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To cite this article: Jane Traies (2015) Old Lesbians in the UK: Community and Friendship, Journal of Lesbian Studies, 19:1, 35-49, DOI: [10.1080/10894160.2015.959872](https://doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2015.959872)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10894160.2015.959872>



Published online: 09 Jan 2015.



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Old Lesbians in the UK: Community and Friendship

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Drawing on data from the first large-scale comprehensive study of older lesbian life in the United Kingdom, this article explores the nature of friendship and community among old lesbians. Strong friendship bonds and social networking emerge as key features of old lesbian culture. In particular the article focuses on “chosen families,” including relationships with ex-lovers, and on the extensive network of both organized and informal social groups that continue to structure and support a sense of community among old lesbians. It shows the lasting importance of friendships and social structures formed earlier in life against a background of stigmatization, homophobia, and heterosexism, and argues for the recognition of these communities of identity by those who care for older people.

KEYWORDS *lesbian aging, lesbian community, lesbian friendship, families of choice, lesbian social networks, women’s friendship*

Although there is a body of research about old lesbian experience in North America (Almvig, 1982; Adelman, 1986; Meyer and Raphael, 1988; Kehoe, 1988; Clunis et al., 2005; Claassen, 2005, among others) there has until now been a dearth of broad-based empirical data about old lesbians in the United Kingdom. Women are under-represented in lesbian gay bisexual and transgender research generally, and this is especially true of the studies of older lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, where respondent samples include very low numbers of old lesbians (for instance, Heaphy, Yip and Thompson, 2003; Stonewall, 2011). When there are few old lesbians in a research sample, to regard “older LGBT” as a single monolithic category can lead to unhelpful generalizations (or even misrepresentations) based

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only on the experiences of gay men and younger lesbian women, and can obscure differences between the experiences of men and women in these generations.

The “invisibility” of old lesbians has been a running theme in queer gerontology from its inception (Almvig, 1982; Kehoe, 1986; Deevey, 1990; Ward, River, and Fenge, 2008). In a major study of non-heterosexual people over age 50 in the United Kingdom, for instance, Heaphy, Yip, and Thompson (2003) planned for an equal gender balance in their sample but recruited only half as many women as men, and only three women over 70. They suggest (2003:6) that “older lesbians may have particular concerns about ‘going public’ about their sexuality, and experience greater pressures to conceal their sexual identities” than gay men. They conclude (2003:13) that further research into the experiences of old age by lesbians—and the development of research strategies to access this particularly hard to reach population—should be a priority for future research. The doctoral project on which this article is based was a response to that challenge, and is the first comprehensive study of old lesbian life in the United Kingdom. The data were gathered between 2009 and 2011.

THE WOMEN IN THE STUDY

More than 400 women aged 60 to 90 participated, making this the largest survey of older lesbian life to date. The questionnaires were completed by 372 women, of whom 45 were aged 70 or over, and 9 were over 80. In addition, 46 women contributed their life-stories, either through interview or by autobiographical writing. The participants came from all over the United Kingdom, from towns and cities, suburbs and rural areas. They had had a wide variety of jobs and careers and, although the large majority (83%) now described themselves as middle class, nearly half grew up in working-class families. Just over half the survey respondents had been heterosexually married; four out of ten had had children. In these ways, the participants could be said to be broadly representative both of the lesbian community and of the population at large. They were slightly less representative in two respects: 93% were White, compared with 86% of the United Kingdom’s over-60 population in 2011 (Office for National Statistics, 2012) and the majority had higher than average levels of educational achievement.

The data cover a wide range of topics; this article focuses specifically on the findings about community and friendship for older lesbians.

LESBIAN FRIENDSHIP

The importance of friendship for lesbians and gay men has long been recognized (Kehoe, 1986; Weston, 1991; Barker, 2004). Heaphy, Yip, and

Thompson (2003:11) note that, for older lesbians and gay men, the real value of friendship is shown “when it is emotional support that is required” and this is borne out by my survey data. Although old lesbians in the present study were slightly more likely to turn to family members than friends for help in physical illness or disability, when they were asked, “Who would you turn to for help with emotional mental health problems?” only a very small minority of the women (3%) said they would seek help from their families, while nearly a third (28%) would confide in a friend. One reason for this could be that emotional and mental health issues were likely to be associated with a woman’s sexual orientation: no fewer than one in three (35%) of survey respondents had at some point been in therapy or counseling for issues related to being a lesbian; 4% were undergoing such counseling at the time of completing the questionnaire.

