fourteen percent were self-employed, 8% were employed in a nonprofessional category, and 8% were currently students. Only 5% of the respondents were unemployed. In terms of yearly income, 48% of the respondents reported earning $35,000 plus a year. Twenty-two percent earned between $25,000 and $35,000, 17% earned between $15,000 and $24,999, and 13% reported earnings of $15,000 or less.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school diploma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0-15,000</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000-24,000</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000-35,000</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 35,000</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In examining religious preference, 36% attended a traditional religious church, 10% attended an alternative religious group such as Native American, Spiritualist, etc., and 51% acknowledged no religious preference. In years spent living together as a couple, 10% of the women had cohabited 2 years or less, 24% had lived together 2-5 years, 43% had
lived together 5-10 years, 16% had lived together 10-15 years, and 8% had lived together 15-20 years. The mean time together was 7 years.

It is apparent that this sample reflects women who are older, stable financially, with professional careers, and good educational backgrounds. The majority of women have had a continuous relationship for a minimum of 5 years. It would appear that this sample reflects a group of women who are involved in committed relationships and stable life situations.

In studying a hidden population which is not easily accessible for research, it is important to carefully describe the sample achieved. Replication of the study is one way of achieving generalizability of results (Herek et al., 1991). National demographics are not available for comparisons, and each study reflects some bias, as participants who respond are "usually out of the closet" and connected in some way to the lesbian community. For purposes of comparison, Table 2 lists demographic statistics of this study with a study conducted by Eldridge and Gilbert (1990). Their sample included 550 participants from 39 states, the District of Columbia, and two foreign countries, Canada and Israel. The purpose of their study was to examine certain specific relationship variables such as career, autonomy, dyadic attachment, intimacy, etc. with relationship satisfaction in lesbian couples who had lived together for a minimum of 2 years. The present study is similar to the Eldridge and Gilbert study in certain demographic areas such as race, education, and employment. The women in the present study, however, reported a higher standard of living with 48% earning over $35,000 per year. The similarities in demographic data between the two studies indicate that a
Table 2
Comparison of Demographics Between the Current Study and a Study by Eldridge and Gilbert

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic descriptor</th>
<th>This study %</th>
<th>Eldridge &amp; Gilbert %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctorate</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full time</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0-15,000</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15,000-24,000</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25,000-35,000</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 35,000</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

comparable group of women responded to each study. It is likely that certain groups of individuals, such as women of different cultures and races, are underrepresented in each study. This is a limitation found in purposeful sampling.
Quantitative Results

In this study a correlational matrix was established using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) system (Norusis, 1988). The variables of mutuality, cohesion, merging, and months living together were correlated with satisfaction in the relationship. Secondly, a step-wise multiple regression analysis was completed to examine which variable was the best predictor of relationship satisfaction. Means and standard deviations for the variables of mutuality, cohesion, merging, and satisfaction in the relationship were calculated.

**Hypothesis 1:** Mutuality as measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire is found to be significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

As seen in Table 3, mutuality was significantly correlated with satisfaction ($r = .6512, p < .01$). The correlation was the strongest of all the variables measured and points to the conclusion that mutuality is strongly connected to relationship satisfaction. Mutuality attends to the aspects of intimacy, including empathy, engagement, authenticity, empowerment, zest, and diversity. These factors seem highly related to positive feelings about the relationship.

**Hypothesis 2:** Cohesion as measured by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II is found to be significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.
Table 3
Correlational Matrix Between Psychological Variables, Months in Relationship, and Relationship Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mutuality</th>
<th>Cohesion</th>
<th>Months together</th>
<th>Life style</th>
<th>Satisfaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>.5276*</td>
<td>-.1619</td>
<td>.2208</td>
<td>.6512*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.5276*</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>-.0424</td>
<td>.3573*</td>
<td>.5726*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months together</td>
<td>-.1619</td>
<td>-.0424</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>.0898</td>
<td>.1681</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life style</td>
<td>.2208</td>
<td>.3573*</td>
<td>.0898</td>
<td>1.0000</td>
<td>.3492*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates significance at .01 (two-tailed).

Cohesion, as seen in Table 3, was found to be significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction ($r = .5726, p < .01$), although this correlation was not as strong as the correlation between mutuality and relationship satisfaction. Cohesion is assessed by examining bonding in the relationship, shared activities, friendships, and decision making. These aspects of the relationship evidentially correlate positively with relationship satisfaction.

**Hypothesis 3:** Merging as measured by the Life Style Questionnaire is found to be nonsignificantly and negatively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

The correlation between merging and relationship satisfaction ($r = .3492, p < .01$) demonstrates a significant connection between
merging and relationship satisfaction, although not in the predicted direction. The correlation indicates that less than 50% of the time does this connection exist and therefore needs to be interpreted cautiously. A negative correlation between merging and relationship satisfaction was not found, indicating that merging as reported in this sample is not a variable which hampers or places a negative stress upon the relationship.

**Hypothesis 4:** Mutuality as measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire and cohesion as measured by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II is significantly and positively correlated.

Mutuality and cohesion were found to be positively correlated with each other ($r = .5276, p < .01$). Certainly both mutuality and cohesion contain similar elements which reflect intimacy and closeness. It is believed that independence of factors is still constant as mutuality appears to incorporate many of the elements found in cohesion.

Mutuality was negatively correlated with time spent in the relationship ($r = -.1619$), indicating an inverse relationship between time together and a reported mutuality. However, the negative correlation is close to zero, which minimizes any conclusions from this statistic. A nonsignificant correlation ($r = .2208$) was found between mutuality and merging which indicates little relationship between these two variables.

In examining other correlations between the main variables, cohesion has a significant correlation with the Life Style Questionnaire, which measures merging ($r = .3573, p < .01$). Several of the factors such as knowing the friends of your partner, time spent together, similar interests, support, etc. are used to measure cohesion and are also
included as concepts for questions in the Life Style Questionnaire. These similarities in item construction may account for the positive correlation. The correlation is not strong enough to block independence of factors.

**Hypothesis 5:** The length of time involved in the relationship is significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction as measured by the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

No relationship between time spent in the relationship and relationship satisfaction was found, as a nonsignificant correlation of \( r = .1681 \) was determined. Months in the relationship had an inverse and nonsignificant relationship with mutuality \( (r = -.1619) \) and with cohesion \( (r = -.0424) \). A correlation near zero \( (r = .0898) \) was found between merging and time spent together in the relationship. It is apparent that the factor of months together in the relationship did not demonstrate any connection with any of the variables studied.

**Hypothesis 6:** Mutuality as measured by the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire and cohesion as measured by the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II are significant and positive predictors of relationship satisfaction, as compared to the factor of merging.

