Masculinity, Femininity and the Development of Sexual Orientati in Women

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ABSTRACT. In an analysis that focuses exclusively on women, t thors argue that gender nonconformity is not the key to underst women's sexual orientation. Instead, they assert, the associations masculinity, femininity and women's sexual orientation are diver vary across time and place. To develop this perspective, this pa views research on biological processes, childhood gender nonc mity, and adult masculinity and femininity. It also draws on his and cross-cultural accounts and considers the important but neg role that financial self-sufficiency plays in the lives of women. T thors urge the adoption of a new paradigm recognizing that the de ment of women's sexual orientation can follow diverse develop pathways shaped by multiple biological, social and cultural influ
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There is growing recognition that theories of sexuality and sexual orientation that purport to encompass both sexes simultaneously may implicitly use men's experiences as the standard and assume that parallel processes apply to women (Peplau and Garnets, 2000). This assumption is particularly problematic in analyses of gender nonconformity and the development of sexual orientation. The goal of this article is to put the spotlight directly on women. There are many reasons to believe that sexuality and sexual orientation are areas in which the sexes are most likely to diverge (Peplau, 2003). Evolutionary theorists maintain that male and female constitute one of the few distinct anatomical and physiological types of the human species, and so universal sex differences ought to be expected, especially in the domains of sexuality and reproduction (Okami and Shackelford, 2001). Social theorists maintain that women and men continue to differ markedly in their social roles and access to power and status; therefore the lives of women and men provide differing opportunities and constraints (Hyde and Durik, 2000). Consequently, "one-size-fits-all" theories of gender nonconformity and sexual orientation cannot do justice to women's distinctive experiences.

It is this paper's central thesis that for women, gender conformity is not the key to understanding sexual orientation. Rather, the links between masculinity, femininity and women's sexual orientation are diverse and vary across time and place. To develop this perspective, this paper reviews research that focuses on biological processes, childhood gender nonconformity, and adult masculinity and femininity among women. To bolster the case for variable associations between gender conformity and women's sexual orientation, this paper also reviews evidence from the historical and cross-cultural record. The paper goes on to consider an important but neglected way in which lesbians do differ from the traditional feminine role: the need to be financially self-sufficient. The paper concludes by suggesting that women's sexual orientation follows diverse developmental trajectories that are shaped by multiple biological, social and cultural influences.

DO LESBIANS HAVE MASCULINIZED BODIES?

Historically, most theorizing and empirical research about wor sexual orientation have been guided by a belief in an essential mas ity of lesbians and the femininity of heterosexual women. This ide be traced to inversion theories of early sexologists who propose homosexuality results from a biological abnormality that leads tc der-atypical ("inverted") sexual attractions and personality. In a re of this popular hypothesis, Veniegas and Conley (2000) found remarkably little empirical support as applied to women.

Today, the neurohormonal theory of sexual orientation is a le biological perspective. This theory proposes that exposure to part prenatal hormones during a critical period before birth affects the c opment of brain structures that in turn influence sexual orientatior hypothesis is that, "if a female fetus is exposed to high levels of t terone in the latter half of gestation, her brain will function as a brain. Following puberty, one manifestation of this male brain fun ing will be a preference for female sex partners" (Ellis, 1996, p Three types of research have tested this theory among humans: ana of brain structures and studies of the effects of prenatal hormon physical characteristics and on same-sex interest and behavior (Must Chivers and Bailey, 2002, Zucker, 2001).

The lesbian brain. One direct and definitive way to find eviden the neuroendocrine theory in women would be to demonstrate v able differences between the brain structures of lesbian and heter ual women. Studies have been done comparing (1) straight (2) purported gay male,[1] and (3) female brains where the sexual or tion is unknown (Levay, 1991). However, no studies of "gay" l have included lesbians. At present, there is no physical evidence gesting that lesbians have masculinized brain structures or neur tomical structures distinctive from other women.