Although the survey showed that old lesbians feel more able to be open about their sexual identities today than they were in the past, women in the survey were still more likely to be out to their friends than their families. Eight out of ten (82%) said that “most” of their friends knew about their sexual orientation, while seven out of ten (73%) said that “most” of their family now knew. Nearly 6% said that no one in their family knew about their lesbian identity, but only 2% said that none of their friends currently knew.

The fact that the large majority of older lesbians in the survey were out to “most” of their friends must be further qualified by the fact that most of these friends were also lesbians. Six out of ten (57%) respondents checked “Most of my closest friends are lesbians”; eight out of ten (81%) checked “Most of my closest lesbian friends are within 10 years of my age” and nearly half (47%) said that they saw their closest friends once a week or more often. Data from the interviews and life-writers suggest that many older lesbian friendships operate within close-knit groups and have lasted for many years, starting at a time when the social stigma associated with alternative sexualities was greater than it is now. Four out of ten survey respondents (38%) reported that, thirty years ago, they had told no one at all in their family that they were gay. In that situation, social support from friends within the lesbian and gay communities helped to “fend off the negative consequences of stress resulting from stigmatization, homophobia, and heterosexism” (DiPlacido, 1998:145). The experience of stigma in the past continues to shape the identities and behavior of older lesbians and gay men (Rosenfeld, 2005); my data show that the particular characteristics of old lesbian friendships also have their roots in past experience of stigma and secrecy.

However, lesbian friendships may also have characteristics that are particularly female. U.S. psychologists Taylor et al. (2000:411) have suggested that “tending and befriending” might be a specifically female response to stress:

The human stress response has been characterized, both physiologically and behaviorally, as “fight-or-flight.” Although fight-or-flight may characterize the primary physiological responses to stress for both males and females, we propose that, behaviorally, females’ responses are more marked by a pattern of “tend-and-befriend.” Tending involves nurturant activities . . . that promote safety and reduce distress; befriending is the creation and maintenance of social networks that may aid in this process.

From this perspective, lesbian sociality could be viewed not only as a buffer against the stress of stigmatization, but as a bio-behavioral response to it: the more threatened we feel, the more we look after each other.

Friendships certainly emerge as crucially important support structures in the lives of many older lesbians in this study. They appear in two overlapping forms—personal friendship networks (or “families of choice”), and organized or semi-organized lesbian social groups.

FAMILIES OF CHOICE

The idea of “friends as family” has become closely associated with lesbian, gay, and bisexual lives; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan (1999:44) describe chosen families as “flexible but often strong and supportive networks . . . which provide the framework for mutual care, responsibility and commitment for many lesbians and gay men.” Almack, Seymour, and Bellamy (2010) and Croghan, Moone, and Olson (2014), among others, have also written about the importance of these “families of choice” or “chosen families” to older lesbians and gay men.¹ Heaphy, Yip, and Thompson (2004:890) stress the importance of recognising this kind of kinship in later life as “highly relevant to the understanding of the relational contexts in which non-heterosexuals age.” This recognition of the nature of old lesbian community and friendship is particularly important in the context of services for old people, where the close relationships of LGBT elders are too often overlooked or misunderstood (Traies, 2012).

An older lesbian’s family of choice will sometimes consist entirely of other lesbians and gay men, but more often it will be “a mix of social and biological family links, friendships and inter-generational connections” (Almack, Seymour, and Bellamy, 2010:916). In the case of many older lesbians, the relatives of partners and ex-partners may be members of the family of choice. Interviewee Chris, for example, counts her god-daughter, whose mother was once Chris’s partner, among her family of friends:

Interviewer: So, when you say you’ve got good friends, are you mostly talking about gay friends?

Chris: Mostly. That's because of where life kind of leads you . . . although my god-daughter's also a friend, and a good one . . . but that's a different kind of friendship, in a way. I've got friends of many, many years' standing . . . we don't live in each other's pockets, we probably won't see each other for about six months, but when we do, it's like yesterday! (Chris, born 1946)

These are what Mason (2008), examining current definitions of kinship, would define as "negotiated and creative affinities."