A multiple stepwise regression analysis was performed on the data to determine which of the variables was the best predictor of relationship satisfaction. As seen in Table 4, the variable of mutuality was found to be the best predictor of relationship satisfaction. Each other predictor variable added only a small increment of statistical significance to the variable of relationship satisfaction. Mutuality accounted for 65%
Table 4
Summary of Predictor Variables for Relationship Satisfaction From Stepwise Regression Procedure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Partial R²</th>
<th>Model e²</th>
<th>F</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>.65119</td>
<td>.42404</td>
<td>44.91054</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months together</td>
<td>.70774</td>
<td>.50089</td>
<td>30.10691</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.75250</td>
<td>.56626</td>
<td>25.67571</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life style</td>
<td>.76009</td>
<td>.57773</td>
<td>19.83853</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. R = .76, R² = .58, F (4,58) = 19.8385.

of the variance, with the additional three variables of cohesion, merging, and time living together accounting for another 11% of the variance.

Another way of understanding the regression analysis is to examine the b and beta values (see Table 5). The b regression coefficient is a

Table 5
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>b</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>.632209</td>
<td>.527774</td>
<td>5.174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life style</td>
<td>.137268</td>
<td>.109359</td>
<td>1.255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>.117503</td>
<td>.263587</td>
<td>2.511</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months together</td>
<td>.002741</td>
<td>.254357</td>
<td>2.916</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
measure of the average unit increase in each of the four independent variables associated with a unit change in satisfaction. For every unit increase in mutuality, perception of satisfaction increased by .63. For every unit increase in merging, perception of satisfaction increased by .137, and for every unit increase in cohesion, the perception of satisfaction increased by .118. Similarly, for every unit increase in months lived together, the perception of satisfaction in the relationship increased by only .003. By examining the influence of each variable in this manner, it is obvious that the factor of mutuality has the greatest influence change in perception of relationship satisfaction. The beta score is also listed which is a standardized regression coefficient accounting for the range of value in the predictor variables.

**Hypothesis 7:** Lesbians report a significant level of mutuality in their relationships as measured by scores on the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire.

As shown in Table 6, a mean mutuality score of 4.72 with a standard deviation of 0.4661 was calculated. The scale ranged from a 1 of never to a 6 of all the time. The mean mutual response fell between a 4 of more often than not and a 5 of most of the time. The standard deviation of 0.4661 indicated little variance in responses. This sample reflects a group of women who report that most of the time they feel mutually involved with their partner. It appears that this mean reflects a high level of mutuality and supports the hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 8:** Lesbians report a significant level of cohesion in their relationships as measured by scores on the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II.
Table 6
Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for Psychological Variables and Months Together

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mutuality</td>
<td>4.72</td>
<td>0.4661</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohesion</td>
<td>6.69</td>
<td>1.2500</td>
<td>1-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life style</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>0.4700</td>
<td>1-6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>4.58</td>
<td>0.5500</td>
<td>1-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Months together</td>
<td>84.71</td>
<td>51.8100</td>
<td>6-210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The percentage of the sample as it is distributed among the various levels of cohesion is described in Table 7.

A mean cohesion score of 6.69 with a standard deviation of 1.25 was calculated. The scale ranged from a 1-2 of disengaged, 3-4 of separated, 5-6 of connected, and a 7-8 of very connected. The mean cohesion score was close to a 7 which falls in the category of very connected. The standard deviation of 1.25 indicates a variance which places the majority of responses in the connected or very connected categories. The hypothesis is supported, as this sample demonstrates a strong cohesive quality in their relationships.

Hypothesis 9: Lesbians report a significant level of merging in their relationships as measured by scores on the Life Style Questionnaire.

A mean merging score of 3.56 with a standard deviation of 0.47 was calculated. The scale ranged from a 1 of never to a 6 of all the
Table 7
Percentage of the Sample in Each Level of Cohesion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cohesion</th>
<th>Level of cohesion</th>
<th>Couple type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>35.00%</td>
<td>Very connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>22.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 8 and 7</td>
<td>57.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>29.00%</td>
<td>Connected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.08%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 6 and 5</td>
<td>29.08%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
<td>Separated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.02%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 4 and 3</td>
<td>0.07%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>Disengaged</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 2 and 1</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Time. The mean score fell halfway between responses of occasionally to more often than not. A standard deviation of 0.47 indicates little variance. The hypothesis is not supported, as the mean score does not reflect merging.

Question 2 on the Life Style Questionnaire asked "Are you involved in activities and/or friendships within the lesbian community?" This question was included to assess the systems theory supposition

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
that the more involvement in the lesbian community, the less merged the relationship. A mean score to Question 2 was calculated and correlated with the entire Life Style Questionnaire. An inverse relationship was found to exist ($r = -.1387$). Due to the nonsignificance of this correlation, a relationship between isolation and merging cannot be interpreted.

**Hypothesis 10:** Lesbians report a significant level of satisfaction in their relationships as measured by scores on the Marital Satisfaction Scale.

A mean satisfaction score of 4.58 with a standard deviation of 0.55 was calculated. The scale ranged from a 1 of strongly disagree to a 5 of strongly agree. The number 3 was assigned a neutral value; 4 indicated a response of agree. When compared with an optimal response of 5, the mean of 4.58 is quite high. The women in this sample appear very satisfied with their relationship, which supports the hypothesis.

**Summary**

This chapter began with a demographic description of the sample. The particular demographics were discussed, since results of a purposeful sample can only be generalized to another sample with similar characteristics. An analysis of the results was provided through a correlational matrix and multiple regression analysis. It was found that mutuality was the most significant predictor of relationship satisfaction when compared to the variables of cohesion, merging, and time spent together. Mutuality was positively and significantly correlated with relationship satisfaction. Cohesion was also positively and significantly correlated with
relationship satisfaction, and merging demonstrated a positive correlation with relationship satisfaction. Lesbians in this sample reported significant levels of mutuality, cohesion, and satisfaction in their relationships. Merging as measured by the Life Style Questionnaire did not occur in a significant way. These results are discussed in terms of their implications in Chapter V.
CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Summary

The strong emphasis on the relational capacity of the female has been recently addressed by feminist writers. Chodorow (1978) focused on the differences in the developmental path of the female, which is characterized by a strong relational bond with mother. The need for separation to develop a sense of identity is not required for the female and a sense of empathy and closeness remains, as the daughter seeks to develop her own unique self. Writers from the Stone Center emphasize that female development occurs through relationships. Periods of intense closeness and effective joining of the self in the issues or feelings of the other promote female development, rather than confound it (Jordan, 1984). Boundaries which are viewed as flexible allow for intense connections with others. The ability for the female to develop and maintain a fluid boundary structure is viewed positively, in contrast to past negative traditional evaluations which describe women's boundaries as weak or overinvolved with others (Miller, 1976).