Effects of prenatal hormones on physical attributes. Indirect su for the prenatal hormone theory might be provided by evidence th bians show male-typical physical attributes that might result fron natal masculinization of the brain (Rahman and Wilson, 2003; Zu 2001). Current research has examined biological markers that are subtle and not closely linked to sexual orientation. Research on ha ness is illustrative. More men than women show a preference fo left hand. Consequently, greater left-handedness among lesbian heterosexual women would be consistent with a more male-like pa Consistent with the prenatal hormone explanation, a recent meta-a

sis (Lalumiere, Blanchard and Zucker, 2000) found a higher proportion of non-right handedness among lesbians compared to heterosexual women. Researchers have also examined differences between lesbian and heterosexual women in other physical markers including finger length, the patterning of fingerprint ridges, and cochlea-generated sounds. However, as Mustanski et al. (2002) note, replication by independent laboratories and technological advances are needed to provide "a clearer picture of the relationship between sexual orientation and many of these putative biological markers of prenatal hormonal status. . . . Until that time it is difficult to make any definitive conclusions about the soundness of the neurohormonal hypothesis" (p. 110).

Effects of CAH and DES. Currently, the most convincing evidence for the prenatal hormone theory among women comes from "experiments of nature" created by genetic anomalies or from medical treatments during pregnancy (Mustanski et al., 2002). Two conditions provide plausible tests. Congenital adrenal hyperplasia (CAH) is a rare genetic condition that exposes female fetuses to androgens and can result in ambiguous or masculinized genitals (Zucker et al., 1996). Diethylstilbesterol (DES) is a drug formerly prescribed to pregnant women to prevent miscarriages. It has a masculinizing/defeminizing effect on the developing brain of the fetus (Meyer-Bahlburg et al., 1995). But do CAH and DES produce homosexuality in women?

The vast majority of CAH and DES women are heterosexual in their reports of sexual desire, fantasy, and behavior. In a recent study, Hines, Brook and Conway (2004) compared 16 women with CAH to 15 unaffected female relatives. The CAH women were significantly less likely than the comparison group to be exclusively heterosexual: 31% of CAH women reported some degree of homosexuality or bisexuality in their recent sexual behavior compared to none of the comparison women. Results of research on DES have generally been weaker. Meyer-Bahlburg et al. (1995) studied 97 DES-exposed women and appropriate control groups. Although a higher percentage of DES-exposed women than controls (17% versus 0%) reported they had engaged in same-sex relations, the great majority of DES women were exclusively heterosexual. Taken together, CAH and DES studies provide limited support for the prenatal hormone theory of women's sexual orientation.

Investigators subscribing to the prenatal hormone theory view findings from studies of CAH, DES and physical markers as providing support for their theory. However, these results need to be viewed cautiously as they fail to provide an adequate explanation of all women's sexual orientation. For example, most women with CAH and DES self report

as heterosexual despite a purportedly "masculinized" neuroanator
addition, there is little evidence that the majority of lesbians hav
atypical prenatal experiences. At best, this perspective may de:
one of many possible pathways to a lesbian sexual orientation
small number of women. It does not offer a general explanation o
ations in women's sexual orientation in the population at large.

CHILDHOOD GENDER NONCONFORMITY: DO TOMBOYS BECOME LESBIANS?

Several theories predict a link between childhood gender nonc
mity and adult sexual orientation. The neurohormonal theory, fo
posits that prenatal hormone experiences influence both children'
preferences and their later sexual orientation (Hines et al., 2004). I
"exotic becomes erotic" (EBE) theory (1996, and this volume) su
that childhood gender nonconformity has a causal role in adult s
orientation, although the proposed mechanism is developmental
than biological. Does research show that feminine girls grow up
heterosexuals and tomboys become lesbians?

Empirical findings. The term "tomboy" refers to girls who l
play "boy" games or enjoy traditional masculine activities. Such
may also disdain traditionally female pursuits or clothing. Many s
have found that lesbians are more likely than heterosexual women
member being a tomboy (Bailey and Zucker, 1995). In an illust
study, Phillips and Over (1992) recruited women from comn
health centers. They found that 86% of lesbians compared to 6
heterosexual women remembered preferring boys' games and
Likewise, 77% of lesbians compared to 63% of heterosexual wom
called being considered a tomboy by others. The association be
childhood gender nonconformity and women's sexual orientatic
also been documented cross-culturally. For example, a study
United States, the Philippines, Brazil, and Peru (Whitam and M
1991) found that, across cultures, lesbians exceeded heterosexual w
on measures of childhood gender nonconformity, including pla
boys' toys and being regarded as a tomboy by others.