One of the times during which chosen family can be most important for a lesbian is during the ending of a relationship and its aftermath, because other lesbian and gay people can model and mirror a woman's life-choices and give social validity to her personal experiences in a way that her heterosexual friends and family might not be able to do (Becker, 1988:213). This was true for interviewee Julia after her partner died:

[M]y friends were there to help hold me together, my gay friends. And what happened after a year, eighteen months. . . . I was obviously seeing my friends, and I used to say, "Can I give you a hug, because I can't hug her? Can I tell you I love her, because I can't tell her anymore?" And they were just really sweet. And one of them said to me, "Look, there's this organisation, the Older Lesbians' Network, and they meet once every month. . . . And to me that sounded like the ideal sort of thing. And I think they were trying to give me a bit of a push, because they felt I ought to get to know new people, although my own friends were very kind and supportive. And so I did go along, and yes it was true, it really was a life-saver, a really good move for me . . . and I was able just to meet new people. (Julia, born 1948)

The Older Lesbian Network that helped Julia was founded in 1984 and still meets monthly in central London. It is one of many regional groups for lesbians that exist all over the United Kingdom and have been a life-line for many women. Some of these groups began as branches of Kenric, a lesbian network that started in London in the 1960s and has since spread through much of England and Wales; others were formed by a handful of friends looking for like-minded company.

ORGANIZED SOCIAL GROUPS

When Heaphy, Yip, and Thompson (2003:6) write that "few organised networks exist for older lesbians compared to gay men," and go on to suggest that "there is a greater reliance on informal, local and 'hidden' networks amongst these women," they are drawing a frequently made distinction between the lives of lesbians and gay men. As Jennings (2007:5) has stated:

Theorists have emphasized the importance of gender in shaping lesbians' experience of space as distinctly different from that of male homosexuals, constructing lesbians' social interaction in terms of private friendship networks rather than the public spaces of bars and the street. Longstanding narratives opposing public and private space, which have historically linked the female gender with the private sphere, have shaped much of this debate.

However, my data suggest that the distinction between "organized networks" and "informal, local and 'hidden' networks" is unhelpful. In reality most lesbian social organizations fit into both categories. Groups operate mainly at a local level, and still exercise a good deal of secrecy around their existence and the identities of their members, but are often highly organized through newsletters, e-mail groups, social media, and so on. Many women belong to more than one group, so that the lines of communication, both formal and informal, between individuals and groups make up a far-reaching web of connections.

The existence of this extensive networking in the lesbian community was not one of my original topics of enquiry, but is an important finding. The speed with which the original call for participation was disseminated across the United Kingdom (and beyond), and the unexpectedly large number of respondents, were indicators of a wide-reaching lesbian network that crosses barriers of class, education, and economic status, and challenges the assertion of Heaphy, Yip, and Thompson (2003:6) that few networks exist for lesbians. Indeed the response to the survey suggested that such networks are not only numerous and widespread but also interconnected, so that information for older lesbians can be quickly and efficiently shared. The most frequent reply to the final question in the questionnaire, "How did you hear about this research?" was either "through a friend" or the name of a lesbian group.

Many of these groups, whether specifically designated as "older" lesbian or not, have very few members under age 40. Many started at a time when lesbians led deeply closeted lives and there were limited opportunities to meet other women. There was no lesbian "scene" outside of large cities; the groups (typically meeting in women's homes) built communities where a woman could develop and maintain a lesbian identity and lifestyle. In contrast to mainstream and local communities, such networks still provide much-needed support and resources, offering spaces and relationships in which individuals can be themselves (Heaphy, Yip, and Thompson, 2004).

Interviewer: I think some of these groups have been going for a very long time.

Crunchy: Oh, this one's been going—I've been in it for years! And it was very handy, actually, to mix up with—it was after [partner] died—it was

very nice to mix up with people, and I found two people in the group that knew [her], you see, as well, which was lovely. And as I say, we meet once a month in the gay pub, and it's a really nice group. Sometimes there's only half a dozen there, other times there'll be maybe twenty will turn up. (Crunchy, born 1939)

No fewer than eight out of ten survey respondents (82%) had belonged to a lesbian social group at some time; more than four out of ten (45%) still did. Of women who lived alone, slightly more than half (51%) currently belonged to a group.

Some lesbian social groups have been in existence for 30 or even 40 years and will usually have a core of long-standing, older members who have become good friends. Groups like the Older Lesbian Network are open to all self-identified "older lesbians," but smaller, local groups, particularly those with a history of meeting in members' houses, have sometimes felt the need to regulate who can join (more than one group has had recurring discussions about the acceptability of trans-women as members). Over time, groups develop their own character. Barbara and Joyce compared the social class composition of two groups they attend:

Barbara: Well, [that] one is a very middle class group—

Joyce: Anyone who doesn't fit in...