Lesbians in intimate relationships are emotionally and physically involved with each other. Lesbian relationships seem to epitomize the qualities found in female relating, as mutuality and a sense of cohesiveness are likely to be emphasized as important values in the relationship.
In addition, lesbians face other pressures which affect the relationship. Due to the homophobic nature of our society, many lesbians are isolated to some extent. A systems perspective purports that the greater the isolation from society, the more closed the system becomes (Krestan & Bepko, 1980). A lesbian couple may create aspects of merging within their relationship, as they fight to protect their union from a scornful society.

Research regarding factors which relate to satisfaction in lesbian relationships is sparse. Preliminary findings suggest that an equal power balance and a strong sense of intimacy correlate with relationship satisfaction. Dyadic attachment characterized by a strong sense of connection appears to be the best predictor of relationship satisfaction.

This study examined the relational qualities of mutuality, cohesion, and merging as compared to satisfaction in the relationship. One hundred and fifteen questionnaire packets were distributed to volunteers through advertisements in the Western Herald, Lavender Morning, and Pandora’s Bookstore. Additional volunteers were recruited from a local friendship network. The questionnaire packet included two consent forms, a letter of instruction, a personal information questionnaire, the Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire, the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II, the Life Style Questionnaire, and the Marital Satisfaction Scale. Sixty-three completed packets were returned by the deadline date, resulting in a return rate of 55%.

Each questionnaire was manually scored and correlations between each variable were calculated using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) system (Norūsis, 1988).
multiple regression analysis was completed to assess which variable was the best predictor of satisfaction in this sample of lesbians. The mean and standard deviation of each relational variable was also calculated. Demographic statistics were collected and described to allow for a complete understanding of the sample and to compensate for the challenge of studying a hidden population.

Discussion of the Results

Mutuality and Relationship Satisfaction

The relational quality of mutuality was found to have the strongest significant correlation with relationship satisfaction. This finding supports the literature which discusses mutuality as a growth producing quality. Miller (1986) focused upon mutuality as a relational quality which enhances both the relationship and the development of the self. The relationship becomes a focus for growth of the self, as each individual experiences a greater sense of self-worth, zest, ability to act, an accurate self-portrait, and a desire for connection to others.

Jordan (1986), in describing a new theory of development called self-in-relation theory, stressed that women's development occurs through engagement in relationships, as opposed to the traditional model of separation-individuation. She discussed the importance of mutual intersubjectivity in which there is "an attunement to a responsiveness to the subjective, inner experience of the other, both at a cognitive and affective level" (p. 2). The experience of mutuality is supported by the results of the current study in which women who value mutuality report...
the greatest amount of satisfaction.

In a similar study, Genero, Miller, Surrey, & Baldwin (1992) investigated mutuality in two types of close relationships: spouse/partner and friend. The assessment of the friend dyad allowed the researchers to study the effects of mutuality within same and mixed sex relationships. As a means of comparison, measures of adequacy of social support, relationship satisfaction, cohesion, and depression were also collected. It was found that mutuality was significantly and positively correlated with relationship satisfaction and cohesion. A negative correlation with depression was obtained and adequacy of social support was more predictive of friend than spouse/partner mutuality. A statistically significant effect for gender was achieved, as women reported higher perceived mutuality than men. In friendship relationships mutuality scores for same sex female dyads were greater than for same sex male dyads.

The results of the study by Genero et al. (1992) are replicated by the current study. While Genero et al. studied heterosexual couples, the current study focused on the relationships of lesbian couples. Another difference occurs in the selection of the independent variable. In the first study mutuality, the independent variable is correlated with satisfaction and cohesion. In the current study, satisfaction is correlated with mutuality and cohesion. The replication of results highlights the significance of the role that mutuality plays in relationship satisfaction.

Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) compared 14 variables with relationship satisfaction in a sample of 275 couples. The goal of the study was to examine the correlational pattern of each variable with the criterion variable of relationship satisfaction. The variables considered were:
dyadic attachment, personal autonomy, power, types of intimacy, self-esteem, career commitment, life satisfaction, and role conflict. The strongest positive correlation existed between emotional intimacy and satisfaction in the relationship. The importance of emotional intimacy again highlights the value which women place on relating and sharing connections within the relationship. It would appear that emotional intimacy shares similar elements with mutuality. The results of their study support the findings of the current study.

Cohesion and Relationship Satisfaction

A significant and positive correlation between cohesion and relationship satisfaction was found. This finding is not surprising when one considers the value placed by women upon relationships. In a study of American couples, Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) described lesbian couples as relationship-centered. They wrote that "lesbians are so relationship-centered that even though they profess a strong commitment to independence, they yearn for more time together" (p. 178). Lesbians express the desire for open communication, expression of feelings, time spent with mutual friends, and equality. These values are part of the assessment of cohesion as defined by Olson et al. (1979). The cohesive aspect of shared leisure activities may be greater in lesbian couples, as gender similarity lends itself to shared interests and activities. Blumstein and Schwartz pointed out that many heterosexual couples with differing interests, friends, and hobbies share mainly in the drudgery aspects of maintaining a relationship such as child care, finances, etc. This reduces both cohesion and relationship satisfaction, as a lack of balance exists.
The importance of the relationship between cohesion and satisfaction was not entirely replicated by the Peplau et al. (1978) study. They reported that women who were self-rated as high in dyadic attachment scored similar levels of satisfaction with those women who were rated high on the dimension of autonomy. Dyadic attachment was, however, associated with greater emotional intimacy in the relationship. The Peplau et al. study is contradicted by results from the Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) study in which dyadic attachment has a slight positive correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = .19, p < .0001$), while personal autonomy has a negative correlation with relationship satisfaction ($r = -.25, p < .0001$). It is interesting to note that Eldridge and Gilbert used the scales for dyadic attachment and autonomy which were developed by Peplau et al. in their original study. It is possible that values have changed in the lesbian political climate, as the Peplau et al. study was completed 12 years earlier.

As the lesbian political climate has changed, traditional sex roles have been dropped. As lesbian couples discussed in A. P. Bell and Weinberg's (1978) study, butch and femme roles are typically adopted only by older or traditional couples. The feminist movement with its emphasis on sisterhood, equality, and sharing does not endorse the use of roles to define the relationship. The feminine values of relating, sharing feelings, equality, and communication are espoused. It is likely that these values are found in a cohesive relationship. In a dissertation study by Max (1990), he reported just such a finding. He used the FACES questionnaire and the Bem Sex-Role Inventory to evaluate the degree of cohesion amongst heterosexual, lesbian, and gay male couples.
Cohesion in the relationship was affected by sex role rather than gender. The feminine identified couple reported a higher level of cohesion than either the masculine or androgynous type. It would be interesting to examine if sex role was the determinant for the correlation between cohesion and relationship satisfaction in the present study. It is likely that most lesbians adopt a feminine or androgynous sex role.