To evaluate the link between tomboyism and adult women's s
orientation, Bailey and Zucker (1995) conducted a meta-analysis
studies. They found a statistically significant association be
women's retrospective reports of gender nonconformity and thei
sexual orientation, with a large mean effect size of .96. Although

ings from tomboy studies are consistent with the neurohormonal and EBE theories, there are good reasons to be cautious in viewing these results as offering a general explanation of women's sexual orientation.

The limitations of retrospective reports. All available studies of childhood gender nonconformity and women's sexual orientation rely on retrospective reports, which cannot provide conclusive evidence of causal processes. Lesbians may tend to exaggerate their childhood gender atypicality in line with stereotypes of lesbians as masculine, and heterosexual women may tend to forget their tomboy experiences. Lacking longitudinal data, the available evidence must be considered tentative. Recently, Bailey, Bechtold and Berenbaum (2002) sought to remedy this problem by initiating the Tomboy Project, which will follow parent-identified tomboys longitudinally, and compare them to their non-tomboy siblings. These tomboys have not yet reached puberty and information about their sexual orientation must await follow-up studies.

Too many tomboys. If tomboyism is a precursor to lesbianism, which characterizes no more than 1-3% of the adult female population in the U. S. (Laumann et al., 1994), then tomboyism should be rare. In fact, tomboyism is quite common. Approximately half of adult American women report having been tomboys in childhood (Peplau et al., 1999). Given that gender nonconformity is so widespread, it is extremely limited in its predictive power. The overwhelming majority of tomboys become heterosexual adults. Bailey and Zucker (1995, p. 49) estimated that fully 94% of the girls who show a degree of cross-sex behavior typical of those who will become lesbians (i.e., who score above the median of the lesbian distribution) will actually be heterosexual. As a result, childhood gender nonconformity alone cannot adequately predict or explain why some girls become heterosexual and others lesbian.

Researchers have begun to tackle the problem of "too many tomboys" by suggesting that specific features of childhood nonconformity may be crucial. One important factor may be the extent of nonconformity in childhood. Zucker (2004) and Drummond (2006) have studied girls diagnosed with Gender Identity Disorder (GID), an uncommon pattern in which girls not only show a very extreme pattern of gender nonconforming behavior but also express a strong desire to be a boy. Their research suggests that as young adults, these women were substantially more likely than population base rates to report a non-heterosexual orientation. For example, in Drummond's (2006) study of 25 women diagnosed in childhood with GID and then followed up as adults, 24% reported a bisexual/homosexual orientation in behavior and 32% in fantasy.

Recently, Gottschalk (2003) urged researchers to investigat meanings that girls and women themselves give to gender nor forming behavior and the ways in which cultural beliefs about s orientation affect these interpretations. In interviews, women wh lieved in a biological basis for their lesbianism interpreted their tor ism as a sign of masculinity. One woman explained (p. 41): "As a c always felt different. I preferred to do boy's things in play. I wa feminine." In contrast, women who believed they chose to be les interpreted their tomboy behavior as a rejection of women's tradi roles: One woman (p. 46) explained that she resisted "confining g roles by a rejection of anything considered feminine and a des compete on equal terms with boys." In Gottschalk's analysis, child gender nonconformity does not reflect ingrained masculine dispos but rather a desire to escape narrow social definitions of women's Further studies of girls' and women's interpretations of gender no formity would be valuable. Additionally, this research area would fit from detailed investigations of those lesbians who were not ton and also of the majority of tomboys who grow up to be heteros women.

PSYCHOLOGICAL MASCULINITY, FEMININITY AND WOMEN'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Are adult lesbians more masculine in their personality than h sexual women?