Barbara: Yes, that poor girl who came and. . . . And there's always [name]! She doesn't fit in, but [she] is too obtuse to have noticed, and everybody loves her! [laughter]

Joyce: She's a big butch, and she drives a big van, and she carries the wine boxes from A to B. . . . She's not as rough as I'm saying, but yeah, she doesn't fit in at all. But everybody loves her, because she's honest and straightforward. She's likeable, isn't she?

Barbara: Yes.

Interviewer: But basically you're saying that is essentially a middle-class group?

Barbara: Yes, whereas the [other] group isn't. . . .

It is clear, too, that these social networks continue to play an important part in the lives of older lesbians:

Sandy: I remember [ex-partner] saying, when we were splitting up . . . , "You're really lucky, because wherever you go in the country you will

have a ready-made supply of friends.” And that’s true, isn’t it? You know, there’s always a gay community wherever you go. Whereas for somebody who’s straight or bisexual, it’s much more difficult when they’re getting older to get friends, or to find friends, I think.

Interviewer: Yes, that’s a good point. The lesbian groups that we’ve belonged to have been quite important in our lives, haven’t they?

Sandy: Absolutely! Yes, yes. And I think still are. When you talk to women who come to OLN and things like that, you know often it’s the only gay contact that they have; but at least they have that. (Sandy, born 1943)

Interviewee Maureen makes a slightly different point about the link between outsider status and the need for community:

[T]his closeness in the community depends to some extent on us being outsiders for its fulfilment. The more outside you are, the more you need one another, and the more it fosters something or other. . . . So our new status, it’s not. . . . It’s interesting. It’s not unalloyed. . . . It’s wonderful, of course it’s wonderful, I’m so thrilled to see the day of civil partnerships and all this, but something has been lost as well. . . . (Maureen, born 1945)

She is suggesting here that the more lesbians become assimilated into mainstream society (civil partnership being a major stage in this process), the less such close and supportive communities will be needed. It is interesting to speculate whether the existence of lesbian social groups, which derive from a sense of minority status, will decline over time if younger generations of lesbians no longer feel the need for such support.

In spite of the very clear benefits of these social networks to so many of the survey participants, one in five had never belonged to one. It is important to remember that “not all older LGB adults have equal opportunity to participate in LGB-focused friendship groups and social networks” and that it might not be appropriate to generalize about an “LGB-centred culture of ageing” at all (Cronin and King, 2010:882). The concepts of “friends as family,” and “families of choice,” are “intersected by other salient factors” (Cronin and King, 2010:882). From this perspective, the 20% of older lesbians in the survey who had never been involved with an organized lesbian social group could have had a variety of reasons for not doing so. The data show that they were more likely to live in rural areas, recalling Bell and Valentine’s (1995a; 1995b) findings that social group membership is affected by geographical location. The Gay and Grey Project (Help and Care Development, 2006:24) also found that “gay social groups and personal support structures are not fulfilling a need for the majority” of older gay men and lesbians in rural Dorset.

Survey respondents who were not members of a group were also more likely to be in a relationship and living with their partner, so might not feel the same need for an organized social life as single lesbians. But they might simply be people who did not choose to organize their social lives in that way, or who did not wish to identify with the lesbian community, whether publicly or privately. Women who had never belonged to a lesbian social group were only slightly more likely to say that loneliness was a problem for them. Anna is single, and admits to feeling lonely and isolated, but does not feel that socializing with other lesbians is the answer:

I don't want to be in a group just because of orientation. I can't really see the point of that. . . . For instance, I could have gone round in a group that walks round Kew Gardens, all lesbians. Why would I want to go walking around Kew Gardens with a lot of people who happen to be of the same sexual orientation? (Anna, born 1945)

In later life, illness and disability can lead to isolation from lesbian society, even for those, like Monica, who were previously active members of a group:

Interviewer: And are you still in touch with any of the people that used to come to the parties?