**Merging and Relationship Satisfaction**

A significant correlation between merging and relationship satisfaction was found. Several possible explanations for this finding exist. Recent literature (Berzoff, 1989; G. D. Green, 1990; Markowitz, 1991) has proposed that a merged relationship may be the norm for lesbian relationships and, instead of detracting, adds to the growth in the relationship. Although merger has been discussed repeatedly in the literature on lesbian relationships, it has been viewed as pathological and problematic. Merging has been viewed as pathological, as it has been described as a regressive phenomenon in which an attempt to reunite with the other in an infantile symbiosis occurs. Mencher (1990) wrote that the merger as pathology argument is dependent upon three assumptions. These are: (1) Life begins in a state of infantile symbiosis with mother, (2) development consists of a process of a series of disengagements from the initial symbiotic relationship, and (3) merger in adulthood represents merger to a regressed infantile state. Recently confrontation of Mahler’s interpretation of infantile symbiosis has occurred with Stern’s (1986) work in infant research. He refuted the idea of mother infant symbiosis and suggested that from birth the infant experiences a
self separate from others. The process of development switches from a focus upon separation-individuation to development through connections with others.

The self-in-relation theorists point to a developmental path in which women grow through a process of differentiation and elaboration in relationships, rather than by disengagement and separation (Surrey, 1984). In describing empathy, Jordan (1984) described a temporary leaving of the self to experience the feelings of the other through the perspective of the other. In the past this abandonment of self might traditionally be described as a temporary merged state. Yet Jordan emphasized how a developed sense of self with flexible boundaries can easily allow this process to occur. A rigid boundary structure does not allow for mutual empathy. It is through the processes of mutual empathy, mutual engagement, and mutual empowerment that the development of the self occurs.

The problematic aspects of merger have been cited as isolation of the couple, rigidity of relational patterns and roles, diminished tolerance for individual differences, inability to handle conflict, and struggles in the development of a self-identity. If development is examined as a process of growth through relationships and the emphasis on connection is incorporated as an essential concept, then many of the problems associated with merger can be reinterpreted without a pejorative connotation. As Mencher (1990) wrote,

Features of lesbian relationships which have been described as fusion-intense intimacy, acute sensitivity to the inner emotional world of the other, and the embeddedness of individual identity within the relationship appear to be the likely result of two women--both of whom have traveled
developmental pathways marked by movement toward connection. (p. 8)

It is essential then to understand that what has been noted as problematic in traditional terms may be nonproblematic for females and lesbians in particular.

Mencher (1990) discussed her 1984 study in which she interviewed stable, well functioning lesbian couples. The relationships were characterized by merger, but this aspect of the relationship was not viewed as problematic by the couples. Mencher concluded, "contrary to the idea that fusion limits the growth of individual identity, these women conveyed that intense intimacy creates the trust and safety which fosters self-actualization and risk taking" (p. 4). Allowing the norms for female and specifically lesbian relationships to emerge and accepting the validity of these norms is a process which has not occurred. Lesbian relationships will not mirror heterosexual relationships and should not be interpreted by traditional male values. As Burch (1986) wrote,

We must remember that merger is a concept, a metaphor, not an empirical reality. . . . Lesbian relationships are often closer than other coupled relationships. This is a natural, even predictable, outcome of women's desire and capacity for emotional connection. Lesbian relationships will look and feel different from other relationships. Their emotional intensity may be misunderstood or interpreted pathologically if we assume they should reflect the norms of heterosexual relationships. (p. 69)

Studying the process of merging in lesbian relationships may help in understanding women's relational patterns in general. In an informal study of heterosexual women's friendships, Berzoff (1989) found that women in her therapy group experienced merger as a growth process, promoting connections and empathy for others. Berzoff then
interviewed 18 females who were recruited due to a strong value placed on their female friendships. Each participant also completed the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test, which is a projective instrument based on Loevinger's stages of the progression and maturity of personality development. Four of these 18 women described experiencing temporary fused self/other boundaries with a close female friend. Interestingly enough, these four women scored at the highest level of ego development, the stage at which an integrated self exists within a complex social context. Thus the experience of merging was reported by women who were rated the most differentiated and autonomous, as measured by the Loevinger-Wessler scale. Berzoff explained this phenomenon by writing that autonomy and merging are not mutually exclusive. This finding also serves to reinforce the self-in-relation theory that women develop through the intensity of the relationship, achieving a greater sense of differentiation through cyclical merging experiences with the other. In summary the merging experienced in lesbian relationships needs to be viewed as normative, not pathological, regressive, or problematic.

Relationship Between Mutuality and Cohesion

Mutuality and cohesion were found to be significantly correlated in the present study. This finding is similar to that reported by Genero et al. (1992) in which cohesion and satisfaction were positively and significantly correlated with mutuality. Genero et al. asserted that mutuality as measured by the MPDQ has features which are not found in either the variables of cohesion or satisfaction. She wrote that mutuality is derived
from well articulated theory and taps into specific elements such as empathy, authenticity, and zest which are not present in the measurement of cohesion. Lastly, the MPDQ examines the bidirectional nature of relationships by asking respondents to assess the perspective of the other as well as themselves in answering the statements. The cohesion dimension of FACES II consists of items which assess support, caring, shared activities, mutual friends, interests, and decision making within the relationship. Although a significant correlation exists between mutuality and cohesion, each variable maintains a unique sense of what it attempts to measure.

Separate studies (Genero et al., 1992; Zacks et al. 1988) report that women value both mutuality and cohesion in their relationships. Mutuality and cohesion are related to connection and closeness which are values which women express. The significant correlation between mutuality and cohesion reflects the assumption that knowing the friends of your partner, sharing activities together, showing support for one’s partner by listening, attempting to understand one’s partner, etc. are all positive indicators of ways of maintaining and developing connections.

Length of Relationship and Relationship Satisfaction

The length of time together in the relationship had no significant correlation with satisfaction in the relationship. Other studies (Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990; Peplau et al., 1982) which compared demographic statistics with relationship satisfaction share similar findings. Normative data for a hidden population does not exist (Morin, 1977). Attempting to derive conclusions from data which are not representative of the
population is an impossible task. This finding has been reported in studies of heterosexual relationships where a random sample of the population has been achieved. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) stated that the length of relationships for heterosexual couples is longer than that experienced by homosexual couples. Yet length of relationship, a demographic statistic, cannot be directly compared due to the isolated nature of the homosexual population and the strong homophobic focus which does not support homosexual relationships.

The developmental aspects which unfold in the relationship may have differing effects upon relationship satisfaction. Couples in the blissful, joyful state of initial merger in the relationship may report greater relationship satisfaction than those couples in the midst of conflict negotiation. Settled couples who have resolved conflicts may also report greater relationship satisfaction.