Standard tests of self-reported personal attributes. Research sy atically comparing the psychological attributes of lesbian and h sexual women began in the 1970s, spurred by the development o measures assessing masculinity in terms of self-rated instrumental (e.g., self-reliant, assertive, willing to take risks) and feminin terms of traits indicating expressiveness (e.g., sensitive to the ne others, warm, gentle). In a meta-analysis of 13 published studies these measures, Peplau et al. (1999) found no significant differen tween lesbian and heterosexual women on femininity, but a sma ference for masculinity (effect size $d = .39$). More recent studies (I 2000, 2002) have continued to find that lesbians and heteros women are similar in their femininity scores, but sometimes diff nificantly in their self-ratings on masculinity (for example, $d =$ Lippa, 2000). In considering the results of these studies, it is instr to note that during the past 30 years, young adults have come to vi

strumental "masculine" qualities in women more favorably, with self-sufficiency, independence, and assertiveness carrying less negative connotations than in the past (Auster and Ohm, 2000). Further, the majority of women undergraduates today rate themselves higher on standardized measures of masculinity than did earlier cohorts (Twenge, 1997). In other words, American women are moving toward a more male-typical pattern, illustrating the variable nature of personality traits across generations and cautioning against overstating the association between sexual orientation and personality.

Self-reports of "masculinity" and "femininity." In a recent study, Lippa (2000, 2002) used measures that explicitly include the words "masculinity" and "femininity." Sample items are: "I see myself as someone who has a masculine personality" and "I see myself as someone who acts, appears, and comes across to others as feminine." These studies have found larger differences between lesbian and heterosexual women. In an illustrative study, the effect sizes were .94 for self-ascribed masculinity and -1.22 for self-ascribed femininity (Lippa, 2000, Study 2). It is also noteworthy that lesbians are not identical to men: rather, compared to men, lesbians' have lower self-ratings of masculinity and higher self-ratings of femininity.

Self-reports of interest in masculine and feminine jobs and hobbies. In other work, Lippa broadened the topic of assessment to include interest in traditionally masculine and feminine occupations and hobbies. Lippa used self-reported interest in gender-associated occupations (e.g., physician, elementary school teacher), activities (e.g., cooking, car repair), and hobbies (e.g., dancing, home electronics) to create measures of "gender diagnosticity" which assess the gender typicality of occupational interests and hobbies. Lippa has found that the gender diagnosticity of a woman's interests is a relatively strong predictor of her sexual orientation. In a meta-analysis of studies assessing gender diagnosticity among more than 5,000 women, Lippa (2005) reported a large difference in the gender diagnosticity scores of lesbian and heterosexual women ($d = 1.46$). In an illustrative study (Lippa, 2000), lesbians, compared to heterosexual women, reported less interest in being a beauty consultant, interior decorator, fashion model or grade school teacher. Lesbians also reported greater interest in being a poet, carpenter, computer programmer or jet pilot. Lesbian and heterosexual women did not differ in their interest in other occupations such as lawyer, physician, newspaper reporter or psychologist. It is important to note that lesbians' occupational and hobby interests were not identical to those of men. Rather, lesbians on average scored near the midpoint of male-typical and female-typical preference ratings, showing more mas interests than heterosexual women but less masculine interests heterosexual men.

In summary, available research points to a fairly consistent patt results. On standardized measures of self-perceived expressiv lesbians and heterosexual women are typically indistinguishab many studies, small but significant differences are found in sel ceived instrumentality, with lesbians rating themselves higher or qualities as independence, having a strong personality, making sions easily, being competitive and acting as a leader. On self-r that use the terms "masculinity" and "femininity," lesbians and h sexual women show larger differences. Further, lesbian and hete ual women also differ in their occupational and recreational int with lesbians showing more interest in some non-traditional ("n line") activities than heterosexual women but less interest than h sexual men. However, there are at least three important limitati trait research.

Sampling issues. First, differences between lesbian and heteros women in masculinity and femininity may, to some degree, be a fact of sample bias. None of the trait studies has used a represen sample. Rather, they have relied on convenience samples of colle dents, sometimes augmented by recruiting lesbians from gay/lesbi ganizations. Consequently, lesbian and heterosexual women may on attributes such as their age, employment, and feminist belief can affect their occupational interests and self-perceptions. Furthe bians recruited from gay/lesbian organizations and activities may from lesbians who are less involved and/or more cautious about r ing their sexual identity. Peters and Cantrell (1993) illustrated t tential impact of using non-comparable samples in research by sh that when lesbian and heterosexual women were matched for fe beliefs, they did not differ on masculinity. It is essential that research pay closer attention to the comparability of lesbia heterosexual samples.