Monica: Not really, no. [Pause] Yes, one or two. One or two of them I'm in touch with . . . but none of them live anywhere near, so I don't see them. (Monica, born 1922)

Although Monica has good friends and neighbors who call on her, none of her once-extensive lesbian friendship network lives near enough to visit regularly, and this impacts on her sense of identity. She says, "I don't know if any of my neighbors know that I used to be a lesbian," implying that her lesbian identity has withered as her lesbian relationships have died away. At nearly 90, she no longer has a lesbian social life. So she "used to be" a lesbian.

EX-LOVERS AS FRIENDS

Because, in many cases, an organized lesbian social group offered women the only way of meeting other lesbians in their area, one of the features such a group is that it is likely to include ex-lovers. Linda remembers: "One of the very first things that struck me when I went to a . . . lesbian group weekend was the number of people who were there with their exes . . . apparently managing well; and I thought that was pretty amazing" (Linda, born 1934).

Patricia describes a similar situation: “I think in my social circle it is a feature. I can think of occasions when I’ve been at a party, at somebody’s house, and you sit with a big group of people, and I’ve been able to notice and sort of count up . . . the three previous partners, all there!” (Patricia, born 1950).

When Aine was relatively new to the scene, she found this aspect of lesbian social life disconcerting:

And so I got involved with another group. I didn’t go out with anybody there, though; they were all very . . . incestuous, let’s put it that way. One was going with another one, the next week they’d be going with somebody else in the group, and so I thought, I’m not going to get involved with this lot! (Aine, born 1941)

Patricia explains:

I think it’s a peculiar situation which comes about because it’s a very small community. And there’s a big fear of isolation. If something comes to an end . . . people are concerned about their social circle, and they don’t want to lose it, and they don’t want to feel isolated and out in the cold. (Patricia, born 1950)

Linda makes a similar point when she says: “We’re a very—certainly if you look at the age group—we’re a very small group of people; and it really pays to do that if you can, doesn’t it?” (Linda, born 1934).

An older lesbian’s ex-lovers are not only likely to remain in her social circle, as described above; they are often among her best friends. It is not uncommon, as Almack, Seymour, and Bellamy (2010:912) have pointed out, for lesbian and gay families of choice to include both ex-partners and the current partners of ex-partners. Often a lesbian’s previous partners are her closest friends (Clunis and Green, 1988:98). My interviewees provided many examples of this phenomenon. Monica, remembering a parting long ago, added, “I went on remaining friends with her for ever.” Judy said of her first partner: “[W]e were together for ten years. And it has to be said, it was entirely my fault we parted—but I’m delighted also to be able to say that we are now the best of friends” (Judy, born 1942).

Frieda had two long-term relationships:

I still see [first partner], and I still meet [second partner] for coffee. . . . Well, I think [first partner]’s my best friend. . . . I think most of it was because of me—I didn’t want to lose them totally. I think probably they would have just gone, and thought, “Oh, that’s history.” But I’m not like that. I’m still very friendly with my ex-husband. Well, I think when people have been that much part of your life. . . . I hate the idea of them

just vanishing. And I still love all of them. I'm not in love with them. You know, it's moved on that much. (Frieda, born 1928)

For Monica, the effort to retain the friendship needs to come from both sides:

Interviewer: You seem to be very good at remaining friends with people.

Monica: Well, yes. Because when you've had a lot with somebody ... and it's up to them as well. It's more difficult for some people than others. After a certain passage of time, you realize the real things about a person, rather than just the sex, or whatever it was that got you together. (Monica, born 1922)

Monica and Frieda both express the need to preserve something that transcends the now ended love-affair. Becker (1988:212–213) theorizes that the experiences women have shared as lesbians may mean that even after parting they have more in common than other people:

Because lesbians are a stigmatized minority group, lesbian ex-lovers are united to one another by a bond of sisterhood. As lovers, they have fought for acceptance and understanding from their nuclear families, their children, their colleagues, and their neighbors. Having grown up in a homophobic environment, they have shared a battle against internalized homophobia as well. ... lesbian ex-lovers remained connected by an overriding common cause—that of combating negative stereotypes of themselves, their relationship, and their lifestyle.