The measurement of relationship satisfaction used in this study was chosen because it represented a measurement of attitude toward the relationship. Attitude is viewed as a perception at a point in time rather than a fixed state. The satisfaction measured in this study reflects the respondents' current level of relationship satisfaction and is not considered to represent a global rating of relationship success.

**Best Predictor of Relationship Satisfaction**

Mutuality was found to be the best predictor of relationship satisfaction using a stepwise multiple regression procedure. This result reinforces the conclusion that mutuality has the strongest connection with relationship satisfaction. Cohesion, merging, and length of time together
added an insignificant portion of the variance. In a dissertation study of intimacy, fusion, and relationship quality in lesbian and heterosexual relationships, Anderson (1990) found that intimacy as measured by the Personal Authority in the Family Questionnaire System was the best predictor of positive relationship quality for lesbian relationships. Intimacy and mutuality share both similarities and differences. Yet in comparison to the other variables studied, including merging, the value that women place on connection, a sharing of self, and mutual understanding was demonstrated as the best predictor of relationship satisfaction.

Merging has been previously discussed as a factor which promotes growth and is nonproblematic in lesbian relationships. The process of merging has been described as joyful and liberating (Burch, 1987). Finding a balance in the merging in the relationship may be work which does not relate to immediate relationship satisfaction. Mutuality seems to provide immediate rewards, as the other person feels understood, supported, and cared about in the relationship.

Mutuality and Lesbian Relationships

Mutuality was present at a significant level in the current study. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) remarked that lesbians place a great deal of importance upon their relationships. Communication and sharing of feelings are other values which are expressed. One female describes her female relationships by stating:

There is much more emotional intensity between two women. The standard complaint from my heterosexual friends is that there is something missing. Another thing I hear is that their husbands are not interested in the same kind of sharing or talking about people. My best friend, I
know, likes to talk to me more than she likes to talk to her husband about stuff that we see going on. (p. 492).

The high level of mutuality in lesbian relationships may be due to the way that lesbians often begin their relationships as friends. Vetere (1982) wrote that friendship is a prime developmental and maintenance factor in lesbian love relationships. She discovered that responses regarding relationships "fell into three main thematic categories: that the friendship created a certain mutuality between the women in which there was a feeling of closeness and security, and also a reinforcement of individual growth" (p. 60).

The mean score of mutuality in the current study was 4.72 with a standard deviation of 0.47. In Genero's et al. study (1992), women in heterosexual relationships reported higher perceived mutuality ($M = 4.71, SD = 0.54$) than men ($M = 4.25, SD = 0.66$). In comparing mutuality between friends, Genero found that mutuality scores for same sex female dyads were greater ($M = 4.99, SD = 0.52$) than for mixed sex dyads ($M = 4.85, SD = 0.59$) or for same sex male dyads ($M = 4.62, SD = 0.48$). Both Genero's et al. study and the current study report similar means for females in love relationships (4.71 and 4.72, respectively). Yet in Genero's et al. study the mean mutuality score for same sex female friendships is quite high ($M = 4.89$). All groupings report higher levels of perceived mutuality in their friend relationships. This may indicate that mutuality may be difficult to maintain when negotiating personal conflicts within an intimate love relationship.
Cohesion and Lesbian Relationships

A high percentage of lesbians do report a high level of cohesion in their relationships. This finding is similar to that reported by Zacks et al. (1988). They found that 78.9% of their sample scored in the connected and enmeshed categories of the cohesion scale. They used FACES III, which was initially proposed as a measurement of cohesion on a curvilinear design. Further research by R. G. Green et al. (1991) has revealed that FACES II is a more accurate measure of cohesion, as it is constructed on a linear design. In the current study, 87% of the sample scored in the connected and very connected categories of the cohesion scale. This percentage is similar to that reported in the Zacks et al. study.

When compared with heterosexual relationships, lesbians show a greater degree of cohesion in their relationships. The value that females place upon connection and closeness may effect the degree of cohesion. Same sex female friendships may also portray a strong sense of cohesion due to similar interests. Traditional roles are abandoned, as homosexual women share similarities in activities, and ideas about how to share time together. R. R. Bell (1981) studied differences in male and female friendships. Traditional males used roles to relate in friendships. For example, they had one friend with whom they played golf and another with whom they discussed career issues. There existed a greater tendency to partition aspects of self. Women tended to use their friends in a global manner by relating more emotionally and sharing many parts of themselves with one person.
Cohesion in the lesbian relationship may also be intensified by the need to protect the relationship from homophobia which exists in the general heterosexual community. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) reported that homosexual women may have as few as one heterosexual friend. Maintaining involvement in the lesbian community and within the relationship, can allow the couple to develop a sense of specialness and cohesion.

McCandlish (1982) examined the stresses that are placed on a lesbian couple in a homophobic society. She wondered if those couples who remain together have worked through these pressures, and have developed a cohesive bond. It would be interesting to compare length of time in the relationship with cohesion. In the current study a correlation between length of time together and cohesion did not exist.

**Merging and Lesbian Relationships**

Lesbians in this study demonstrated an average level of merging as measured by the Life Style Questionnaire. This finding may be related to the developmental nature of the merging process. Again the sample in this study was composed of settled women who were involved in committed, enduring relationships. Since the mean duration of the relationship was 7 years, these women had already experienced and worked through some of the process of merging which occurs in the early phases of each relationship. In new relationships, a sense of blissful union exists in which one's goals, desires, and interests are temporarily abandoned for the relationship (Burch, 1982; Clunis & Green, 1988; N. Roth, 1986). Clunis and Green described a six-stage model of lesbian
relationships, which includes the developmental aspect of merger. First is the prerelationship stage in which the women are getting to know each other. The second stage is the romance stage which is described as the time of greatest merger, when friends and autonomy needs are neglected. The third stage is a time when differences in temperament, values, or goals surface. Conflict resolutions skills are needed, and relationships frequently break up at this time. It would seem that the women in the present sample have negotiated through this point in their relationships. The next stage, acceptance, is characterized by stability, deep affection, and respect for differences. The authors wrote that merger and separateness find a balance in this stage. They continued by describing the commitment stage in which the relationship is seen as dynamic and changing and each person takes responsibility for her own needs and choices. The last stage, collaboration, is a time when the couple focuses upon something larger than the relationship such as political achievement, raising children, building a home, etc. It is likely that the women in this sample have reached the acceptance stage and are finding a balance between merger and differentiation.