Culture and ethnicity. A further limitation of available researc liance on predominantly white participants. In the one study th tematically investigated ethnicity, Lippa and Tan (2001) found differences in occupational interests and self-ascribed masculini femininity between lesbian and heterosexual women among Hi Americans and Asian Americans than among Americans of Eur descent. The authors speculated that in traditional, gender-pol cultures (Hispanic and Asian), lesbians may adopt more mas

roles as the only available alternative to traditional femininity. In contrast, cultures (Anglo) where gender roles are less differentiated may provide more alternatives for lesbians. These data cast doubt on the existence of an invariant link between masculinity and women's sexual orientation, showing instead the potential influence of sociocultural factors.

An uncertain causal connection. Finally, the explanation for differences between adult lesbians and heterosexual women in self-reported personal attributes and interests is uncertain. Does a sense of self-reliance and an interest in nontraditional hobbies and jobs contribute to becoming lesbian? Or does the experience of living without a male protector and provider encourage women to become assertive, learn skills often associated with men, and take an interest in nontraditional jobs? Available evidence does not shed light on the causal connections involved.

BUTCH AND FEMME IDENTITIES AND ROLES

In an influential early book on sexual orientation, Havelock Ellis (1928) distinguished between the "mannish" or "inverted" woman and her more feminine female partner. Recently, some researchers testing the prenatal hormone theory of sexual orientation have suggested that early androgen exposure may play a role in the sexual orientation of butch but not femme lesbians (Brown et al., 2002). Although these analyses appear to take the butch-femme distinction as a factual characterization of lesbians, the actual experiences of lesbian women do not necessarily fit into simplistic masculine and feminine categories.

Historical accounts (Faderman, 1991) document changing patterns of masculine and feminine gender presentation among American lesbians. In the 1950s, for example, an urban working-class lesbian subculture developed that emphasized intimate relationships between a masculine and a feminine partner. Relationships were deemed appropriate only between a butch and a femme partner; to gain social acceptance, women had to adopt either one role or the other. By the 1970s, however, many white lesbian feminists rejected such roles as imitations of patriarchal, heterosexual patterns that limited women's potential. Instead, images of lesbian androgyny (e.g., jeans, comfortable shoes, no makeup) were encouraged. In the 1980s, a newer version of butch-femme roles reemerged in some white middle and upper-class urban lesbian communities, in part as a reaction to the lesbian "clones" of the

1970s. "Many young women who claimed butch or femme identi
the 1980s saw themselves as taboo-smashers and iconoclasts" (Fade
1991, pp. 263-264). Recently, lesbian "drag kings" have become
visible, with an annual International Drag King Extravaganza an
cialized publications. In contrast, some contemporary lesbians a
femme identity (Levitt, Gerrish and Hiestand, 2003).

Most studies of contemporary lesbians have investigated the e
ences of white, middle-class women. These lesbians do not usual
neatly into butch or femme categories in their gender presen
(Peplau, Fingerhut and Beals, 2004). Further, when lesbians have
timate partner, they are typically in a dual-worker relationshi
when partners live together, they typically share homemaking, fin
responsibilities, and decision-making equitably (Kurdek, 1993).
vey of lesbian readers of *The Advocate* magazine (Lever, 1995)
women to rate themselves and their partner on a 7-point scale
"very femme/feminine" to "very butch/masculine." Most women
themselves and their partner in the middle of the scale. About a q
of the women described themselves as being in a butch/femme p
17% characterized themselves and their partner as femme-femm
8% as butch/butch. Half the women did not view themselves in
terms. Lever (1995, p. 28) found "very little evidence that ima
masculinity or femininity relate to who takes the role of the
aggressor within relationships."