Some women I spoke to found that the later friendship was more comfortable than the love-relationship:

In the end we parted; she went back to her husband. ... And I realized—I mean were still friends; I actually just had a postcard from her this morning. We meet occasionally, and have a good *craic* [chat, discussion]—but as partners, it was a dead loss. (Pauline, born 1934)

Marion and a woman who is now one of her best friends were political activists together in the 1970s, and were lovers until their relationship was put under pressure by the politics of race. Marion reflects that:

... in a way it was inevitable, when the Civil Rights Movement was blazing away in the States, and she was moving towards a kind of Black separatism. ... But our friendship transcended that. There was a wobbly time, when I thought, "Oh God, I represent everything she hates!" But she's not a hatey kind of person. ... And it's a friendship that's important to both of us. Really, really important. (Marion, born 1942)

Kitzinger and Perkins (1993, cited in Cronin and King, 2010:882) have suggested that, unlike heterosexuals, lesbians are less likely to make a rigid distinction between a love relationship and a friendship relationship. Joyce's joking remark during her interview had an undertone of seriousness: "I think actually the best way to make a friend is to have a brief affair, and then you end up with a friend!" (Joyce, born 1940).

The point of transition from lover to friend is usually clear (and painful), but sometimes the relationship moves slowly and almost imperceptibly from one to the other. Andrea (born 1946) was in this state of transition when I met her. She and her partner had stopped living together but, as Andrea explained, "there's some doubt as to whether we're still a partnership or a close friendship." Another interviewee, Tamsin, also describes a relationship which lasted for: "... really only one year, two years at the most, and then went on as a kind of friendship where we weren't a couple, but everyone thought we were, for about five years" (Tamsin, born 1947).

The fact that the end of the lover relationship is not always visible to outsiders proved useful to Lynn and her partner when they decided to adopt. They did not feel that the concept of "lesbian ex-partner as family" would be intelligible to the authorities, whereas "lesbian couple" would:

So we decided to do this thing, went through the process of assessment, and by this time, although we were living together, [we] weren't really a couple, but we didn't tell them that. It sounds perverse really, but we didn't, so they thought they were assessing this lesbian couple, and actually they were assessing two lesbians with a familial relationship, and I felt that they wouldn't understand that, and they wouldn't see it as a strong relationship, so I never told them that by that point we weren't a couple. ... [Ex-partner] lives nearby, and we share gardens and dogs and stuff, but we don't actually live together. But she's always had a commitment to [adoptive daughter]. (Lynn, born 1948)

Keeping in touch with ex-partners can leave the door open for the healing of old wounds, sometimes many years later. Crunchy described how she was able to repair an important relationship. She had lived with this partner until, in her words, "I was very naughty, and I went and had an affair, and we split up." They had friends in common within their lesbian network, and did not lose touch. Eventually they began to see each other again. When the ex-partner was diagnosed with inoperable cancer, it was Crunchy who became her full-time carer. She describes that time as "awful—just terrible," but at the same time is clearly grateful that she had this second chance to be close to, and look after, someone she loved: "I was so pleased that my life worked out that I was around to look after her. Because she wouldn't have wanted anybody else bathing her, and stuff like that. ... And it was lovely, really. It was sad, but it was lovely, you know?" (Crunchy, born 1939)

Such stories are moving, not only because they describe the enduring nature of some individual relationships, but also because they bear witness to the strength of bonds formed within a closed and stigmatized community.

SUMMARY

Strong friendship and social bonds emerge as a key feature of old lesbian culture. Although many old lesbians are less closeted than they were years ago, women in this survey were still more likely to be out to their friends than their families, and most of these friends were also lesbians. Old lesbians' friendships often operate within close-knit groups and have lasted for many years, having been formed at a time when social stigma associated with alternative sexualities was greater than it is now. The nature of old lesbian friendship has its roots in the secrecy and stigma of the lesbian and gay past.

An old lesbian's chosen family is usually a "mix of social and biological family links, friendships and inter-generational connections" (Almack, Seymour, and Bellamy, 2010:916). In the case of many older lesbians, ex-partners and the relatives of partners and ex-partners may also be members of the family of choice; ex-partners are important friends for many old lesbians.

The majority of old lesbians have at some time belonged to an organized lesbian social group. Many such groups exist all over the United Kingdom, forming a wide-reaching lesbian network that crosses barriers of class, education, and economic status, and challenges prevailing assumptions that few networks exist for lesbians as opposed to gay men. All these relationships continue to play an important support role in the lives of older lesbians, and need to be more widely recognized if old lesbians are to receive optimum care in later old age.

NOTE

1. Roseneil (2006:333), however, has drawn attention to the normalizing effect of the term "families of choice" used to describe lesbian and gay friendship networks, pointing out that it serves to direct attention away from the extra-familial, counter-heteronormative nature of many of these relationships.

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