Developmental theorists such as Kegan (1982) examine merging as one aspect of a growth process which typically occurs in early adolescent or adult relationships. Kegan described stages which either favor independence (autonomy) or inclusion (connection). The interpersonal era which favors inclusion is encountered in late adolescence or early adulthood. Relationships at this time are characterized by absorption with the other. Time, energies, activities are focused upon the other and individual goals may be temporarily abandoned. As the relationship
evolves, the need for pursuit of interests for self contradicts the strongly inclusive character of the relationship. Kegan did not view autonomy as the peak level of development as he wrote "that highly differentiated psychological autonomy, independence, or full formal operations may not be the fullest picture of maturity in the domain of the person" (p. 228). He described the interindividual era as a balance between autonomy and connection. In this era intimacy is reexperienced and a sense of reciprocity or mutuality is involved. He wrote "the very balance breaking that signals this emerging new availability for human interpretation leaves one temporarily unclear both as to who is the self and who are the others" (p. 238). This statement sounds reasonably similar to the position of the self-in-relation theorists who describe the movement between self and other as movement toward self-growth and understanding. As Jordan et al. (1983) wrote, "The female adult self engages in a mutual process of merging and separateness where, in the process of joining with another, a more differentiated self emerges" (p. 3). What might appear as a merged state in mature female relationships may then be the evolving sense of self. It is likely that the women in this sample with an older mean age are focused upon later developmental issues. Merging becomes integrated within the relationship and is not perceived as the same struggle as occurs in the interpersonal era.

Another aspect of the study which may have effected the average level of reported merging concerns the instrument used to measure merging. The questionnaire developed to examine merging in relationships has not been validated and results need to be viewed in a cautionary manner. It is possible that this questionnaire does not address
issues of merging. The questions which were included to measure an acute sensitivity to partner's needs did not include any mention of the emotional expense of fulfilling needs for self, which may be a more accurate definition of merging. It might be helpful to use more feeling statements regarding guilt or regret regarding autonomy issues in the relationship. The questions which target the frequency of time spent together in activities are similar to the questions on the cohesion dimension on the FACES II instrument. These questions may more accurately target the dimension of cohesion in the relationship. Since the questionnaire is not a validated instrument, these findings need to be interpreted as preliminary.

Question 2 in the Life Style Questionnaire asks "Are you involved in activities and/or friendships within the lesbian community?" The literature points to an increase in merging as isolation from the system increases. An isolated couple would then report a more merged experience. A mediating factor is involvement in the lesbian community, which reduces isolation, provides validation for the relationship, and allows for the establishment of new connections. It was thought that women who were actively involved in the lesbian community would report a less merged experience in their relationships. A nonsignificant correlation between Question 2 and the total score was in fact calculated, which does not support the system's perspective of merging.

The literature abounds with theoretical and practical case studies in clinical populations regarding the presence of merging in lesbian relationships. The sample in this study was obtained from a nonclinical population and consists of older women who appear financially settled.
and stable in their relationships. The characteristics of the sample may have affected the lack of merging reported. It has previously been discussed that the level of merging in established relationships is lower due to resolution of developmental issues. In the current study it appears that the women have incorporated merging in a satisfactory way in their relationships. For example, 72% of the women answered never or rarely to the following question on the Life Style Questionnaire: "Do you feel guilty if you engage in activities with friends without your partner?" Since few women remarked feeling guilty, there is an indication that the women in this sample feel comfortable with the balance of closeness in their relationship.

In a dissertation study, Colwell (1989) found that gay male couples had the highest total levels of merging. Lesbian couples did not have the highest level of merging, but they did demonstrate the lowest total level of disengagement. Heterosexual men and women were as likely to merge or to disengage. The author suggested that her results indicate that merging and disengagement are not universally gender specific. Perhaps it would be enlightening to study sex roles as compared to gender.

Colwell (1989) advocated dropping the term merging from the literature, since it appears ambiguous and traditionally has indicated pathology. Mencher (1990) similarly confronted the history of the term as derogatory and recommends substituting the word embeddedness, which describes how women function within their relationships. Mencher wrote:
The use of embeddedness bypasses the confusion and inaccuracy of the word fusion. Embeddedness as a description of healthy relational involvement acknowledges the normative developmental needs and intimacy patterns of women and revises the traditional standards of autonomy and separation which are so male-derived. (p. 9)

A bias in understanding the phenomenon of merging does exist, and it is important to redefine or understand how this process is normalized in lesbian relationships.

**Satisfaction and Lesbian Relationships**

The high level of relationship satisfaction in lesbian relationships was supported in this study with a mean of 4.58 on a 5-point scale. Other studies have reported similarly high levels of satisfaction in lesbian love relationships. Eldridge and Gilbert (1990) found that women in their study reported a mean satisfaction score of 4.34 on a 6-point scale. In Peplau's et al. (1982) study a mean satisfaction score of 7.7 on a 9-point scale was established. Satisfaction was highly intercorrelated with closeness, love, and liking. These findings were replicated by Kurdek and Schmitt (1986a) who reported high levels of relationship quality in feminine and androgynous sex role types. In another study Kurdek and Schmitt (1986b) compared satisfaction as it related to stages in the relationship. They used the McWhirter and Mattison six-stage model and correlated the following three stages: (1) blending (first year), (2) nesting (second and third years), and (3) maintaining (fourth and fifth years). They found a curvilinear relationship between stage and relationship quality, as the nesting stage related to the lowest level of relationship quality. It is during this stage that conflict and role issues are
negotiated. These results were similar amongst heterosexual, lesbian, and gay male couples. The authors concluded that the stage of development in the relationship is a robust predictor of relationship quality. Since the current sample was composed of a group of women in stable, committed relationships, it is likely that relationship satisfaction in the current study is similarly affected by the stage of development of the relationship.

As previously discussed, mutuality is correlated positively with relationship satisfaction. As Miller (1984) wrote, "to feel more related to another person(s) does not mean to feel one's self threatened, but enhanced. It doesn't feel like a loss of part of one's self, but the prospect of a step toward more pleasure and effectiveness" (p. 5). The satisfaction within the relationship becomes a major aspect in the life of the female. In the satisfaction scale used in this study, one question stands out as a statement which reflects the priority of the relationship: "My relationship gives me more real personal satisfaction than anything I do." This statement was strongly endorsed by the women in the current study. The satisfaction derived from the relationship is then a priority and as Miller wrote, "the importance of the relationship becomes a motivation which drives the individual's life force" (p. 5). It would be interesting to assess the value of this statement with heterosexual couples. Since perceived mutuality is lower and the couple is a mixed sex, it is likely that the value placed on the relationship would be lower. There is some evidence that heterosexual women meet some of their needs for mutuality with female friendships, family, and children.
An additional factor which may account for the high level of satisfaction in the current study involves the bias of the respondents. Women who volunteered to participate in this study may be interested in portraying their relationship in a favorable light and those women who were less satisfied with their relationship may have elected to not participate in the study.

Implications for Future Research

The goal of this study was to correlate the relational qualities of mutuality, cohesion, and merging with satisfaction in lesbian relationships. In examining each relational quality, the impact and meaning upon the relationship was discussed. The impact of mutuality upon relationship satisfaction is quite clear. Gender differences have been found to exist. It would be interesting to evaluate the effects of mutuality upon the relationship using sex role analysis.