Research on the gender presentations of ethnic minority lesbi
limited. In a recent analysis of African-American lesbians,
(2006) suggested that the existence of separate black lesbian com
ties has enabled black women to develop distinctive social patter
differ from those of white women. She noted (p. 113) "many
women in the 1970s did not distance themselves from the use of
cal presentations of gender as an organizing mechanism for thei
tionships and for lesbian community life." In a detailed stu
contemporary black lesbians in New York, Moore identified
patterns: femme women, gender-blenders (who combine traditi
masculine and feminine elements in their self-presentation), and
gressive women (who adopt a more masculine presentation). She
that once formed, the gender style a woman chose remained
consistent over time and structured her social relationships with
lesbians.

In summary, the gender presentations and identities of l
women are variable across time, social contexts, ethnicity and
class. Butch and femme are familiar themes for contemporary les

However, many women do not view themselves as fitting into rigidly gendered categories.

CROSS-CULTURAL EVIDENCE

Most research on gender nonconformity and sexual orientation has been limited to European-American cultures. In the context of modern society, many women who identify as lesbians are in a long-term, exclusive relationship with a woman partner. Yet in historical and cross-cultural perspective, exclusive same-sex ties are atypical. A brief examination of three major social patterns is informative. If masculinity is the key to understanding women's same-sex attractions, then it should consistently emerge in accounts of women's same-sex experiences in other cultures and time periods. In fact, masculinity is notably absent from many of these descriptions (Peplau, 2001).

Adolescent passionate friendships. In global perspective, the most frequent type of romantic liaison between women has probably been the passionate friendships formed among adolescent girls. For example, in parts of southern Africa it was once common for adolescent schoolgirls to engage in a form of institutionalized friendship known as mummy-baby relations (Gay, 1986). In this arrangement, an older girl (the "mummy" or mother) formed an emotionally close relationship with a younger girl (the "baby"). The girls exchanged love letters, and the older girl provided gifts and advice about becoming a woman. These relationships sometimes but not always had a genital sex component. With its maternal and nurturing imagery, this pattern was distinctly "feminine." Passionate friendships were also common among girls at European boarding schools during the early 20th century. Havelock Ellis (1928) reported that in Italy and England, a majority of schoolgirls had intense friendships known as "flames" or "raves." During the same time period, American researcher Katharine Davis (1929) mailed a questionnaire about sexuality to 2200 graduates of women's colleges in the United States. The questionnaire asked, "Have you at any time experienced intense emotional relations with other women?" Forty two percent of the sample replied that they had. Of these, 52% said that the relationship was sexual in character. In other words, one woman in 5 reported a sexual relationship with a best woman friend in college. Although some of these women continued to have intimate relationships with women after college, most did not. Passionate friendships have also been documented among contemporary American adolescent

women (Diamond, 2000). None of the accounts of these passi friendships gives prominence to masculinity.

Adult relationships in the context of marriage. In many cultures riage and motherhood have been prerequisites for full adult status ing outside of marriage has been socially and financially impossit women, except in rare cases such as nuns. Consequently, wor adult same-sex relationships have probably most often co-existec heterosexual marriage. In some cultures, same-sex relations bet women are informal and unacknowledged. Khan (1997, p. 28- scribed life in modern day Pakistan: "If a woman refuses to get m . . . she is effectively a pariah. If a married woman dallies with ar woman . . . there is little problem" so long as she is a good wif mother. In other cultures, women's same-sex relations are sociall ognized. In rural Lesotho prior to Western influence, "single pe [were] regarded as anomalous and tragic. Thus women have no id apart from that of the men to whom they are related" (Kendall, 1(162). In this context, it was common for married women to have cial, long-term female friend. These loving sexual relationships celebrated with a ritual feast in which the entire community ack edged the commitment that the two women were making to each Regardless of whether these same-sex extramarital relations wer bly celebrated or conducted in relative secrecy, they were not asso with themes of masculinity.

Same-sex relationships have also flourished in contexts women were viewed as fundamentally asexual or sexual only sponse to male initiatives. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many American and European women formed intense romantic frien with other women, often celebrating these passionate relationsh letters and poetry (Faderman, 1981). "Ah, how I love you," Pre Grover Cleveland's married sister Rose wrote to her friend Evan in 1890. "All my whole being leans out to you . . . I dare not th your arms" (cited in Goode, 1999, p. 33). After Rose's husband the two women spent their last years living together in Italy. At the society considered these enduring intimate relationships to be a able, normal, and feminine. The American and European wome formed romantic friendships during this era viewed their relatio as reflecting womanly ideals of purity, love, and devotion.

Exclusive relations between women. From time to time, soci economic conditions have made it possible for women to forego riage and to form relationships exclusively with women. Importa requisites include women's financial independence and the existe

supportive ideologies and institutions. In some contexts, women's same-sex relationships have involved a "masculine" and a "feminine" partner. Among the Kaska Indians of Canada, parents depended on a son to hunt big game to provide food for the family. Families without a son were permitted by social custom to designate one of their daughters to be raised as a son. As an adult, she was expected to take a wife, since it was believed that a female hunter who had sex with a man would have bad luck with game (Williams, 1998). Among the Mohave Indians in North America, it was possible for a woman to perform male social roles and to take a wife without stigma. This wife, a traditionally feminine woman, was not considered homosexual or cross-gendered herself. If the relationship ended, the traditional ex-wife could pursue a heterosexual marriage (Blackwood, 1984). In contemporary Sumatra, the term *tomboi* (from the English word "tomboy") is used to describe women who act in the manner of men and are erotically attracted to feminine women. Tombois construct their actions and desire for women on a model of masculinity (Blackwood, 2000). The female sexual partners of these tombois have no special designation or label; they are simply considered women.

In contrast, masculinity is not universally a theme in women's same-sex relationships. In 19th century China, the establishment of silk factories permitted thousands of young women to avoid marriage and gain financial self-sufficiency as silk workers (Blackwood, 2000). These women formed social institutions known as "sisterhoods." They lived in cooperative houses and provided mutual aid. Some women took formal vows never to marry. Loving partnerships and sexual relations between women were apparently common and accepted.[2]

In summary, the cross-cultural and historical record documents diverse patterns of women's same-sex relations. Masculinity is far from universal in the description of these relationships. More often, women's same-sex relations have been interpreted through a lens of feminine attributes and values.

A JOB OF HER OWN: EXPERIENCES OF CONTEMPORARY LESBIANS

As we have seen, investigations of gender nonconformity among women have focused on such issues as handedness, childhood play preferences, and self-perceived personality traits. While theoretically important, these topics overlook the major way in which modern

women who identify as lesbian differ from their heterosexual si the necessity of earning a livelihood. Arguably the greatest area o der nonconformity found among lesbians is their rejection of hete ual marriage from which follows the necessity of being econom self-sufficient. The decision to live as a lesbian is accompanied expectation that a woman will be financially self-supporting (M and Brown, 1991). In data from the 2000 Census (Human Rights paign, 2003), 69% of lesbians with partners worked full-time com to only 47% of married women and 74% of married men. The nec of providing for oneself is a common theme in lesbians' descripti their lives. A lesbian from a working-class background explained, " was a time when I think it sort of dawned on me, that I was going t to support myself and I'd better start getting my act together and s do it" (cited in Dunne, 1997, p. 211).

To the extent that lesbians are less constrained by the need to pl male partner and to conform to traditional standards of feminin duct, they may be freer than their heterosexual female peers to p nontraditional career paths that lead to better paying jobs. Lesbian also be less likely than heterosexual women to have children, furth panding their career options. Recognizing that she will not have a to provide for her may spur lesbians to pursue higher education, velop marketable skills, to seek better paying jobs in traditionally fields, and to move up the career ladder.

Education. One of the most striking characteristics of America bians is their relatively high level of education. To be sure, lesbia be found among all educational levels from high school dropo PhDs, but several national surveys suggest that contemporary le are disproportionately represented at the upper end.

For example, in an analysis of data from the General Social S 39% of lesbians had a college degree or higher compared to 2 married women (Black et al., 2000). Indeed, lesbians' educatio tainment surpassed that of heterosexual men; only 27% of marrie had a college degree or higher. In another national study, only 0. women with a high school degree identified as lesbian, compa 1.2% of women with some college and 3.6% of college gra (Laumann, et al., 1994). A meta-analysis of data on sexual orier and educational level would be informative.