In addition some preliminary findings indicate that mutuality in same sex female friendships may be higher than perceived mutuality in lesbian or heterosexual love relationships. Exploring the effects of partnership versus friendship in both homosexual and heterosexual females and males would shed some light on the differences in types of relationships. Is mutuality stronger in heterosexual or homosexual friendships? How does mutuality affect satisfaction in lesbian, gay male, and heterosexual couples? Again some limits for direct comparison exist due to sampling difficulties. However, studies which pursue these themes will help to determine trends, which validate current research.
Since few studies have focused on lesbian or gay male relationships, additional research is needed to provide understanding and norming in this area.

Cohesion was found to be correlated with satisfaction in lesbian relationships. Other studies support this finding. The specific factors which define cohesion have been mentioned. How similar is cohesion to the other relational qualities of mutuality and merging? Attempting to explore similarities and differences might be helpful. Many of the questions on FACES II are similar to those in the Life Style Questionnaire. Are these instruments measuring the same quality? Is cohesion another way of looking at merging without the traditional negative connotation?

As previously mentioned in the discussion section, the questionnaire developed by the researcher was used to evaluate trends, as it is not a validated instrument. Validating an instrument to measure merger would help in attempting to accurately capture this quality. The current study did not find a strong level of merging in lesbian relationships. Other studies report mixed results. Yet the literature abounds with references to the intense merger which exists in lesbian relationships. How does one account for the discrepancy between reported results and the literature which is filled with case studies and theoretical interpretations? Perhaps the sense of merger which exists is not really being captured. Exploring any difficulties in meeting one’s own needs within the relationship and defining a sense of self within the relationship might be aspects of merger which could be examined. An in-depth interview approach which could focus on relational issues might assist in a better understanding of the merger process in lesbian relationships.
Exploring the developmental level of the relationship in connection to merging might elucidate how merging presents itself. Addressing and identifying the growth producing aspects of merger would be helpful in understanding its role in female and lesbian relationships.

Another area which merits further research exists around the autonomy and attachment issues. Studies (Caldwell & Peplau, 1984; Eldridge & Gilbert, 1990) indicate that an equal power balance in the relationship is correlated with relationship satisfaction. Stiglitz (1990) wrote that an equal power base allows each woman to protect against feeling overwhelmed by the effects of merging. She stated the belief that if the power base is not stable, then the fears of dependency may divide the relationship. Peplau et al. (1982) found that the most important reasons cited for leaving a relationship centered around the desire to be independent and doubts about the partner's dependency upon the relationship. Further studies are needed to clarify the role of equal power in the relationship. Is it related to merging or is it a value expressed in feminist circles?

The issues addressed in this study are complex, as there is an overlap between intimacy, mutuality, cohesion, and merging. How these relational qualities truly differ and compare are questions which need further work to be determined. How they are intertwined with the dynamics in heterosexual, lesbian, and gay male relationships are questions which deserve continued exploration and interpretation.
Appendix A

Cover Letter
To: Research Participants

From: Patricia R. Murray
Doctoral Candidate
Counseling Psychology
Western Michigan University

As a doctoral candidate, I am conducting a study to examine the qualities which lesbians value in a relationship as compared to their satisfaction with the relationship. It is my belief that information regarding lesbian relationships will produce an awareness which will enhance relationships.

I am requesting that each volunteer complete the four enclosed questionnaires and personal data sheet. It will require approximately 45 minutes to one hour to complete this task. Your responses will remain anonymous and confidential. The personal data sheet will be used to compare this sample of participants with national demographic data.

Please follow these instructions:

1. Complete the four enclosed questionnaires and personal data sheet. Take your time and answer each question as accurately as possible. It is important that you do not receive any help from your partner in completing the questions.

2. Sign the enclosed consent forms.

3. Return one (signed) consent form, the four completed questionnaires, and the personal data sheet to me in the enclosed pre-addressed, postage-paid envelope as soon as possible. The second consent form is for your records.

All participants who return completed questionnaires and a signed consent form will receive a final report of the study. Your participation is very much appreciated.
Appendix B

Informed Consent Form
The purpose of this research is to examine qualities in lesbian relationships as compared to relationship satisfaction. The research project is being conducted by Patricia R. Murray, a doctoral candidate in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. Each subject will be asked to complete four questionnaires regarding aspects of their relationship. Time spent in responding will average 45 minutes.

The data collected in this research will be held in confidence. The published dissertation will not contain any names and only general demographic data will be reported. The results of the questionnaires will be reviewed only by the researcher. Participation in this study is totally voluntary.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the research described above. I agree to voluntarily participate in the research. I also realize that I may withdraw from the study at any time and that if I have any questions, I can contact the researcher, Pat Murray, at 668-4018.

Signature ________________________________
Witness ________________________________
Researcher ______________________________
Appendix C
Advertisement for Participants
I am conducting a research study about the qualities which lesbians value in their relationships, and how these qualities effect relationship satisfaction. I am pursuing this study to complete the requirements of my doctorate in counseling psychology at Western Michigan University. I need volunteers who have been living in a primary love relationship with another woman for a minimum of six months. Each volunteer will receive four questionnaires which will require approximately 45 minutes of time to complete. A self-addressed envelope is enclosed to return the questionnaires. All information gathered is confidential. Each person who completes the questionnaires and informed consent forms will receive a final report of the study. Questionnaires may be obtained at Pandora’s Bookstore or by contacting Patricia R. Murray, P.O. Box 321, Mattawan, MI 49071, 668-4018.
Appendix D

Letter of Approval From Human Subjects
Institutional Review Board
Date: December 2, 1992

To: Patricia Murray

From: M. Michele Burnette, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number: 92-11-33

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research protocol, "Mutuality, merging, cohesion, and satisfaction in lesbian relationships" has been approved under the exempt category of review by the HSIRB. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the approval application.

You must seek reapproval for any changes in this design. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

xc: Betz, CECP

Approval Termination: December 2, 1993
Appendix E

Personal Data Sheet
PERSONAL DATA SHEET

AGE: ______

ETHNIC BACKGROUND:

_____ White  _____ Native American
_____ Hispanic  _____ Asian
_____ Black  _____ Other

RELIGION: ____________________  NO RELIGIOUS PREFERENCE ___

EDUCATION: check the highest level of completion

_____ Not completed high school  _____ Bachelor’s degree
_____ High school diploma/GED  _____ Master’s degree
_____ 1-2 years college/Associates degree  _____ Doctoral degree

EMPLOYMENT STATUS:

_____ Unemployed
_____ Self-employed
_____ Non-professional employment
_____ Professional/Management employment
_____ Student

ECONOMIC STATUS (Yearly Income):

_____ 0-14,999
_____ 15-24,999
_____ 25-34,999
_____ 35,000 +

How many years and months have you lived with your partner?