Occupational choice. Compared to heterosexual women, "lesbi are less likely to make vocational and life choices based on acco dating men or conforming to traditional gender roles . . . . Thus les liberal gender roles might permit them considerable flexibility in

choice" (Fassinger, 1996, pp. 164-165). Although lesbians can undoubtedly be found across the occupational spectrum, available evidence shows that lesbians are more likely than heterosexual women to hold nontraditional better-paying jobs in male-dominated fields (Croteau et al., 2000; Dunne, 1997). For instance, lesbians are more likely than heterosexual women to serve in the military (Black et al., 2000). In Dunne's (1997) British study, lesbians from working-class backgrounds tended to pursue male-dominant manual jobs, rather than lower paying forms of "women's work." The need to be financially self-sufficient may also sustain lesbians' work motivation. A lesbian business executive commented, "My theory is that in a corporate environment, the percentage of lesbians versus heterosexual women is probably higher the higher you go, because lesbians don't opt out" (cited in Friskopp and Silverstein, 1995, p. 376). One consequence is that, on average, lesbian workers earn significantly higher wages than their heterosexual women counterparts (Peplau and Fingerhut, 2004). In short, what some have described as lesbians' interest in masculine occupations may, in part, be an interest in seeking higher-status and better paying jobs.

More generally, a consideration of the economics of lesbian life suggests that many of the so-called masculine characteristics attributed to lesbians may, in fact, be consequences rather than causes of women's sexual orientation. Women who live without a male provider may come to see themselves as independent and self-confident, take an interest in activities such as home repair typically deemed masculine, and seek work in higher status, higher paying "masculine" jobs.

MULTIPLE DEVELOPMENTAL PATHWAYS: A NEW PARADIGM

An emerging view among researchers is that sexual orientation is multiply-determined by many influences. Peplau et al. (1999) used the metaphor of "intimate careers." Just as the factors that lead various individuals to become therapists or accountants are multiple and diverse, so too are the developmental origins of a woman's sexual orientation. The career perspective also recognizes that sexual identities, like the job categories available in a society, change over time. Similarly, Diamond and Savin-Williams (2000) used the concept of "multiple developmental trajectories" to capture the idea that many different pathways can

lead women to a similar outcome, for example, identifying as lesbi
a review of biological influences on psychosexual differenti
Zucker (2001, p. 115) also argued for a "multifactorial model of s
orientation differentiation which includes not only diverse biol
pathways, but psychosocial pathways as well."

Further, women's sexual orientation may be more fluid than
ously believed. Congruent with the perspective of multiple develo
tal pathways is a view of human sexuality as flexible and respons
social contexts. Scholars from many disciplines have noted that wo
sexuality tends to be fluid, malleable, and capable of change over
This point is often made in comparison to men, whose sexuality i
as less flexible. Baumeister (2000) systematically reviewed a large
of empirical research documenting the greater plasticity of wo
sexuality, which he defined as the degree to which a person's sex
can be shaped and altered by cultural, social and situational pres
The concept of sexual fluidity is a cornerstone in a new paradig
understanding women's sexual orientation. If women's sexuality
rigidly programmed by biology, then theories of women's sexual
tation must account for contextual influences. In addition to cultur
economic factors, intimate relationships are likely to have a pron
influence on women's sexuality (Peplau, 2001).

Although researchers have speculated about possible pathway
involve masculine interests and dispositions, we know relatively
about other pathways that may be constructed around femininity
which masculine/feminine dichotomies are irrelevant. For some w
falling in love with one "special person" who happens to be a w
may be pivotal. For some women, a rejection of traditional dor
roles for women may be important. For some women, an ideol
commitment to feminism or the desire to be loved but not dom
may promote a life focused on women. In practical terms, the m
pathways perspective encourages us to consider distinctive route
lesbian sexual orientation.

NOTES

1. LeVay's sample of "gay male" brains were taken from individuals who h
of AIDS and were presumed to be gay. Lasco et al. (2002) were unable to r
LeVay's findings.

2. See Wu (1993) for a review of homosexuality in China.

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