_____ Years  _____ Months
Appendix F

Mutual Psychological Development Questionnaire
Form A
MUTUAL PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT QUESTIONNAIRE
FORM A

We would like you to tell us about your relationship with your partner. By partner we mean a person with whom you live.

In this section, we would like to explore certain aspects of your relationship with your partner. Using the scale below, please tell us your best estimate of how often you and your partner experience each of the following:

1 = Never  3 = Occasionally  5 = Most of the time
2 = Rarely  4 = More often than not  6 = All the time

When we talk about things that matter to my partner, I am likely to ...

- be receptive  1  2  3  4  5  6
- get impatient  1  2  3  4  5  6
- try to understand  1  2  3  4  5  6
- get bored  1  2  3  4  5  6
- feel moved  1  2  3  4  5  6
- avoid being honest  1  2  3  4  5  6
- be open-minded  1  2  3  4  5  6
- get discouraged  1  2  3  4  5  6
- get involved  1  2  3  4  5  6
- have difficulty listening  1  2  3  4  5  6
- feel energized by our conversation  1  2  3  4  5  6

When we talk about things that matter to me, my partner is likely to ...

- pick up on my feelings  1  2  3  4  5  6
- feel like we’re not getting anywhere  1  2  3  4  5  6
- show an interest  1  2  3  4  5  6
- get frustrated  1  2  3  4  5  6
- share similar experiences  1  2  3  4  5  6
- keep feelings inside  1  2  3  4  5  6
- respect my point of view  1  2  3  4  5  6
- change the subject  1  2  3  4  5  6
- see the humor in things  1  2  3  4  5  6
- feel down  1  2  3  4  5  6
- express an opinion clearly  1  2  3  4  5  6

Appendix G

Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale II
FACES II

The following questions explore certain aspects of your relationship with your partner. Using the scale below, please mark the response that best describes your experience in your relationship.

1 = Almost never   3 = Sometimes   5 = Almost always
2 = Once in a while  4 = Frequently

___ 1. We are supportive of each other during difficult times.
___ 2. In our relationship, it is easy for both of us to express our opinion.
___ 3. It is easier to discuss problems with people outside the relationship than with my partner.
___ 4. We each have input regarding major decisions in our relationship.
___ 5. We spend time together when we are home.
___ 6. We are flexible in how we handle differences.
___ 7. We do things together.
___ 8. We discuss problems and feel good about the solutions.
___ 9. In our relationship, we each go our own way.
___ 10. We shift household responsibilities between us.
___ 11. We know each other's close friends.
___ 12. It is hard to know what the rules are in our relationship.
___ 13. We consult each other on personal decisions.
___ 14. We freely say what we want.
___ 15. We have difficulty thinking of things to do together.
___ 16. We have a good balance of leadership in our relationship.
___ 17. We feel very close to each other.
___ 18. We operate on the principle of fairness in our relationship.
19. I feel closer to people outside the relationship than to my partner.
20. We try new ways of dealing with problems.
21. I go along with what my partner decides to do.
22. In our relationship, we share responsibilities.
23. We like to spend our free time with each other.
24. It is difficult to get a rule change in our relationship.
25. We avoid each other at home.
26. When problems arise, we compromise.
27. We approve of each other’s friends.
28. We are afraid to say what is on our minds.
29. We tend to do more things separately.
30. We share interests and hobbies with each other.

David H. Olson, Joyce Portner, and Richard Bell
Family Social Science
University of Minnesota
197 McNeal Hall
St. Paul, Minnesota 55108
Appendix H

Marital Satisfaction Scale
The following statements concern your current feelings, beliefs, or attitudes towards your present special relationship. There are no right or wrong responses to these statements. The answer that best describes you, your partner, or your relationship as it is right now is the desired response.

There are 24 items in this inventory. For each statement, a 5-point scale is provided for indicating your response.

The response symbols and their meanings are:

- SD = Strongly disagree (not true)
- D = Disagree (probably not true)
- N = Neutral (undecided, cannot say)
- A = Agree (probably true)
- SA = Strongly agree (true)

Cross out the appropriate symbol to indicate your response to each statement. For example, you would cross out the symbol SD on the scale if you strongly disagree with the following statement:

My relationship is definitely unhappy  SD D N A SA

Work rapidly without being careless, and without spending too much time on any one statement. It is important that you respond to each statement. Use the Neutral (N) response as little as possible.

MARITAL SATISFACTION SCALE

1. I regard my relationship as a success.  SD D N A SA
2. I worry a lot about my relationship.  SD D N A SA
3. I think that I might move on to a new relationship with someone other than my present partner.  SD D N A SA
4. I feel competent and able to handle my relationship.  SD D N A SA
5. My relationship is too confining to suit me.  SD D N A SA
6. I feel that I am "in a rut" in my relationship.  SD D N A SA
7. I know where I stand with my partner.  SD D N A SA
8. My relationship has a bad effect on my health.  
9. I get discouraged trying to make my relationship work out.  
10. My relationship is pleasant enough for me.  
11. My relationship gives me more real personal satisfaction than anything else I do.  
12. My relationship is becoming more and more difficult for me.  
13. I become badly flustered and jittery when my partner does certain things.  
14. I get along well with my partner.  
15. I must look outside my relationship for those things that make my life worthwhile and interesting.  
16. The future of my relationship looks promising to me.  
17. I am really interested in my partner.  
18. Lately, I wish I had not taken up with my present partner.  
19. My relationship helps me toward the goals I have set for myself.  
20. My partner is willing to work at improving our relationship.  
21. My partner lacks respect for me.  
22. I have definite difficulty confiding in my partner.  
23. My partner usually understands the way I feel.  
24. I am definitely satisfied with my relationship.

SD  D  N  A  SA

Appendix I

Life Styles Questionnaire
LIFE STYLES QUESTIONNAIRE

The following questions explore certain aspects of your relationship with your partner. Please mark the response that best describes your experience in your relationship.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>More often than not</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>All the time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How often do you engage in recreational activities that do not include your partner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Are you involved in activities and/or friendships within the lesbian community?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How often do you discuss your personal feelings and thoughts with a good friend who is closer to you than to your partner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. How often do you and your partner call or touch base during your work day?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you feel like you understand or know what your partner is thinking without her saying a word?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. How frequently do you engage in hobbies and interests that are different from those of your partner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you feel guilty if you engage in activities with friends without your partner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>Rarely</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>More often than not</td>
<td>Most of the time</td>
<td>All the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>How often do you feel responsible for the feelings of your partner so that she will not feel hurt, alone, bored, or angry?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>How frequently do you have fantasies, secrets, or wishes that you do not share with your partner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>How often do you spend time alone without your partner?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>In your relationship, do you believe that your partner's needs should be considered before your own?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Do you feel like your partner understands or knows how you feel without you saying a word?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P. Murray, 1992

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


